

Star Gate 381

Chapter 381: The Demon Hunters Assemble (II)

“Say whatever you want to say!” Li Hao declared loudly. “What are you afraid of? I used to be afraid of crowds too and got uncomfortable in front of them. But then I realized there’s nothing to a crowd. They won’t dare laugh at you if you’re stronger than them or talk louder than them. They won’t even dare talk badly about you behind your back—they’ll be afraid of you hearing them!”

Hong Qing burst out laughing and quickly calmed herself. “Question! L... leader... You mentioned executing missions. W-what kind of missions are we going to be doing?”

“Killing people!”

“Huh?”

“Killing people!” Li Hao frowned. “Whether it’s soldiers or martial masters, the only goal in this war-torn era is to kill people! It’s my first time being a soldier, so I don’t know much about it or understand this role, but at the very least I know that we should kill those cretins who commit wrongful acts, disturb the people, kill others for their goods, or cause disturbances. It’s not like we have a good understanding right now of defending home and country or safeguarding the nation, but we might in the future. That can wait until later!”

Since the Silver Moon Guards had the word “guard” in it, that also made them soldiers. When Li Hao said he didn’t understand concept, he really didn’t understand. The duties, obligations, and mission of protecting the nation or defending home and country were beyond his reach. They also didn’t seem necessary to grasp at this time.

Hong Qing seemed to understand. She nodded without further question. The answer was to just kill! Li Hao’s answer was very simple.

Over on the Inspectorate delegation side, someone squirmed awkwardly before opening their mouth, “Question, leader!”

“Go ahead!”

“I’d like to ask if we have any rules or a code of conduct, or standards throughout the course of conducting missions. Do we have a reward and punishment system, a set period of missions, an officer who records accomplishments, and a system to go along with that...”

Li Hao stared back at the man. His mind was a complete blank. It wasn’t that he didn’t know anything about these concepts, but that he hadn’t given any thought to it.

“What’s your name?” He smiled.

“Milord, I’m...”

“I am your leader!”

“Leader, my name is Li Heng!”

“So we’re from the same family!” Li Hao smiled. “We’re both from Silver City and the same family... Good, I have high hopes for you. Write up a detailed analysis and description of what you mentioned. Since you asked, you must have some understanding of these ideas. You can ask other people and teams for what you don’t. I’ll make you the examination officer if you finish this report!”

“.....” The speaker wasn’t that old—in his thirties at most. He was at a loss for words and glanced at Liu Long. The man didn’t say anything; there was no issue with what Li Hao had said.

There weren’t that many among the Demon Hunters—just fifty people—so there wasn’t much meaning in creating too many systems. Those that were necessary could be formed. He wouldn’t bother with this if this was the Demon Hunters of old, but they were no longer in these times.

It was normal that Li Hao didn't really understand them—neither did Liu Long. Hence, his Demon Hunters hadn't cared about them at all. It was all up to his personal authority that merits and rewards were doled out.

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“Boss!” transmitted a pained Mu Lin. “I think Li Hao is less reliable than me! If it comes down to it, I can be a centurion and he can be the deputy of the Guards. I'm worried that his Demon Hunters will all be dead in a few days!”

Golden Spear watched, unmoved. He transmitted in response to Mu Lin's nagging, “We'll know his mettle once he showcases his abilities! Li Hao said that he wants to take his people out to practice for a few days and help the team adjust to each other. After that, he'll hunt down the three great organizations alongside the four institutions. Let's just wait a few days.”

“What? He wants to bring out his people right now?” Mu Lin blinked. They'd only just established the team. Li Hao didn't even know all of them yet, did he? Wasn't he worried about a myriad of issues cropping up?

On the other hand, the man smiled when a new thought struck him. “That's just as well. A certain degree of safety is ensured around White Moon City. Although a lot of Red Moon supernaturals have come to the province lately, they don't dare approach the capital. A lot of them have gathered near Rift Canyon, however.”

It was good to take the team out to temper the members. Safety wouldn't be a concern with Li Hao around. Not to mention, one wouldn't necessarily run into the three great organizations just because one was in the field. The organizations weren't staffed by idiots. Who would take the risk of poking their heads out knowing full well that they were being targeted, unless they were confident of being victorious?

They were all deep in hiding.

The Night Watchers might not encounter a single one of their members when they went on patrol. There were hundreds of millions of people in Silver Moon. How was one supposed to locate a thousand supernaturals if they hid themselves well and retracted their mysterious power?

Such were Golden Spear's thoughts. Hence, he didn't refuse Li Hao's proposal. It was fine if the young man didn't seek to walk the beaten path and wasn't willing to slowly forge his team. If he wanted to just bring his team into the field... that could be done as well.

There were the ruins that he wanted to explore with Li Hao—those could wait for a few days. The other ruins of Battle Heaven wouldn't open until the 28th—that was another half month. They might not even open this time. If they didn't, everyone would have to wait for next month. It was still very early.

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"There are many powerhouses in the Silver Moon Guards!" Li Hao spoke in a ringing voice. "We have fifty-one members in the Demon Hunters. Two Dominators, twenty Sunderers, and the rest of Slayers. We're very weak without even a half step Dominator!

"Therefore, our first goal is simple. The entire team needs to reach Sunderer! The rise of the supernatural is not without benefits to martial masters. I've decided that we will head out of the city tomorrow to search for the three great organizations and kill their people! Mysterious power, blood pearls, and mysterious power stones will fuel our transformation!

"Red Moon members in particular carry blood pearls on nearly all of them. I'll find a way to borrow an origin weapon to extract them. So long as we kill more of them, everyone will become a late Sunderer!

"I hear that Red Moon has sent a batch of powerhouses to Silver Moon!" his voice rang like a bell. "These people are the basis for our strength and rise! Once everyone quickly becomes a late Sunderer, I have a dao comprehension weapon that will allow ten people to comprehend the aura. The ten Sunderers who kill and accomplish the most can perceive the aura. Succeeding is another matter entirely, but at least you stand a chance!

“If you’re lucky like me, you’ll be a Sunderer today, a late Sunderer tomorrow, comprehend the aura a day after that, and perhaps be a Dominator in a few days. Everything is possible!”

His logic was simple and raised excitement in a group of young martial masters. The older ones, however, remained unfazed. I know how to paint a picture in the sky just as well, it’s not that easy. Red Moon members are part of the three great organizations—they have a lot of powerhouses among them. You might not even find any, but you speak of them like they’re apples ripe from the picking. That’s a little too full of it.

Plus, who knew who’d do the killing if the two sides ran into each other? As strong as Li Hao was, a Dominator was on par with a Sunflare. So maybe he was extraordinarily strong and could compare to a Solar—did Red Moon not have Solars?

Therefore, only a few Sword Sect disciples were caught up in the speech. Those like Hong Qing were young and rarely conducted missions, so they agitated with expectation. Others from the Inspectorate were old hats and completely unmoved.

A full complement of Sunderers? He spoke of that so easily. Advancement would be much easier with the aid of mysterious power, but it wasn’t like that would lead to automatic breakthroughs. And for blood pearls... they would require one per person, at least. Twenty-nine Slayers meant that twenty-nine Darkmoon blood pearls were necessary. They’d have to kill twenty-nine Red Moon Darkmoons, or even more than that!

Not all of their members seemed equipped with blood pearls. Not to mention, would there be no Sunflares or Solars around them? Were the Darkmoons just standing around, waiting to be killed?

The more they thought about it, the more they felt that Li Hao was just empty talk. And this was his first goal? So he had more and stronger ones?

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The other martial masters on the scene watched with amused expressions. Someone kept his voice low, “This one... has quite the charisma! The Silver Moon Guards have been established for so many years, yet still have nearly half our number as Slayers.”

The Demon Hunters were just forming, but aimed for all of their people to be Sunderers. They were Sunderers today, Dominators tomorrow! If it was that easy, then wouldn't there be more Dominators in the Guards?

There were many half step Dominators among them, but that was also a threshold that one could be stuck at. They'd grasped the aura, but usually through the ancient weapons. There was an inherent drawback to those as auras comprehended from them weren't easily strengthened!

A lack of deeper understanding of the aura caused nearly one hundred half step Dominators to fail to take the final step.

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Li Hao didn't care whether people believed him or not. He just wanted to speak of his goals. They would believe him when he accomplished them. If not, his eyes were completely useless. If he couldn't help even twenty-nine Slayers bridge the gap to Sunderer, then what use were the Guards? A martial kindergarten?

People would know that he wasn't boasting when he accomplished his words.

“I now proclaim that the Demon Hunters are officially established! Ranking officer Golden Spear and Deputy Mu Lin are in attendance as witnesses. I am your commanding officer from henceforth!”

Golden Spear and Mu Lin inclined their heads behind him. Golden Spear wanted to say a few words... but Li Hao didn't give him a chance to. The young man felt that there was no need to say anything, and that perhaps the experienced senior Golden Spear didn't want to waste time in long-winded fluff.

“My thanks to the two esteemed personages for witnessing our formation today, we send you off in style!”

Clap clap clap! The young man began applauding. Martial masters around them started rolling their eyes. What a... perfunctory establishment ceremony. Golden Spear and Mu Lin found themselves at a loss for words. This guy...

What could they say now? Forget it, he'd recruited the Demon Hunters himself and hadn't taken one single coin from the Guards yet. It wasn't time for the monthly salary to be paid, so he could do whatever he wished. If the young man went to the trouble of causing all of his people's deaths, then Wang Henggang and Hong Yitang would naturally come for his head.

The two of them wouldn't permit him to be so reckless if he'd taken some of their people. Golden Spear and Mu Lin left, unwilling to accompany Li Hao in this farce. In their eyes, the young man wasn't taking this seriously enough. Taking the team out to train? He was going on a leisure jaunt, wasn't he?

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Li Hao didn't care about his audience. He looked at the Demon Hunters in front of him and continued, “Additionally, we're going to select five team captains! It'll be ten people to a minor team. The other nine will listen to the team captain when we've decided upon them, you are not allowed to set out on your own!

“In the future, I will give missions only to the team captains!” The young man scanned his troops. “You probably won't like it if I choose for you. There's not many of us and just twenty Sunderers. Let's choose from the Sunderers! Of course, Slayers who think they can kill enemies above their level can also participate!

“Whoever among the twenty is willing to be a team captain can spar among yourselves.”

The group looked at each other, hesitant to leap into action.

“None of you are inclined?” Li Hao laughed. “Then let me be more detailed. Based on current Guard rules, all of the gains we obtain on a mission belong to us. As the leader of the Demon Hunters, I have the right to distribute the spoils. I don’t want much, just thirty percent! Deputy Liu will take ten percent, which leaves sixty for everyone.

“Forty-nine people will divvy up the sixty percent. Each team captain oversees nine people and can claim another ten percent of their team’s distribution when all is said and done. That’s the equivalent of a doubled share!”

“.....” Eyes widened when this was announced. Setting aside the question of whether there would be gains or not, the team captain would receive an additional ten percent of loot! It was only ten percent less for the team members, which didn’t seem like a lot, but it equated to double the reward for the captain!

That difference was enormous!

“Leader,” Hong Qing couldn’t help but pipe up. “Doesn’t this mean there will be a large gap between those who are team captain and those who aren’t?”

“Certainly!” Li Hao nodded. “Strength speaks! Fight for the position if you have the confidence to! If you win it, opportunities will follow. Additionally, the position isn’t set in stone. If a team of ten wishes to change their captain everyday, that is permissible too. It won’t affect much. In fact, the team captains will be redetermined every month. You can submit a challenge for the position if you think your strength is sufficient. Everyone stands a chance.”

“But Slayers are weaker than Sunderers to begin with, we’re losing ten percent without being able to do anything about it!” Some Slayers grew frantic. No one would keep silent when profits were at stake.

“It’s easier for Slayers to improve and catch up to Sunderers so long as the Sunderers haven’t comprehended the aura yet,” Li Hao chuckled. “Be more confident in yourself. Not to mention, is it fair that those weaker want a larger share of the spoils? Fairness stems from a basis of similar strength!

“The captains will be expending more effort and energy. They’ll be the first in a fight, it’s not like they’re just sitting there and waiting for money to roll in. There’s only so many Demon Hunters and I’m not blind. Will I not be able to see who’s putting in the work and who’s not?”

The Sunderers were stirring to action. Although there were no gains to speak of at the moment, obtaining the position of team captain first was still well worth it.

There were eight late Sunderers among the twenty—a high proportion at forty percent. If only late Sunderers were allowed to participate, that meant at least three of them would be denied the position. There were also some mid Sunderers who harbored certain ambitions.

Sunderer wasn’t a level delineated by massive strength gaps. There was no hope for a Sunderer to challenge a Dominator, but quite a few mid Sunderers could win out over a late Sunderer.

There wasn’t much of a chance for an initial Sunderer, however. The gap there was too big. They possessed less than half the internal force of a late Sunderer, which made it very difficult for upsets.

Twelve people presented themselves not long after Li Hao finished speaking. Eight late Sunderers threw their hats in the ring, as did four mid Sunderers. Three of the Silver City Demon Hunters chose to participate. Liu Yan was a late Sunderer, Wu Chao and Chen Jian were mid Sunderers.

The young man knew some of the remaining nine. Hong Qing went without saying, as did her senior brother Hong Hao. Those from the Inspectorate also participated—the Li Heng who’d spoken up earlier. He was young, but also a mid Sunderer.

“We’re picking five from twelve of you, so that means seven need to be eliminated...” Li Hao glanced at the candidates. “Let’s fight one on one first so that six are left. The six who lose have one opportunity to challenge the winners, but you cannot pick the same person. If you win, you can replace the previous victor! Let’s make this more efficient and have all the fights go at the same time. It wastes too much time to fight round after round...”

He had his own thoughts, but didn't voice them. Li Hao grabbed a nearby branch and cut it into twelve segments.

"Pick your segment—they're of varying lengths. Whoever picks the same length is each other's opponent. There will certainly be late Sunderers matched against mid Sunderers, but don't think that gives you an unfair advantage. You are the one choosing your own fate!"

Everyone stepped forward to draw their lots, swiftly splitting off into six groups.

"Let the fights commence at once. We'll have our results soon!"

Everyone looked at each other with hesitation. Granted, they were in a large area so they wouldn't interfere with each other's fights.

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Li Hao ignored them and walked to the side with Liu Long. The others made way too, leaving space for the combatants. The twelve martial masters took their measure of each other in the plaza. No one was in a hurry to begin.

"Do you think... that Liu Yan and the others can become team captains?" Liu Long asked softly.

"Sis Liu won't have much of a problem. She's vicious and will probably outmatch most martial masters she meets. The Sword Sect members haven't experienced as many life and death situations and the Inspectorate representatives seemed to have lived a cushy life. Big brother Wang takes good care of them. They don't have a ferocious presence and are more like oily politicians."

Liu Long inclined his head. He'd seen the same as well. He knew the ones from the Inspectorate, but some were really much more slippery than how they'd been in Silver City.

“As for Brother Chao and Jian... it’s hard to say. They have experience, but it’s not like their opponents are rookies. Martial masters all have certain degrees of battle experience and they’re only mid Sunderers.”

Those two had only just reached mid Sunderer, so it would be difficult for them to win.

Battle commenced as they conversed. First to conclude wasn’t Liu Yan, but Hong Qing. She slashed extremely quickly with her longsword against a late Sunderer from the Inspectorate. It took less than ten seconds for her to send him flying with a bloody mark on his body.

Liu Long frowned sharply at this! He was very familiar with the defeated—this man had been his deputy back in the day. He was stronger than Liu Yan, but appeared to have lived in ease and comfort for too long. He was a late Sunderer, but didn’t last ten moves in Hong Qing’s hand!

The girl beamed happily, quickly followed by Liu Yan stabbing both blades into her opponent’s throat. She didn’t drive them in, but left a bloody mark all the same. Her Sword Sect opponent paled with horror and was deathly afraid that the woman would kill him.

Two fights were over in the blink of an eye with the women being victorious. They’d gone up against late Sunderers, leaving the four mid Sunderers to face off against each other. No one was matched with someone not of their level. It was clear to Liu Long that Li Hao must have cheated. This coincidence wouldn’t be possible otherwise.

A third fight concluded after a short while—Hong Hao sent Chen Jian flying with a mighty slash. A dejected Chen Jian didn’t scramble up from the ground. He wanted to make use of his premier defensive abilities to fight the man, but he’d still lost very quickly.

“Earthturner’s sword skills are still very capable,” Liu Long sighed softly. “His disciples may lack experience, but their foundations are solid. This Hong Hao is strong—he matches how I was when I became late Sunderer. He just lacks in killing intent...”

It was high praise! Liu Long had made his way to his position through gradual bloodshed.

Li Hao nodded and continued to watch the fights. The fourth wasn't far from concluding. Fights were usually over very quickly if there was a disparity between martial masters. A chubby martial master from the Inspectorate headbutted a mid Sunderer from the Sword Sect out of the way and claimed his spot.

"Wang Chao, Wang Henggang's nephew," Liu Long muttered. "He trains in the Iron Shirt discipline as well and it looks like he's done well for himself. His foundations are very solid!"

Li Hao nodded again, they were indeed good. This man seemed much stronger than Chen Jian.

With four fights out of the way, that left two ongoing. Wu Chao faced a late Sunderer from the Inspectorate while Li Heng faced a late Sunderer from the Sword Sect. Being adept at speed, Wu Chao spent his fight dodging his opponent. It caused an extreme headache for the Inspectorate martial master. He could not end the fight if he couldn't hit his enemy.

Seeing that four fights had concluded and he was yet to even touch Wu Chao, the Inspectorate martial master was so irritated that he started cursing. "Damn your skinny ass, Wu! Are you done running yet or what?!"

Plainly, they knew each other. Perhaps they'd been friends before since they both hailed from the Silver City Inspectorate.

"Cut the crap and catch me first!"

The two ran around the training grounds while Li Hao glanced at Li Heng's fight. Li Heng was just a mid Sunderer, but he was strong. The Sword Sect was skilled with the longsword. Li Heng's sword methods were graceful and floated upon the air. He lacked the ponderous keenness that was customary of his sect. He drifted through his motions in a way reminiscent of the Ghost Shadow Sword.

“Li Heng used to be part of the law enforcement team as well,” Liu Long introduced. “He doesn’t talk much and he’s not that old at thirty-two years old. He might be turning thirty-three soon, if not already. His sword method has a bit of history to it. There was once a swordsman in Silver City that no one knew was a martial master. He was forced to take action a few times and happened to land his eyes on Li Heng. After taking Li Heng as his disciple, he passed on some sword techniques before dying on a trip. We learned that he was the heir of the Weeping Willow Sword when White Moon notified us to collect a corpse...”

Weeping Willow had not been one of the Seven Swords, but might have been part of the ranking if it was the Ten Swords. To be able to place in the top ten of swordsmen during Silver Moon martial world’s most glorious heyday made that person quite an exalted personage. Their second generation disciple wouldn’t be too weak either. Although Li Heng was a mid Sunderer and facing a disciple of Earthturner Sword, his Weeping Willow techniques made it hard for his opponent to muster an effective counterattack.

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The Earthturner Sword technique was certainly not weak! But even the same sword method produced varying results when different people practiced it. After a few minutes of stalemate, Li Heng stabbed his opponent’s wrist with his sword and disarmed the man. He was the first mid Sunderer to triumph over his opponent.

Li Heng panted heavily, but smiled brilliantly. His fight had ended; Wu Chao and the Inspectorate martial master were still busy running circles. Li Hao raised an eyebrow at them, finding a fast speed irritating for the first time. All of the other fights were complete—had these two exchanged a single blow?

Wu Chao’s tongue lolled as he panted; he really could run. The late Sunderer chasing him could barely catch his breath and certainly couldn’t catch his opponent. Whenever he stopped to rest, Wu Chao jabbed at him in a sneak attack. It was too tiring to deal with.

After a while, the martial master roared with irritation, “That’s enough!”

“Are you conceding?”

“I’m not, but I’m not fighting you anymore either. There’s still six people if you make it, Wu. One more needs to be eliminated. As fast as you run, there’s going to be someone faster than you!” complained the Inspectorate martial master as he gave up the fight. He was much slower than Wu Chao and would never catch the man. It was impossible to have a fair fight.

Delighted, Wu Chao was ready to be challenged. He’d just continue running. Being fast was nothing to be ashamed of.

The six victors stood in a line; the six vanquished stared at Li Heng and Wu Chao. These two were the weakest. What a pity they only had one chance to issue a challenge, and that only one person could fight either of the two. Conflicted, the six debated what to do. What if all of them chose those two?

No one wanted to consider Hong Qing, Liu Yan, or Hong Hao. Wang Henggang’s nephew Wang Chao was skilled at the Iron Shirt method, making his defenses hard to break. No one thought they could claim an easy victory, which made the two mid Sunderers easy targets.

“It looks like everyone only wants to challenge Wu Chao and Li Heng.” Li Hao smiled at the six. “The other four are assured of their victory then. The two who lost to Wu Chao and Li Heng can step to the side. If you can’t fight even a mid Sunderer, there’s no point in further mounting a challenge. The remaining four of you can battle it out among yourselves. The victor can choose any opponent you want. Having to fight an extra battle is also fair since you lost your first one!”

No one had an opposing opinion; the remaining four hadn’t fought each other yet. The ones who lost to Hong Qing and Liu Yan quickly stepped forward and picked an opponent, commencing their next battle.

Li Hao watched for a while before looking away. These martial masters didn’t possess an aura. Those without an aura simply called upon stronger fist or leg techniques. There wasn’t anything too special about them. That two mid Sunderers could defeat their late Sunderer opponent spoke of their abilities.

After another ten minutes, a profusely sweating Li Heng utilized the Weeping Willow Sword to defeat his opponent. He’d fought two battles in a row against opponents of a higher cultivation level. Exhausted, the taciturn martial master couldn’t say a single word.

Drops of Wu Chao's sweat hit the ground as he ran and evaded his Sword Sect opponent. The latter was rather incensed as he hacked and slashed his sword around, each stroke more cutting than the last. Regardless of what he tried, he was unable to defeat Wu Chao.

"Brother Chao is pretty fast." Li Hao hadn't paid this much attention before, but was now a bit confused. "Did he learn from a famous teacher as well?"

Chen Jian's Iron Shirt could be found in a lot of practitioners. But famous teachers who commanded body methods were few and far in between. Li Hao had known before that Wu Chao was very fast. He'd run away with Panther and Yun Yao when facing Red Moon supernaturals and still managed to shake them off. Now as the young man took a closer look, he felt that Wu Chao was much faster than regular late Sunderers.

"I didn't want to mention certain things before," murmured Liu Long after thinking it over. "But I said that everyone on the team carries some secrets and they're willing to stay in Silver City for their own reasons. Wu Chao... Wu Chao is Wu Xinghong's grandson..."

Wu Xinghong?

Li Hao turned over the name, drawing a blank. He looked at Liu Long, who smiled. "You might not know his name. He had the moniker of Flies Over Grass."

"Oh!" Li Hao understood. "That one! He was well known back in the day. He's not in the Record of Thirty-Six Heroes only because he wasn't strong enough. He was number one when it came to body methods, so many people said that he should be named in the record!"

Someone not of the thirty-six, yet hailed as the greatest practitioner of body methods in Silver Moon was certainly a force to contend with. Wu Chao was his grandson?

"What's Brother Chao doing in the team then?"

“Someone killed Wu Xinghong and the entire Wu family. Rumors say Celestial might’ve done it, that one of their supernaturals wanted the family method. No one knows the details, but the Wus were indeed eliminated.”

“Celestial?” A headache brewed for Li Hao. The team was certainly an interesting gathering. His enemy was Red Moon, Liu Yan’s enemy was Yama, and now Wu Chao’s enemy was Celestial. They’d collected all three great organizations!

“Mmhhh, Celestial possesses many assassins that come and go without a trace. Although they may not have a use for martial body methods, would Celestial not be interested in the foremost body secret art of Silver Moon?” Liu Long shook his head with a sigh. “Wu Chao survived because he wasn’t at home at the time. He came to Silver City after that because we’re a remote location. Your teacher was here then, Wu Chao knew that the Night Watchers were protecting your teacher, so he came for shelter.”

Li Hao understood. He now knew Liu Yan and Wu Chao’s story, leaving only Chen Jian and Yun Yao’s untold. They plainly had their own reasons too, but Li Hao didn’t particularly care. All three great organizations were complete. Having one more or less additional enemy didn’t make a difference.

Wu Chao continued running and jumping as the two conversed. The Sword Sect martial master decided to give up in the end. He couldn’t hit his enemy and Wu Chao was an old colleague of Li Hao and Liu Long. After thinking it over, the man elected to forfeit.

With that, battle was over. Looking at the exhausted Wu Chao and Li Heng, then at the other four, Li Hao announced, “The other four don’t need to be further tested and can be directly made team captains. Do you agree with that, Wu Chao and Li Heng?”

What could they not agree with? The latter two barely had a thought in their heads. Any person who fought them now would easily defeat them. They did feel a bit of reluctance and resignation, however. This meant that one of them would be eliminated.

Li Heng was very nervous because he knew that Wu Chao had come with Liu Long and was Li Hao's former teammate. If it was up to the leader to choose, he wouldn't stand much of a chance.

"Leader..." Li Heng quickly said. "I know Ole Wu from before—he runs fast, but I'm not that slow either. Why don't the two of us form a team? He can be in charge of reconnaissance and I'll take point in killing enemies. We can be team captain and vice captain. We'll both share part of the profits from the other eight members of the team..."

"We're a little weaker than the other team captains, but the two of us together don't make us that weak!"

What a self-righteous spiel when he was just concerned about being eliminated!

Li Hao laughed—you said it all before I had a chance to! Wu Chao huffed and puffed, agreeing after some thought. "Leader, I think it's a good idea. Although Li Heng possesses only surface level knowledge of the Weeping Willow Sword, his technique is fine enough..."

Li Heng flicked a glance at the man and cursed inwardly. I didn't get along with this guy when we were both at Silver City. Do you think I want to work with you now?

"Then that's settled!" Li Hao didn't want to go through further hassle. "These are our team captains, you can choose your own team members! It's best if they're willing to be part of your team. If not, you guys can take turns choosing who's left!

"It's better to form a team with some distinguishing characteristics. Either you can attack just as well as you defend, or you focus solely on defense or offense. Don't try to be everything at the same time or completely overlook a certain capacity. Look at Wu Chao, for instance. What will the others do if your team has all the runners and is always the first out of sight?"

The Demon Hunters roared with amusement.

“Let’s stop here for today and regroup. Complete your teams tonight, we’ll be setting out first thing in the morning!”

Liu Long repressed an eye roll. Wasn’t that too fast? But he knew what Li Hao had in mind—the young man wanted to accomplish something big. He didn’t want to be mired in scuffles and back alley fights.

He caught up to the quickly departing young man and muttered, “The group’s just formed and they’re not familiar with each other. In fact, most of them are strangers to one another. Won’t it be too abrupt to set out first thing tomorrow morning?”

“We need to make best use of time!” Li Hao responded in transmission. “I’m not afraid of danger. Our defenses increase greatly when we wear the black armor. We can iron out the kinks along the way. I’ll pick a few weaklings for them to hone themselves first, I won’t go for someone strong straight off the bat. You trust my judgment, don’t you chief?”

Liu Long nodded, that he did, in this area.

“Then if we run into a strong existence…”

“I’m not afraid of anyone below Nova! If we do run into one, lead the team away from the scene and I’ll hold them off!”

Nova!

This once profound and mysterious cultivation level was run-of-the-mill when Li Hao spoke of it. The young man would stop the enemy if a Nova appeared.

Liu Long didn’t say anything. As strong as the young man was, were they really going to let him stand against a Nova?

“I see,” Liu Long answered in a muffled voice.

Li Hao headed for Golden Spear’s office. He wanted to borrow some mysterious power stones—yes, borrow. He’d return them when he came back. Injuries were inevitable and if he didn’t want to lose people, he needed to ensure ample sword energy. He’d borrow a couple dozen or a hundred for now. When he returned, he’d have the funds to repay his debt.

As for the possibility of exposing sword energy, that didn’t matter either. He could offer another explanation when that happened.

Li Hao nursed certain ambitions at the moment. If he could build up this iteration of the Demon Hunters, he would have ample helpers at his beck and call to come. As convenient as fighting alone was, it was sometimes very time consuming.

He walked out of the office before long. Golden Spear had greeted his request wordlessly, offering thirty stones for fifty suits of armor. If Li Hao couldn’t return the stones, the remaining fifty would also belong to the Guards.

Fifty suits of armor were plainly more valuable than thirty stones. The stones were consumables, the armor was not. Li Hao didn’t think about haggling. He was confident that he would be able to return the riches.

Chapter 384: A Ferocious Tiger Emerges From the Mountain (I)

September 15.

A team of fifty assembled at the front doors of the Silver Moon Guards before the sky fully brightened. Hong Qing, Hong Hao, Wang Chao, and Liu Yan had successfully assembled their teams. It went without saying that Hong Qing and Hong Hao filled theirs with swordsmen and women—they were all Sword Sect disciples.

Wang Chao and Liu Yan had taken nearly exclusively Inspectorate members. Only Li Heng and Wu Chao had to choose from the leftovers. Their team was a bit of a motley array.

The Demon Hunters were rather apprehensive. For some of the Sword Sect disciples, this was their first official mission. Although training was arduous and grueling, it was still nerve-racking to actually think of killing someone.

Li Hao strode up to the group and scanned his people. “We’re all here.” He inclined his head. “Get in the cars. The team captains will teach you how to use the armor!”

After obtaining his armor last night, Li Hao also learned how the Silver Moon Guards made use of it. There was a special contraption within them that appeared smooth, but was punctuated by some bumps. Pressing on them in the proper configuration opened the suit of armor. This was a possibility that Li Hao hadn’t thought of and he wondered how Hou Xiaochen had come to know of it.

There were two mini trucks parked in front of the Guards complex. They belonged to the Silver Moon Guards and were outfitted with a special driving system. These cars could drive themselves without needing human drivers.

“Teams one and two on the car up ahead. Three, four, five will take the one behind!” instructed Li Hao. Liu Long was also in the first car. Teams one and two were the ones led by Hong Qing and Liu Yan. They’d claimed most of the few female martial masters in the Demon Hunters.

The teams quickly filed into their cars. Although they’d never received professional training, martial masters understood and swiftly executed these easy commands. The ones from the Inspectorate, in particular, had received systematic training and were used to this kind of operation.

.....

Three teams climbed into the second car. Li Hao vanished in front of the group’s eyes instead of taking one of the cars. These cars belonging to the Silver Moon Guards were specially made. The carriages weren’t completely sealed shut; there was no car roof. Openings were scattered around the carriage to make it convenient to locate enemies.

Li Heng liked to talk. He started chattering as soon as he saw Li Hao wasn't in their car. "There's thirty of us in one car and twenty in the one up ahead. My team with Ole Wu actually only has nine people. Deputy Liu is a Dominator and the leader has lumped him in with us. Are we actually supposed to give the deputy orders?"

Everyone ignored him.

"Also," continued a dejected Li Heng. "We just got to know our teams last night. We don't know any of the other teams. The leader is hastily pushing us into the field to run missions. That's just... so... ugh!"

He'd never seen someone like that! Thankfully, they were probably just going out for a spin. Most people were treating this as a leisure outing. Their new leader wanted to go through the motions. Li Heng understood the concept after many years at the Inspectorate. Li Hao just wanted to obtain some acknowledgement and put himself out there.

Wang Chao ignored him. As Wang Henggang's nephew, the inspector general had told him one thing before he left. Li Hao was not a kind soul. Although young, there was nothing simple about Old Demon Yuan's disciple. Wang Chao was warned to be careful and keep his head down at the Silver Moon Guards.

Therefore, he didn't say anything and turned to his team. "Put the armor on!" He helped his curious team members acclimate themselves to their new battle gear.

"Captain Wang," someone soon said. "It's rather heavy and impacts my movement. Why don't we take it off? We're still in White Moon City..."

"Keep it on!" Wang Chao responded in a muffled voice. There was a certain weight to the armor, but it wasn't too heavy for martial masters. It didn't impact their movement much and the armor wasn't stiff, so there actually wasn't a large effect on the wearer's motions.

There wouldn't be issues after they grew accustomed to it. Plainly, the ancient powerhouses had considered this as well and didn't haphazardly create equipment that would negatively impact battle capabilities.

Hong Hao directed his team to put on the armor too. The car wasn't that big, but suitable enough for three teams to squeeze together. It became rather crowded once they were all dressed for battle.

Li Heng continued to complain when he saw that the other two teams were putting on the armor, but he also directed his team to do the same.

The car was quickly filled with black armored warriors.

"Does anyone know where we're going today? The leader didn't give a destination..."

"Why do you have so many questions?" Wu Chao couldn't help but say behind his visor.

"Aren't you curious, Ole Wu?"

"Nope."

"That's right, you worked with the leader before. Ole Wu, would you say that he's um... ahem, reliable?"

Wu Chao ignored him. Reliable? How would I know?? Li Hao's reliable enough, but he's also crazy bold. The man had chatted with Liu Long last night. Although the chief didn't say anything, he'd hinted to be careful on this mission. Li Hao had grand plans in mind.

.....

Two mini trucks steered out of the Guards complex. Li Hao was up in front, running instead of taking one of the cars. He easily kept up with the cars and found a drowsy Wang Ming in a sports car before long.

Wang Ming didn't sense Li Hao's approach until the latter was near. He sprang up with alertness. "Li Hao... you're so early!"

Li Hao flicked him a glance and cut straight to the chase. "I told you everything last night, are you sure you want to be in on this?"

"Yes!" Wang Ming piped up excitedly. "The Night Watchers are so boring after being out with you a few times. I hear that you're going on a training trip. Take me along, I promise I won't give you trouble."

"The Guards don't recruit supernaturals partially because it's difficult to work together, and partially out of concerns for concealment. Do you understand?"

"Yes!" Wang Ming nodded. Of course he did, Li Hao had mentioned it in the communicator last night.

"I won't refuse your participation," Li Hao continued. "Your only mission is to be bait! Supernaturals are easily discovered and you're not weak as a Sunflare. It'd be best if you can lure out some supernaturals who want to do you harm!"

"You won't be traveling with us, you'll be alone and I won't be responsible if anything happens to you! The dangers are sizable—any powerhouse can swiftly manifest and kill you. I'll be at least one thousand meters away from you, so it'll be up to you to dodge or evade attacks!"

Li Hao didn't turn down Wang Ming's request to join, he happened to lack bait. As good as his eyes were, he couldn't really scan every blade of grass or leaf. It was best if Wang Ming could lure out a group of supernaturals.

However, being bait meant accepting a great deal of risk and danger.

“That’s no problem so long as I receive a commensurate payout!” Wang Ming grinned. “This is the kind of life worth living! We’ll have to kill a few Solars to make it worth waking up so early, won’t we?”

This guy’s appetite had certainly grown. Li Hao raised an eyebrow. Ole Wang was growing bolder and bolder. Li Hao nodded slightly.

“Ah, right. Li... senior brother,” Wang Ming coughed gently. “Can I bring someone?”

“Hmm?”

“Zhou Qin from last time... the one who had the tiger,” explained Wang Ming. “It’s suspicious if I run around by myself. A Sunflare poking around without doing anything? Supernaturals aren’t idiots and will easily tell that I’m bait. If Zhou Qin’s with me, we can race cars or wander around, looking like dandies out for some fun. I don’t look the part if I’m by myself.”

“He’s a Darkmoon, right?”

“Yes, a Fullmoon. That does make him a bit weak...”

“You know best that we’re out to kill people,” Li Hao said calmly. “You know how dangerous it is! This isn’t a leisure jaunt. You can bring him if you want, but I won’t care if he dies!”

A Darkmoon looking for a good time... Li Hao wasn’t a babysitter and he hadn’t told Wang Ming to bring anyone else. He wouldn’t do a thing if Zhou Qin died. A Zhou surname... I wonder if he’s related to Deputy Zhou from the provincial government?

Li Hao didn't really care, in either case.

"It's fine, he dies if he dies." Wang Ming grinned widely. "The guy likes exciting stuff. No one will say anything if he dies. To be honest, senior brother, my friend is already dying from boredom. Would he capture a tiger for fun if he's right in the head? If we can, we should take him and two ladies on a drive. Now that would really be a leisure jaunt! And if we have a couple of bodyguards with us... We'll look like rich scions loafing around. No one will suspect a thing!"

Such were his thoughts to really look the part. If the bait was two guys that were supernaturals, would it make sense?

"If senior brother okays it, I'll find someone right away," Wang Ming elaborated when Li Hao remained silent. "I promise I'll have it done quick and won't hold us up! The ladies will also be my friends. They'll be daredevils who won't blame anyone if they die! It doesn't matter if we have bodyguards or not. We're all supernaturals and young. It's normal that we're bold and don't think much of anyone."

Li Hao frowned at him, not understanding what went on in these people's heads. These second generations seemed a little different. They weren't lackadaisical good-for-nothings who spent their days partying. They had the strange urge to look for fun and exciting things.

If he was part of them, Li Hao felt that he'd never share the same mindset.

"We can forget about it if you don't think it's appropriate, senior brother," Wang Ming quickly backtracked when he still failed to receive a response from Li Hao. "I was just thinking of making the disguise more complete."

"Are there any descendants of major personages among your friends?" Li Hao thought for a while. "The kind that will make trouble if their descendants die?"

“No!” Wang Ming immediately answered. “Even if there were, they wouldn’t make trouble either. Don’t worry, senior brother. Would I cause trouble for my own people?”

Chapter 385: A Ferocious Tiger Emerges From the Mountain (II)

Li Hao raised a brow and looked at Wang Ming. “Ole Wang, you can do as you see fit. I won’t order you around for the next part. You do your thing, I’ll do mine. We don’t have to be in communication, you just need to lure out large numbers of supernaturals with malevolent intent. I don’t care about the rest!”

“Then the target is...” Wang Ming nodded.

“Take the road to Rift Canyon! I’ll contact you when you reach the canyon. We might cross it, or we might stay and sweep it out. There must be supernaturals hiding there!”

“Understood!” Wang Ming hastily bobbed his head with excitement. His colleague wanted to do something big! Life had become quite boring ever since they returned to White Moon. There weren’t many missions to go around and there was an absolute lack of exciting fights. Wang Ming was only one step away from mid Sunflare, but was never able to take it.

The minor missions from the Night Watchers no longer piqued his interest. Even though the agency started moving against the three great organizations a few days ago, it was a lot of fanfare for not much action. The strongest that Hao Lianchuan killed was a Sunflare—battle was over quickly.

A bunch of Night Watchers had mobilized for just a few Red Moon powerhouses. The benefits they reaped were barely enough to look at!

Li Hao turned and left without a word. Wang Ming’s sources of news worked fast, but it wasn’t like Li Hao had planned on keeping any secrets from the supernatural. If he wanted to take risks, then he could. Such was Li Hao’s attitude toward these martial masters and supernaturals.

They were all adults, they had to be responsible for themselves. Wang Ming was right, his preparations would make them seem more like rich scions out for a casual jaunt. Granted, that was also the truth.

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Li Hao swiftly caught up to the Guards' two cars. He jumped onto the second car instead of continuing to run. Li Heng and the others were so startled that they thought enemies had ambushed them. Sighs of relief were forthcoming when their new addition resolved itself to be Li Hao.

.....

The Night Watcher headquarters.

Hou Xiaochen had returned and was caressing the Flaming Phoenix Spear. He seemed to be probing for something and laughed softly after a while, understanding certain things.

Li Hao!

So it was you!

Who would've thought that you'd break the mind intent behind the Broken Will Spear! That was rather unexpected.

"Li Hao's gone out with his team," Manager Yu murmured, entering the room after knocking. "They're a team that formed yesterday and some of the members might still be unfamiliar with each other. He decided to take them out anyways—Li Hao's resume didn't mention that he's a brash, impulsive person!"

Li Hao's resume was clear, he was a young man who planned and strategized first before coming to a decision. He wasn't as impetuous as he behaved. That Red Moon's series of murders had been exposed in Silver City was all due to Li Hao. If it wasn't for the young man's determination and secret investigation spanning more than a year, even his death might not have been enough to prompt discovery of this connection. Red Moon had acted very covertly.

So why was the young man in such a hurry today?

“He has his own thoughts.” Hou Xiaochen gently ran his hand up the spear. “Perhaps he senses a difference in strength after seeing more of the world. He might also want to support Yuan Shuo or ease some of the pressure. Yuan Shuo is marching toward the central region with great fanfare to kill Red Moon members. Do you really think he’s that crazed?”

Manager Yu thought for a moment and said softly, “So the director means that... Yuan Shuo is so bold and cocky because he also wants to redirect Red Moon’s attention?”

“Why else?” Hou Xiaochen sighed as he looked into the distance. “His disciple is a thorn in Red Moon’s side and Silver Moon has become troubled territory. If Yuan Shuo doesn’t step forward to distract those powerhouses, the Orange and Yellow Moon hunting him might be on their way to eliminate Li Hao instead!”

If Yuan Shuo didn’t throw a wrench into the works, who would Red Moon pull out so many powerhouses for?

Only Li Hao!

Many people understood this logic, including Ying Hongyue. But compared to the nondescript young man, Yuan Shuo was a more pressing concern. Everyone was well aware of the old demon’s terrors. The man had broken his fetters; if left unchecked, he would soon turn into a general calamity!

If it wasn’t for Ying Hongyue himself being indisposed, he’d personally mobilize against Yuan Shuo. He directed the second and third strongest of his organization to set aside their affairs in the central region and focus on Yuan Shuo. The significance of the old demon was well apparent from that alone. Ying Hongyue placed extreme importance on him!

Blue Moon and Violet Moon were also in the province; they were here for Li Hao. Any talk of the ruins or Hou Xiaochen was of secondary importance. Blue Moon's previous plan was to sneak Li Hao away when they fought Hou Xiaochen. Red Moon had sent four of their highest executives against the master and disciple duo!

"You said it yourself that Li Hao is someone who acts after working out a plan. Why does he not plan now?" Hou Xiaochen asked. "It's only because he has no time. His master is braving the central region alone for his sake. Who would locate Yuan Shuo otherwise if he kept a low profile? Li Hao also understands this. Just because he doesn't speak of it doesn't mean he doesn't understand. If you think he doesn't, that'd be doing the young man a disservice!"

Manager Yu inclined her head, but still didn't quite understand. "Yuan Shuo has more than one disciple and it's only been three years since he accepted Li Hao. They might have a good relationship, but is one Li Hao worth such a hefty price?"

"That's only part of the equation, the other part is that Yuan Shuo himself refuses to accept the situation!" A merry Hou Xiaochen seemed to understand Yuan Shuo very well. "He's unwilling to accept that those who were less than him before can step on him now!"

"He didn't reveal what he was capable of before as he was despairing or depressed. But now that he sees a chance... People like him can bring a hundred percent of their efforts to bear if they grasp a single chance or opportunity. Yuan Shuo also wants to give himself some pressure. From the dangers of life and death stems a greater hope to catch up to those who have surpassed him.

"Sky Sword, Tyrant Blade, and the others are all still alive and doing well for themselves. Ying Hongyue is even more so. Southern Fist and Golden Spear are well off too, and some of his old friends are also in the central region. Do you think he's willing to go down like this?"

Multiple reasons contributed to Yuan Shuo's madness. He'd embarked on a frenzied rampage from Near River to the central region. Although he concealed his movements, he exposed himself every time he killed someone. Yuan Shuo constantly placed himself in a state of perpetual peril.

Such craziness also made those who were paying attention to him uneasy. If he didn't die, he would eventually become their doom.

Having started off with Solars, Yuan Shuo had moved on to killing peak Solars. Jadelight Sword traveled with him and was rumored to show signs of entering Summoner of Spirit. She was barely able to withstand weaker initial Solars at first, but news soon spoke of her swiftly dispatching initial Solars. These veteran martial masters quickly grew strong whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Manager Yu was fully aware of the situation now.

“Can you not see it yourself? Why ask me?” Hou Xiaochen chuckled.

Yu Luochoa was no fool. A fool could not become grand secretary of the Night Watchers. She was the one who handled the agency’s affairs. Hou Xiaochen didn’t actually oversee much of his agency.

“I can discern some of Li Hao’s plans, I’m just slightly baffled,” Manager Yu offered after some thought. “He’s very confident—or rather, very calm. He’s respectful whenever meeting Golden Spear or an even stronger existence, but he’s not terribly surprised or shocked. It doesn’t fit his identity—he comes from the small town of Silver City and didn’t visit elsewhere when he was young. How does he remain so composed?”

“One becomes this way after seeing more of the world.” Hou Xiaochen wasn’t surprised. “Perhaps he’s seen something incredible or unparalleled distances. That is why he dares wave the sword around and sever the Broken Will Spear! While his own strength is not up to par, why should he be shocked by a lower world after witnessing a higher plane?”

“Then... do we need to send people to protect him from the shadows?” Manager Yu asked thoughtfully.

Li Hao was a thorn in Red Moon’s side. The organization cared deeply about his movements. They might not know now, but they would find out sooner or later that the young man had left White Moon. That would be when danger came for him.

“It’s fine...” Hou Xiaochen smiled. “Every martial master walks their own path. He won’t die so easily. If he does, that means he lacked a bit of luck. We just need to continue exerting pressure on Red Moon and suppressing their powerhouses. It’s up to Li Hao to see if he can break through their blockade.”

“You were not this way toward Yuan Shuo back in the day...”

“Does Ying Hongyue compare to the likes of Blue Moon?” Hou Xiaochen turned solemn.
“Although Yuan Shuo and his disciple regularly denounce Ying Hongyue, you are familiar with him as a person. Being able to rapidly build up Red Moon puts him far beyond trash like Blue Moon. Not to mention, Blue Moon is only the second generation of his title!”

Hou Xiaochen placed great importance on Ying Hongyue. In reality, no one dared to not do so. He led one of the three great organizations and could walk around with impunity in the central region. Whoever dared overlook Ying Hongyue did so at their own risk.

“I understand!” Manager Yu said nothing else and prepare to leave.

“You... can also make your preparations!” Hou Xiaochen decided to say when she almost left the office. The secretary’s footsteps paused.

“It’s time to give it a try,” Hou Xiaochen said softly. “Those from Nova and above can try. The drawbacks still cannot be fully resolved for now, but there’s some ways to make up for them. The blood pearls have decent effect, but they are not infinite. There aren’t many Nova level blood pearls and Red Moon will retrieve them all sooner or later...”

“So let’s make our moves as fast as possible before Red Moon does so!”

The blood pearls could settle some of the drawbacks of their current situation, but there wasn’t an infinite supply of them. It addressed the symptoms, not the root cause. Only when Yuan Shuo successfully modified his Breathing Method of the Five Styles would it truly address the root cause.

So many powerhouses had their eyes on him because of it. It didn't matter if the method was slightly worse than the blood pearls so long as it was truly suited for the task.

Otherwise, what could they do after the blood pearls ran empty? Not everyone could use external objects to solve an internal problem, and neither was that the proper path!

Chapter 386: A Ferocious Tiger Emerges From the Mountain (III)

"Alright!" Manager Yu breathed out softly with a nod. The day had finally arrived to return to being a martial master! She no longer used the name Yu Luocha because she had long ceased to be her. But if she successfully converted back to martial dao, then the Yu Luocha of yesteryear would be back.

"Although I've made some preparations, they may not be enough," Hou Xiaochen was solemn. "If I fail..."

His supernatural abilities would fade away, his physical body would be gravely injured, and he'd be crippled if not outright dead. It wasn't that easy for a supernatural to convert back to a martial master. The cost of failure was nearly the same as death. Succeeding would also leave a host of problems that might take an even greater opportunity to supplement.

"It will be fine!" Manager Yu didn't mind. She wasn't afraid of failure.

"Then go back and spend a few days in quiet training. Don't bother yourself with minutiae over the next few days."

"Understood." The secretary left.

Hou Xiaochen coughed gently when she left and shook his head with a sigh. He looked out the window, wondering if someone had fully dispelled the aftereffects. Those in Silver Moon couldn't do so. What about the central region? The royal family? The nine ministries? The premier existences within the three great organizations? How were those fellows hiding in the shadows of various provinces doing?

The first person to take a step in this field might ignite a full uproar. Equilibrium was still maintained at the moment. Who knew how many existences like him were out there? They wouldn't be rare, and they were all waiting for the right timing.

.....

At the same time in a place of darkness.

It seemed to be a mountain cave or a karst cave. The surroundings were dark; a figure suddenly appeared in the quiet surroundings.

“Pavilion Master, Li Hao seems to have left White Moon City.”

People in cloaks—Celestial. Celestial powerhouses that oversaw operations in a province were hailed as pavilion masters. Plainly, Half Mountain was present in this locale.

His voice slowly trailed out of the darkness. “Li Hao... isn't keeping his nose down in White Moon. Red Moon members have come in large numbers to gather in Silver Moon. Yuan Shuo's disciple is just as bold as him!”

“Do we need to do anything, Pavilion Master?”

“No, just continue to keep an eye on him! Red Moon has operated in the province for many years, Hou Xiaochen won't uproot all of their plants that easily. He can hoodwink them for a period of time, but not forever. They'll discover Li Hao's movements sooner or later! Let's keep watching for now!”

“Understood!” The cloaked person making a report vanished. Some light appeared in the mountain cave before long. There was more than Half Mountain in the darkness—there was another cloaked individual that'd been deathly silent earlier. The latter was so starkly quiet that the earlier Celestial member hadn't discovered them.

“Elder, is Li Hao truly the only heir of the eight families?” asked Half Mountain.

Elder.

Celestial was an unusually mysterious organization that even the Night Watchers knew very little about. They were similar to an organization of assassins, killing whoever they were paid to target. Of course, they were paid in cultivation treasures instead of money.

The Night Watchers weren't too familiar with the Celestial structure. They were the most obscure organization out of the three. The agency only knew some general details, such as the existence of an elder council that contained premier killers.

The elder's voice was hoarse beneath the cloak. “There might be other survivors, but Li Hao is the only one out in the open! However... maybe that one from Red Moon is also from the eight families. His knowledge of them is greater than ours and Red Moon has been the one making the first move all these years. We have always been limited to following closely behind. Is Ying Hongyue's surname really Ying?”

Half Mountain fell silent. That was right, Ying Hongyue was also of the Silver Moon martial world. Both Celestial and Yama had previously wondered if he might be of the eight families. There weren't many clues that pointed either way, and it didn't affect anything whether he was or not.

After Li Hao was exposed in Silver City and the eight families became widely known, Ying Hongyue no longer bothered to hide anything.

“Should we strike first then? Uncontrollable developments might result if Li Hao is taken by Red Moon. They've been extremely cautious and spent a dozen years setting up plans in Silver City in pursuit of the eight families. It's obvious that they are seeking a great deal!”

“Let's wait and see... With Hou Xiaochen and the others still here, they won't let Red Moon succeed!”

“Mmhmm.”

The conversation was over, but Celestial wouldn't really sit on their hands. As emissaries of the dark, they would continue to keep an eye on things.

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Two trucks slowly drove out of White Moon. The prosperous city dwindled in the rearview mirror. Li Hao looked ahead and peered around them, looking for balls of light. His departure from the city might've drawn some attention. Was anyone following him?

He didn't notice any supernaturals in pursuit after a while. There were no balls of light within one thousand meters, or perhaps they were so weak that he couldn't see them.

The trucks traveled down major roads, tossing and jolting along the way. Many people were nodding off after several hours. Only when the trucks traveled through a patch of jungle did the teams struggle back to wakefulness. Li Hao's voice sounded in their ears before they had further time to think, “Get out of the cars!”

Martial masters quickly jumped off. Some that didn't react swiftly enough were dragged off by a surge of strength. Two trucks worth of martial masters in black armor were all on the ground. Meanwhile, the trucks continued driving forward.

Large rocks appeared out of thin air in Li Hao's hands. He shoved them into the carriages and closed the roofs, obscuring the view of whatever was inside. His voice rang in the drivers' ears, “Keep driving without pause until you reach Flare City. You can alight for food then. We'll take care of our own meal!”

These were drivers arranged by the Guards, but they weren't particularly strong. They followed orders to the letter and wouldn't defy ones from a centurion. The two drivers continued driving without much thought, other than the second car being quieter than before. Chatterbox Li Heng no longer seemed to be talking.

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Li Hao looked ahead and spoke only when the trucks were far away. “Keep your movements small and don’t leave too many traces behind. We are in the forests of Sky Mountain. We will proceed on foot, reach the peak, and continue after dark!”

The group looked at each other, doubtful of the need for such an action. However, no one objected. Martial masters that knew the particulars of this forest inwardly groaned to themselves. The forest spanned a large area; it wasn’t a long distance to travel straight through it. But going over the top and continuing through it added at least fifty kilometers to the trip. As they were all wearing black armor, even martial masters would find the journey exhausting.

Moments later, a group of fifty-one moved softly and began making their way through the forest, vanishing from the road.

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Outside the forest of Sky Mountain.

Someone held a pair of specially crafted binoculars and looked intently through them. They frowned when the trucks drove out of the forest. The roofs were open before, why were they closed now? Was it because the sun was too bright, or did the occupants seek to hide something?

Regardless, it made observation difficult. This was one of the drawbacks to martial masters. Nothing was observable if one wasn’t in close quarters, it was quite a hassle. It would be a different case if it was a truck full of supernaturals. They’d stick out like a sore thumb no matter where they went. Powerhouses would easily pick up on their traces.

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Li Hao's trip out of White Moon City elicited a great deal of attention. The trucks filled with martial masters were kept in many people's line of sight. No one drew near for close inspection as they knew that Liu Long was a Dominator and Li Hao was very possibly a Dominator. The auras of Dominators were sensitive things.

It wasn't until the trucks made it to Flare City and continued to remain still after the drivers returned from lunch that they drew further attention. However, there was still no one who dared approach for a closer look.

The sky eventually grew dark. Meanwhile, a group of rich children drove out in style in a sports car. Handsome young men and beautiful young women had a ball of a time racing to Rift Canyon. They raised some attention, but no one was overly concerned. It was just a group of youngsters seeking fresh air.

Li Hao took the Demon Hunters through several forests and evaded all spots where there were balls of light. Fifty-one people disappeared from the public eye with none the wiser.

.....

The outskirts of the Sky Mountain forests.

Night was upon them. Li Hao stood unmoving on the spot like a stone sculpture. Some of the armored warriors behind him panted softly, dog-tired. They'd run all day through mountain trails while being clad in armor. This was true field training—they hadn't had a bite to eat or a drop to drink.

What was Li Hao doing? Looking for enemies? Searching for members of the three great organizations? But... was this how one searched? They were going to reach Rift Canyon if they continued like this. In that case, it was better to ride in the trucks. It'd be an easier journey.

The Sunderers were holding up, but some of the Slayers could barely stay on their feet. They were beyond exhausted. No expressions were visible since everyone's faces were obscured by black

visors, but resentment was plainly fomenting within the team. They didn't understand and were discontent with Li Hao's decision because the young man didn't offer any explanations.

"Rest here for half an hour," Li Hao said at this time. "Eat some and drink a bit of water. Relieve yourselves if you must, but do not walk off from your team. Do your business here. We continue after half an hour!"

Someone couldn't help themselves any longer and muttered, "Question, leader! Where are we headed to?"

"Just follow me!" Li Hao didn't give a straight answer as he didn't know what the destination was either. His destination was wherever there were members of the three great organizations.

Liu Long took out some rations and water to split among the team. Apart from Li Hao, he was the only one with a storage ring—the young man had given him the one he wore. After killing Yu Xiao and Huang Jie, Li Hao owned two. He'd given one to Liu Long so that the chief could also be in charge of collections.

Chapter 387: A Victorious First Battle (I)

Liu Long walked over moments later. He and Li Hao were the only ones not in armor. His expression was stern as he looked at the young man. He knew that Li Hao was taking this route to evade certain people's line of sight, but that also meant he'd strayed from the Guards and Night Watcher vision as well.

The Guards had a special tracking device, but the young man tossed it into the truck when he alighted. At the moment, the Demon Hunters were a lone army unit that'd lost contact with headquarters. None of the others had had a chance to be outfitted with the tracking device. They'd joined the Guards too recently.

"Do we have a target?" Liu Long asked in a low voice. Li Hao took out a map and pointed at a specific area. "Here are the Night Watchers. Director Hao did some preparatory work before and locked onto certain areas that may be strongholds for the three great organizations. He's paused from further investigation because Red Moon has entered the province in large numbers. I benefit from his efforts instead."

Was that really benefiting?

“This particular spot is closest to Rift Canyon,” Li Hao continued. “It might be a Red Moon stronghold. I sent Wang Ming there first to see if he can bait some people out.” With that, he bought into his own picture of grandeur that he was painting. “We’ll slip in at night. It’s early yet, so if all goes well, they’ll be distracted by Wang Ming. We’ll follow them to their nest and clean out the entire lot!”

“There’s another fifty kilometers to that spot.” Liu Long studied the map. “Can people hold up?”

“I’m doing that on purpose. Slayers don’t have much internal force, I want to deplete them!” Li Hao muttered. “Only then will new force be born to extend the old force. Any scarlet shadows or mysterious power that we absorb will show the greatest effect!”

That was the theory, but Liu Long felt that it might give rise to some complaints within the team. After some thought, however, he set it out of his mind.

“We move out!” Li Hao grunted after half an hour. “I’ll knock out anyone who lags and leave you here. Don’t blame me if wild beasts, supernaturals, or martial masters come across you and kill you!”

Some Slayers nearly broke out in curses when they heard this. Are you human?! But one had to lower their heads when under another’s roof. As great as their resentment was building, they had to silently follow behind their leader. The Sunderers gave them a hand sometimes, particularly during difficult stretches of the path.

Martial masters weren’t weak, but they were no different from mundanes when their internal force was depleted.

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There was a large lake surrounded by trees roughly twenty-five kilometers from Rift Canyon. It was a beautiful environment with a gorgeous view. Since it was far from the city, however, not many visited on a normal basis. It was extremely quiet at night.

Two young men and three young women had set up camp here tonight. They built a bonfire and enjoyed themselves with a party. Their tents were set up by the lake.

The five chatted and laughed with joy, enjoying grilled food and partaking fragrant wine that traveled upon the wind. Their laughter was loud, but close inspection revealed certain nervousness in the depths of their eyes.

One of the young men was Wang Ming, the other was Zhou Qin—the one who'd captured the tiger. Zhou Qin was munching on a skewer and chortling at a joke, but tension filled his eyes. Some incidents had occurred at this spot before, people often went missing. This wasn't a good place to be.

And yet, this was precisely where they wanted to visit. Excitement and thrills were what they pursued.

"Ole Wang..." Zhou Qin kept his voice down after a few more bites.

Laughing heartily, Wang Ming shook his head when he noticed that Zhou Qing wanted to say something. "This place is beautiful! White Moon is such a bore. It's so stifling after staying there for long!"

The women quickly tittered in agreement. All of them were tense, but a certain glee marked their alertness. Daredevils, all three of them. They knew full well what this trip was about and wanted nothing more than for people to be watching them in the surroundings.

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The truth was, there were indeed people watching them from the shadows. They saw five rich scions that were all supernaturals. There were no storage rings to be seen, but all of them wore energy rings. The flamboyant Wang Ming wore five energy rings between his two hands.

Energy rings were also quite valuable, but more importantly, they contained large quantities of mysterious power. One ring often held one thousand cubes. These youngsters might not possess that much, but even if there were only one hundred cubes in a ring, Wang Ming alone carried five hundred cubes. Any supernatural apart from the premier powerhouses would find this massively tempting.

There was more than Wang Ming present, there were five people total! Zhou Qin also wore an energy ring on his hand.

Two figures flashed through the ground roughly five hundred meters away from the small group. One of them emanated earth energy as he created a space underground. The other's ear twitched as he noticeably extended it forward.

"They're just chatting about inconsequential things," Extended Ear whispered after a while. "But one of them mentioned an identity—there's a Wang surnamed initial Sunflare among them. His status is high as his family has some authority within the White Dragons."

"White Dragons?" The earth powerhouse thought for a bit and muttered, "Their vice commander is surnamed Wang. I think I know who this person is—Wang Ming of the Wang family! He's hailed as a peerless genius and a Night Watcher supernatural..."

"A Night Watcher?" Extended Ear frowned.

"It's fine, so what if he's a Night Watcher?" whispered the earth supernatural. "It looks like they're out to have fun. Let's go back with this report. We just need to be a bit more careful."

The two shifted quickly and burrowed into another area. They ran into open space after advancing for a while—earth supernaturals had fortified an underground base that spanned one acre.

People bustled to and fro from the underground buildings; there were quite a few of them.

They were only a few thousand meters away from the lake that Wang Ming and the others were at. Being several dozen meters underground in the wilderness, no one would discover them under ordinary circumstances.

An expert in a Ghostface mask met them upon their return. “Long Ear’s back! Well, what’s the situation?”

“Five rich second gens that are descendants of officials in White Moon City...” the two quickly summed up.

A hulking man in the distance walked over; he didn’t wear a mask. “A Night Watcher... Are they bait?”

“We didn’t see anyone following them,” replied the earth supernatural. “If they’re bait, they’re all children of powerful people and one of them’s a Night Watcher genius. It’ll be troublesome if anything happens to them, so would they be used as bait?”

“Even if they are, we can take them with Hao Lianchuan being absent and Hou Xiaochen not stirring from his office!” someone else laughed.

“It’s one Sunflare and four Darkmoons... They’re not weak, but they’re not worth anything either.”

“We should think this over carefully and not take rash action. Their camp is too close to our base. If they disappear, that’ll draw a deeper investigation from actual heavyweights...”

Discussion flourished as some wanted to kill these people, while others advocated for caution. Indeed, this was one of Red Moon's strongholds. It held only ten or so people before, but swelled to nearly fifty when greater numbers of Red Moon powerhouses arrived in the province.

It was because of this that the base was a bit disorderly. There were too many people that came from different areas—members from three different provinces were crammed into this tiny stronghold. They didn't feel much of a connection with each other, so a variety of voices and suggestions abounded when they talked.

They weren't too far from Rift Canyon and were camped here for one mission—to kill supernaturals wandering around on their own. Any that didn't belong to Red Moon were fair game. Those who were too strong to kill should be taken note of.

The based possessed a few supernaturals adept at investigation—Long Ear, for example. Although he was only a Fullmoon, his ears could hear anything within one thousand meters. It was an exceptionally useful ability.

There were also supernaturals skilled at observing things in the distance. The hour had grown too late for their ability, so they hadn't been present earlier.

There were also powerhouses present, such as the hulking man. He was a peak Sunflare and the temporary leader of the camp. A headache brewed as the group squabbled and he cut them off, "That's enough! Be quiet! There's nothing noteworthy about the Night Watchers and we'll kill them if we need to. We'll get these guys so long as this isn't a trap. These bastards have killed enough of us recently as it is! Since when did Red Moon fear the Night Watchers?"

"The Silver Moon government and us have shared a death feud ever since Hou Xiaochen killed Elder Red Hair!" The man thought over his next steps. "Keep watching them for a bit to make sure they're not bait from the Night Watchers. Also, have our people in White Moon investigate to see if the Night Watcher powerhouses have made any movements lately."

"Understood!" The group dispersed. They spent their days beneath the ground crowded among too many people. It was impossible to properly train and they were all beginning to go stir crazy. Smiles

spread across faces as they thought of the three tender women outside and the rich Wang Ming. They finally had something to do!

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“Huff... puff...” Heavy panting sounded in the team. A group of nearly exhausted soldiers ran through the darkness. Some stabbed their longswords into the ground as walking sticks, ignoring how precious the weapon was and that it should not be used for this purpose.

Li Hao stopped up ahead. He looked back at Liu Long and transmitted, “Wang Ming seems to be nearby. I’m going to take a look first. If he’s lured some people over, we’ll attack right after resting for a bit!”

Liu Long was also growing resigned with the young man. They’d been running for a full day and night!

Li Hao ignored him and vanished on the spot.

Chapter 388: A Victorious First Battle (II)

Li Hao spotted five balls of light after a while. Wang Ming’s was sizable, the other four were lesser.

“This guy really isn’t afraid of death. He’s brought four Darkmoons with him!” Li Hao was struck dumb by what he found. Light and nimble on his feet, he swiftly approached the group that’d set up camp. He’d absorbed a good deal of wind energy and was skilled in the deer style. A few leaps in the darkness propelled him several hundred meters forward so that he landed gently on a tree.

Looking in the direction of the bonfire, Li Hao saw Wang Ming and Zhou Qin, as well as three girls who weren’t that old. He didn’t look too closely at them. Having a party in the middle of the night would draw attention from anyone keeping an eye on the location.

The young man looked around, casting his eyes below the ground as well. His eyes were particularly bright in the darkness. They soon darted back to a spot—he vanished where he was and

reappeared on another big tree. A ball of light was within his vision. It wasn't big, so it was likely a Fullmoon level. It was inside the tree instead of below the ground—a wood supernatural!

So there was a wood supernatural hidden nearby, observing the group.

Li Hao looked around again, wanting to see if there were any scarlet shadows around. Red Moon members loved sending out their shadows to surveil the target because the shadows were formless and intangible. They were oftentimes more useful than supernatural abilities.

The young man did indeed pick up a moderately sized scarlet shadow after looking around. It floated at a location further away from the ball of light, directly facing the wood supernatural. Had the supernatural set it there out of concern for being targeted by someone?

“So it really is a Red Moon supernatural...” Li Hao smiled from his vantage point. They hadn't run all this way for nothing. Darkmoons wouldn't dare target Wang Ming and the others, so there must be a Red Moon base nearby. He'd just failed to discover it during the earlier reconnaissance.

The young man waited silently for a bit and suddenly sensed movement underground. Ears twitching, Li Hao focused his eyes on a ball of light that'd suddenly appeared. An earth supernatural!

The earth supernatural quickly burrowed to the wood supernatural and poked his head up. The two were very close to each other, making their conversation impossible to identify.

He didn't mind either way; Li Hao watched the swiftly departing earth supernatural and ignored the one on watch duty. The earth supernatural abruptly vanished after asking almost a thousand meters.

Li Hao blinked. The ball of light had disappeared? The young man frowned. If the ball of light had disappeared... that meant the other had burrowed deep into the ground. Regular earth supernaturals wouldn't go that far down because too much pressure would be exerted on them.

“The base is underground?” Li Hao was slightly surprised, but also found it perfectly logical. As more powerhouses joined the Silver Moon branch, they would jointly create a new headquarters. An underground place didn’t seem that hard and offered more privacy.

However, it would interfere with his observations if they were too far down.

The young man landed gently on the ground and thought for a bit, sending a surge of earth sword aura below him. As the aura drilled down, his mind intent spread out and afforded him a larger range of observation. His vision expanded alongside his mind intent and he sensed certain supernatural ripples.

Supernatural ripples were noticeable and easy to pick up if one was near them. Li Hao silently took stock of them and had an estimation after a while.

“Four or five Sunflares, thirty-some Darkmoons. It’s a decently sized stronghold!” He looked into the distance again and saw a few more scarlet shadows. These Red Moon members had hidden their shadows deep, positioning them on paths that people were certain to pass through. The supernaturals would be quickly alerted when someone found this locale, making it very difficult to hunt them down.

Li Hao vanished on the spot after making observations for a while.

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Moments later.

Li Hao returned to where the Demon Hunters were. Some of the Guards were lying in complete exhaustion on the ground—feeling much better after momentary rest. Everyone returned to their feet upon seeing their leader return.

“I’ve discovered the enemy!” Li Hao cut straight to the chase. “There’s a Red Moon stronghold up ahead with roughly forty people and four or five Sunflares. The rest are almost all Darkmoons.”

A disturbance shifted the crowd—he’d discovered a Red Moon nest just like that? That easily? They weren’t rookies and knew that the three great organizations kept their spots under strict concealment. It was hard to catch even a hint of one. Li Hao had simply gone out for a walk to find one?

If his information was true, it was a strong hiding spot.

“It’s just a few Sunflares... You guys are in black armor that they won’t be able to break. Added to that Sunderers on our side, it’ll be easy to defeat them!” Li Hao chuckled. “Do keep in mind that these are all Red Moon members. They’re tasty tidbits for the taking! Blood pearls do exist and they’re the biggest treasure for martial masters. Killing the people here and taking their blood pearls will mean that a lot of Slayers will become Sunderers tonight!”

The group stared with agitation and Hong Qing quickly asked, “Leader, will you be making a move too?”

“No, you guys are in charge of the battlefield. Deputy Liu and I will be covering the surroundings. We’ll eliminate anyone who gets away!” Li Hao wasn’t going to be part of the fighting, a decision that worried Hong Qing and the others. Their enemies were not weak.

Also, the Demon Hunters weren’t too familiar with each other yet. The teams comprised of Sword Sect or Inspectorate members were better off, but those with intermixed people would have a difficult time coordinating since they were unfamiliar with each other’s strengths.

“Go on!” Li Hao ordered and described the area that the enemy was in.

Underground... was a difficult proposition for martial masters. However, Li Hao knew that once they appeared in Red Moon territory, they would soon raise the organization’s alarm and attack. The presence of the Demon Hunters meant that they’d been exposed!

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“Are we really not going to do anything?” Liu Long frowned as they walked off. “It’s their first time working together and they may not be able to utilize the armor to its full advantage...”

“The enemy’s a motley array as well. They’re shoved together from a bunch of other provinces and have no coordination to speak of. Running drills is too much of a hassle. We’ll naturally grow familiar with each other through fighting...” Li Hao changed focus. “You can take care of the wood supernatural near Wang Ming. I’ll keep an eye on things here. Regular Sunflares won’t be able to kill martial masters outfitted in black armor, but that peak Sunflare might actually kill some. Having people die under my nose in our first battle... that would damage morale!”

No one could die in the beginning. When the team grew familiar with fighting and morale was high, that was when they’d be able to accept losing some of their own when encountering danger. They needed to win every single fight from the start!

Li Hao didn’t understand military affairs, but he did understand one concept. Even a worm would dare fight a dragon if the worm won every battle.

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Within the underground base.

A loud hubbub roared as Red Moon members seemed ready to eliminate Wang Ming and the others. Just as some resident experts prepared to move, Long Ear suddenly frowned. “Hold on!”

“What is it?”

“There’s footsteps coming from the ground. Eh? There’s more than one... there’s a lot of people...”

The group blinked when they heard his report. A lot of people?

Long Ear continued to listen intently and frowned ferociously at the ceiling above him. “Their footsteps are very heavy, as if they’re moving with equipment. There seems to be... forty or fifty people.”

“That many? Is it a merchant convoy?” Someone else sensed the ground above them and didn’t detect mysterious power ripples. So many who were not supernaturals... then it was merchants?

No one considered the possibility of martial masters. Who would send nearly fifty martial masters out together? Martial masters were hard to locate in the vast Silver Moon. Although the Silver Moon Guards were more or less public knowledge now, not everyone knew about them.

“Forget them. If it’s just a merchant convoy, we’ll take it out when we’re done with business at hand. Nothing will be left after a handful of flames!”

“That’s right!” The crowd clamored excitedly, not paying this any heed.

Some supernaturals, however, tilted their heads with wariness. “The divine shadows seem to have picked up on something. This... doesn’t seem to be a merchant convoy, but army troops?”

Someone’s scarlet shadow had detected something and sent back a few images. Brows knitted together when they reviewed the images. Armor?

An army unit wearing armor? Were they trying to relive the ancient past? None of the modern day armies were outfitted with such equipment—although there were rumors of the royal family possessing troops of black armor.

The group of Red Moon supernaturals were perplexed by the latest development. An armored unit? If it wasn't for the size of the crowd here, some would think that they'd traveled back to the ancient past. Where did such an army unit come from in this day and age?

"It's not the Black Armaturas, is it?" someone snorted, mostly cracking a joke. The Black Armaturas resided in Skystar City to protect the royal family. They didn't even participate in the war of the central region, so how would they possibly appear in a forgotten place like Silver Moon?

"Shall we go take a look?" someone raised. Further discussion commenced, but the hulking peak Sunflare suddenly frowned. His eyes widened with dismay.

BOOM!

The world underground shook with a loud rumble. The sturdy buildings began trembling like an earthquake was upon them. Multiple supernaturals panicked as they were dozens of meters below the surface. Infinite soil was over their heads. The earth supernaturals might be fine in the event of a cave-in, but the others would be out of luck.

Was this an earthquake?

"Go up!" Everyone started running for the passageways that led upward. The base wasn't completely sealed off as that meant they were all doomed without earth supernaturals.

As people ran for the outside world, some earth supernaturals quickly flew through the dirt.

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At the same time, directly over the buildings.

Li Hao stomped his foot and reverberated the earth sword aura. After shaking the earth a few times, he vanished on the spot. Not coming out? Then have a good taste of the earth sword aura!

The Demon Hunters rushed over as soon as he left. Heads popped out of the ground at the same time, catching both sides off guard. They'd encountered the enemy before anyone was prepared.

"Kill!" Liu Yan was very clear headed. She'd encountered many situations like this and grunted without a word, manifesting her twin blades and stabbing it at the nearest head!

Hong Qing quickly regained her senses and slashed with her sword!

All of the martial masters reacted properly now. The encounter was unexpected, but they were slightly more prepared than the enemy because they were here to kill Red Moon members.

Chapter 389: A Victorious First Battle (III)

Boom!

Sword qi ignited; there were a lot of Sword Sect disciples on the scene. Rays of sword qi raced through the area. The earth supernaturals in front had time to jump back with shock and reenter the earth, but those who'd just popped up didn't have space to react.

BAM!

A series of techniques rained down on their heads. Internal force exploded and ripped the ground apart. Two earth supernaturals who didn't have a chance to retreat were killed beneath the ground.

The Demon Hunters were attacking in a haphazard way. Everyone had their eyes on the same target and sometimes got in each other's ways. When the team captain noticed the disarray, they roared for order.

“Split up, don’t clump together!”

There were too many people crowded together in an attempt to take out the enemy. People jostled for position and shoved each other out of the way. As disorganized as they were, so was Red Moon. The ground abruptly opened up as a boulder moved out of the way, disgorging a dozen supernaturals. The two sides looked at each other before Red Moon members yelled, “Enemies at the gates, it’s martial masters!”

The Demon Hunters immediately realized that the boulder was covering the entrance.

“They’re underground, hurry and kill them!”

Boom!

Several martial masters rushed over as the supernaturals regained their footing. Some of the latter called upon supernatural abilities while others summoned their scarlet shadows. A chaotic melee developed between the two sides.

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Li Hao watched silently from a tree in the distance. Liu Long returned before long, fresh blood on his ax.

“It’s done!” he breathed out.

Li Hao nodded; Liu Long followed his gaze down and frowned. “Too disorderly! They’re a complete mess and the teams are all jumbled together. Some of the Sunderers show absolutely no desire to work together. They’re all going after the enemy in their own way...”

He’d be beside himself with urgency if he was in charge of the group. But with Li Hao here, he was much more at ease, even if the disarray in front of him was immensely irritating.

“That’s why we skipped the training portion and sent them directly into the field.” Li Hao nodded. “They’ll know what the problems are after this battle.”

BOOM!

Battle continued in an eruptive fashion beneath them. As more Red Moon Sunflares charged up from below, they quickly forced back the martial masters that held an advantage. One of the peak Sunflares was a metal supernatural. He punched out and sent the charging Wang Chao flying. Although the latter was a late Sunderer wearing a suit of armor, his head still spun from the blow!

“Defensive types up front while I take care of the Sunflare!” Liu Yan roared angrily. “Don’t get pushed around!”

Hong Qing was also in a frenzy. She was very strong, but kept out of the action by her own fellow disciples. “Team one, charge to the left!”

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The Red Moon powerhouses thought they’d encountered the Black Armaturas at first. But once a full pitched battle was underway, they could tell that these black armored martial masters were even more disorganized than themselves. Only a few supernaturals died at the start!

The hulking leader’s eyes darted around as he thought of something. “Kill them! These are suits of black armor and it’s the Sword Sect inside! How dare the Sword Sect ambush us! Hong Yitang is probably nearby too, so hurry up and kill them! The armor is highly valuable and upstairs will give us one mysterious power stone for each set!”

Black armor, martial masters... The Sword Sect was the first to spring to mind. The armor was no longer a secret after Battle Heaven, and the sect had been lucky enough to walk away with some. The only factor that Red Moon needed to take into consideration was that Sword Sect Solars could be nearby.

If they weren't, then this jumbled assembly of martial masters would be theirs sooner or later, even with strong defensive abilities.

Eyes grew bloodshot when the supernaturals heard that each set of armor would fetch one mysterious power stone. Someone soon yelled, "Work together, everyone work together! Martial masters are trash before they reach Dominator. Set up an earth trapping formation according to our routines, c'mon!"

The Red Moon members mobilized concerted action as orders were called out. Earth supernaturals shook the ground and formed pits in the dirt. The martial masters were confined to one area and were easily tripped up by random holes in the ground if they tried to advance.

"Fire types are in charge of long range attacks, wood types trip them up, flight types close in for direct combat. Let's go!" The Red Moon supernaturals acclimated to the situation more easily than the Demon Hunters. They had extensive experience fighting in many areas. While the group was unfamiliar with each other, it was enough to split up duties in a generalized fashion.

Balls of fire hurtled toward Liu Yan's group!

Rumble!!

Martial masters wearing black armor were forced back. Wood energy surrounded them and accelerated the growth of shrubbery on the ground, tangling martial masters in their branches. The armor was hard to break and possessed immense defensive abilities, but did nothing to prevent capture.

Several Sunflares were in charge of the offense. A peak metal Sunflare punched martial masters into the air, incapacitating them even if he wasn't able to kill them. The flight supernaturals quickly knocked their targets back down, whereupon countless branches stretched out from the ground. If a martial master was skilled enough to avoid the branches, they might land in a huge hole and be covered by an endless stream of dirt.

Having just taken the upper hand, the martial masters were quickly forced back as the battle continued. The team captains struck fiercely, able to harm and kill the enemy because they themselves were quite strong. However, the effects were less than ideal and they quickly had no alternative but to retreat.

If it wasn't for their equipment, the Demon Hunters would've quickly lost half their number over the short course of the engagement. While the Red Moon side lacked superior equipment and had been ambushed, they lost only eight supernaturals before stabilizing the situation.

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Liu Long frowned ferociously. "Ai!" he sighed and looked at Li Hao. This was the team that the young man wanted to lead in battle against powerhouses. To be honest, they were a motley crew. There were already eight martial masters that'd been captured. They were either locked in place or buried by dirt, unable to move.

As strong as the sets of black armor were, the martial masters inside would be shaken to death if power reverberated through them. They weren't invincible!

Li Hao watched silently, thinking back to the army of Battle Heaven. They might not be stronger than these martial masters if fifty of those troops were here, but half of these supernaturals might be dead after their concerted opening moves. It would take another charge at most to fully eliminate the supernaturals.

Such were the elite troops of the ancient civilization. These martial masters were a scattered bunch without clear leadership.

Li Hao had taken a position to prevent their quarry from running, but now... these supernaturals weren't trying to run at all. They wanted to eliminate the Demon Hunters and seize the armor. If it wasn't for their Sunflares being wary of Hong Yitang and sending their scarlet shadows to find the man, the Sunderer team captains would've long fallen to the combined pressure of Sunflares and scarlet shadows.

The armor could prevent part of the shadow's incursion, but the martial master was still affected. A scarlet shadow lay on Liu Yan and attempted to invade her body through the, eating away at her internal force.

As more martial masters were captured and there was still no sign of Hong Yitang to be seen, the Sunflares were emboldened. Roaring, they attacked with increasing viciousness and forced Liu Yan and the others back. A powerful defense only ensured preservation of one's life. It didn't enable any sort of effective counterattack.

The other team captains grew frantic. They'd thought it'd be an easy mission, but reality gave them a harsh blow. More and more martial masters were captured and immobilized off to the side.

"Switch up!" Li Heng roared. "Sword cultivators on one team, defense on one team, and close quarters combat on another..."

The teams were so unorganized to the point that they were severely interfering with other people's operations.

"Sword Sect disciples, follow my lead," Hong Qing immediately followed up. "Don't lose your composure!"

"Kill!" The remaining martial masters abandoned their preset teams and made adjustments themselves. Defense in the front, offense to the rear, some people smashed the ground with internal force so that the ground could not serve as the Red Moon base.

Such was actual combat. This was when they could make swift improvements. It would be hard to see effects that quickly in outright training.

"Those adept at body methods follow me. We kill the flight supernaturals!" Wu Chao roared and leapt into the air. He was exceedingly fast as he raced into the sky, followed by some martial masters confident in their body methods. They all aimed for the supernaturals in the sky!

Supernaturals were superior whether in the sky or on the ground. There were very few techniques that martial masters could employ in comparison, but the armor closed the gap somewhat.

Casualties appeared on both sides as the situation stabilized. Liu Long's knitted brows relaxed. Martial masters were not idiots, after all. After a few adjustments in the face of danger, they'd finally found their footing despite losing a third of their number. They could now hold their own against the enemy.

"Hoo!" Liu Long breathed out. Li Hao smiled faintly as well. There were still people with their heads on straight in the Demon Hunters. To be honest, he didn't really understand military formations. But some of the team had naturally assembled into them, making it much easier for them to withstand supernatural attacks.

He observed closely, taking everyone's performance into account. It was roughly five minutes since battle started and the disturbance was significant. Thankfully, they were in the wild. If supernatural ripples continued to oscillate as they continued, it was only a matter of time before greater powerhouses happened upon the scene.

Just as both sides flailed at each other, the leading Sunflare jerked his head up in alarm. A ray of sword light flashed through the air, like a ferocious tiger breaking free of its cage. The strongest Sunflares standing in the front exploded when the light arced through the void!

Four Sunflares were dead on the spot! The supernaturals dissolved into instant mayhem. Hong Qing and the others were gripped by shock. Sword aura! That was Li Hao's sword aura!

Chapter 390: A Victorious First Battle (IV)

"What are you standing around for?? Kill, kill them all! Hurry up!" Li Hao's decisive killing of the Sunflares vanquished the battle intent in the other Red Moon supernaturals. They focused their efforts on fleeing.

"How dare you ambush Red Moon, Hong Yitang!" one of them yelled. "The Sword Sect will be ended for this!"

Plainly, the Red Moon members had mistaken Li Hao for Hong Yitang!

The young man couldn't be bothered to respond and stabbed the ground with his sword. Sword aura pulverized supernaturals fleeing through the earth. Up ahead, Hong Qing and the others erupted with full fury. Sword qi criss-crossed through the scene and killed every supernatural seeking to run.

The flight supernaturals in the sky wanted to soar away, but a person landed from above before they had a chance to launch themselves in motion. Liu Long hacked a supernatural to death with one ax stroke and swiftly twirled his weapon across the void, eliminating all of the Darkmoons in the blink of an eye!

Liu Yan and the others also made their moves. The scene was quiet in the quick span of a breath. Heavy panting abounded. Liu Yan cut through the restraints with a casual slash and freed the martial masters that'd been immobilized. More than a dozen people bounded to their feet, their faces beet red with embarrassment. Their expressions were impossible to make out through the armor, but it was no mark of honor to be captured in battle.

"Clean up the battlefield, collect the mysterious power, and send someone to sweep through their base," Liu Yan instructed calmly. "You have ten minutes before we move out!"

No one said a word, but some folks quickly walked down the passageways in the ground. Others made sure the enemy was dead while more began collecting mysterious power. Everyone was very quiet. If it wasn't for their armor and impressive leader, they might've all been lost.

Li Hao grabbed the metal peak Sunflare and utilized his energy ring to store roughly three hundred cubes of metal mysterious power.

"This goes to our bait, make sure that's recorded." He looked at Liu Long.

“Understood!” Liu Long nodded, neither envious nor finding it inappropriate. Although the bait hadn’t done anything, they’d assumed extreme danger. Any slight misstep might’ve resulted in all of their deaths.

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Not too far away.

Wang Ming and the others stared with dropped jaws. They’d rushed over when they heard the disturbance and were in time to see the battle between the two sides. They witnessed large numbers of supernaturals dying and Sunflares being run through with one sword stroke. Four Sunflares weren’t able to stand against one stroke! Other than Wang Ming, the rest had their hearts in their throat!

“Ole Wang, your... your senior brother is crazy strong!”

“Seriously, he killed those Sunflares with one move! That’s insane!”

“And is the other one Liu Long? Dominators are definitely incredible, he hacked so many flight supernaturals to death...”

“.....” They were highly flushed and excited. Almost none of them had seen such a massive battle scene before—more than one hundred combined martial masters and supernaturals had clashed with each other, but it was the supernaturals that were routed.

This kind of incident was very hard to come across in Silver Moon. This trip was well worth it. Being able to watch this battle alone made everything worth it.

A figure flashed in front of their eyes; Li Hao threw an energy ring to Wang Ming. “This is for you, there’s three hundred cubes of metal mysterious power in it. You guys can divide it yourselves among yourselves, it’s your payment for this operation! Keep going. The more powerhouses you

attract, the greater the gains, the more you earn! Of course, the more danger associated with the operation. I won't be able to come so quickly each time and may not make it in time for every encounter. It's up to you guys if you want to back out!"

The young man vanished after those words.

Three hundred cubes... It wasn't much to these rich second generations, but they were keyed up all the same. Although each of them wouldn't receive that much after the distribution was made—just a couple dozen that their families could easily afford—they'd earned this by themselves!

"I... Ole Wang, I've earned mysterious power!" Zhou Qin said excitedly.

They'd been highly nervous as they would be partially participating in battle. It was both a thrilling and nerve-wracking idea that there would be so many supernatural powerhouses around. They would've been done for if Li Hao and the others had come a bit later.

But now, none of them wanted to leave. There was only excitement and exhilaration in their eyes. It felt so different to earn their own riches!

"This is nothing!" Wang Ming snorted. "Let me tell you guys something, I've killed a Solar before!"

"What??"

"It's true, my senior brother and I did it together. Obviously, don't tell anyone about this. Remember when someone ambushed my senior brother in an alley? It was that time!" He didn't speak of Zhang Ting's matter, but the events of the alley were no secret.

Wang Ming preened with pride. He could finally boast about this! No one would believe him if they hadn't just seen what'd happened with their own eyes.

“Isn’t my senior brother something?” Wang Ming chuckled. “How long would it take for us to earn three hundred cubes in the Night Watchers? C’mon, let’s go to the next location. It’s dangerous, but if we keep our heads on straight, we can all make it rich tonight and witness even stronger battles!”

Excited beyond belief, the group quickly dismantled their camp and set course for the next location, as loud and proud as they could be along the way.

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“What are you all depressed about?” Li Hao smiled at the swiftly regathering Demon Hunters. “Didn’t we win? C’mon, let’s find a place to rest for the night and think about the events of the day. Should you reform your teams? This was just a small skirmish. If you’re dejected about what happened today, how will you do greater things later on?”

Hearts shook at his words—Li Hao wasn’t blaming them!

“Let’s go, I’m a rookie too. We can slowly get to know each other. We gained a fair bit tonight, so I hope that we’re all Sunderers by tomorrow!”

They’d reaped a fair deal after killing more than forty supernaturals. Only now did the team experience the thrills of victory. We... killed a lot of Red Moon supernaturals tonight!

The group now had full faith in Li Hao. The young man was so strong, very mysterious, possessed numerous methods up his sleeve, and had found a base in the blink of an eye. As martial masters, they knew how hard it was to locate the three great organizations.

Liu Long watched them silently and glanced at Li Hao, smiling at what he saw. This team wasn’t fully fleshed out yet, but it’d grow stronger through more battles. They would be more coordinated with each other and Li Hao... would gain more prestige. Did the kid really not know any of this, or did he just have unusual methods? How else could one have become part of this team in a more natural way?

Their first battle had come with a lot of war spoils, yet Liu Long knew that this was only the beginning. If Red Moon was unable to swiftly deter them or identify where the Demon Hunters were heading, the organization would only suffer increasing losses.

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In the wilderness.

A group of martial masters sat on the ground in a valley between two mountains. Everyone was silent. Some meditated cross-legged, others contemplated the battle that'd taken place earlier.

All forty-nine were present and accounted for. Some were injured, however. There were those who'd bore the brunt of mysterious power reverberating through them and those who'd been attacked by Sunflares. Although they hadn't died, they'd suffered internal injuries all the same. But even so, no one dared complain.

They were all thinking back to the battle and reflecting on various actions. A lot had gone wrong during that skirmish.

Li Hao came back at this time with several red pills in his hand. "These are blood pearls. Only origin weapons can extract them. You might've sensed something before—they're formless and intangible, but you can still sense a little of their presence.

"Our most pressing task isn't to properly divvy up the spoils, but to use our gains to help everyone swiftly grow stronger. Therefore, the loot will be divided according to need for the moment. We can consider other factors when we are all stronger."

Twenty-nine pills shot toward certain martial masters in the crowd, landing in front of their recipients. They were all Slayers!

“Swallow these, absorb, and digest them! Tell me if you’re unable to do so fully, I’ll use the Breathing Method of the Five Styles to help you digest them. They’re almost all Darkmoon level blood pearls, which is precisely what you guys need.”

Some were tempted among the twenty-nine, but others were too embarrassed to take the gift.

“Leader, we... did not accomplish anything in this battle,” muttered one of the Slayers. “We were swiftly captured by the enemy when we fought and would be long dead if it wasn’t for the armor.”

“From shame springs valor.” Li Hao nodded. “You did indeed drag us down because you’re too weak! Therefore, I hope you guys can be stronger in the future. It’s a success if you can become Sunderer after devouring one blood pearl, otherwise... you’ll hold us back in even worse ways.”

The group said nothing more. Someone picked up their blood pearl and placed it by their mouth. The visor parted to let the blood pearl pass through. After this precedent was set, everyone else followed suit. The Sunderers watched them silently.

“You can reform your teams tonight,” Li Hao continued. “Don’t change them anymore after finalizing them. I’ll teach you an army formation after you reconvene. I trust that we all understand now that there isn’t necessarily always strength in numbers. Coordination is vital.

“If we wish for the combined whole to be stronger, for one plus one to be greater than two, then we might throw ourselves forward as a mob. That, however, is the tactic of street thugs. We are not street thugs.”

“Leader, can the smaller teams use army formations as well?” asked Hong Qing.

“Of course!”

Hong Qing was skeptical, but didn’t say anything. There were only ten people in each small team. A formation for ten... She’d spoken with some martial masters over the past two days. The Guards

did not have any formations staffed by only ten people. The lowest number required was one hundred.

While the Sword Sect possessed some formations, they were just for support purposes. True army formations went far beyond support. Were those the type that Li Hao meant?