

## Star Gate 371

### Chapter 371: Silver Moon's Eighth Sword (II)

"I still can't do it!" Li Hao sent the Flaming Phoenix Spear flying with a clang. The origin weapon dimmed—the ninth mysterious power stone had been exhausted.

The young man breathed out heavily and sagged to the ground. He frowned at the dull spear. It'd eaten so many mysterious power stones, but remained just the equivalent of a training partner. The effects were decent the first couple of times, but the process grew increasingly boring as the situation progressed. The phoenix didn't seem as strong as before and wasn't much of a threat to Li Hao toward the end.

The young man scanned the mysterious power stones he had left—eleven pieces. He looked hesitantly at the Flaming Phoenix Spear, wondering if he should feed it another piece. Manager Yu was probably coming for it tomorrow.

"My sword is very fast now, but the sword aura refuses to manifest. Is it insufficient pressure? Or something else?"

Three days wasn't long, but whether it was the earth sword aura, the fire sword aura, or the sword overview aura—comprehension had been swift each time after he grasped the heart of the concept. Identifying the main threads of the aura was the precursor to rapid success, so Li Hao thought it would be the same case this time. Were three days not enough?

Apparently, it was not.

Li Hao picked up the Flaming Phoenix Spear and gently caressed it. "You've been bringing the phoenix aura against me the past couple of days, but I've yet to sense Director Hou's will or aura. He can't possibly have refrained from utilizing them, you must know them. He was already strong beyond compare when he broke my master's will twenty years ago, so why don't you use his remaining will and aura against me?"

He Yong wanted him to borrow the Flaming Phoenix Spear so that the young man could perceive Hou Xiaochen's will. But Li Hao was yet to come in contact with it throughout the past couple of days. The origin weapon was keeping certain things to itself!

Li Hao frowned when the Flaming Phoenix Spear shook. It was sometimes quite onerous to communicate with a weapon. He could only guess what it meant.

“Are you worried that displaying the director's will might kill me?”

The weapon shook, just once, indicating that it was indeed worried. But after a while, it began shaking again.

“You need more mysterious power stones?” Li Hao guessed.

The weapon shook again.

The young man understood. One, the Flaming Phoenix Spear was worried about killing him and two, it wasn't being supplied with enough stones. Plainly, the energy it was being fed now was insufficient for a self-activated spear to bring forth Director Hou's will. This meant that the director's will was stronger than the phoenix soul!

He Yong had said that it was a measure of Hou Xiaochen's strength if Li Hao survived the director's will. Was He Yong strong? The young man felt that his own assessment might not be accurate. The man might not be weak—could he be an initial Solar? It was difficult to say.

Li Hao looked at the Flaming Phoenix Spear and said, “How many stones do you need to bring out Director Hou's will?”

The spear shook once, twice, thrice...

Three times!

It needed at least three stones to summon the lingering will. That brought a tight frown to Li Hao's forehead. So many stones were needed for momentary display? One stone contained hundreds of cubes of mysterious power! Nearly two thousand were sufficient fuel for only a small eruption?

This was over the top!

The Flaming Phoenix Spear must be embezzling some energy, the young man was sure of it! He took a deep breath as he looked at the eleven pieces in his storage ring. He'd only have eight left if he went for it... and it wasn't like he was spending them for an enjoyable time. He was spending his wealth to abuse himself. It would be an incredible loss if he still didn't gain anything from this expenditure.

Was Hou Xiaochen's will worth such a hefty price? Li Hao hesitated only briefly before coming to a decision. He experienced continued difficulties in manifesting the metal sword aura. Perhaps there wasn't enough pressure being brought to bear on himself. If there was more pressure, he might be able to encourage himself to perceive the aura and break through.

There was no need for further consideration. Li Hao took out three mysterious power stones, all of the metal attribute. These were the only three metal stones he had left. He didn't choose the fire attribute despite the Flaming Phoenix Spear being of fire. It was a spear, so the metal attribute could bring its strength into play as well.

He crushed the mysterious power stones as soon as he took them out. The spear immediately started absorbing them; it seemed to be very happy.

Li Hao adjusted his mentality and began waiting. Could the Flaming Phoenix Spear give him a surprise?

Three stones worth of mysterious power vanished in the blink of an eye. The spear sparkled and Li Hao seemed to see a small phoenix moving through it. This was different from before; the weapon seemed to be gearing up for something.

A faint aura brewed within the origin weapon—very, very faint. As Li Hao stared fixedly at it, the scene in front of him shifted. He sank into an illusory realm while his focus shifted in and out of a trance.

A spear appeared in his mind's eye—one spear to pierce the heavens! It bore down soundlessly upon Li Hao, the weapon breaking through everything! He could even hear some sounds—Hou Xiaochen's voice.

“To break the will!”

Aloof, tyrannical, arrogant. The will broke when the spear was unleashed! The Broken Will Spear!

Li Hao was in a daze. He seemed to see Hou Xiaochen standing in front of him, stabbing the spear at him just like how he'd killed Red Hair. As Li Hao's mind wandered, he also felt the sensation of being cut down.

Death... was right in front of him. His mind started splitting apart with the spear on one side and the suffocating sensation of death on the other. He seemed to return to the day that his good friend was murdered. It was the same stifling feeling... His heart was clenched by an iron grip as he watched from a few meters away.

That had been his first time seeing the scarlet shadow and witnessing the power of the supernatural. It was like his soul had been plucked out of him. He could only watch as his friend died meters away, staring as his friend struggled in agony and soundlessly warned him to run.

Run! Danger!

It was that same despairing feeling, the feeling that he would be next! It was present again and the first time in a year that Li Hao sensed such helplessness and an overwhelming stifling sensation of death. His heart clenched tight.

.....

At the same time.

Rift Canyon.

Hou Xiaochen suddenly frowned and looked toward White Moon City. His expression was dark and unpleasant. The Flaming Phoenix Spear... was completely active!

Who'd done it?

He knew about the weapon being lent to Li Hao, but he'd sealed off the spear so it couldn't be activated unless it encountered imminent danger. Li Hao wouldn't be able to do so even with mysterious power stones.

Little did Hou Xiaochen know that the Flaming Phoenix Spear had absorbed so many stones that it'd long broken through his seal. He didn't know either that the phoenix was worried about being cut into two if it didn't satisfy Li Hao. Stellaris would strike it down. It didn't want the Eternal Sword to come for it, so the phoenix didn't hold back in the slightest. Li Hao could see what Li Hao wanted to see.

Frowning, Hou Xiaochen looked wordlessly in the direction of his weapon. It was too late to go back and he didn't know what'd happened to Li Hao. Had the Flaming Phoenix Spear encountered something? At the same time, Hou Xiaochen knew that once his spear intent erupted, even a peak Solar's mental spirit might be cut down by it.

Mental spirit was mind intent. Both martial masters and supernaturals possessed them. It wasn't that supernaturals lacked it, just that they were unable to use it. How could strong supernaturals not command it?

Once the Flaming Phoenix Spear was activated, his lingering will would crush the opponent's mind! Hou Xiaochen waited for a while and set the matter aside. There was nothing he could do. He could sense this happening because the Flaming Phoenix Spear had recognized him for its master. They were so far away from each other that it was the limits of possibility for him to feel something, however faint. It was impossible to suppress the weapon again when he was hundreds of kilometers out. He wouldn't be able to do that no matter how strong he was.

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At the same time.

Someone else was also startled. Golden Spear sensed a familiar presence the second Li Hao activated the Flaming Phoenix Spear. He disappeared on the spot and reappeared several hundred meters in front of the young man. The look in his eyes shifted and his expression was displeased. Why had Li Hao suddenly provoked Director Hou's will out of the weapon? And the key was, the Flaming Phoenix Spear was erupting with too much force! It was like the director was right in front of him!

It reminded him of when the director pierced through his internal demon with a singular spear jab. He'd also seen vague hints of Hou Xiaochen smashing through five beasts at the same time. It was a kind of mental suppression from the five beasts, which he'd broken on a mental level.

'Director Hou's spear intent doesn't connect with the body... This is bad!' Golden Spear looked on with an unpleasant expression. He wouldn't be afraid of meeting this move head-on, but the Broken Will Spear had already been deployed. This was now a battle of mind intent and the consciousness. Although he could suppress the weapon now... it wouldn't be of any use. The spear's will had already entered Li Hao's mind intent. Golden Spear wasn't capable of expelling the attack from the young man's mind.

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Not too far away.

Blood streamed from Li Hao's orifices as his body swayed. There was only that inexorable spear in his eyes—it was about to kill him.

“The scarlet shadow...” Li Hao murmured to himself. He could see a scarlet shadow in this moment. While the two could not be more unlike, they both brought to him the enormous risk of death.

I was once terrified into retreat!

Zhang Yuan had been so close to him, yet Li Hao had been so worried, afraid, and terrified that he didn't step forward despite wanting to.

If Yuan Shuo was the internal demon of Silver Moon martial masters, then the scarlet shadow might be Li Hao's. Even though he'd killed multiple scarlet shadows by now, Zhang Yuan was still dead. Li Hao had shrank back in fear that night. Even though he knew it wasn't his fault and he'd just been a mundane, he was still deeply afraid when he saw that kind of scene. He was so afraid that he shook.

It was a fear he could not control.

But when the same sensation came upon him today, a crazed glee dawned in his eyes after the initial terror.

### Chapter 372: Silver Moon's Eighth Sword (III)

Ever since Li Hao came in contact with the supernatural and officially set foot into martial dao, he'd continuously grown stronger, searched for opportunities, and constantly taken risks. Whether it was killing Zhang Ting, taking a chance to hunt the powerhouses of the three great organizations, killing Yu Xiao or Huang Jie... his thoughts were simple. I don't wish to experience that scene of impotence for a second time.

On his first occasion of killing people, he'd done so with such cold-bloodedness that Liu Yan and the others exclaimed he was a pervert. Was he afraid then?

A little.

Had he found the scene gross?

A little.

But he hadn't been that afraid as he'd witnessed more horrifying things than that. Do you think you can scare me this time? Not happening!

The fire sword aura, earth sword aura, sword overview aura... The auras spontaneously manifested in his mind—a mountain peak, a ferocious tiger, the stroke of his ancestor, and the resplendent rise of the Silver Amor's final strike!

What fear could the Eternal Sword not sever? If there was such a fear, that only meant one's sword wasn't strong enough!

"Kill!" came a cry from the mind. It erupted as Li Hao swung his sword! It contained all of his knowledge and power! All of his reflections and accumulated considerations centered on this stroke. He wanted to hack the Flaming Phoenix Spear into two and cut through the night that'd imprinted the terrors of the scarlet shadow on his mind.

Sword intent arose! It coalesced into a sword of severing the self. It struck, aiming for the Broken Will Spear that pierced through the firmament. That may be Hou Xiaochen's will, but who cared?

The Flaming Phoenix Spear shuddered in the real world. Li Hao didn't deploy his sword with the greatest speed; a little sword slashed out in a moment of spontaneous eruption. The Flaming Phoenix Spear was startled by the reaction and broke through the void, vanishing on the spot.

A surge of sword intent locked onto the origin weapon. The phoenix materialized over the spear, fear in its eyes. It darted behind Golden Spear when it spotted the man nearby.



It needed to flee! It was afraid!

It was afraid of Li Hao and the sword intent. It recalled such a stroke in the depths of its fragmented memories and found it terrifying to the extreme. The Flaming Phoenix Spear hadn't planned on paying further attention to Li Hao after it brought out Hou Xiaochen's move. But now, it was forced to run and hide behind Golden Spear!

Regardless, a domineering surge of sword intent billowed over. Golden Spear's expression shifted minutely as well. Was Li Hao... striking back?

The young man could counter attack despite being suppressed by Director Hou, and strike with a heretofore unseen move! Golden Spear didn't want to meet it head-on and shifted to dodge the blow, but he could sense that the sword had locked onto him!

The man threw everything to the back of his mind and summoned a spear himself, jabbing it forward with a grunt!

The spear lit up the void with a trail of fire. Spear intent was on full display! Incomparably formidable, just the internal force within the weapon sent the void shaking. The trees around them shattered—Golden Spear well deserved his reputation!

Boom!

A tremendous boom erupted as a hot wave roiled in all directions. Tightly gripping his weapon, Golden Spear focused his spear intent and smashed through Li Hao's combined sword intent, scattering it into the air.

His spear intent collapsed at the same time.

Golden Spear stood dumbly on the spot, unmoving and staring at the young man off in the distance. He seemed to see the other spear and sword of Li Hao's mind intent, clashing and engaging each other in a series of explosive collisions...

Li Hao's sword intent had already dissipated. He and Golden Spear had only caused large-scale destruction of nearby flora. Nothing else was damaged.

Golden Spear stood unmoving, his hand still gripping his weapon. A tiny bloody mark appeared on his forehead after an indeterminable period of time. A single drop of blood slowly slid to the ground.

It was only now that the man gently caressed his forehead, shock hard to conceal in his eyes. When the sword dissipated, a certain resolution and extremity of speed exploded in the last possible second. They delivered some backlash that pierced the skin of his forehead.

It was just a small wound that Golden Spear could heal with a quick circulation of his internal force. And yet, peace was hard to come by his heart. His emotions were not tranquil at all.

Such a disturbance had occurred only three times in his life. The first when he was defeated by Yuan Shuo. The intent behind the Five Styles had completely overwhelmed him, preventing him from striking back. It was a defeat that tormented him for many years.

The second when Hou Xiaochen broke through the demons left by the Five Styles and helped him set foot into Dominator. He'd experienced the same scene that Li Hao had just undergone—the spear and Five Styles had fought in his mind's eye. Hou Xiaochen had won because he was too strong.

Shock from the first two times had lingered for many years. The third time was this moment.

Li Hao wasn't that strong, at least, not as strong as Golden Spear. However, the stroke that he struck with unsettled the man's emotions in a way that was difficult to describe. He gained further insight into the young man in front of him the moment the sword qi exploded.

Unwillingness, refusal to submit, and refusal to give ground! It didn't matter if Hou Xiaochen stood in front of him! I, Li Hao, will not give way to the Hou Xiaochen who killed a Nova with one move...

There were very few people like Li Hao among the younger martial masters. Or rather, it'd be more accurate to say that Golden Spear had never met one. Whether it was Wang Qing or Kong Youyun, neither of them were so determined that they were loath to concede.

Why did Li Hao possess such grim resolution?

Golden Spear knew of Li Hao's background; the young man didn't seem to have experienced rough sailing in his life. His had been an easy one as he smoothly became Yuan Shuo's disciple, weathered the dangers of Silver City, walked out of Battle Heaven, killed Yu Xiao...

Li Hao's resume spoke of an effortless journey that wasn't filled with too many obstacles, much less setbacks. So what was the reason for what Golden Spear felt?

As the man puzzled over his findings, a clash detectable only by mind intent thoroughly unfolded.

BOOM!

It was a collision of the mental level! The scene blurred in front of Golden Spear as two people seemed to appear. Li Hao wielded a sword and Hou Xiaochen grasped a spear. Sword and spear smashed against each other in the air, both of them domineering to the extreme and giving rise to an incredible explosion!

The spear split the sword with unparalleled spear intent, but the longsword immediately flared with unprecedented fury and reluctance, like a caged tiger springing free of its prison. Fire blazed through the land and reduced the spear to ashes!

The mountain peak broke and the tiger struggled upon the verge of death!

Golden Spear saw Li Hao waving his hand, using his hand as a sword that blurred with such speed that it made one overlook space and time. There was only a pure sword stroke that swung at the firmament!

The struggling tiger melded into his arm and the broken mountain peak reappeared in a complete whole. With arm as sword, the young man swung at the broken spear.

KABOOM!

It was a cry that echoed only in the mind, one that reverberated in all directions. Golden Spear blinked dazedly, as if seeing mountains and rivers crumble away and the sky split open. What was this? He'd never seen a scene like this in his life; it seemed like the very cosmos were shattering.

"I'm not afraid of you!" A hoarse roar filled the mind. It was Li Hao, and he was saying that he wasn't scared!

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Li Hao vented the fury brewing in his heart. I'm not afraid of you! Little Yuan, I'm not afraid of this thing and I'll never back away again. My legs will never shake to the point where I can't move. I'm not afraid. I'll crush everything!

His arm shattered as Li Hao swung at the firmament, crushing the last section of spear. He snarled again and swung once more, aiming at the scarlet shadow that could not be seen.

I'm not afraid of you either, Ying Hongyue!

“Kill!” Only this roar echoed beneath the heavens. There was just one person observing the battle; no one else sensed the skirmish. Golden Spear was the only witness—he saw Li Hao cut down the spear and obliterate Hou Xiaochen’s spear intent!

Boom!

Another loud crash rang out as the Flaming Phoenix Spear shuddered. Li Hao spat out a mouthful of blood and his arm exploded with rays of sword qi and arrows of blood.

Blood streamed down his right arm as the young man heaved for breath. He was a dying fish greedily gasping for oxygen. Blood ran from his orifices, but his lips stretched in a smile as he looked at the nearby Golden Spear.

“I’ve made a fool of myself in front of you... sir!”

“You... took too much risk!” said Golden Spear after looking at him for a while. What a crazy fellow! He’d summoned the director’s spear intent and somehow, incredibly, smashed through it!

Other than admonishment for taking such a risk, he didn’t know what to say to the young man. What are you afraid of and what are you crushing? No matter what it was, Li Hao had won.

Golden Spear suddenly grew lost in thought. If I could’ve been like Li Hao back in the day and shown just as much resolution in breaking the pressure from the Five Styles, could I have broken through to Dominator myself?

Would I be stronger today?

Some regret crept in, of which was quickly replaced by resignation. I tried, but I couldn’t break that curse! Showing further regret now would only highlight his incompetence. He knew full well that if Li Hao had been the martial master that Yuan Shuo suppressed, he might’ve been able to break the curse and walk on a new path.

It boggled the mind to consider.

Li Hao heaved for breath and wiped away the bloody traces on his face. The wounds on his arm were ghastly. He took off his shirt and wrapped his arm with it so that others wouldn't see how bad it was.

He smiled, feeling a complete depletion of energy as he struggled to his feet. He was drained of internal force and mental spirit. It was like when he utilized the Incantation of the Blade of Blood—it might be even worse than that.

The difference was that one felt empty after deploying that method, but this time, he felt reborn. One walked toward death and the other new life.

Golden Spear returned from his memories and didn't know what to say when he looked at Li Hao. Finally, he voiced, "Go back and rest, Li Hao. It will be a new life when you awake!"

With that, he left.

### Chapter 373: Mask of Pain (I)

As Golden Spear walked away, he regretted not voicing what was on his mind. He wanted to say that if there'd been the Seven Swords of Silver Moon twenty years ago, it would be the Eight Swords of Silver Moon today. Not only that, but Li Hao would rank number one or two among the eight.

In Golden Spear's eyes, the young man was second to only Sky Sword. He might even rival Sky Sword. Perhaps there would be a seat for Li Hao among the Record of Thirty-Six Heroes, and it would be close to the front.

Did Sky Sword break Yuan Shuo's suppression back in the day?

Golden Spear didn't know.

Perhaps Sky Sword had, perhaps he hadn't. The man had left, so no one knew if he'd smashed through it before he left. With Sky Sword's personality, would he be willing to leave like that if he hadn't thrown off Yuan Shuo's will?

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Back in the clearing, Li Hao laughed. He tottered to his feet with inexplicable glee. He suddenly raised his middle finger toward the south. That was all Ying Hongyue was good for! The scarlet shadow is no longer my internal demon. In fact, it's you, Ying Hongyue!

Neither would the move that Hou Xiaochen employed against the Nova stir up any more emotion in him.

"I have seen the sky beyond the sky, so how can I be kept under your heel..." Li Hao laughed and beckoned to the Flaming Phoenix Spear in the distance. "Come here, I won't slash at you anymore. I'll break you into two if you keep running though!"

The origin weapon was afraid, but still flew back into Li Hao's hand after a slight struggle. The young man waved it around and suddenly smiled, infusing the last vestiges of his strength into the spear. He stabbed it forward with no hesitation whatsoever, breaking through the void and sending fire through the air!

If Manager Yu or the others were here, they would find it impossible to recover from their shock. Origin weapons only had one master. Unless their master lent the weapon out, no one else could bring the weapon's ferocity to bear before the master died.

And yet, Li Hao only needed to simply wave it around for the Flaming Phoenix Spear to immediately erupt with its true force!

"The spear's nice, it just doesn't feel that smooth in the hand..." Li Hao shook his head, then smiled again. "The Broken Will Spear... So Director Hou's spear is called Broken Will."

Not the Flaming Phoenix Spear, but the spear method that Hou Xiaochen employed. The will was broken when the spear was deployed. He seemed to have read about this method in an ancient tome somewhere. The young man sank into thought as he walked. But right now, his brains didn't seem up for the task. He felt rather muddle-headed.

Forget it, who cares. I'm not a spear user.

The Flaming Phoenix Spear was as gentle as a kitten and permitted Li Hao to wave it around as he would. It didn't even stir when he used it as a walking staff. If it'd been Hao Lianchuan, the spear would've long immolated the man.

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In this moment, Rift Canyon.

Hou Xiaochen abruptly paused and stared at White Moon City in the distance.

"Is it Li Hao?" he murmured. The kid that he valued only because of his bloodline seemed... a little different.

My spear intent has faded away at a faster speed than anticipated. Did a powerhouse break my spear intent or Li Hao? It didn't mean much if it was a powerhouse. That was just will he'd left behind, it didn't mean that the other could defeat him. But if it was Li Hao who'd triumphed over his will... Did that mean the young man was stronger than those of his level?

"First Yuan Shuo, then Li Hao... Is this discipline really that strong?" Hou Xiaochen suddenly smiled, suddenly expectant. He hoped for the young man to grow into his own, to reach Hou Xiaochen's level. Perhaps they could determine which of them was stronger then.



If it really was Li Hao who had broken his spear intent, then Silver Moon might soon see another premier martial master among its ranks, one that could rival Tyrant Blade and Sky Sword. Breathing out softly, Hou Xiaochen vanished on the spot. He would know if it was Li Hao as soon as he returned.

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Li Hao stumbled his way back to his accommodations. He didn't have time to see Liu Long and the others before toppling over to sleep like a log.

It was a particularly sound sleep with a beautiful dream. He dreamed of the old days when he and Zhang Yuan secretly roasted game in the latter's backyard. The spits turned with such fragrant fare that Li Hao's drool threatened to pool on his face.

He took a closer look and raised an eyebrow when he saw that they were roasting scarlet shadows. Some of them were fried to perfection!

They ate one delicious scarlet shadow after scarlet shadow, brimming with fiery light after they finished that Li Hao thought they were on fire. Upon further observation, it was an abundance of blood qi that made them glow with a bloody light.

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Li Hao woke up, full from his dream. He'd eaten countless scarlet shadows with Zhang Yuan. They baked, stewed, and fried the shadows in all manner of scrumptious preparation. He'd eaten so much that he couldn't anymore, so he awoke.

Surprisingly, he did feel full when he woke up. Li Hao blinked. I ate scarlet shadows in a dream... Did it actually have an effect? I feel a bit more internal force in me.

He was resigned to the situation when he made a closer exploration of his body. The little sword laid in a dull fashion next to his body, depleted of sword energy. The young man raised his head, at a loss for words. He'd probably operated the breathing method in his sleep. It wasn't that he'd eaten his fill, but that he'd absorbed so much sword energy that he was full.

The little bit of sword energy in the sword had all gone to him because he needed energy supplements after his body was injured. Thus, he'd drained the little sword.

Li Hao looked around wordlessly. And I really thought I killed people in my dream and ate scarlet shadows! I was devouring my own things and depleted the sword energy again. However, the injuries on his arm were recovered. The injuries within his body after that stroke were also healed.

"I'm meant to be poor!" Li Hao shook his head with a sigh. Forget it, let's just pretend the meal in the dream was on me. Little Yuan ate half. I didn't have money to treat him before, so I brought him a big meal today. He should be very satisfied. Ah, I'm such a generous person!

Li Hao smiled when his thoughts traveled here. He found his internal force to be stronger than before when he assessed his current condition. His blood qi was more abundant, his meridians thick, his bones durable. The knot in his heart loosened greatly.

When the young man took out three mysterious power stones and crushed them, the Flaming Phoenix Spear stirred, wanting to absorb them. Li Hao picked up the little sword instead, operating the breathing method. Stellaris took in the energy with some reluctance; the origin weapon immediately quieted down. If it didn't, the hungry little sword might decide to take a bite out of phoenix leg instead.

Three mysterious power stones enabled a partial recovery for the little sword. Li Hao fretted as he looked at the five stones in his storage ring. He was spending them too quickly! How quickly had it taken for his stores to dwindle by so much? If it wasn't for the earlier replenishment, he would've spent them all a long time ago. Were these ancient weapons all gluttons?

Li Hao took stock of his body again, focusing on the lungs. Something strange had newly appeared there. The young man sent his senses at it. It didn't seem to be an aura, but what could it be if not?

His sword stroke had exploded with the extremity of speed. Li Hao felt that he should've comprehended the aura after that move—his third aura, the metal sword aura. And yet, the thing in his lungs didn't seem to be an aura.

The young man poked at it with his consciousness, a strange look building in his eyes. It should be the aura, but his earth aura was a mountain, his fire aura a tiger. He thought his metal sword aura would be a phoenix or a bird. It came from the bird style, so creating a bird would be very normal.

Reality proved otherwise. Li Hao took a close look—it was just a dot. A dot that was a round ball, like a marble.

“Is it a ball? Or a dot?” Li Hao wondered blankly. Why did his metal sword aura look like this? That shouldn't be. Auras were related to the underlying secret art or comprehension. No matter which it was, the metal sword aura shouldn't just be a dot.

The young man frowned, had he failed to coalesce his aura? Was this a preliminary understanding and his aura too weak, thus creating this situation?

He thought about it and decided to give it a try. He shifted the little dot into the center of the lungs to be locked away. It was time to lock his third aura!

The metal sword aura was very docile when it entered the lungs; it appeared quite weak. Li Hao found it odd as it didn't seem that the aura should be weak. Whether it was the mountain or tiger, all had struggled fiercely when they entered the five organs.

The metal sword aura didn't shift at all.

Forget it, let's give it a try. A massive chain floated up from Li Hao's lungs—his supernatural lock. It snaked toward the ball. This was when the tiger and mountain would struggle, but the ball was so still that it made Li Hao uneasy. The lock could approach as it would.

As the young man's unease mounted, the dot in his lungs suddenly erupted. It was so fast that he didn't have time to react. A crisp explosion rang in Li Hao's mind.

"Pfft!" His newly recovered body was once more covered in injuries after the impact. Li Hao paled and continuously spat out blood. His expression changed drastically; the dot of light had vanished!

Enormous changes took place in his lungs as the metal dot of light returned to its original state. Still and unmoving. However, a noticeable crack appeared on the chain. Li Hao regarded it with horror!

He instantly sent his supernatural lock out of sight and transported the dot of light out of the lungs. Fear and shock were writ large over his face. Hot damn! That was an explosion of extremity! The thing played tricks and spontaneously erupted, nearly breaking his supernatural lock!

The consequences would be disastrous once the lock broke—he would instantly become a supernatural, a metal supernatural at that. But was this what Li Hao wanted? He'd finally made it to his point and comprehended three auras. Smooth sailing was ahead for his martial path. If his supernatural lock broke now, he might quickly become a powerhouse among supernaturals... but was that what he wanted?

#### Chapter 374: Mask of Pain (II)

Terrified, Li Hao took stock of his current status. The supernatural lock of his lungs was damaged, there was a crack on it. Some mysterious power was seeping out and modifying his lungs. The young man didn't dare leave it unattended—this was not a good development. At least not right now.

One's supernatural locks might eventually be broken, but that timing could not be now. They kept one's potential locked away. If broken, the martial master either became a supernatural or fully released the potential of their body.

Li Hao was yet to reach this stage.

He swiftly directed internal force into his lungs and hastily broke a mysterious power stone to absorb its energy. Although the metal attribute stones had been consumed, mysterious power stones were able to strengthen the entire body as a whole.

The young man replenished the lungs with internal force, blood qi, and energy. He was shocked beyond belief that the lungs, already fortified with one thousand cubes, could not contain the dot that was the metal sword aura.

“The metal sword aura... dot... An ultimate eruption from the dot for a split second that exceeds the fire tiger aura.” Li Hao drew certain conclusions about this new kind of aura that’d appeared. The extremity of sudden force!

It was quiet and docile in regular times, but when activated, it was the strongest among the three auras even though he’d just comprehended it.

“This one creeps up on you!” Li Hao clucked his tongue. There would have been a massive problem if his supernatural lock had been just a bit weaker. But in either case, his lungs were insufficient to accommodate the item.

He would have to continue strengthening the lungs alongside his five organs, or he’d have to let the metal sword aura exist alone. It couldn’t be locked away, which meant that it wouldn’t meld into the sword overview like the fire tiger and earth sword auras had. It could only be used alone.

“A pair of lungs with a thousand cubes of energy can’t contain you?” Li Hao sensed the dot within his mind intent. He’d thought that the tiger aura was ferocious and strong enough, but the momentary eruption of the metal sword aura was far greater.

“It’s strong... but to the point of crippling someone!” Li Hao sighed with resignation, both happy and in pain. He liked a strong aura, but when it was so strong that his lungs couldn’t contain it, that was a problem. His five organs were in balance with each other. It wasn’t that they couldn’t be further strengthened—he could obtain more mysterious power if he needed to—but that his organs were too strong. He would have to fortify the rest of his body and bones to keep everything aligned.

In this way, he would require more sword energy. Extracting mysterious power also required sword energy. In other words... he was out of money. He still had the twelve hundred cubes of wind and thunder he'd traded from the Night Watchers and four mysterious power stones remaining after the one he'd just consumed.

The little sword had just absorbed three pieces. It would mean seven total if it devoured his remaining stores. That wasn't much, but it would just barely help him convert all of his mysterious power.

The little sword required money, his body required money... They were so voracious that a rich guy like Li Hao was finding it difficult to keep up. He sighed and temporarily set aside the thought of strengthening his organs. The metal sword aura could not be melded into the rest at the moment. He couldn't handle the strain!

In that case, he would absorb the wind and thunder energies first and enhance his bones and body. Otherwise, with the increasing power of his auras as his organs grew stronger, his body would become the limiter. While he was also nurturing his internal force, that was a slow process of accumulation. If one wanted instant results, that still required sword energy.

Li Hao looked outside the window, it was dark. His watch read three o'clock—likely three o'clock in the morning. This wasn't a good time to visit anyone.

Thus, he decided to take out his storage ring and absorb the wind and thunder energies. The little sword probably wouldn't be sufficient for this use since it'd only absorbed three mysterious power stones. Hopefully, he'd be able to complete the deed before depleting the other stones. He could continue to work on the organs only after he strengthened his body. As of now, his organs were noticeably stronger than his physical body.

It wouldn't do for the organs to be too weak as they wouldn't be able to support his cultivation then. It wouldn't do for the organs to be too strong either as that would place too much strain on the body. A balance was necessary, or he'd turn into someone sickly and feeble who coughed all day. He might also become a fragile scholar who saw his body ripped apart by fierce blood qi in a moment of carelessness.

Li Hao began cultivating again. He tempered his joy of comprehending another aura. The appearance of the metal sword aura did indeed enhance his strength, but not by much. The crux of the issue was that it didn't assimilate into the sword overview, so it couldn't be used to summon a spirit.

In other words, he was too poor and didn't have enough money. While he'd gained a lot, he improved so quickly that his ample stores of mysterious power and stones could not withstand the young man's furious rate of consumption.

On this evening, Li Hao continued to absorb energy and strengthen his body. His body often broke when he employed it as a sword. That was a sign that his body wasn't strong enough to endure the manifestation of aura. He was stronger now; even if he used his body with abandon, all he would do was give himself some cuts and scrapes.

Strengthening the body and skeleton was imperative.

.....

The sky brightened. Li Hao was still absorbing thunder energy. His bones popped and snapped as thunder energy circled around him, tempering his bones. Thunder and lightning dissipated after a long while, leaving the young man free to open his eyes and assess his body. His body and bones were much stronger than before, but... he sighed heavily.

He'd consumed more than three pieces of mysterious power to absorb twelve hundred cubes of wind and thunder energy! Three pieces hadn't been enough! He'd had to smash two more pieces, leaving him with just two in his possession. The little sword was devoid of energy once more.

Li Hao stared at his two remaining pieces, one was of the dark attribute and the other of light. He'd wanted to try their properties for himself, but now... forget it. He was uneasy when the little sword was devoid of energy. Sword energy was his greatest guarantee.

“I earn money to spend it so I can be stronger. Then I earn more money to continue the positive feedback cycle,” Li Hao comforted himself. He thought of nothing else and crushed the last two stones, feeding it to the little sword. He was now out of mysterious power cubes and stones, but all of it had been worthwhile.

He’d paid such an enormous price to comprehend a third aura, strengthen his body and bones, and ratchet up his strength to a new level compared to before. He might be able to fortify his organs a bit next.

The most pressing course of action was to meld his metal sword aura into the organs. Once he successfully assimilated three auras together, Li Hao felt that he could stand at the peak of the Solar level. At least, he wouldn’t be weaker than the Huang Jie he’d met before. This was probably when he’d surpass the Yuan Shuo of old when the man battled the Qimei Staff.

His teacher had melded two auras together then; Li Hao had just finished three auras. Based on his current thoughts and judgment, he might be a little stronger than his teacher. But there were limits to his strength. The particulars depended on actual combat—his teacher was much more experienced than him.

“It was August 27th when teacher left... It’s September 13 now...” Li Hao realized in a daze. It felt like such a long time ago, but was only sixteen days when it came down to it.

His teacher had been an unparalleled existence sixteen days ago. Now if his teacher hadn’t improved recently... Li Hao rather felt that he could flex his muscles at his teacher.

“Can teacher finish summoning the third spirit in sixteen days? His organs aren’t strong, but he’s apparently killed a lot of Red Moon members lately. If he has sufficient blood pearls to strengthen his organs, then perhaps he’s finished incorporating his third aura!”

Yuan Shuo’s process wasn’t that complicated. All he needed to do was to strengthen his organ and input his aura into it. He didn’t need to comprehend or try anything, just shove his aura in. Thus, it was possible for him to complete his fourth and fifth aura if he possessed sufficient blood pearls, to say nothing of his third.



Some thoughts that'd just popped into Li Hao's mind instantly vanished. He... likely still couldn't defeat his teacher, not unless he finished the fusion of the five auras before his teacher did.

When the young man rose, it took him a few seconds to acclimate to his strengthened body. It didn't take him long to do so, however. His three auras were more like four auras given the fortitude of his mind. Li Hao's mind intent was growing ever stronger. His mind intent was strong, his mentality was strong, which cast his body in a weak light. On the other hand, it wasn't hard to adapt to his condition.

Regular martial masters strengthened the body first, then mind intent. Li Hao had gone about it in the opposite direction. His mind intent was growing ever stronger! Ordinary Dominators would likely have issues withstanding him if he let loose without control.

The sunlight was bright and beautiful outside the little building. Shouts and calls from martial masters echoed in the distance. A new day of training had begun.

Li Hao was in an excellent mood; his spirits further lifted upon thinking that the chief should already be here. What a wonderful day!

A figure flashed to the door before Li Hao set out to look for Liu Long. Manager Yu looked at him with a frosty expression. She'd come quite early.

"Where is the Flaming Phoenix Spear?"

How miserly! Li Hao bared his teeth. It's not like I said I'm keeping it. He reached out and manifested a spear, tossing it to Manager Yu. He'd seen all that he wanted to see, so the spear was of no further use to him. Other than it being a durable weapon, there wasn't a single redeeming point about it. He couldn't be bothered keeping it.

Manager Yu caught it with a quick shift of her eyes. She looked at Li Hao. "You... seemed to have changed some. Did you activate the spear?"

Director Hou had sealed it away, so how had the young man done it?

“Nope!” A blatant lie!

Manager Yu furrowed her brows, but didn’t say anything. It was fine so long as the Flaming Phoenix Spear had been returned in one piece. “I hear that you’ve been training all day and night the past couple of days. There is a path of training and a path of relaxation. It is not a good idea to be constantly training.”

Li Hao nodded in agreement.

“The manager speaks true, so I won’t be training starting from today.”

The secretary took a few more glances at Li Hao without saying anything else. The young man seemed to be in a good mood, so it looked like he’d gained quite a lot. The air of melancholy between his brows had dissipated.

### Chapter 375: Mask of Pain (III)

“Then I’m off,” said Manager Yu. “Additionally, you should refrain from walking around too freely lately. Large numbers of Red Moon powerhouses have surged into Silver Moon to stand against the operations conducted by the four institutions. All powerhouses from nineteen northern provinces have congregated upon us. Hao Lianchuan was injured last night, the Night Watchers have lost a few, and all four institutions are being impacted. We’re discussing amongst ourselves if we should give up our earlier plans and no longer seek to eliminate them...”

“You are a thorn in their side, so you should be careful. Granted, they don’t have the nerve to enter White Moon City.”

“Large numbers of powerhouses have come from Red Moon?” Li Hao’s eyes darted around.

“Correct!” Manager Yu nodded, then frowned faintly again. “The four institutions haven’t killed that many Red Moon powerhouses, but some others are acting from the shadows. The blood pearls previously elicited quite a great deal of attention. We’re not the ones killing so many Red Moon members that they’ve been forced to gather in Silver Moon.”

The four institutions possessed limited strength; powerhouses among their ranks were mostly hidden or concealed. Therefore, they didn’t have that much of an impact on the supernatural organization. The institutions had only managed to kill a few supernaturals below Solar. Although Red Moon lost quite a few Solars, that didn’t have much to do with the Night Watchers. Hao Lianchuan himself was only a mid Solar, so it wasn’t easy for him to kill Solar powerhouses.

Blue Moon might not have called all the nearby Red Moon members to Silver Moon if it was just the four institutions targeting them. Plainly, it was hardly just those four.

Silver Moon’s martial world, martial masters all throughout the lands, and even Yama and Celestial were acting from the shadows. This was why Blue Moon had staked everything on a single throw and summoned all powerhouses to Silver Moon in a fit of anger.

“Are there many Red Moon powerhouses in the nineteen northern provinces?”

“Many.” Manager Yu was as aloof as always. “If there’s roughly fifty in each province, that makes for almost one thousand supernaturals in the northern region. They all start at Darkmoon and there’s plenty of Sunflares. Even if there’s only two or three Solars per province, that’s a couple dozen! Rumors say that a Nova might be hiding among them as well. There was a Nova in residence at the three northern provinces, but those are in such disarray now that our intelligence indicates the Nova might come here. So you should stay within the city if possible!”

“Understood!” Li Hao nodded solemnly. A Nova! He couldn’t afford to offend that, not even if he’d melded three auras with his organs. He could fight a peak Solar and possibly have a chance of killing such an opponent, but a Nova? Absolutely not.

When he melded two auras together, he’d had to employ the Incantation of the Blade of Blood to triumph over a peak Solar. That only put him on par with his opponent, or even a little less. He might not have killed Huang Jie if it wasn’t for Hao Lianchuan’s appearance. So when Li Hao heard that a Nova might have come... he was very nervous.

Gotta be careful! Can't piss that one off! But what else am I afraid of? Not Red Moon's people! Their first thought is to take me alive, not kill me. That was why Li Hao wasn't that apprehensive. If he ran into Celestial or Yama's Novas, however, he'd be terrified out of his mind.

Manager Yu was simply giving him a warning. Li Hao was no child, he had his own thoughts, so she turned and walked off without a word.

The young man thought for a bit and still decided to ask, "Manager, what do you think about me attacking Violet Moon with my people?"

The woman's footsteps slowed and she looked back with an arctic look. "You can cease your tiresome probing. I left Red Moon many years ago and I am not interested in your affairs. Red Moon was just an organization in the shadows when I departed. I am unfamiliar with the current Violet Moon and have not been in contact with the Black Spider for many years. Are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied, very satisfied," Li Hao hastily responded. "Don't misunderstand, I'm just afraid of hurting someone on the same team."

"Additionally." Manager Yu took another few steps before turning back. "You better not execute such a plan! The current Violet Moon may very well be Ying Hongyue's daughter... I'm not certain of the particulars. The Black Spider has a unique personality and most people would not be able to convince her to birth a child..."

"Ying Hongyue's appetite is that expansive?" Li Hao blinked.

"Ying Hongyue... is an interesting character!" Manager Yu suddenly smiled. "You're right to wonder if his appetite is that comprehensive. Your master killed one of his sons not too long ago, but Ying Hongyue has an entire hall of them. He has at least eighty, if not one hundred children. However, he quite values Violet Moon. She may be different from the trash that died before."

A stud stallion! Li Hao took a sharp breath, only now understanding that Ying Hongyue had so many freaking descendants! Just his sons and daughters numbered nearly one hundred—if his grandchildren and great grandchildren were also totaled, then wasn't he creating a massive organization of nearly a thousand people strong by himself alone?

Hot damn!

Ying Hongyue deserved to have the title of Old Lecher affixed to his name!

"I see!" Li Hao nodded, secret glee blooming in his heart. Ying Hongyue's daughter? That was even better! It would mean more to threaten or kill her.

Ying Hongyue wouldn't care about a son or daughter he didn't value, such as the initial Solar that his teacher had killed. But if Violet Moon was dead, Ying Hongyue might erupt in a rage.

Manager Yu furrowed her brows, unsure of what Li Hao was thinking while also understanding something else. Forget it! She disappeared in front of the young man. She was only here for the Flaming Phoenix Spear.

.....

Moments later, Li Hao was overjoyed to see Liu Long and the others.

"Chief, Sis Liu, Brother Chao, Brother Jian..." Wreathed in smiles, Li Hao stepped forward with his arms outstretched. Liu Long wasn't used to this kind of greeting and was about to step forward with a hug when Li Hao circled past him to hug Liu Yan. Liu Long blinked, nonplussed.

Liu Yan simply smiled coquettishly. "Why the sudden passion?"

“Long time no see, Sis Liu!” Li Hao dropped his hug as soon as he touched the woman. “You’ve gotten prettier! I would’ve visited you a few days ago had I known! Are you in a better mood because you’re seeing the chief again?”

“.....” Liu Yan rolled her eyes at him and couldn’t be bothered to respond.

Liu Long didn’t pick up the conversation either. He looked at Li Hao and asked in a low voice, “You’ve been training hard the past couple of days. Have you improved again?”

“More or less!” Li Hao responded merrily. “But not that much, I’m probably not up to my teacher’s level yet...”

What kind of response is that? Liu Long wondered gloomily. What do you mean you’re probably not up to your teacher’s level? When your teacher left, he killed the Qimei Staff, someone on par with peak Solar. So you mean you also have a chance of killing peak Solars?”

“Perfect timing, chief. I have some business to take care of, let’s go together.”

“To do what?”

“To meet Wang Henggang and ask him for some people. I want to see if there are any Iron Shirt powerhouses that can join my team. They can work with Brother Jian and form a defensive squad. When they’re equipped with black armor... Heh, Sunflares won’t be able to damage them and even Solars will gape with shock!”

“Wang Henggang?” Liu Long frowned. “Are you familiar with him?”

“No, but chief is.”

The heck! Liu Long was indeed familiar with the man as Wang Henggang had been present in Silver City for many years. However, the man frowned. “While I do know him, we broke off in open hostilities years ago. He insisted on leaving Silver City and I wanted to return, so we left on bad terms.”

“It’s fine, it’s better to get rid of a grudge than to keep it alive. Chief, does he have any people under his command?”

“He certainly would,” Liu Long explained. “He’s a powerhouse of the Iron Shirt discipline and made it to half step Dominator years ago. He’s one of the more renowned martial masters in this locale and took a few martial master experts from the Inspectorate when he left. That was why our Inspectorate grew weaker, so I’m full of ill will toward this guy...”

“Then we should go see him. Right, he’s either a late or peak Solar now, so let’s be polite when we see him, chief.”

“Eh?” Liu Long started. He nodded without further word. Peak Solar? Wang Henggang? This rate of improvement was blazingly fast. But it made sense since he’d crossed over to the supernatural years ago. He should’ve done so as a Sunflare, so becoming a Solar a few years later was only normal. Martial masters possessed significant potential. It was just that peak Solar was still a bit beyond expectations.

“Sis Liu, you guys chat with the Sword Sect people first. Chief and I will be back soon!”

“Okay!”

.....

Li Hao and Liu Long quickly left the barracks, taking a car that Li Hao had requested from Mu Lin. The Guards had its own cars; Mu Lin was very generous and lent Li Hao his own car.

Inside the car.

Liu Long drove. Li Hao wanted to drive, but Liu Long didn't let him.

The young man felt that the chief thought too little of him. It was true that he'd struggled with control during his first drive, but he was so strong now and much more experienced! It was inappropriate that the chief still didn't think much of his skill.

Liu Long ignored Li Hao and spoke as he drove, "Wang Henggang is a Silver City native and not that old. We're about the same age. He was a good inspector general—you know how safe the city was when he was at the helm. I formed the Demon Hunters after he left. Before that, regular supernaturals didn't dare trespass in Silver City when we were both in residence.

"The two of us wanted to join the Night Watchers together. His ascension was successful, mine was not. He wasn't willing to leave White Moon after he crossed over. My dissatisfaction toward him doesn't stem from his refusal to leave, but from his refusal to support my proposal of opening a Night Watcher branch in Silver City. He would be the director, we would be his subordinates. He was a Sunflare then, perfectly adequate for overseeing the situation.

"Sunflares were still the peak of supernatural strength four years ago. There weren't that many in the entire Night Watcher system, but he refused the notion..."

"To each their own." Li Hao nodded. "That's not important. If he has men, he can lend me some martial masters."

"I might know some of them if the old guard's still there." Liu Long nodded after further thought. "He took more than a dozen Slayers with him that year and a Sunderer. I don't know if they've become supernaturals or continued the path of martial masters."

These people were the foundation of the Silver City Inspectorate back in those days, but they were all moved to White Moon.

Chapter 376: Mask of Pain (IV)



Li Hao thought for a bit more. “Is it possible that he knew of certain things, such as Mu Sen being pretty strong, so Silver City would be fine with Mu Sen there...”

He wanted to say a word or two on the man’s behalf because he’d met Wang Henggang once. The deeply tanned man seemed to be a nice guy. Of course, to know one’s face was not to know one’s heart. From Liu Long’s perspective, Wang Henggang was an incredibly loathsome person for taking away the Inspectorate’s powerhouses and leaving the city’s defenses in a very weakened state.

“It doesn’t matter,” Liu Long said softly, not as angry as he was all those years back. “Not to mention... It now looks like it was a good thing that he took those people with him! What would they gain if they remained in Silver City? It’s still the same after all these years without the slightest hint of improvement. Wu Chao and the others stayed with me and refused to go. You see how they were. If it wasn’t for your support, they would still be Slayers!”

He shook his head with a sigh. “Hence, he might’ve given the people a better future in taking them with him. There is no talk of blame to go around, just a little disgruntlement.”

The car headed for the White Moon City Inspectorate as they conversed, not the Inspectorate headquarters. The provincial capital had its own independent Inspectorate; its sense of existence was so weak that most people didn’t know the capital had its own independent Inspectorate.

.....

The White Moon City Inspectorate.

Wang Henggang was hard at work. He was very busy after large numbers of Red Moon powerhouses surged into the province. He needed to prevent the organization from assaulting the capital. His communicator rang while he was face down in work.

The voice of someone from downstairs traveled into his ear when he picked up. “Inspector General, someone’s here to see you. It’s a chief commissioner and a commissioner inspector from the Night Watchers...”

The Night Watchers? Wang Henggang blinked. He didn't have much to do with the Night Watchers, why was someone here to see him? A chief commissioner was at least a Sunflare.

"What are their names?"

"One's surnamed Liu and says he's from Silver City..."

Old memories suddenly gripped Wang Henggang. He thought of Liu Long, the fellow with the stubborn temper. Wang Henggang had chosen to come to White Moon City three years ago, but Liu Long chose to stay in Silver City. They had a close relationship before that. One was the inspector general of the Inspectorate and the other the team captain of the law enforcement team. The entire city had been within their grasp and security was very good. They'd worked together for many years in a happy partnership.

What a pity...

"Let them come up..." Wang Henggang breathed out softly. "Forget it, take them to the reception room. I'll go down."

"Inspector General..."

"Leave it at that!" Wang Henggang stood up and dithered for a moment before walking downstairs. Had Liu Long come for him? To fight? To yell? To make trouble? Or to persuade him to return to Silver City?

Regardless, this fellow had chosen to visit today after many years. It didn't seem like he came with friendly intentions.

.....

Within the reception room.

Li Hao looked around calmly, Liu Long was a bit silent.

“Don’t worry, boss. If you’re really ticked off, we can beat him up before we go!”

“.....” Liu Long looked at him wordlessly. This is the White Moon Inspectorate! You’re going to beat up their inspector general right here? You already said he’s a peak Solar! Do you realize how arrogant you’re being??

Footsteps sounded as he mentally censured Li Hao. They were a bit heavy, plainly on purpose. The door swung open, revealing a heavily tanned man.

Wang Henggang looked at Li Hao, learning only now that the other person was the young man. He turned to Liu Long instead and smiled, “Ole Liu... It’s been a while.”

Liu Long flicked a glance at him and nodded. “It’s been a few years.”

“Let’s grab a drink tonight?”

“Let’s not, I’m busy with official duties.”

“Then...” The two ignored Li Hao, who didn’t mind.

Liu Long started first, “Let’s not stand on pleasantries, there’s no need to do so. Do you know the Silver Moon Guards?”

“.....” Wang Henggang raised an eyebrow, but nodded. “Yes.”

“There’s a new one hundred person team there who needs people. Do you have any suitable talents?”

“Yes.” Wang Henggang nodded. “You know the group of brothers from all those years ago. Apart from a couple who ascended to the supernatural, the rest are still martial masters. There are seven Sunderers and nine Slayers. Is that enough? They’re willing to follow you if you ask them. They’ve wanted to go back for you all these years, but I stopped them. I said we can go back when there’s really a need, that it wasn’t the time. It’s too hard for us to improve in Silver City.”

Sixteen martial masters, seven of which were Sunderers. That wasn’t too few. It was clear to see that Wang Henggang thought Liu Long had joined the Guards and that the Dominator needed to build a team.

“Not me, but Li Hao!” Liu Long corrected.

“Hmm?” Wang Henggang blinked and looked at the young man. Li Hao was the centurion? “Li Hao... is a Dominator?”

“Yes!” Li Hao smoothly inserted himself. “It was just luck, pure luck! I know that big brother Wang’s from Silver City, so I grabbed chief here to come looking for some support. I’ve only just arrived and don’t know anyone or anything. I can only look to big brother Wang.”

“Then you...” Wang Henggang looked at Liu Long.

“I’m Li Hao’s helper,” the man responded calmly. “Don’t look at me like that, he’s stronger than you! I was your subordinate for many years, why can’t I do the same for Li Hao? Go ask those brothers if they’re willing to come. Tell them clearly that it’ll be more dangerous than their current gig. They can come if they’re willing, no one will be forced into something they don’t want. It’s going to be dangerous work that puts our lives on the line, not going shopping on the streets.”

“Do you think they won’t be willing?” Wang Henggang laughed, then quickly frowned. “Li Hao’s also here, so I’ll be frank. It’s not that I don’t think much of you, but I wonder if you’re too young...”

Liu Long turned to Li Hao without further ado. “Give him a punch and see how much of the Iron Shirt skill he still retains!”

Li Hao beamed happily, could he?

“A try is just as good!” Wang Henggang laughed. “Li Hao, bring your full strength to bear. To be honest, I’d be comfortable letting Liu Long take the men away. But if it’s you... I’m a little uneasy. So bring your full strength to bear...”

“Then, big brother Wang, you... need to bring your full strength to defend!”

“Of course!” Wang Henggang smiled. I know you’re strong, but do you know that I’m a peak Solar?

“I mean it, big brother Wang, it has to be your full strength for defense!” Li Hao reminded. “I’m very strong, I’ve already killed a Solar!”

“.....” Wang Henggang blinked, a light dancing in his eyes. Killed a Solar? Yu Xiao?

“Then... I’ll punch you?”

“Mmhmm!”

Li Hao cocked his hand back with everything he had, not using the earth or fire sword aura, but the spontaneous eruption of the metal sword aura! BOOM!

A massive collision exploded as the fist landed on a metal wall. The eruption of the metal sword aura was domineering in the extreme! Wang Henggang flew backward with a rumble and smashed a hole out of the wall.

Li Hao shrugged. I told you to bring your full strength to bear. This punch is for the chief.

Indeed, Liu Long grinned from ear to ear. He was in a fantastic mood. The Inspectorate promptly exploded with activity, to which Wang Henggang calmed with a roar, "I'm fine, this is a spar between friends. Back to your duties!"

Moments later, the man walked back and nodded at Li Hao. "Very good, you can take the men with you. You've got a bright future ahead!" He patted his chest like he was brushing dust off. "I'm going to change my uniform as it seems to have ripped. That doesn't look proper, so I'll be a few moments..."

He turned and left, a rictus of pain twisting his face a few steps later. He sucked in air through bared teeth, the breath hurting his lungs. Agony was written over his deeply tanned face as he showcased a mask of pain!

Fuck!

The boy... that punch... was too damned brutal! Wang Henggang felt that his bones were about to shatter. Judging from the other's nonchalant attitude, that hadn't been his full strength. If it were, it wouldn't look like this.

Wang Henggang's expression was so twisted that it confused those who saw him. The inspector general immediately regained his composure.

"Go about your duties..." He vanished out of sight. It hurt so much! That bastard Liu Long, I was wondering why he was so agreeable to everything. He set up a trap for me!

.....

Back in the reception room.

Li Hao laughed. That's a stiff upper lip, alright!

Wang Henggang was the latest he'd met in a series of powerhouses adept at defense. Mu Lin was the other—both of them probably walked the Iron Shirt path. One had become a supernatural and the other a martial master.

Wang Henggang walked the path of the supernatural. Li Hao had briefly sensed him—he should be an earth supernatural, a good match for martial dao. He was a peak Solar, but unknown as to whether or not he counted as a strong peak Solar. The young man had met a few peak Solars by now. Violet Moon, the Revolution King, Huang Jie, Wang Henggang...

But their strengths varied wildly and the presence of an origin weapon was also a deciding factor. One also needed to see if they were crossed over from martial masters, such as the late Solar Qimei Staff and Hu Dingfang. Those two were also very strong, giving Li Hao the feeling that they were stronger than Huang Jie.

Wang Henggang might be an even stronger peak Solar since he was a martial master first. He was the first martial-master-to-peak-Solar that Li Hao had met. The rest, such as Violet Moon and the Revolution King, were plainly not former martial masters.

Although Li Hao's earlier punch had drifted lightly without strength, he'd utilized the metal sword aura because he knew that his opponent focused on defense. The metal sword aura specialized in spontaneous eruption, so this punch would not be weak. Added to that the natural increase in Li Hao's strength, the gap between his punch and the sword stroke he brought to bear against Mu Lin wouldn't be that great.

He'd slammed Mu Lin into the ground and covered the man in wounds. When it came to Wang Henggang, Li Hao judged his force to cause minute cracks in the man's bones at most. For powerhouses like them, those were easily recovered from. Of course, one was still in for a world of pain.

Li Hao didn't use any force that reverberated, he was just testing the inspector general. He didn't want to kill anyone—shaking the organs would lead to more severe injuries.

#### Chapter 377: The Five Styles Leap Over the Sea (I)

Liu Long laughed for a while before sighing, "This guy really did improve very quickly, so he wasn't wrong to move to White Moon City. Seven of the brothers who left with him have become Sunderers..."

"Is that a lot, chief?" Li Hao chuckled. "We also have three Sunderers, me and you as a Dominator, and Sis Yun Yao who's a Darkmoon. We don't seem to be worse off than him, do we?"

"That's now." Liu Long smiled. That hadn't been the case before.

"It's all the same," Li Hao continued merrily. "The inspector general is stronger than chief, but what comes next after peak Solar is Nova and that's incredibly difficult. On the other hand, you have a lot of room for improvement. There are many paths available to Dominator and plenty of places where you can strengthen yourself."

Strengthening the body, blood qi, consciousness, the five visceral organs... Based on current knowledge, there were four tried and true ways that one could enhance oneself. All that peak Solars could do was smash the fifth supernatural lock. It was up to luck whether or not they would succeed, and there was no path available to them if they couldn't locate their lock like Hao Lianchuan.

Liu Long nodded and dropped the subject. "Who would've thought that there'd be so many brothers still pursuing martial dao? Sixteen of them... The guy took twenty with him that year, which means there have been no fatalities in all this time. He's got some skill."



The man grew despondent again. No one died following Wang Henggang, whereas his people died in droves. The Demon Hunters had lost many, but they chose him and didn't look back, each and every single one of them.

"That's different!" Li Hao said. "The Inspectorate is only in charge of inner city security. This is White Moon City with countless powerhouses. The Night Watchers oversee the critical issues and the army is also here. Who would dare make trouble in White Moon City? Executing daily missions naturally minimizes losses. It's a completely different situation, chief."

"Mmhhh." Liu Long knew that Li Hao was comforting him, so he swiftly regained control of his mood.

His mindset had always been alright, but seeing the old friend that he'd disagreed with back in the day had set him back a little. He saw for himself how strong the other was, how the brothers he'd taken with him were all safe and well. In the meantime, Liu Long was weak and half of his brothers were injured or dead.

Li Hao had nothing further to say. He thought for a bit and made certain calculations. Thirty from the Sword Sect and another sixteen here made for forty-six total. Added to that Liu Long, Liu Yan, Wu Chao, Chen Jian, and excluding himself, that made for fifty. He'd managed to complete just half of his team.

This wasn't including Golden Spear's promise of being able to commandeer thirty-seven people from the Guards. If they were included, that made for eighty-seven. He would be very close to completing his team then. However, he had no intention of shifting people from the other teams. Everyone flowed smoothly through practice, losing a member here or there could immensely irritate the teams.

Fifty people were enough. He would make fifty-one. Two Dominators, twenty Sunderers, twenty-nine Slayers. There were quite a few Sunderers and naturally, his ratio of Slayers to the rest of the team was high compared to the rest. But he had suits of black armor, so it didn't matter. Slayers would field equally powerful defensive capabilities if they wore it.

Ah yes, could the armor be opened? They should be, possibly thanks to Hou Xiaochen. The armor was hard to slash through even with Stellaris. It was possibly the only weapon that could.

“If all twenty-nine Slayers become Sunderers... Strength of internal force is the only consideration when it comes to Slayers setting foot into Sunderers. The aura is irrelevant, so blood pearls, sword energy, mysterious power stones, and unattributed mysterious power are all very effective methods to enhance Slayers!”

Li Hao's first thought was to raise his entire team to the Sunderer level. Outfitted with black armor, this would be a formidable team. He wouldn't need to worry about being attacked by Sunflares. Two or three Sunderers working in tandem could absolutely turn the tables. The big caveat was if their speed could keep up. These Sunderers were a little less than ideal as their speed couldn't necessarily catch up to others.

Various thoughts floated into Li Hao's mind. Wang Henggang walked back in at this time, wearing a fresh uniform. Smiling faintly, he waved his hand and instantly filled in the broken wall. Such are the terrifying capabilities of earth supernaturals! They were first class at building structures!

“Heroes come from the young, alright!” Wang Henggang sighed with appreciation, finally having the ability to closely inspect Li Hao. “With your strength... probably only Golden Spear can defeat you in the Guards!”

He sat down with a shake of his head and looked at Liu Long. “What brings you to your senses and to White Moon City? You weren't willing when I invited you, but you're willing when Li Hao does?”

“Was your timing the same as the timing now?” Liu Long sneered. “Supernaturals ran rampant everywhere then, but they're mostly dead now. The four institutions are cleaning house and individual supernaturals can't run fast enough. But in those times, these lone wolves were completely out of control and killed people everywhere. If I left then, Silver City would be long destroyed!”

“I understand everything you say, Ole Liu, but you know Mu Sen. He's not weak. Silver City's safety was guaranteed with him present.”

“Inspector General Mu hides himself too deeply,” Li Hao interjected. “We normally can’t tell.”

Wang Henggang thought for a bit and nodded in agreement. That fatty was just as shameless as his brother. He knew Mu Lin and had a relationship with the man. As two practitioners of the Iron Shirt discipline, they’d once engaged in a sparring match. Wang Henggang won by a small margin, but he wasn’t much stronger as Mu Lin was also very strong.

The inspector general set the affairs of yesteryear out of mind. Each decision had their own pros and cons, there was no talk of right and wrong. He didn’t think that he’d done wrong either.

“Ole Liu, I’ll have them report to the Silver Moon Guards tomorrow. No one will decline when they know that it’s you.” Wang Henggang turned to Li Hao. “We’re all Silver City brothers, Li Hao, so I’ll speak frankly. These days, someone from a shared hometown is more reliable than outsiders, so this warrants special attention. I know a bit about the Guards—it’s a very dangerous place, much more dangerous than the Inspectorate. Some of these brothers aren’t spring chickens anymore. They won’t have another chance if they miss this one.

“I considered having them join the Guards after the faction moved toward taking its place in the light. Now that you and Ole Liu have found your footing in the Guards, the situation is better than I thought it would be.”

He’d agreed so readily due to this consideration. He’d already thought of sending his men to the Guards when it emerged from the shadows. Apart from the Guards, it was supernaturals that dominated all other fields. Martial masters were not in a good spot in this world.

Since he’d discussed this possibility with his men early on, he didn’t bother asking for their opinion now. There wouldn’t be much opposition and this turn of events was even more up their alley. While Li Hao may not be familiar with them, Liu Long would be! Liu Yan and the others had also worked with the people he’d taken—they’d all been part of the law enforcement team.

It could be said that Li Hao’s arrival fit in readily with his plans!

“Then it’s settled!” Liu Long rose to leave. The discussion was concluded and he couldn’t be bothered to say another word to Wang Henggang.

The inspector general raised a hand to stop him. “What are you in such a hurry for? We old friends are finally meeting after so many years. Stay for a meal.”

“I don’t want to eat with you!”

“.....” Wang Henggang broke out in laughter and looked at Li Hao. The young man shrugged. Don’t look at me, what chief says goes.

“Let’s share a meal and I’ll send the brothers with a nice treasure when they go to the Guards tomorrow.” Wang Henggang grinned.

“What?”

“A supernatural net! The Inspectorate hasn’t been stuck in place over these years. Apart from nurturing martial masters and supernaturals, we’ve also created some special weapons. There isn’t much to the rest, but the supernatural net is quite something!

“It comes from the central region and even mundanes can use it. A supernatural weapon is fashioned from a large net containing ice crystals mixed with other special materials. Not even Sunflares are able to withstand it if the net comes down over the target. Their strength is suppressed and their mysterious power immensely affected...”

“Why doesn’t Silver City have this?” Liu Long raised a brow.

“There are very few of them. The Night Watchers took a few, leaving only three for the Inspectorate. I’ll have them bring one over tomorrow. The production method is so unique that imitations are impossible.”

Li Hao's interest was piqued. "Is it effective only against Sunflares?"

"Yes, Solars are too hard to cope with!" Wang Henggang shook his head. "It's already fast progress to create a supernatural object effective against Sunflares within twenty years. Sunflares are the peak of power to mid and low level power structures. Solars rarely appear in the public eye, which makes this net enough."

There were too few nets. The central region sent a dozen over. Wang Henggang had been able to lay hands on three because the White Moon Inspectorate was in charge of handling the capital's affairs.

Liu Long considered the proposal, then nodded. They could eat together!

Wang Henggang smiled and had men relay orders for people to prepare a meal at the Inspectorate. He was the inspector general, no one would gainsay him.

.....

Noon.

The Inspectorate's internal cafeteria, the second floor.

Wang Henggang didn't normally drink, but he had plenty of wine prepared today. He insisted on pouring for Liu Long. Liu Long didn't drink either, but didn't turn the man down.

"Ole Liu, I want to say something from the heart. When I chose to stay in White Moon, I also meant to fight for Silver City. I don't care if you believe me or not, I have no reason to lie to you.

“The province wanted to migrate all of the small cities then, but no one could speak on Silver City’s behalf in the capital. No one would help us. I stayed and searched for opportunities, climbing to the position of inspector general of White Moon City after a few years. If migration was on the agenda again, at least I had a seat at the table...”

“Those guys wanted to split up the people simply because we had no one backing us!” Wang Henggang sneered. “If we moved, there were only a million of us to settle. White Moon is a metropolis that contains thirty million people. Any of its supernaturals could mobilize to create a small city near White Moon. It would be no trouble to shelter a million denizens!”

“Fertile farmland can be found all around White Moon, much of it lying fallow. Silver City people are a sturdy bunch. If we settle down here, it would only be a few years before we recovered...”

Liu Long didn’t say anything. Only Wang Henggang himself knew if these words were real or fake.

#### Chapter 378: The Five Styles Leap Over the Sea (II)

But if Wang Henggang really continued upward and reached Kong Jie’s position, then a mere Silver City with its one million inhabitants would be completely up to his discretion even if it was slated for migration.

Li Hao didn’t normally drink, yet he followed the other two in taking a sip. It burned all the way down; he smacked his lips and drank some tea before chuckling, “Big brother Wang, why did you have your sights set on White Moon City? As small as Silver City is, empty land borders us on every front. You can expand in any way you want from north to south to east to west!”

“Silver City was the capital of Silver Moon back in the day. When we grow stronger, we’ll call the shots! What talk of migration... It should be more of you guys migrating to us!”

“Those are nice ambitions!” Wang Henggang laughed uproariously, truly treating it as a joke.

Li Hao wasn’t weak and he wasn’t weak. They were powerhouses from Silver City. But it was almost impossible for the vast Silver Moon to treat it as its core again. Silver City did indeed have

numerous empty lots around it. It'd been quite big before and some of the older neighborhoods were outright abandoned when it declined.

It used to be the province's capital, after all. It was a pity that transportation was inconvenient and its infrastructure outdated. A massive mountain range was found in the north, supposedly bordering other nations. Moving toward Silver City would truly be asking for trouble.

Wang Henggang was also well aware of how many powerhouses White Moon possessed. All of them hid and concealed themselves. As one of their number, he knew some of the details. Li Hao was spewing utter drivel; the kid had only needed a small sip to be inebriated!

"Wang, you treat it like a joke, but I think of it as real!" Liu Long was abruptly filled with heroic air. "Why not? Silver City isn't worse than any other place. While it may not be the capital again, what's wrong with having two cores of the province? With Rift Canyon as the boundary, everything to the south falls to White Moon City. Everything to the north can be assigned to Silver City. What's so inconceivable about that?"

"We can rebuild Rift Bridge to connect north and south again. Silver Moon is most suited for a twin core situation. When only White Moon City is the heart, the sixteen cities in the north suffer untold bitterness!"

It was a coincidence that Rift Canyon split the thirty-two cities of Silver Moon into sixteen on each side. The province had indeed operated under a twin core in the past; Silver City had been later demoted. The sixteen cities in the north truly eked out a tough existence; the southern sixteen basked beneath the glow of White Moon City. And with Flare City rapidly developing, the southern sixteen cities as a whole were more prosperous than the north, which naturally made for more powerhouses.

"Twin cores?" Wang Henggang blinked, then quickly laughed. "Let's work in that direction then!"

He wasn't discouraging them. He wanted to do the same thing, but knew that it was too hard. It wasn't just a matter of strength, but also of labor, resources, and vast sums of day-to-day living from the citizenry. These were all hard to resolve.

While old grudges were not fully eliminated after a meal, no one mentioned them again. After lunch, Li Hao and Liu Long took their leave.

.....

Inside the car.

Li Hao drove back while Liu Long stared off into space in the passenger seat. He jerked to his senses after the young man veered into a large rock. Used to such occurrences, Liu Long suddenly asked, “Li Hao, do you think my earlier boasting is possible?”

“Is it supposed to be hard to achieve?” Li Hao laughed and rolled down the window, pointing ahead of them to crush the large rock beneath the tire. The car continued forward. “A twin core system works the best for Silver Moon, but Director Hou and the others aren’t willing to split their attention between two places after the rise of the supernatural. It will only create openings for others to move in.

“Silver Moon possesses wealth, resources, and people. It just lacks powerhouses to anchor the north. If we develop to Director Hou’s level and don’t need White Moon to shoulder any costs, the capital will naturally approve of our plan.”

“Director Hou’s level...” Liu Long became lost in a daze. Killing a Nova with one spear jab? Was that possible?

“Chief, I’ve got it,” Li Hao raised. “The team can familiarize itself with each other over the next two days and run some drills. After that, we’ll take them past Rift Canyon and toward the north!”

“Hmm?”

“We’ll sweep the northern sixteen cities of their supernaturals!” Li Hao said merrily. “The four institutions are present in the south, so we can’t get a share of the pie. Therefore, we should head



north. That's where our home city is located and there ought to be numerous active supernaturals there right now...

"Additionally, let's call our team the Demon Hunters! The Silver City Demon Hunters... Forget it, it'd be inappropriate to affix Silver City to it. Not that many in the Sword Sect are from Silver City, so let's just call it the Demon Hunters!

"We can't let our little team disappear like this. Our mission statement is still the same as before—to uphold justice!"

Upholding justice... hunting down demons!

Liu Long looked around blankly and glanced at Li Hao, unable to make a sound for a long time. Did the team he'd created still exist? It ran beyond his expectations that Li Hao would name this new team the Demon Hunters.

"Chief..."

"Mmhmm!" Liu Long blossomed with joy and asked excitedly, "Then... we call it the Demon Hunters?"

"Of course!" chuckled the young man. "Let's not go back yet, I'll take you to view the sea. How about it, chief?"

"The sea..." Liu Long's eyes widened and he nodded. Let's go look at the sea. It'd been a long time since he'd visited.

.....

The Moon Sea.

A car stopped several thousand meters away from the Guards complex. The beach was ahead, an unbounded ocean on the other side.

Li Hao stopped the car, alighted, and sank deeply into the sand when he stepped down with his leather boots. He looked into the distance with appreciation, “This is a bay formed by the sea? There doesn’t seem to be an end to it... and it’s only part of the sea?”

He could look very far into the distance. But no matter how far he peered, he couldn’t see the end. If this was just part of the North Sea, how majestic and imposing must the North Sea be?

The sea was very calm at the moment with no sign of the surging, billowing waves that everyone spoke of. Liu Long also got out of the car and smiled into the distance.

“The Moon Sea is big, but it’s said that the North Sea is even grander! I’ve never been to the North Sea, I’ve only ever seen the Moon Sea.

“What a pity that there are no waves today or you’d see more than this. Although the Moon Sea is just part of the sea, it’s still immensely frightening when the waves come!”

“Chief, has your water wave aura improved lately?”

“A little.”

“Then... would you like to have some fun in the sea?”

“Hmm?” Liu Long looked blankly at Li Hao.

“The water wave aura is most suited for a place with water. There are no waves here, chief. As a Dominator, a walking god... You can go create waves when there aren’t any. Show me what it means to be a real god!”

Liu Long blinked. The hell?! You want me to get in there to create waves for you?? Get this straight, this is the sea! It’s not a river or a pond. I can easily overturn any of those, but this is the Moon Sea! The kid thinks too highly of me!

“Go and try, chief!”

“You...” Liu Long was speechless, but suddenly smiled. “Alright!”

I’ll give it a try!

He shot upward and raced for the sea. Here goes nothing!

This was his first time visiting the Moon Sea after comprehending the aura. It was a calm and quiet day without wind or waves. That made it rather pointless to look at the sea. One needed to gaze upon its grand scale if observing the deep blue!

Liu Long shot out and appeared over the sea in the blink of an eye. He touched down lightly on the surface, walking on water. Meanwhile, Li Hao also shot up and swiftly landed within the waters.

A heroic air suddenly seized Liu Long and he strode out several hundred meters along the water surface until he was almost one thousand meters away from shore.

“I can’t create waves if I’m too close!” he called out. “This is good. Li Hao, I’ll let you see the water ripple aura!”

He punched out when his words fell. Boom! A massive wave layered nine times appeared as a fist punched through the water surface. Some ripples appeared in the tranquil sea, disturbances that were quickly absorbed by the sea and creating a small wave in the distance.

On Li Hao's side, the water surface simply undulated once with almost no reaction. Who knew, perhaps this undulation existed to begin with. The calmest water surface would certainly experience some ebb and flows.

Liu Long looked on a bit awkwardly from afar. He roared again and punched once more. Water splattered everywhere as nine layers of waves swept through the area!

A small vortex formed with the explosion this time and caused fluctuations in the nearby currents. But... that was all!

Liu Long frowned and roared another time! Punch after punch came as the layers of waves built. Li Hao watched silently, eventually glimpsing a wave building in the distance. It wasn't big as it rose only a little over the water surface. The wave started churning toward shore, one building upon the next...

It was still very calm, there was nothing frightening about the phenomenon at all. Liu Long brought his full strength to bear as he hollered with all his might, punching to create a white line along the water surface.

Waves began rolling through the sea as they towered, each higher than the one before! The waves came in an unceasing roll, accompanied by the roar of the water. They moved toward Li Hao—five hundred meters, three hundred, one hundred...

When they were one hundred meters away, the accumulated waves were several meters taller than the water surface. The waves moved faster; Li Hao's eyes sharpened when they were less than thirty meters from him.

Boom!

The somewhat weak waves slapped the reefs by the shore. The waves exploded and sea spray covered Li Hao! The young man didn't step away—his eyes darted around as he punched out. He could vaguely hear the sound of waves through his blow.

His punch shattered only the water in front of him. More waves crashed upon him after that!

Bam!

It was just sprays of water, but they crashed upon the stones with the roar of a missile bombardment. Li Hao's face stung from the force of the last wave.

The waves and layering them!

These were just Liu Long's creations. He waved his fists around again and again a thousand meters away, continuously creating waves. He was in a fine mood as he punched with gusto, but he soon sensed something different.

His face immediately changed when he looked into the distance. There seemed to be thunderclouds gathering there and a faint wind slowly building. The sea wind wasn't big at first, but it started whipping into a bigger gale. The thunderclouds also approached at fast speed...

The wind was overwhelming in the blink of an eye. Liu Long ran as soon as he registered the development. He was in over his head! No, this wasn't his playground anymore. The sea breezes truly had picked up today. So Li Hao wanted to see the waves? He had his chance to now!

### Chapter 379: The Five Styles Leap Over the Sea (III)

Li Hao was still slapping the waves by the shore. He smiled when he saw Liu Long rush back.

“Chief, this is nice, but it doesn't seem that much different than river water. Well, seawater is salty...”

Liu Long wanted to give him a warning, but decided not to say anything when he registered the young man's attitude. No matter how big they were, they wouldn't kill Li Hao, right?

"Mm, they're alright. Wait a bit longer, watch out for another surge of small waves incoming."

"Alright!" Li Hao chuckled merrily. The wind soon picked up where he was and grew so big that it was uncomfortable to endure. When he looked up at the sky and saw that patch of thunderclouds... There was a tall white wall in the distance—no, that wasn't a wall, but something created by the towering waves.

The look in the young man's eyes shifted. Were these the real waves? Were they mighty? He wanted to give them a try!

Splish splash!

Water undulations abounded as Liu Long made it back to the shore. He laughed when he saw that Li Hao was still waiting. Kid, you'll get it in a moment. You won't think you're all that afterward!

A clap of thunder echoed among the clouds just as Liu Long cackled!

BOOM!

A wave crashed down like thunder and lightning! Li Hao swayed in the wind and rain. He stomped down on seawater and leapt into the air, punching with a furious tiger roar that was drowned out by the waves. He wanted to see if this wave could suppress his fist!

WHAM!

Li Hao laughed as he punched straight through a wave, so that was all there was to it! He jerked his head up with astonishment the next second. There was more?

A second wave reared!

Li Hao roared as well. WHAM! Another wave scattered.

He didn't have a chance to look before the third wave crashed down and smacked him in the face, turning him into a bedraggled drowned cat. The young man shouted and waved his fist around!

Wham!

Wham!

Wham!

Unceasing layer after layer unfurled like the Nine Forged Force. Giant waves came one after another. Li Hao was exceedingly strong to be able to break them each time they came. But once, twice, thrice...

He couldn't keep up after several hundred times and started cursing inwardly. That's enough!

Every wave he punched through caused subsequent waves to churn even stronger. Each wave was higher than the one before. This was when Li Hao finally realized that the power of nature was truly interminable without end!

He would've beaten his opponent to death a long time ago if they were human. But he faced waves, not a human. The waves were inexhaustible and tireless, growing larger the more one hit them!

Li Hao roared and sent the tiger punch outward, boom!

An even taller wave bore down on him, crashing so utterly that the ferocious tiger fell silent. Another punch and another crash!

Li Hao furiously fought the waves like a demented fool. Meanwhile, Liu Long frowned as he watched from the shore. The waves were growing stronger. They hadn't been that big before, but the lad was smashing them into ever larger versions of themselves.

Li Hao seemed to be a mad dog who didn't know the definition of weariness. Everything he punched out was absorbed by the sea to create even stronger waves. Would he punch a tidal wave into existence if this continued?

"He... shouldn't! Right?"

.....

"Hoo!" Li Hao panted, in an excellent mood. The waves, layered force... This was his first time sensing the layered nature of the waves, an unending motion that consecutively arrived. He was very excited and wanted to holler a few times. This place was very suited to practice the Nine Forged Force! It was a natural enemy that did not require anyone's company to train. All one had to do was continuously punch the waves for a training partner.

Punch, punch, punch...

Nine layers overlapped each other. Li Hao's powers of imitation were very strong. Simply perceiving the continuous interplay of force between the waves and the unending interaction between them brought him deeper understanding of the Nine Forged Force.



He didn't want to perceive the aura yet, he just wanted to swiftly propel his understanding to eight layers. When he completed nine layers after that, it might naturally give rise to the water ripple aura.

The waves in front of him grew stronger, as if angry that a human would dare bring their strength against the heavens!

Boom!

Li Hao stumbled slightly when the waves crashed into him. This was stunning, they were starting to physically move him! These waves were growing ever stronger!

"Li Hao, come back!"

"Wait!" roared the young man. What was he going back for? This place was eminently suited for practicing the Nine Forged Force! He punched out again.

Wham!

The waves towered overhead...

Unceasing without end, the unending waves were met with Li Hao's equally untiring fists. He was very strong. Though he couldn't beat the waves to death, he felt that he could stand here and punch for a few hours with no problem.

The waves picked up speed as his thoughts ran wild. It wasn't one wave this time, but a series that crashed consecutively onto the shore. There was no break between them as they slammed into Li Hao. Finally, internal force manifested over Li Hao's body to defend against the onslaught. He could sense that eight layers of force were on the verge of manifesting. It was so nice to train here!

Bam!

Another loud collision sounded as Li Hao was slammed into the sand by an incredibly tall wave. He was plowed deep into the ground. The young man swiftly crawled out and was promptly met with another wave that slapped his face.

.....

By the shore.

Liu Long sighed. That idiot... was being so childish at his first sighting of the sea. This was the sea, not a lake. There were borders to a lake that stopped even the greatest wave and prevented it from further accumulating strength. The sea, however, was boundless without end. The more one resisted, the more strength it answered with. Waves from the back propelled waves in the front. As undulations fluctuated, they sometimes sent large waves from elsewhere toward the one resisting.

You'll come back with a face full of snot and tears after a while, kid. Liu Long sat down to quietly appreciate the show.

Li Hao tirelessly fought enormous waves in the sea, roaring and snarling with effort. The cries had a difficult time traveling—only the sounds of waves churning through the water did.

Rumble!!

The area quickly turned into one of exploding thunder and lightning. The sound reverberated so much that the nearby Silver Moon Guards felt the craziness of the waves.

Ten minutes, twenty minutes...

An incredible wave sent Li Hao flying after half an hour; the young man crashed into the water. An even stronger wave smashed down before he had a chance to crawl back up. They gave him no chance to react; waves drilled him into the water one after another.

Upon the shore, Liu Long frowned. This wouldn't kill the kid, would it? The waves were starting to reach him on the shore.

Off in the distance, Li Hao was thrown up into the air. He quickly scampered for higher ground, but was brought down into the water again. He was quickly expending stamina and couldn't help but yell, "Chief, when will this thing... cough cough... stop!"

Liu Long could barely make out his words and had no response. It doesn't stop. It's not like there's no solution though, just stop resisting and quietly enjoy it for a bit. The sea will naturally stop when it's had its fun.

Li Hao seemed to understand the logic this time. He stopped resisting and allowed the sea to fling him wherever it would. He was thrown out of the sea and slammed down again, then flung elsewhere...

He was buffeted back and forth like a ball by the enormous waves. It took more than ten minutes for the waves to gradually die down; no tsunami was forthcoming.

.....

Half an hour later, Li Hao crawled up from the beach covered in sand. Liu Long reached out to pluck a crab off his head.

"How do you feel?" he asked with a smile.

"Damn nice!" Li Hao panted happily. "I definitely learned something new today! Nature is the most fearsome! The more I hit back, the more it came at me until I conceded! But I was also worried

about affecting the Guards complex if I created an even bigger wave. Otherwise I could've hung on!"

Liu Long was speechless. Hadn't this guy expended enough internal force already? Granted, he'd been able to fight for a full day when they sparred. There was nothing he could say. If he'd been the ones struck by the waves, he would've lost the strength to counterattack long ago.

"Let's go, we can have some seafood when we get back..." Liu Long picked up another large crab, a sea fish, and some shellfish...

Li Hao cackled and spat out some sand. He took stock of his body and suddenly punched out, running away as he did so. The punch brought forth eight layers of force! Overjoyed, the young man continued running.

Liu Long blinked and looked at Li Hao, lost in thought. He was so distracted that he was drenched by a counterblow from the sea. He didn't mind much and smiled at the fleeing Li Hao. The kid seriously had talent! Eight layers of force! Although it wasn't the full Nine Forged Force, it hadn't been long since he'd learned the method!

Even if his physique was so strong that it was ridiculous, being able to create eight layers of force in one punch within such a short period of time was immeasurable.

"Chief, I'm going to fight the sea again when I can manage nine layers!" Li Hao roared with laughter off in the distance. He couldn't beat it now; the sea was boundless without end and the waves never stopped coming. He was tired after his earlier exertions.

Liu Long shook his head without a word. He looked at the recovering sea and suddenly punched out. Waves spread from the point of impact—boom!

A large hole appeared in the deep blue as seawater churned into a vortex. Liu Long watched for a bit, leaving only when the vortex slowly dissipated. He had some new reflections to mull over—the layering of waves and the power of a vortex...

.....

At the end of the Moon Sea, upon an even greater expanse of water.

A ferocious tiger roared as it swallowed a mighty powerhouse. Its claws flashed out to rip apart the humanoid shadow in its stomach!

The tiger disassembled into a human figure. Yuan Shuo heaved for breath and cackled. The water tiger aura!

His fire heart ape had reached perfection, as had his water kidney tiger. Not only that, but his third aura was on the verge of perfection as well. When these three were melded together, he'd dare fight even a Nova—but it was unknown whether or not he'd win.

Yuan Shuo breathed out after killing the peak Solar. He slashed a scarlet shadow out of the void, it disappeared as the stone blade absorbed it with gusto. Yuan Shuo transformed back into a ferocious tiger and padded away on the water surface, vanishing on the spot.

Li Hao's tiger was of fire, but Yuan Shuo's was of water. A tiger was the king of the mountain, but this one was the tyrant of the seas and cavorted throughout the North Sea.

Another figure descended a long while after Yuan Shuo left. Unfortunately, all traces of fighting had been washed away by the waters. There was nothing to observe. A powerful personage looked around with a frosty look.

Yuan Shuo... really was something!

He'd thought that the Five Styles King would be powerless within the sea, but it turned out he was still as mighty as ever. The Five Styles... the five beasts... When did they start running through the sea?

“Send word that Yuan Shuo might have crossed the North Sea and entered the central region!” someone said grimly as more figures converged. Nearby Ghostfaces immediately vanished.

Yuan Shuo might be entering the central region.

### Chapter 380: The Demon Hunters Assemble (I)

It was another day in the blink of an eye.

September 14th. A sunny day. With the arrival of sixteen martial masters from the Inspectorate, the Demon Hunters suddenly had fifty-one members.

In the training plaza.

All fifty martial masters of the team were present and feeling a bit of trepidation. The Demon Hunters team could be split into two factions—the Silver City faction and the Sword Sect faction. Those from the Inspectorate were Liu Long's old acquaintances. Some were even his former law enforcement members who'd left with Wang Henggang many years ago.

Whether it was the Sword Sect martial masters or Inspectorate martial masters, everyone was slightly apprehensive. They were unfamiliar with Li Hao and hadn't personally requested this opportunity to join his team. It was their sect master or inspector general who'd recommended the action. Both Hong Yitang and Wang Henggang spoke very highly of Li Hao—but the group in the plaza felt the young man might be overrated.

There were many other martial masters on the sidelines watching the show. No one had thought that Li Hao would so quickly collect his team. Although he hadn't filled out a full complement of one hundred, it'd only been a few days! Already recruiting fifty was an immense surprise.

Other than the Silver Moon Guards, there really weren't that many martial masters in the wild anymore. The Sword Sect might be the province's largest martial dao sect these days, even though their sect master was a supernatural.

Li Hao was yet to arrive; gossip flurried through some of the martial masters.

"A bunch of rookie plebes!"

"But honestly, they're decent enough. Apparently, both the Sword Sect and Inspectorate think highly of that one. There's quite a few Sunderers and one Dominator among them."

"Liu Long?"

"Mmhmm, that's him."

"That's not bad, but it's not like he's that strong since he's just set foot into Dominator."

"Do you think that guy will transfer some of us? There's only fifty in his team at the moment. Sir Golden Spear apparently said that he can pull three from each team and ten from his bodyguards."

"Are you going?"

"Hells no!"

"Then that's it. I'm not going if he wants me to go either. They're just a bunch of rookies. They may be strong, but so many of them relied on mysterious power to get where they are. They're even less than those supernaturals with a variety of measures to get stronger!"

"....."

Comments flew thick and fast. The martial masters kept their voices down, but so many people were discussing the newcomers that it created quite some pressure for the Demon Hunters team. There were almost one hundred half step Dominators in the area. The congregation of so much aura made the subjects of discussion nervous. After all, their strongest was late Sunderer. Liu Long was a Dominator, but he was as still as a Buddha statue at the moment. He was so unmoving that no one knew what he was thinking.

The martial masters from the other teams weren't the only observers—Dominator on the stage near the center of the plaza were also watching. They just weren't as overt as the martial masters crowding the Demon Hunters.

"He's fast enough," snorted the ferocious Chen Jin. "He's got so many people after just a few days. Earthturner Sword's willing enough—he even sent his own daughter!"

The sight of Li Hao deeply irked Chen Jin as he was the heir of Mountain Ax. That feeling remained even after being beaten up by the young man. Next to him, the towering heir of the Luo spear—Luo Qizhao of the slender arms—laughed at those words.

"You should talk more softly," he said in a low voice. "Or have you not been beaten up enough?"

Chen Jin flicked a glance at him. "And were you not beaten up yourself?" Who are you laughing at!

Out of the nine centurions, five had lost to the young man and the remaining four didn't even have the chance to take the field.

"Couldn't help it, we were no match for him." Instead of flying into a rage, Luo Qizhao smiled. "But he's brought in Liu Long... Silver Spear's heir. He's got some strength. What do you guys think, will we be able to handle Liu Long if he wants to fight?"

"Him?"



“He’s a fresh Dominator, all of us have been at this stage for several years. We’ve spent a lot of time with various dao comprehension weapons and absorbed mysterious power stones... There’s been a large share of treasures coming our way. Liu Long falls short in this regard.”

“Don’t forget though, Silver City people are freaks. Setting aside the Five Styles King, how long has it been since Li Hao set foot onto the path of martial dao? Liu Long might be the same as them.”

Silver City’s Dominators had progressed this year, but each was stronger and more terrifying than the rest. They improved at an unbelievable speed.

As one of the few female martial masters, Xie Lan interrupted their discussion with a frown. “Is Li Hao officially establishing his team by assembling his people here? He hasn’t filled out his ranks yet and they don’t know the Guards’ Skyjade Formation... It won’t be convenient for him if he starts practicing first and slowly fills in the gaps after.”

The Silver Moon Guards possessed an army formation called the Skyjade Formation. It could be fielded with one thousand or one hundred people. They usually trained one hundred to a formation, but the entire army unit trained together every five days to familiarize themselves with the formation. This ensured they would be able to respond adequately in the case of meeting with a strong enemy.

Li Hao did not have a full one hundred yet and his people were all new. It would be difficult for them to learn the formation.

“I don’t want to train with him,” Chen Jin snorted. “Not to mention, the formation can only host one thousand people. We already have 980 of us. They would put us over the limit...”

“Chen Jin!” rebuked a martial master off to the side. “Enough! We know that his master killed your master, so it’s normal for you to be irritated at the sight of him. But don’t forget that this is the Silver Moon Guards. No one will say anything in normal times, but be careful of problems developing if you continue to nurse resentment!”

Grudges abounded among martial masters. In the martial world, those on opposing sides either never crossed paths again, took revenge, or forsook their hatred. But after joining the Silver Moon Guards, all of that was left in the past. Enormous trouble would develop if martial masters pursued their feuds to the bitter end.

Although Chen Jin spoke no more, bitterness overflowed from his eyes. The others didn't try to speak more sense into him. If this was out in the world, the two would have to fight to the death if they met. It was good enough that they could coexist peacefully.

Li Hao approached from a distance as the group chatted. He was followed by Golden Spear and Mu Lin. Upon seeing the latter, everyone knew that the young man was truly establishing his team today.

.....

"Li Hao," Mu Lin transmitted. "You don't have a full contingent yet and you're not willing to transfer the veterans... Isn't it too early to formally establish your team? Both boss and the director mean for you to do this at the end of the year..."

"It's about time!" Li Hao replied without a change in expression. "Establishing it early means getting to work early. That means we earn money earlier! I'm almost too poor to live."

Mu Lin didn't have a response for that, neither did the young man say anything else. He swiftly walked ahead, parting the way through the observing martial masters. This one was not a kind soul and was not someone to provoke.

Li Hao walked very, very quickly until he reached his people. He cut straight to the chase without pleasantries or greetings. "I won't bother with extraneous words. Everyone's here because we want to grow stronger! I, Li Hao, am a rookie who doesn't know anything about operations or partnership. Thus, the Demon Hunters need everyone to work together with utmost sincerity so that we can make a name for ourselves!"

“I don’t have that many merits, but neither do I have that many demerits. If I am to prove myself to you, I speak only of strength!” He pointed at the centurions standing in the distance. “I defeated five of those nine Dominators a few days ago and the remaining four didn’t dare fight me together. If that still doesn’t prove my strength, all of you can attack me in however many numbers you want. What you say goes if you defeat me, if not, my word is law!”

He spoke loudly enough that unpleasant expressions appeared on the centurions’ faces, but they didn’t say anything. They had indeed been defeated, what could they say about that? Li Hao was stepping on them in public, but they had to resign themselves to their fates.

Over on the Demon Hunters side, not everyone knew about what he spoke of. Some of them looked at the centurions with strange looks, shock reverberating in their hearts. What their leader said was real! None of the nine was a match for him. So this disciple of the Five Styles is very, very strong—at least among martial masters!

No wonder the sect master (inspector general) praised him so effusively. Martial masters spoke of strength; all the rest could be spoken of later. So long as Li Hao led with a relatively fair hand and didn’t nitpick at his people or purposefully send them to death, he would be a good leader in their eyes. Martial masters were that simple at times. These words were easy to say, but hard to execute.

“There are only fifty in our hundred person team at the moment,” Li Hao continued. “If I’m not included, we happen to have precisely half of the amount we need. I don’t intend to recruit more for the moment as too many people makes it inconvenient. Fifty is enough, and we’ll be called the Demon Hunters in the future!

“Just call me leader—centurion is too small of a title!”

“.....” Golden Spear and Mu Lin watched silently from behind. The title was too small? Was this boy even listening to himself?

“Our deputy is Liu Long. He used to be my chief in Silver City and he’s also a Dominator!” Li Hao chuckled. “We’re all martial masters, so let’s be more direct. Speak of any dissatisfaction openly,

don't complain or whisper behind someone's back. That just harms the ties that bind us together. I'm close with martial uncle Hong and big brother Wang. They're willing to let you come naturally because they trust me, and I won't let their trust be given in vain!

"The Demon Hunters are officially established today. What does that mean? It means we will be executing missions from now on and getting to work. We'll be growing stronger, earning money, and growing stronger again. We won't be waiting for retirement in the base!"

Some martial masters on the outskirts were unhappy at the last pronouncement. What was he insinuating? Martial masters didn't have to run missions everyday to be properly living life—rest and labor went hand in hand. They conducted missions every month to every three months. Their lives were on the line each time!

Why did it turn into waiting for retirement from Li Hao's mouth?

"I see you looking around, Hong Qing." Li Hao suddenly pointed at the girl. "Do you have something to say? Just yell out 'question'!"

"Huh?"

"Say you have a question! Have you never been to school?"

"....." The awkward Hong Qing really hadn't gone to school before. The Sword Sect had a private school, but that was different from a regular school.

She was embarrassed to be singled out and it felt that everyone on all sides was looking at her. Her face grew even redder. She usually carried herself with carefree poise, but was now nervous beyond belief.