

Star Gate 401

Chapter 401: The Fortune of Five Auras (I)

Celestial's powerhouse was adequately outfitted. Their peak Solar was highly valued.

These were only the profits from today. The Demon Hunters had killed many supernaturals over the past few days and obtained nearly five thousand cubes of mysterious power. Trickle of power from close to one hundred supernaturals accumulated to a significant amount in the end. Unfortunately, the Demon Hunters netted only three mysterious power stones from those supernaturals

Indeed, they were all very poor. Only certain Sunflares possessed stones out of the one hundred—the stones were likely awarded from upstairs. It made for a total harvest of thirty stones thus far on their trip. Li Hao had consumed nearly twenty, resulting in a profit of ten stones.

He'd borrowed thirty stones from Golden Spear, which meant he carried forty stones on him at the moment. The team had collected seventeen thousand cubes of mysterious power.

He looked back at the tired assembly with a smile. "Did you all hear that? Profits. C'mon, let's go find a safe place to absorb mysterious power. I'll use the Breathing Method of the Five Styles to convert the energy to mysterious power more suited for everyone's cultivation.

"Seventeen thousand cubes... are we going to leave that as war spoils for the enemy? No, we're going to spend it all! There's only so many of us—fifty-one if you include me—which means at least three hundred cubes each. We'll live it up tonight!"

General glee seized the crowd! More than three hundred cubes each! Before they'd joined the Demon Hunters, it was enough to extract twenty cubes from a Darkmoon. How many Darkmoons would they have to kill for the bounty they were receiving today? To these martial masters, a Darkmoon was on par with a Sunderer, so that meant more than a dozen times of putting their lives on the line, and they had to win each time!

Whether it was the Inspectorate or Sword Sect, both Hong Yitang and Wang Henggang were very strong, but they wouldn't give their disciples too much. After all, they weren't that rich themselves. Not even the Night Watchers were that well off, to say nothing of themselves.

"Additionally, I have a dao comprehension weapon on me," Li Hao mentioned as he walked. "It's a broken sword from a swordsman of the ancient civilization. It can be utilized ten times, so the captains and late Sunderers who've killed the most people can give it a try!"

"If you can become a half step Dominator, breaking through to Dominator won't be too far away!"

The Demon Hunters were further delighted by Li Hao's words. The young man said nothing else, he was focused on swiftly recovering from his wounds. Not only that, but he brought out some energy rings from his storage ring. He wanted to cultivate as well.

He possessed energy of all five elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, as well as that of wind, thunder, and dark. They'd killed so many supernaturals that he didn't lack any attribute. Li Hao executed the rules of distribution to the letter. Thirty percent of the gains went to him, which meant he was claiming nearly five thousand cubes himself. He'd killed all of the Solars by himself, so he could take even more.

Therefore, he didn't need to follow the Guards' rules of distribution.

Li Hao looked over the selection and chose five hundred cubes of the five elements, wind, and thunder. After brief hesitation, he chose another five hundred of dark mysterious power.

Four thousand cubes of mysterious power, but it would require roughly twenty energy stones to digest them all. One stone could convert nearly two hundred bucks of mysterious power. He was also injured, so he needed at least twenty stones for his purposes.

Ten needed to be held back as reserves out of the remaining twenty. The remaining ten would be converted to sword energy—that would supply mysterious power for the rest of the team so they could swiftly strengthen themselves.

Whatever they'd reaped needed to be quickly spent. Spending their harvest was the true strength. Who knew who it'd benefit in the end if they hoarded their treasure?

Ten mysterious power stones wouldn't convert too much out of the remaining thirteen thousand cubes, but the team wasn't able to absorb much either. A couple cubes was more than enough for a Sunderer. Out of the two thousand that Li Hao could convert, it would be quite an abundance for each person to absorb forty cubes.

Li Hao continued down the mountain path, exiting a natural path a while later and entering some trails that were very difficult to pick through. He even climbed a few cliffs and led the team another hour into the mountain before finding a natural-made mountain cave.

He quickly sealed off the entrance after entering the cave. "Start cultivating now. A state of total exhaustion is perfect for our purposes. Don't rest—resting will cause your attention to slack!"

"Understood!" chorused the team, all of them very hopeful. No one took off their armor.

Li Hao crushed some mysterious power stones and started large-scale energy conversion. There was mysterious power of the five elements and unattributed power stripped out from them. The energy filled the void, available for martial masters to freely absorb.

It wasn't their first time doing so. While they found Li Hao's methods astounding, the team was used to it after several occurrences. They could sense the advantages of this converted energy—it was easier to absorb and also enhanced the physical body and organs in an evenly distributed manner.

They couldn't fully appreciate the benefits of such energy at the moment. Only when they reached Dominator would they understand the significance of enhanced organs. It meant that the path to Summoner of Spirit was unfolding in front of them.

Liu Long was the one who understood this the most out of the team. He'd gained quite a great deal over the past couple of days. Being a Dominator, he absorbed energy very quickly and focused on the five elements. He could sense a noticeable improvement in his organs by now.

The man was highly envious of the rest of the team. They lived in the lap of abundance and knew it not!

None of them recognized their good fortune. Only after they entered Dominator and began pursuing the path to Summoner would they understand how beneficial it was to strengthen the organs during the Sunderer stage. Each instance of absorbing energy would save them several years of cultivation.

More than ten thousand cubes of mysterious power was just a number. The true benefits were far greater than the energy. If Hou Xiaochen and the others knew what was taking place, they'd likely be willing to pay ten times or a hundred times the price to trade for this special energy.

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Li Hao set the team out of his mind and began his own recovery and cultivation. His lungs continued to seep blood and heal. The metal sword aura was too strong and erupted too ferociously. It also continued to struggle. Each time it struggled brought about another coughing fit.

His five organs still weren't strong enough!

Their weakness stemmed from an inherent weakness in flesh and bone, so the young man needed to strengthen those first. Wind and thunder energy was his first choice. Sword energy surged out and raised a series of rumbles in his body.

All he needed was pure elemental energy—he expelled the unattributed energy for the other martial masters to absorb. Unattributed energy also strengthened the body, it just didn't have much of an effect for Li Hao. But for Sunderers, unattributed mysterious power had a much better effect than regular power.

It was deathly quiet inside the cave of fifty-one people. Only Li Hao's coughing and thunder roaring within his bones occasionally sounded, bringing a hint of life to the absolutely still cave.

Demon Hunter members continuously progressed through their dao. Mid stage entered late stage, initial stage entered mid stage.

The Slayers who hadn't broken through earlier had all succeeded a long time ago. They all progressed to mid Sunderer. Some late Sunderers were feeling their way around the aura—not through the dao comprehension weapon, but through their own powers of understanding.

Hong Yitang's daughter Hong Qing, Hong Hao, Wang Chao, and the others came to their own conclusions. So did Liu Yan and Li Hang, martial masters equipped with unique heritages. Wu Chao, Li Heng, and Chen Jian had progressed to late Sunderer. All of them had improved greatly over the past couple of days.

A few days of battle and cultivation was the equivalent of several years or a decade of hard work on their own!

There was a noticeable increase in the number of late Sunderers among the Demon Hunters; Liu Long had also taken remarkable steps forward. He was attempting to lock his aura in his organs, such as the water aura in the kidneys. However, his organs veered on the weaker side, so the process delivered stabbing pain to his organs. And yet, this was already a tremendous improvement. It meant that he proceeded toward peak Dominator.

He was much stronger than before and could take on late Sunflares with ease. He could even battle peak Sunflares, but the outcome would depend on the situation. Liu Long looked quietly at Li Hao. All of this had come from this guy. This little fellow was the scariest of them all!

The group quickly lost themselves in the joys of cultivation. There was none of the usual pain associated with absorbing mysterious power, just comfort.

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As Li Hao's group traveled through the night to Ash Mountain, others crossed the northern reaches of Silver Moon to where battle had taken place last night. Several powerhouses stood in the air and silently observed the traces left behind by yesterday's battle.

A middle-aged woman with hair tinged blue casually summoned a piece of broken rock into her hand and looked at it closely. "He is the Demon Sword alright!" she said softly. This sword qi was unparalleled in its keenness! It was still domineering after a night of dissipation. The wielder had plainly reached unfathomable heights when it came to sword dao. Who among Silver Moon swordsmen could compare?

Sky Sword?

He was probably the only one who could stand against this one.

Powerhouses had ever hailed from Silver Moon. As expected, talents still emerged from this place despite its decline. An ignoble fellow such as Li Hao was now known through the dynasty after a night of battle.

A cloaked figure bent down not too far away and scrutinized a broken corpse. He shook his head gently. "This person was shaken to death beneath the ground. Li Hao is also skilled at the earth aura!"

"Sword aura, earth aura, and possibly the fire aura..."

"No, the metal aura!"

"....." After a flurry of conversation, the powerhouses fell silent. Li Hao was too perverse!

“Although Li Hao does not cultivate the aura of the Five Styles, we can still look at his accomplishments through that lens. He’s comprehended at least three auras, possibly four thus far. He’s developing very similarly compared to Yuan Shuo’s Five Styles!”

“It’s impossible for him to grasp so many in a month!” the blue-haired woman said coldly. “I would believe it if he advanced from Slayer to late Sunderer in a day, but to understand so many auras in a month is not feasible! Therefore, he must’ve grasped them beforehand!”

Chapter 402: The Fortune of Five Auras (II)

Everyone understood the methods of improving the physical body and blood qi when it came to enhancing strength. Hope sprang eternal for these paths so long as one possessed sufficient treasure. But comprehending the aura was not contingent on treasure.

Gazing upon a dao comprehension weapon day in and day out was not sufficient to guarantee further understanding an aura. Hence, the powerhouses scrutinizing last night’s battle scene judged that Li Hao should’ve comprehended the aura a long time ago—possibly more than a year ago.

Therefore, everything written in his resume was bullshit.

Li Hao might’ve been more than an ordinary martial master when Yuan Shuo accepted him as a disciple. He might’ve been a martial master long ago or received the old demon’s true teachings three years ago, not the two or three months that was commonly quoted.

One aura per year for three years was feasible for a premier genius.

“Tidal Wave,” Half Mountain addressed the middle-aged woman off to the side. “What level do you think he’s at now?”

“Peak Solar, one who’s just reached that level,” Tidal Wave immediately discerned. “Of course, he’s a martial master with domineering mind intent and numerous auras, so he’s stronger than regular peak Solars. However, there’s a limit to his strength. Judging from the signs of battle, he killed those of my Red Moon last in a bitterly fought battle. He looks to have suffered significant injuries in that fight.

“If he can rival Novas, he wouldn’t have needed to bring so much effort to bear for those three!”

“Yue Pu fell to an ambush.” Half Mountain inclined his head. “Although Li Hao finished the deed very quickly, that doesn’t mean he’s much stronger than Yue Pu. He does look to have just reached peak Solar.”

These powerhouses possessed the ability to determine the overall situation from just a few traces. Even so, this was a frightening conclusion.

Li Hao was just in his twenties, but he could already kill peak Solars. He was more powerful than some premier Heaven Favored in the central region, and he was just a martial master, not a supernatural! If he could cross over right this second, wouldn’t he instantly become a Nova?

That was extremely terrifying!

Of course, it was very difficult to ascend to the supernatural at Li Hao’s level. He might not do so even if he could. If he was a supernatural, he would be a Nova... Only the most perverse of powerhouses in the central region could match such an accomplishment. The three great organizations and Night Watchers had some Novas, but very few.

Of those they had, they were all active in the central region. None of them had come to Silver Moon. Someone had come from Yama—not the Parity King, but the Revolution King. The wind supernatural kept a lower profile in front of the two Novas, but wasn’t overly fearful of his counterparts.

“I met this Li Hao in the last expedition,” he declared coldly. “He masqueraded as a Sunderer then and I failed to see through his disguise. No wonder the three great organizations suffered such immense losses last time... It goes without saying that someone was striking from the shadows!”

They’d all thought that the Night Watchers had been lucky last time, but no one thought that now. It must’ve been Li Hao acting without their knowing.

Tidal Wave didn't mind this, she simply frowned, "He's run off with his people. Red Moon is not skilled at tracking and tracing, but Celestial is. Half Mountain, how goes your pursuit?"

As an organization of killers, they must be adept at hunting down their targets. Each Celestial member was very skilled at following others. Half Mountain, however, frowned beneath his hood.

"Elder Tidal Wave should send your divine shadow after him!" His voice was calm.

"I cannot!" Tidal Wave shook her head. "I suspect that Li Hao possesses the heavenly eye and can see the divine shadows! Why else can he so quickly discover our people each time? Therefore, he might notice the divine shadows."

"The heavenly eye?" Half Mountain blinked before thinking of something. "The unique group of people who can see existences on the mental level?"

"Correct, them!" Tidal Wave affirmed. "Li Hao possesses a powerful mind intent and a bit of resemblance to them. These people might not be the strongest in martial dao or the supernatural domain, but they can see unique material. They are utterly terrifying once they progress to Nova. Their mind can control everything—such foreboding existences have appeared in the central region already!

"Divine shadows are similar to such entities. Regular people can't see it, but Li Hao... possibly can!"

Why else would he so quickly discover Red Moon's people each time? The divine shadows didn't seem to inflict any damage on the young man either. Based on the traces at the scene, Li Hao seemed to have taken the divine shadows with him. She could even hear their keening howl before they were snuffed out.

People like him were everywhere, but few were those who survived. They often exploded throughout the course of cultivation. But if they survived and surpassed certain obstacles, they would swiftly develop to preeminent experts. It was a horrifying proposition.

All sides secretly searched for such people, but there were very few of them with any accomplishments to their name. Most of them were dead, leaving a few at various headquarters to participate in certain research. There were even some who remained in the ruins. They could glimpse dangers and opportunities that others could not.

Tidal Wave's hypothesis left the others grave. If that was the case... it would impact Red Moon the most. There wouldn't be that great of an impact on the other two organizations.

Meanwhile, Li Hao could also see the mysterious power within the body. This was out of reach of those with the heavenly eye, but he didn't know that. Neither would this group understand the differences within.

Someone who'd cultivated to Li Hao's level was very difficult to handle. Certain unique tactics were ineffective when it came to him. Realms of illusion, supernatural powers of hypnosis, and subterfuge were hard pressed to pull the wool over those with the heavenly eye.

"Half Mountain, this Li Hao doesn't hate just Red Moon alone," Tidal Wave pointed out. "Has he ever shown any mercy to Celestial or Yama? Although Yuan Shuo is stronger than him, Yuan Shuo only targets Red Moon. Li Hao is perfectly happy to make trouble for anyone!"

Yuan Shuo wasn't only moving against Red Moon either, but he wouldn't go for the other two organizations under normal circumstances. He would only take action if he happened to run into them as they didn't possess scarlet shadows. Li Hao, on the other hand, didn't care who he encountered. If his victim lacked a scarlet shadow, then he'd kill them for mysterious power.

That was what made the young man truly frightening. In his eyes, there were only those who could be killed and those who could not. Few were those who could not, most were perfectly acceptable targets. He did not care if he offended all three great organizations or just one of them.

"I can help." Half Mountain nodded after some thought. "But not indefinitely. If we do not find him within five days, I must leave."

As for where... Rift Canyon, of course. The ruins of Battle Heaven might open on the 28th. If he didn't go back and left only a Nova level elder there, problems would easily arise.

Red Moon didn't care about losing a Nova, they had almost thirty Solars left among their ranks. Yama and Celestial could not compare to this—they weren't nearly as insane as Red Moon to concentrate the strength of nineteen provinces on one. The more that came, the more that died. They'd all seen how many powerhouses Red Moon had lost during this time. They'd lost nearly ten Solars in Silver Moon alone!

It was September 19, leaving only nine days until Battle Heaven opened again. He was showing Red Moon face in helping them for five days. Of course, Half Mountain also wanted to capture or kill Li Hao. The young man was turning into someone frightening!

"What about you, Revolution?" Tidal Wave nodded and looked at the Revolution King. "I'm sure that more than the Parity King has come from Yama. Are none of the other ten free? Aren't you worried of being killed in return by Li Hao?"

A peak wind Solar with an origin weapon was not weak, but might still fall to Li Hao if one was not careful. Only Novas were guaranteed to take the young man down now. Yama looked to have sent only one Nova to Silver Moon on the surface—the Parity King. But there were eight other court masters in Yama, had none of the rest come?

The war in the central region had calmed down much more these days. Red Moon pulled four Moons to hunt down Li Hao and Yuan Shuo, Yama sent the Parity King, and Celestial had sent one of their elders. At the same time, Half Mountain was also a Nova.

The Revolution King frowned. "You don't need to consider me, Elder Tidal Wave. I can wait. The masters of the sixteen hells under the Parity King will be here soon..."

Tidal Wave and Half Mountain said nothing more; they treated this response with gravity. It looked like Yama was paying attention to this matter as well.

The Parity King was a Nova, his subordinates were different from the Revolution King's. They oversaw the sixteen hells and were almost all Solars. When all of them were assembled... they would be no less than Novas.

If combined with the peak Solar Revolution King and an origin weapon, not even Tidal Wave would be their match. Half Mountain likely also wielded an origin weapon. Only Tidal Wave lacked one.

While Tidal Wave was an elder, there weren't enough origin weapons to go around for every elder to be assigned one.

People like Violet Moon and the Revolution King were in charge of holding down the fort, so they nominally possessed high statuses. Tidal Wave was just an elder, of which there were many in Red Moon.

At the same time, they'd heard that Celestial had lost an origin weapon in Battle Heaven in the last expedition. It might have belonged to Half Mountain, so he would not possess one at the moment.

"Li Hao comes from Silver City... Silver City is a small place..." Tidal Wave looked into the distance.

"You want to threaten Silver City to force Li Hao into showing himself?" someone new laughed. "Don't even think about it and don't do anything brash! You've killed his parents, his best friend, and run off his teacher. He's all out there by his lonesome, and now you want to use his hometown? Don't go mucking around and creating bigger trouble for yourself. No one will be able to save you!"

Tidal Wave looked coolly in a certain direction where a figure had appeared—Southern Fist.

"He Yong?" Some blinked. What... was he doing here?

Chapter 403: The Fortune of Five Auras (III)

“What, can I not come?” He Yong roared with laughter. “It’s the Night Watchers who have declared war on you, not the royal family! Are you trying to drag the royal family into this as well? I’m not interested in your business, I want to find Li Hao too. This guy is really something, I want to fight him! His teacher’s run off, but he’ll do...”

“The royal family?” Tidal Wave looked coldly at him. “You’re just a martial teacher, how are you fit to represent the royal family? I’d like to see if the royal family really does emerge from eighty years of seclusion and retaliates on Red Moon if we kill you!”

He Yong was draping himself with the royal banner to impress people! Just look at him strut around!

“Why don’t you give it a try?” He Yong laughed fearlessly. “Do you think I really have just run out from the royal family for the heck of it and refuse to go back? The royal family is also interested in the eight families! Want to share what you know, Tidal Wave? If I’m entertained, I’ll wave a hand and summon some dukes or even princes to help you eliminate Hou Xiaochen!”

“.....”

Silence.

Dukes and princes...

These ancient titles of nobility were rarely mentioned in modern society. However, everyone knew that these people still possessed actual power and authority! He Yong seemed to be saying that he was here on behalf of some special missions.

The three great organizations were aware of the conflict between the royal family and the nine ministries. After the royal family was forced to abdicate eight years ago, they fixed looks of burning hatred on the nine ministries. Those were filled with scum who’d stolen their nation!

Balance was maintained only on the surface in present time.

Tidal Wave briefly thought about it, then ignored the newcomer. There was no need to offend the royal family, but also no need for extended contact. Some of Red Moon's intelligence reports indicated that the royal family was not content to slink off into the night. At the very least, their Black Armaturas remained steadfastly guarding the palace that no one dared enter.

Although the Skystar King who'd abdicated eighty years ago was dead, this generation's king was purported to be a powerhouse and rankled at being an ornament. He wanted to revitalize the family's rule and sovereignty. Those of the royal family all possessed certain strategies and strength...

Tidal Wave no longer wished to communicate with He Yong when her thoughts traveled here. Southern Fist didn't mind. The royal family name was very useful at times. In situations like these, at least, the three great organizations and nine ministries weren't willing to be entangled with the royal family. It was an incredible hassle!

Take the situation at hand, for example. Tidal Wave and the others ignored him, but also didn't do anything to him. If it was those of the nine ministries standing in front of him, they would absolutely attack him.

The powerhouses probed each other briefly before leaving separately. Half Mountain left with Tidal Wave. Just as Southern Fist had said, would using Silver City against Li Hao prove fruitful? His family and friends were dead, his teacher had run off. Were they supposed to use random bystanders in the streets against him?

Li Hao was no saint!

Not to mention, they would raise the crazed ire of Silver Moon's authorities if they moved against Silver City. The situation would be much worse than it was now. Tidal Wave quickly abandoned the notion after further thought.

The Revolution King transported himself away to await the arrival of the masters of the sixteen hells. Plainly, Yama also wanted to try and capture Li Hao for themselves.

Southern Fist jumped to the previous battle site when everyone was gone. He came to several preliminary conclusions after poking around for a bit. Damn, looks like Li Hao's going to walk the path of summoning spirits into his five visceral organs! He's going to do like his teacher did and put an aura in each organ. It looks like he has the metal, fire, and earth auras. So he's lacking water and wood?

Melding three auras together permits him to kill peak Solars... Yuan Shuo utilized two and Incantation of the Blade of Blood to kill Qimei Staff. That guy counted as peak Solar as well...

"Is master and disciple squaring off? So this means that Li Hao is now as strong as Yuan Shuo from that day. But Yuan Shuo's manifested his third aura, so that makes him a bit stronger than his disciple..." He Yong's thoughts flew rapidly, estimating that master and disciple were roughly on the same footing. If Yuan Shuo proceeded down his path, it was only a matter of time before he succeeded with all five auras. Li Hao, on the other hand, would run into trouble. It wasn't that easy to comprehend another two auras.

"The water aura... Liu Long seems to command the water aura—does that map to the Nine Forged Force? So he's lacking the wood aura then. Does the kid have any hint as to what he wants to do?" He Yong analyzed the situation, unsure whether or not Li Hao had any ideas in mind. He probed the traces left by the Nine Forged Force—there were hints of waves in them. Perhaps the young man already had an inkling of the water aura.

"The wood aura..." He Yong thought for a bit before suddenly grinning. He actually did know of a wood aura sword method in Silver Moon's martial world. It was said to have been excavated from an ancient ruin. Its master back in the day was hailed the Wooden Swordsman. However, the method wasn't that well known.

"Weeping Willow Sword... Wooden Swordsman..."

Did Weeping Willow Sword have an heir? The swordsman was dead and his only heir seemed to have died a few years back. So was the inheritance broken?

Weeping Willow Sword had not been one of the Seven Swords of Silver Moon. While it was said that a place among the top ten swordsmen of Silver Moon was absolutely Weeping Willow's due, who cared about those who weren't listed in the Record of Thirty-Six Heroes?

"If this kid can obtain Weeping Willow's heritage, he'll stand a chance of comprehending the wood aura. What a pity that it's been lost. I don't know if there's word aura sword techniques with the other methods." Southern Fist shook his head slightly and put the matter out of his mind.

Li Hao might be lucky enough to obtain the method; other ruins might have ancient tomes that recorded it. If not, it would be up to his own powers of comprehension. Perhaps there were other secret arts or enlightenment out there that would bring him a wood aura.

It was just that Weeping Willow's method would systematically lead Li Hao to the wood aura and save him a lot of time.

Southern Fist looked around a while longer and quietly departed. More people arrived after he left and stayed long enough for a quick glance around.

There were more than the three great organizations and Night Watchers keeping a watch on this area in Silver Moon. The royal family had their representatives, the nine ministries and other esteemed personages also had eyes on the situation.

Detailed reports regarding Li Hao quickly reached all corners of the land. Three kinds of aura! He might be walking the path of melding the auras like the Five Styles as Yuan Shuo had. Li Hao's martial path was yet to reach its end.

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At the same time.

Li Hao concluded his training inside a cave and gave a long exhale. His body felt much stronger and the damage to his organs was mostly healed. There was still a bit of discomfort in his lungs, however. As for the dark attributed energy, he'd fully absorbed that.

He didn't sense any major difference apart from his presence being more contained compared to before. That didn't seem very useful as he wasn't in the business of ambushing people. Martial masters were already hard to detect, so what use was this blasted dark energy to make him even harder to detect?

"The coughing is finally better..." He'd had to cough every few minutes before, but now could resort to coughing gently every few hours. His lungs still felt out of sorts—they'd absorbed fifteen hundred cubes of mysterious power. Surely they would be fine at two thousand cubes.

However, he'd consumed too many mysterious power stones in the process and didn't have more stones to expend.

"My body, bones, and organs are all stronger. I've improved overall, but not that much. It's my auras that are the key. I haven't grasped the water aura yet, but I have some clues so it should be soon.

"The wood aura is the issue!" Li Hao sighed softly. He should be stronger with four auras as one and would be able to take on the greatest of peak Solars or initial Novas. He'd also fight initial Novas without a problem if also deploying the Incantation of the Blade of Blood.

It was the fifth aura that he didn't really have an inkling of! How should he start comprehending the wood aura?

In the Five Styles, the deer style corresponded to the wood aura. However, his path was different from his teacher's. The Five Styles was not a sword technique, so there weren't that many points of similarity between the two. The deer aura that the young man comprehended might not be of the wood attribute.

Although auras did not possess an attribute in of themselves—that came from subsequent comprehension and assignment—starting off on the wrong foot meant that the aura one understood would not be the desired attribute.

As Li Hao was lost in his thoughts, Li Heng enthusiastically stabbed forward with his sword not too far away.

“I think I’ve almost got the aura!” he boasted in a low voice to Wu Chao next to him. “I’m such a genius! It’s only been two days since I became late Sunderer, but I already feel that I’m about to understand the aura. Willow leaves drift through the air and tree branches intertwine around each other when the Weeping Willow Sword is deployed. I have a hunch that once my aura manifests, I will be able to combine offense and defense together. What will you bring against me then, Runaway Wu!”

“The Weeping Willow Sword...” Li Hao blinked and looked at Li Heng. He was aware that Li Heng was the heir of the Weeping Willow Sword. The last heir had lingered in Silver City for some time back in the day, but was quickly discovered and killed. Li Hang was an amateur who didn’t have a firm grasp of the technique. He wasn’t able to deploy the true dominance of the Weeping Willow Sword.

Hence, Li Hao started with surprise when he heard that Li Heng was about to grasp the aura. That fast? This indicated that the technique itself possessed traits that led straight to the aura. Not all secret arts naturally progressed to the aura at certain levels of mastery. The Nine Forged Force and Five Styles could, but they were premier secret arts.

Those of the thirty-six heroes possessed such arts back in the day, did Weeping Willow do the same?

Willow leaves drift through the air and tree branches intertwine around each other... to attack and defend?

Li Hao looked at the other, why... did this sound like a wood aura? Strange emotions percolated through Li Hao’s heart. Had a pillow come knocking on his door just as he was drifting off to sleep?

But Li Heng was a boastful type. Was he running his mouth, or did he really sense the beginning of an aura?

Hot in the middle of preening, Li Heng suddenly sensed a direct gaze on him. He swallowed when he realized it was Li Hao looking at him and shut his mouth. These days, he had only respect and veneration for this one. Even if his accidental master came back to life, he would only suffer the outcome of being squeezed out of the rankings by Li Hao. Li Hao would absolutely be ranked among the thirty-six.

The subject of his adoration looked silently at him. This was all in Li Heng's mind and he was the sort to talk a big talk. Let's just wait and see! His aura would appear soon if he really had begun to grasp it, so Li Hao might be able to ask about it then.

Chapter 404: A Bustling Ash Mountain (I)

Secret arts were valuable and not typically taught to outsiders. But as an amateur, Li Heng might be willing to trade the secret art for some other benefits. If Weeping Willow was still alive, Li Hao would naturally not go through Li Heng. He would go to the source—such were the rules of the martial world. But since Li Heng was the last of his discipline... then there wasn't much of a problem with that.

Li Hao set the matter aside. His most pressing concern was understanding the water aura. Once the water aura formed, he would have the foundation to stand against Novas!

“So long as my strength builds by the day, all of the information you hold will be outdated!” Li Hao looked into the distance. Even with rocks blocking the view, he could sense that there were Novas looking for him.

Let's see who hunts who in the end! I'm almost to the point of sensing the last step of the Nine Forged Force. When my water aura forms, I'll seek you out if you haven't found me yet. I need so many more mysterious power stones. Novas should have a lot of them, right?

Li Hao smiled as he looked at the martial masters in his team. There were now numerous mid Sunderers among the Demon Hunters; initial Sunderers were the minority. There were also many late Sunderers. He could even sense that there were a few who could grasp the aura by themselves.

Indeed, battles of life and death were the best opportunities for martial masters to attain new enlightenment. No wonder martial masters loved to fight and were headstrong. They lived to spar or engage in battles to the death.

If the team could gain a few more Dominators and if Liu Long could set one foot into Summoner, then the Demon Hunters would be able to kill Solars next. They were improving so fast that Li Hao felt the Demon Hunters would soon be known throughout the land!

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The team rested sufficiently after a day in the mountain cave. They absorbed an appropriate amount of mysterious power, ate some rations, drank some water, and recovered their vitality. On a whole, they were noticeably stronger than before. But to Li Hao, this wasn't enough.

There was no hurry, however.

Once everyone became a Dominator, he would have fifty Dominators supplying internal force to him if he was the center of the formation. They would be an entirely different sight to what they were now. And if that was out of reach, then fifty Sunderers were still of enormous help to him in a formation. It just wouldn't be much of an improvement over current circumstances, so he was not so inclined toward that possibility.

"Finish your preparations, everyone. We'll set off in a moment!" Li Hao announced.

The group started packing up, but there wasn't much to put away. All they needed to do was to erase the traces they'd left behind. They were soon finished; Li Hao rolled back the stone at the mountain cave and walked out. He looked around the area and furrowed his brows.

Jumping upward, he vanished and reappeared on a small peak not too far away. There was a creature that looked like a panther in front of him. It turned to look at Li Hao before bounding off.

The young man's frown deepened. He'd seen a small ball of light just now—very faint—and had thought it was a supernatural. But it wasn't, it was a panther.

A panther spirit?

He knew that there were a few wild beasts in the central region that had become animal spirits—the monster spirits that everyone spoke of. There were almost none in Silver Moon, other than Panther who'd become a dog spirit. It was said that powerful monster spirits in the central region could devour Novas.

Li Hao had never considered the issue prior to today, yet he'd discovered a panther about to become a spirit as soon as he entered Ash Mountain. This was only the outer fringe!

He looked sternly into the depths. Would there be large monster spirits in the mountains? He'd come to Ash Mountain because the terrain was perilous and thickly forested, making it good for concealment. He wasn't here with a death wish.

It was fine if they were supernatural monster spirits, he could see those. But... what if they were martial dao monster spirits? Did those exist?

Possibly. Wasn't the little black dog a martial dao monster spirit? They'd be in trouble if they ran into those. Ash Mountain was too big, who knew if big monster spirits like those of the central region would appear here? While he'd yet to hear of any, the north may hold some if the central region already had them.

Perhaps those things like to stay in the mountains and were too lazy to go out. Li Hao silently watched the panther run away and didn't make a move. It would be bad to raise attention from a bigger monster spirit if he beat the younger one up. The situation was unclear and he wasn't prepared to move against these creatures yet, lest it brought greater trouble.

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Li Hao returned to the mountain cave after a while. “Everyone, be careful. Some wild beasts in Ash Mountain seem to have become monster spirits.” His words caused a small disturbance and Hong Qing quickly walked over.

“Leader,” she whispered. “My dad once said that some monster spirits appeared when the supernatural first rose. The supernatural domain turned even some of the domesticated animals. Monster spirits can be found everywhere to varying degrees. But I’ve also heard that there are no monster spirits in Silver Moon...”

Li Hao blinked. No monster spirits in the province? Why?

True, other than Panther, he’d met no other monster spirits in the province. Were they out of Silver Moon’s boundaries now?

Hong Qing didn’t know the particulars, she’d only heard her father mention it before. “My dad says that Silver Moon is a bit unique. Monster spirits naturally shy away from Silver Moon and the province’s native creatures have a difficult time of becoming spirits. They can’t absorb enough mysterious power. Silver Moon is a land barren of mysterious power, which makes for few supernaturals as well. We have to borrow from external sources, such as mysterious power stones and origin weapons, to receive sufficient energy.

“In some places in the central region, one can absorb mysterious power simply through cultivating. Silver Moon seems to have become more destitute over the past twenty years.”

Li Hao blinked. No one had mentioned this to him before. This meant that Silver Moon was not suited for supernaturals to train in. The supernaturals born here were converted through either the three great organizations or Night Watchers. An induction process was needed, apart from the Heaven Favored and those who were accidentally subjected to enough mysterious power to cross over.

There didn’t seem to be any who’d naturally broken through to the supernatural over the course of cultivation.

“Do you mean that there are those in the central region who can train and become supernaturals on their own?”

“Yes, don’t you know that, leader?” Hong Qing looked curiously at Li Hao. Wasn’t this common knowledge?

The young man stayed quiet. He didn’t know. No one had mentioned it before, possibly because they thought he already knew. But what could a country bumpkin from Silver City possibly know, apart from the secrets that Yuan Shuo himself had mentioned before? Li Hao had run off from White Moon a few days after arriving there. Meanwhile, Southern Fist and the others wouldn’t think much of this, so they naturally wouldn’t tell him.

In that case, supernaturals were easily born in the central region and mysterious power filled the air. The same should go for Silver Moon, but reality proved to be otherwise. If a Solar like Hao Lianchuan didn’t consume any energy and spent a few months training and accumulating, he might be able to produce almost one hundred cubes.

However, was there a point to a Solar accumulating several hundred cubes a year without expending any of it?

“I see!” Li Hao suddenly understood.

It was as difficult as scaling the heavens for Silver Moon denizens to become supernatural, not to mention that these wild beasts didn’t have any intelligence. They could only rely on naturally deriving mysterious power to become monster spirits. There wasn’t enough energy to go around for humans, much less wild beasts.

That there were plenty of monster spirits in other areas was due to bountiful energy in the air. Although it didn’t reach the stage of being found everywhere, a wild beast could partake some if they were lucky enough.

The same did not hold true for Silver Moon. Why?

Southern Fist had said that the province was a very ancient place, that every blade of grass here might contain the echoes of great dao from the ancient civilization. It was the center of the world back then, so why was there so little mysterious power here?

The Silver Armor had said there was no future for the path of energy—it meant the supernaturals. Did this mean that Silver Moon itself repulsed the supernatural domain?

Various thoughts rose in Li Hao's mind. This might be why it was so hard to cross over in the province, yet it was relatively easy to become a martial master. That was why it'd been a sacred land of the martial world back in those days.

The young man lifted his head to the sky. He could not see the diagram of the eight trigrams here, but he suddenly thought of it. Very rarely did supernaturals appear in Silver City. Although there were few supernaturals to begin with in the overall province, there was a pitiful number of native supernaturals in the enormous Silver City with its one million strong population. He'd never heard of a Heaven Favored coming from Silver City, and any supernaturals it did have was transferred from elsewhere.

The longer one stayed in Silver City, the harder it was to ascend. Liu Long, Liu Yan... These were the leaders of martial dao in Silver City, yet it was exceedingly difficult for them to ascend. Only Yun Yao had done so—she was the only one to do so in the team.

Some speculations burgeoned in Li Hao's mind. Did the lack of supernaturals in Silver City have to do with the diagram? A suppression? Or a sealing? Or some other reason?

Wang Henggang and the other martial powerhouses had had to leave Silver City and utilize mysterious power to make the crossover. Did Liu Long's continuous failure have to do with a lack of mysterious power or... that it was just impossible?

One could not ascend in Silver City!

Li Hao turned to Liu Long as these thoughts swirled in his mind. “Chief, have there ever been Heaven Favored in Silver City?”

“Huh?” Liu Long jerked and thought for a bit. “I don’t think so, there’s too few of us in the city. It’s not that easy with just one million in Silver City.”

“Are there very few Heaven Favored to go around?” Li Hao asked. “If there’s not even one in a million, then it’d take several million or ten million to produce one. Is there only a dozen Heaven Favored in Silver Moon?”

“There are very few in Silver Moon, period!” Liu Long shook his head. “Hong Qing already mentioned that Silver Moon is a barren landscape for supernaturals. We did have some Heaven Favored at first, but the older generation of martial masters killed them. There have barely been any since, but quite a few from the outside. There’s more elsewhere, we have too few!”

There are very few in Silver Moon!

Li Hao suddenly thought of the ruins of the stone door. It’d rejected the power of the scarlet shadow, but they hadn’t tested it with mysterious power. Both he and Yuan Shuo were martial masters, so they didn’t have mysterious power to test it with.

The young man put a lid on his rampaging thoughts for the moment.

Chapter 405: A Bustling Ash Mountain (II)

Li Hao now had a deeper understanding of what Southern Fist had spoken of that day. There seemed to be many drawbacks to supernaturals converting to martial masters, so then it wasn’t necessarily a bad thing that Silver Moon suppressed the supernatural and mysterious power. But this vast land did indeed seem suited only for martial masters. The revitalization of the supernatural domain had not taken hold in Silver Moon.

Ash Mountain was on the border of Silver Moon and technically out of the province. There might be abundant mysterious power here to facilitate wild beasts turning into monster spirits.

“While there are few monster spirits in Silver Moon, that may not be the case here. Everyone, watch where you step!” With that reminder, Li Hao led the team forward.

Ash Mountain was too big; the dynasty didn’t possess too many maps of it. This was originally the demarcation of the border between two nations. Gradually forgotten and abandoned, no one paid attention to it since it was just an enormous mountain range that didn’t produce anything special.

Ordinary people were hard pressed to find their way through it. Li Hao knew a little about it, but not that much. Silver City locals like Liu Long knew a little as well, but just like the young man, they were the blind leading the blind. They only knew what direction they were proceeding in, nothing else.

Li Hao set course for roughly the eastern direction and proceeded onward. East was where the sun rose, there was no problem with that decision. Since his team was all martial masters, they could climb whatever was in their way if there was no path ahead.

.....

As Li Hao and the others pressed onward again.

The foot of Ash Mountain.

Two people had come—Half Mountain and Tidal Wave.

Half Mountain frowned faintly at the mountain range wreathed in cloud and mist. It was an expression echoed by Tidal Wave.

“So... this is Ash Mountain?”

“Yes,” Half Mountain confirmed. “Ash Mountain is a mountain range that has existed since the ancient times. Old texts mention it. It extends beyond the borders of Silver Moon, so I worry that strong monster spirits will appear here!”

There were no monster spirits in Silver Moon, but there might be in Ash Mountain. Half Mountain and the others knew more than Li Hao.

Silver Moon was an impoverished land. Any place beyond it held denser mysterious power than the province. Thus, Silver Moon didn’t have many supernaturals and the ones they did have weren’t that strong.

Everywhere else was stronger than Silver Moon; the province relied on plentiful martial masters and some that’d crossed over to the supernatural to maintain its strength. Some of its martial masters had trained to the utmost of their path and were exceedingly strong.

While one could not say that Silver Moon was the weakest of the ninety-nine provinces, it definitely ranked among the bottom. Excluding special characters such as Hou Xiaochen, Hao Lianchuan might be the strongest out of pure supernaturals in the province. Hu Dingfang, Wang Henggang, and Hong Yitang were examples of martial masters who’d crossed over. Of the Silver Moon Solars out in the open, only Hao Lianchuan was born and bred a supernatural. He wasn’t a Heaven Favored either, but one who’d cultivated to his position.

“I’ve never heard of any major monster spirit appearing in Ash Mountain.” Tidal Wave frowned. “If there are any, we should detect some disturbances given how close the mountain range is to the province. There are some in the North Sea. I once saw a whale monster spirit that was quite forbidding, but it wasn’t bloodthirsty. A Solar tried attacking it, but didn’t even get through its defenses. It was at least a Nova level monster spirit.”

Monster spirits were considered major at the Solar and Nova levels.

“So Li Hao’s gone into Ash Mountain...” Tidal Wave frowned. As a water supernatural, she didn’t like mountains or plains. She vastly preferred areas with water in them.

This wasn't much of an issue, however.

"Li Hao comes from Silver City." Half Mountain studied the peak in front of them. "Ash Mountain is close to it, he's probably familiar with it. It makes sense that he'd run here. But... I will withdraw if we encounter a major monster spirit. The presence of one means the presence of two. It is not a good idea to be mired down here."

Tidal Wave didn't say a word. This Half Mountain was a complete coward! As expected of a Celestial member, they were used to the dark and could not stand being in the light!

"That's fine, you've made your point!" Tidal Wave set foot in the air and entered the mountain range.

Li Hao and the other martial masters didn't sense it, but she did as soon as she entered the mountain. Mysterious power was surprisingly very dense here, possibly stronger than the ambient power of many other provinces. Why did no one from Silver Moon train here?

Half Mountain entered after her, sensing the same feedback.

"Even if those of Silver Moon aren't willing to leave their province, this mountain is not bad," Tidal Wave voiced her bafflement. "Why do supernaturals not cultivate here? Better here than the province, no?"

Half Mountain didn't respond. He frowned with thought only when the woman turned to look at him. "I don't know, perhaps people do come here. I've never visited before, this is my first time. Either people secretly come here to train, or they do not return after visiting."

The first possibility was likely and nothing worth taking note of. The second possibility... Tidal Wave's expression changed slightly. They do not return!

That was right. If all the supernaturals that entered the mountain died, then naturally no one would know that mysterious power was very dense here.

Even Tidal Wave felt a flutter of panic at these words, but she quickly stifled it.

“It doesn’t matter if they weren’t able to make it back,” she chuckled. “Silver Moon has too few supernaturals and they’re too weak. Even Solars are few and far in between. Those who come here are likely Starlight and Darkmoon. What are we?”

Novas!

They were preeminent powerhouses even in the central region. Would they be afraid of a mountain on an impoverished province’s borders?

Half Mountain spoke no more. He landed on the ground and carefully probed around. Martial masters were difficult to track since they lacked mysterious power. Plant growth abounded in this place and the mountain peak obstructed one’s view. It would be quite difficult to locate Li Hao in an area like this.

Granted, they had to leave certain traces behind given the size of their group.

After a while of searching, Half Mountain settled on a direction and started moving forward. He looked into the distance at the dark depths of the mysterious mountain. He frowned anew. There... wouldn’t be strong monster spirits in Ash Mountain, would there? Martial masters didn’t exude supernatural ripples, there wasn’t much of an issue there. Supernaturals, however, did, unless they were obscured by certain treasures. Monster spirits were very sensitive to such ripples.

.....

At the same time.

The mountain range appeared to be a massive dragon crouched at the bottom of an abyss when viewed from overhead. It was also an overlapping series of ravines and gullies, as if multiple dragons hunched over on the ground.

There was a small mountain valley roughly one fifty kilometers away from Li Hao's group, one beyond numerous other peaks. A small lake sat in its center, the waters still beyond compare. A lotus flower swayed gracefully in the wind from the waters.

A ferocious tiger prowled around the lake. A massive snake was coiled directly across from it. A golden eagle sat on a large tree to one side of the lake and a tremendous ape with golden fur on its head could also be glimpsed in the premises.

There were beasts all around the lake, but everything was very quiet and still. They left each other alone, as if waiting or expecting something.

The lotus bud swayed in the center of the lake, occasionally revealing some golden lotus seeds within. They shifted in and out of view, prompting agitation from the beasts each time they came into view.

A gigantic hawk circled through the air at this time, calling out to the assembly. The golden eagle standing atop the tree jerked its head up, light glinting out of a keen gaze. The hawk was a scout patrolling the perimeter of Ash Mountain. Its cry meant that humans were trespassing.

However, the golden eagle settled down after glancing at the lotus in the center of the lake again. It didn't move. The same went for the snake, ape, and tiger. None of them seemed to hear the hawk.

This wouldn't be the case in regular times. But right now, none of them were willing to leave. The golden eagle answered with a piercing, resonant cry a moment later, sending the hawk away. The giant ape slapped the ground, shaking it with tremors. It drew the attention of the other beasts and the ape displayed a hint of dejection. It laid back down and didn't slap the ground again.

These four beasts seemed to have gained intelligence. They guarded the tiny lake and refused to leave.

.....

At the same time.

Li Hao looked into the sky as he seemed to hear something. He could see some shadows, but it was flying too high to be identified. The young man did discover an abnormality, however—a ball of light!

The bird flying through the high reaches seemed to have a ball of light around it. Its strength was too far away to be assessed. But that he could see it at all meant that it wasn't weak.

There really are monster spirits around! Li Hao took a deep breath. He'd come to Ash Mountain simply because he felt it to be a large landmass with dense forests and overlapping peaks. It wouldn't be easy for supernaturals to discover them. But it hadn't been long into their foray that they saw two monster spirits.

"Everyone, stick more leaves to yourselves..." the young man reminded the team. Bird vision was very keen. They could see their prey moving on the ground.

Of course, the monster spirits wouldn't necessarily care about them since they weren't supernaturals. However, less trouble was always preferable to more. Who knew what level of strength the bird possessed? It would be difficult if it suddenly swooped and attacked them.

Li Hao didn't know anymore if Ash Mountain was a good place to be or not. Let's just take things one step at a time.

The group moved forward, sticking more leaves to themselves. This resource was found in extreme abundance here. As night fell, the group moved silently through the woods in their pitch black

armor and lack of supernatural ripples. Li Hao steered them away from the balls of light, regardless of size. In this regard, their journey was smooth.

Chapter 406: A Bustling Ash Mountain (III)

As effortlessly as the Demon Hunters traveled, Tidal Wave and Half Mountain did not proceed as smoothly.

Tidal Wave shot down a suddenly descending python with a water arrow. She frowned as she looked at it. “These monster spirits are incredibly weak and attack us through sheer instinct. Do they not sense the danger that we bring?”

She and Half Mountain had been ambushed numerous times along the way. There were snakes, birds, creatures of land, panthers... The creatures were all very weak and some were just simple beasts, yet they’d dared attack the supernaturals all the same. Did they not sense the danger exuding from their prey?

They didn’t pose a threat to the two supernaturals, but fending off constant attacks was rather annoying and delayed their tracking of the target.

Half Mountain looked around silently and said after a long moment, “There might be a major monster spirit in the mountain. Tidal Wave, we should not remain here for long! We seem to have caught its eye and it’s sending the minor monster spirits against us.”

“I do sense a thing or two, but what are you afraid of?” Tidal Wave laughed. “Even if there is, that thing doesn’t dare come against us in person. It only compels minor spirits against us. Is it expecting some Starlight, Darkmoon level creatures to do any damage to us? Does it mean to exhaust us?”

“If that’s the case, then that’s all there is to these major spirits and the Solars have overestimated them! If that truly is the situation, we might even come across unexpected gains instead.”

What unexpected gains?

Treasure could typically be found at any place with major monster spirits. There were either large amounts of mysterious power stones buried, artifacts from ancient civilizations, or naturally produced treasures. Some of these monster spirits were born alongside the latter.

“I hear that some of the major monster spirits in the central region protect these ancient ruins,” Tidal Wave laughed. “Ash Mountain has few occupants now, but perhaps this was a place where powerhouses secluded themselves in the past. We might come across some ancient dojos or similar.”

Half Mountain frowned. This Tidal Wave was a greedy sort. He was prudent and cautious; he’d wanted to leave as soon as these monster spirits started attacking. It was best if they could kill Li Hao, but no particular concern if they couldn’t. Celestial had lost a significant Solar, true, but it was best not to barge into an unknown land of peril like Ash Mountain if they could help it.

Tidal Wave grew irritated when her counterpart remained quiet. How could a Nova be so indecisive just because some monster weaklings had attacked them? Li Hao and his people might be far off into the distance after so long.

“Half Mountain, it’s just some weak monster spirits that’ve gained some sentience!” she snapped. “I’ll kill it if it comes. You can take all of the treasure it guards!”

Half Mountain said nothing. He bent down to examine the clues and walked ahead in a certain direction a few moments later. He chose to continue, but he also had his own considerations. He would stay for another three days at most. He couldn’t stay too long, and these were just the outskirts of Ash Mountain. Who knew if Li Hao would venture further into the depths?

.....

The Revolution King swiftly came upon the scene with a group of Solars in camouflage paint after Tidal Wave and Half Mountain departed. He quickly assessed the surroundings and scrutinized the python that had just died.

“There are so many monster spirits in Ash Mountain!” He frowned at the unwelcome discovery. “This place is either special, or there might be a small mine of mysterious power stones somewhere.”

Mysterious power stones were generally located in ruins, but were sometimes found in caches buried underground in arrangements similar to mines. These were very rare and often discovered in abandoned mines. It also indicated that mysterious power stones possibly existed in large numbers in the ancient civilization. They were stored underground; perhaps there were true mines of stones. Their energy had ebbed after countless eons, turning the vast majority of stores into useless stones.

Behind the Revolution King, a supernatural that resembled a malicious ghost shrieked, “Court Master Revolution, you have been in residence at Silver Moon for many years! Have you never visited Ash Mountain?”

A faint frown crossed the Revolution King’s face. Not even the Parity King was this arrogant, but these hellish ghouls underneath his banner were certainly each cockier than the rest. They weren’t too polite to him.

While Revolution wasn’t a Nova, his status was still higher than them since he was one of the ten court masters. And yet, none of these masters of the sixteen hells showed him much respect.

“Ash Mountain is not within Silver Moon territory, it lies on the border,” he responded coolly. “Great Li can be found on the other side. Trouble is easy to stir up if we brashly venture into it.”

“Great Li?” cackled one of the demons. “That barbaric little country that apparently warred with Skystar Dynasty one hundred years ago and has never appeared since? The one that might’ve collapsed long ago?”

Silver Moon was already the savage frontier. Great Li was accessible beyond countless mountain ranges and was a small nation deep in their depths. Wasn’t that make it a village of savages? How was that a country?

No one had heard of this little state in a hundred years. It was to Yama's credit that they knew of such a kingdom beyond Ash Mountain.

The Revolution King didn't say anything. He knew about Great Li as well. Indeed, there'd been no sign of them for the past one hundred years. Perhaps they'd been eliminated by the process of natural selection. All the same, these fellows following him were too full of themselves.

"Enough of this, let's continue chasing them!" He couldn't be bothered with responding. The demons behind him deployed their various abilities and soon determined a direction. They quickly proceeded forward.

.....

Wave after wave of people appeared on the spot. A new figure landed as soon as the Yama delegation left—Southern Fist!

He, too, looked at the discarded python and then at the surroundings. Finally, he raised his head up to the sky and said softly, "This is not normal... Ash Mountain is not a good place. It's very dangerous here!"

As a Silver Moon martial master, he'd visited the mountain before even the rise of the supernatural. He'd vaguely detected something amiss then; Yuan Shuo was aware of this as well. The latter said that he had resided in the mountains for many years to comprehend the auras of the Five Styles. Ash Mountain was that place. The extraordinary qualities of a locale with beasts that enabled him to understand the fearsome Five Styles were plain to see.

Ash Mountain's wild beasts were already stronger than regular beasts many years ago. After twenty years of supernatural development, some terrifying existences might really have sprung forth in these mountains.

What was Li Hao doing here? And those of the three great organizations were truly fearless to venture into these mountains as supernaturals! It was one thing to be a martial master moving through the area, but these supernaturals were obviously being targeted.

I wonder if any of the beasts that Yuan Shuo observed back in those days are among these monster spirits. If so, this will be interesting. They were already ferocious all those years ago. They'll be even stronger now!

"The Five Styles of the tiger, bear, deer, ape, and bird..." He Yong tilted his head back at the sky. Martial masters possessed keen vision, so he could make out a tremendous hawk circling in the upper reaches. Did Yuan Shuo derive his bird style from that hawk? That would be too much of a coincidence, wouldn't it?

He Yong laughed and continued on his way, following the group in front. He didn't have that many goals on this visit to the northern reaches of Silver Moon and Ash Mountain. The man was taking things one step at a time. Perhaps Li Hao would bring him some surprises. The lad also knew the Five Styles; these mountains were a chance to strengthen that method. But it was also unknown whether the opportunity would turn into a dead end.

"If the wild beasts that Yuan Shuo observed back in the day have become major monster spirits... hahaha, Li Hao will be in for a wonderful time! The old man beat up quite a few beasts in his day!" He Yong suddenly couldn't wait for such a scene to appear. For example, if the tiger that Yuan Shuo once thrashed was now a tiger spirit, would it maul the young man to death as soon as he deployed the Five Styles?

It was no joke that Yuan Shuo's enemies could be found all through the land. There were animals in addition to people!

He Yong's eyes abruptly darted to the side and he looked behind him. He jumped into the air and vanished on the spot. Someone else arrived with incredible speed just as he left, landing where He Yong had just been.

"Southern Fist?" The person raised an eyebrow as they looked into the distance. What was He Yong doing here?

The guy was entirely too full of himself. Did he take everyone for a fool and think that no one could tell he'd enhanced his blood qi to the utmost? But... he could at most fight Novas. What was he being so unbridled for?

Hong Yitang kept up a long list of criticism. Pompous little bastard! Watch yourself, Northern Fist is still alive and he'll smash you to death with one punch!

After watching for a while, Hong Yitang sighed with some resentment. What were they doing here? This was Ash Mountain! Multiple Solar level monster spirits could already be found here ten years ago. Li Hao you bastard, you're going wherever there's danger to be found, aren't you? My poor daughter... Daddy's here to save you, run a little slower!

Hong Yitang's head ached at the thought of those monster spirits. That had been ten years ago! After another ten years... damn, they might be Nova level now or even stronger! Even he didn't dare venture into this blasted place.

Was Great Li really dead because they didn't send people? It was more likely that whoever they'd sent had been eaten by those major monster spirits! He'd met a few of their people a couple of years back, but they'd been running for their lives. Ash Mountain was not a good place to hide!

.....

The Demon Hunters proceeded soundlessly. The further in they traveled, the more alarmed Li Hao was. Holy shit, have we walked into a den of snakes? Why does Ash Mountain feel more dangerous than the outside world?

He saw a ball of light again, one with some dots sparkling near it. This was far from his first sighting and they were becoming more common the further in the group traveled.

Monster spirits! They were everywhere inside the mountain.

Chapter 407: One After Another (I)

Li Hao even saw a Solar level monster spirit soar overhead at one point. His timely evasion prevented trouble from developing. He wasn't afraid of Solars, but this was just the outskirts of the mountain.

If there were Solar monster spirits here... wouldn't it be more dangerous further in?

Liu Long also sensed some dangerous presences and walked up to Li Hao, keeping his voice down. "Let's keep to the fringes as we head east. We should avoid penetrating the mountains. According to some Silver City elders, Ash Mountain is made of nine mountains and eighteen layers—nine enormous mountain ranges have become what we know as Ash Mountain."

There would be trouble if they went further in and entered the second mountain.

Li Hao nodded and determined their direction, then shifted slightly to the side. He hadn't followed the foot of the first mountain because that was too obvious and made it impossible to cover their tracks. But now that he sensed the dangers within, he wasn't in the mood to court death.

After a while, the young man exhaled heavily and changed direction. When Liu Long looked at him, he transmitted, "There's a Solar monster spirit ahead. We should walk in another direction."

Liu Long was likewise resigned. Were Solars everywhere in this blasted place? Why did it seem so terrifying?

They proceeded another span of the path before Li Hao scratched his head. He was beginning to sweat as he adjusted their direction again, prompting another glance from Liu Long.

"There's another Solar ahead!"

“.....” Liu Long was dumbfounded. He was from Silver City and the mountain was right next to them. When had it become so dangerous? If the monster spirits residing in Ash Mountain liked to take walks in the plains, then wouldn't Silver City have been destroyed long ago?

The young man didn't say a word. They continued forward; there were no monster spirits on this path. Li Hao heaved a sigh, there was finally a normal route they could take.

He wasn't familiar with monster spirits or the habits of major monster spirits. Records regarding these creatures had long disappeared. The ancient tomes that Yuan Shuo taught from rarely spoke of them. Therefore, it wasn't just Li Hao, but the entire modern world that lacked understanding of monster spirits. Whether it was supernatural, martial masters, or others, very few knew that these kinds of creatures did not congregate in packs. The major monster spirits went a step further and oversaw their own territory.

If there was an empty clearing devoid of monster spirits found amid several major spirits, those of the ancient civilization would warn to not proceed there! That emptiness represented there were even stronger spirits inside. These were so strong that the minor spirits nearby didn't dare approach.

Such was the experience of the ancients. Apart from central region powerhouses possessing some understanding of major spirits, modern superhumans were completely ignorant. They just knew that monster spirits were strong and occasionally appeared with some treasure.

.....

No monster spirits appeared along the way. Li Hao and the Demon Hunters were able to make quick time. Seeing that dawn was at hand, Li Hao decided to rest. He bade the team to stop.

“I'll find a safe place for shelter. We'll rest up and travel at night again,” he transmitted.

It was September 20. He was counting the days and trying to estimate if they would make it past the mountain before the 28th and enter the east side of Rift Canyon. There were eight more days left. Based on their current progress, there would be a bit of difficulty. However, it wouldn't be a big problem if they picked up speed. Accelerating progress was possible once they shook off their pursuers or killed them.

Reminding his people to wait here, Li Hao struck out alone to find a safe place to rest. He ducked, rolled, jumped, and leapt. The young man moved fast when no one was following him and threaded through the endless mountain like an ape.

There were no signs of monster spirits to be seen along the way, making him uneasy. Why wasn't there a single one? While numerous sightings before kept him on edge, he was also apprehensive when all of them disappeared.

Continuing forward through the forest, he seemed to glimpse a small mountain up ahead. No, it was more like a mountain valley with the terrain rising on four sides around it. The center was sunken in—this was a good spot. And was that water vapor rising from the center? Was it a lake in the mountains?

The team had brought rations with them on this trip, but not much. They'd brought even less water with them. Having not run into lakes along the way, the Demon Hunters were a bit short on water.

“Water source... where there is a water source, there will be congregations of animals.” Li Hao was well aware of this, so he didn't dare relax his guard. He was a bit of a distance away and separated by some mountain rock. Unable to see if there were balls of light inside the valley, he cautiously crept forward and kept his presence strictly contained.

He'd absorbed dark energy earlier, which contributed to his concealment. He was also carrying the bronze mirror he'd taken from Qiao Feilong, so there truly was no hint of his presence leaking. Li Hao spread his arms wide, as if soaring through the sky, and quickly approached his target.

Moments later, he landed on a rock in the middle of the shrubbery. There wasn't a single tree here, which made hiding difficult. Thankfully, the sun was yet to fully rise—the sky was only reddening to the east.

Li Hao walked up, finding the mountain to be unique. It looked like someone had dug through it. There was no mountaintop and nothing beyond the halfway point of the landmass. The land was sunken along the four sides.

Li Hao pushed off gently and climbed swiftly, reaching the top in a matter of moments. It was exceedingly flat, like someone had sheared off the mountaintop with a knife and dug a hole in the center. The young man sighed with emotion at nature's exquisite work. A place like this would be a tourist spot anywhere else.

He walked toward the end of the platform, curious about what could be found below. A big lake? There was no path leading to it so... would there be monster spirits? He was yet to see any balls of light even now.

When he reached the end of the walkway, Li Hao looked down and... quickly retracted his gaze, tears glittering in his eyes. Every hair on his body stood on end as he spun on his heel to pick his way back to where he started. His movements were so small that he barely felt them as he slid across the ground.

After that, he glided off the mountain without daring to raise the sound of the wind. His eyes were still teary and red, like a suffering child who'd been beaten. When he reached the foot of the mountain, he vanished on the spot without a look back. He wouldn't return to this place even if someone called him their daddy!

He'd nearly been blinded when he stuck his head out—it was similar to when he entered the provincial government building. When he saw Director General Zhao, Commander Huang Yun, Kong Jie, and Hou Xiaochen, they'd nearly rendered him sightless from the force of their combined strength.

Li Hao saw the same thing today, noting a snake, an ape, a golden bird, and a ferocious tiger... Four kinds of animals and four kinds of light. He was blind!

My heavens, what kind of forsaken place is this?? They're on the same level as Hou Xiaochen and the others given how bright they are. For a moment, the young man thought he'd gone back in time to that meeting at the provincial headquarters and was meeting those four wily old foxes again.

There happened to be four monster spirits here!

In fact, Li Hao was even contemplating that those four had become major monster spirits and hid themselves here. Why else would their light be so similar, and four of them?? What kind of blasted area is this?!

Cold sweat beaded the young man's forehead and he glided outward without a look back. All he wanted was to leave this unlucky place as soon as possible. This was too close to where the team had stopped—less than three thousand meters. LI Hao wouldn't be searching for shelter here otherwise.

We need to leave, as soon as possible! As Li Hao reeled from shock, he was also curious about what the four monster spirits were waiting here for. To have a drink of water together? There was indeed a lake at the center of the valley and there almost seemed to be a flower...

A flower?

Li Hao blinked. Were those monster spirits waiting for that flower? To eat it?

Forget it, it's not important.

Although he was fearless, he didn't wish to meet his end. Just one Hou Xiaochen alone would be his doom. Four Hou Xiaochens... he would die a very grisly death!

.....

As Li Hao ran off.

Within the valley.

Four major monster spirits lifted their heads at almost the same time. They were just taking a look. The ape looked at the golden eagle, the eagle looked at the snake, the snake looked at the tiger...

Someone's there!

The four monster spirits shared the same look in their eyes. You go take a look! Someone's come, go take a look! You're looking at me and I'm looking at you... C'mon, go look!

In the end, no one moved. They weren't going. Whoever did was an idiot. There was nothing to fear about a human on the scene; there was much to fear that the golden lotus would appear as soon as they left. There would be nothing remaining for the one who moved, which would be the greatest loss of all.

They'd kill the human if it really entered the valley, but it didn't—an obvious sign that it wasn't that strong. Although there was no hint of presence, the disturbance it caused was still there. It wasn't a very strong existence.

In that case... who was afraid of the human robbing them?

As Li Hao rejoiced that he hadn't been discovered, he remained blithely unaware that he was alive because he'd seen four monster spirits. If he'd seen only one... he'd be dead on the spot. None of the four were willing to leave because they awaited the maturation of the golden lotus.

In the middle of the lake, the lotus flower petals were gradually turning golden. If one looked carefully, there were eight petals and golden seeds in the middle that bore a hint of green. The golden color kept spreading, however. It would be soon.

The four monster spirits lazily stood guard, no one shifting a muscle. They knew that humans had come to Ash Mountain. Some minor spirits were harassing them to interfere with their travels. It wasn't that the monster spirits were afraid of the trespassers, they just didn't want the humans to arrive too quickly and interfere with the Sky Golden Lotus.

Who would've thought that one of them would find the valley regardless?

A martial master?

Probably.

The major monster spirits turned over the possibilities. One of them suddenly recalled a scene from long ago. The crouching tiger remembered a human who pinned it to the ground for a thorough beating. Those days were the most humiliating of the tiger's life. Some bastard wanted it to roar, go berserk, or even go into heat so that the human could comprehend a so-called aura of the Five Styles... He beat the tiger if it didn't cooperate!

Chapter 408: One After Another (II)

The tiger by the lake had been a juvenile cub then. Well, it was a full-grown tiger according to a wild beast timeline, but based on its current mindset, that was when it was still a baby.

Martial dao... how long had it been since it'd seen a martial master? The world had apparently completely changed in the outside world. Martial masters that once dominated the land were either dead or had gone quiet. As for supernaturals... the tiger had seen a few in its time. They were too weak—they died with one swipe.

It sometimes thought back to that person and wondered if he was still alive. When he perfected his five auras, that arrogant human had declared that it would dominate the lands after it left Ash Mountain and unite the martial world. He would set foot into Dominator and pioneer the martial path beyond it...

Was he dead too?

The golden eagle also took a walk down memory lane as the tiger rifled through its memories. That had been a martial master, hadn't it? A martial master of Skystar Dynasty. Its presence had not been apparent, so it wasn't a supernatural. The eagle was once thrown down a mountaintop by a most villainous human. That human wanted it to hunt and fly. He beat the eagle if the eagle refused or ran away. A beating was in short order even if it flew too high!

The beatings came in mixed format as that scoundrel had been too strong. Any random pebble he tossed into the air reached several hundred meters high. There had been nothing the eagle could do. Now that it thought about it, that was all there was to the situation.

The giant ape on the other side didn't think too much. It did recall a strange human who liked to imitate it a long time ago. The human lived with the ape and ate with the monster spirit, doing whatever the ape did. It hadn't seen the human in a very long time—he was probably dead.

The ape snuck a glance out of the corner of its eye at the tiger and eagle not too far away. Those two had been beaten up by the human, right? It couldn't recall if it was those two. Its memory during that time was hazy, a far cry from the clarity it possessed now.

It was difficult to say if these two had been the ones of his memories. The ape had asked a few times, but both denied it. Perhaps it was other members of their species? Who knew.

Only the enormous snake of the four monster spirits didn't have much on its mind. It didn't care about the human that'd just escaped, it only had eyes for the Golden Lotus. How much could it claim this time? They would have to wait another five years if they missed this opportunity. This area was their joint territory. Whether it was equal division, a fight to determine one victor, or any other manner, they'd yet to settle on a conclusive method.

The four monster spirits immediately forgot about that person. Whether the human had run off or was spying on them, they didn't care so long as there was no interference in their division of the spoils.

.....

Li Hao quickly returned to where the team waited, his clothes soaked through with sweat. Liu Long and the others wanted to greet him when they saw the young man, but he transmitted, "No one talk!"

An instant hush prevailed.

“We need to circle around this area...” Li Hao swallowed hard, finally able to relax slightly. Thank goodness he hadn’t been discovered, that would be horrifying. Knowing that the team was confused, he transmitted a further explanation, “There’s major monster spirits further inside, all of them unparalleled in strength! They’re so strong that they might be Director Hou’s level!”

Everyone’s movements stilled as they stiffened. What level was Director Hou? Someone who killed a Nova with one spear jab!

Major monster spirits, plural? Liu Long’s scalp crawled with numbness. When had Ash Mountain turned this terrifying? It was lucky that Li Hao had discovered them so early without mishap. Otherwise, the team was done for!

Li Hao swallowed hard. A light glittering in his eyes, he tore off a tiny piece of his clothes. It was so small that regular people wouldn’t see it with their eyes. He looked toward the mountain entrance—where the three great organizations still following him?

If they were, they had certain tricks up their sleeves. And if they followed him here, they would certainly press forward. Anyone would be curious when they saw the unique broken mountain.

He didn’t make too many arrangements. Too many would ring too falsely. Anyone slightly sharper on the uptake would find something amiss. Some fibers from his shirt caught in a moment of carelessness would be the best temptation. Regular people wouldn’t detect it and they wouldn’t care if they did.

I hope you idiots don’t keep chasing me. If you do, even Novas will meet their doom if you barge into that place!

Four Novas, much less one, would be the work of a few moments for the monster spirits even if they were on Hou Xiaochen’s level. Li Hao turned back to the group and transmitted, “Step lightly. It’s best if each of you can carry a comrade on your back and leave as few traces as possible. We need to stay far away... If it really comes down to it, we’ll go back the way we came in. If someone’s followed us into Ash Mountain, we’ll avoid them on our way back!”

“.....” The Demon Hunters paused. Wasn’t the plan to go out through the eastern side to emerge in Rift Canyon? Why were they retracting their footsteps?

“Don’t look at me like that, we’ve already run into almost ten Solar level monster spirits along the way. There’s four here on par with Nova or even greater! I’m afraid of all of us dying before we reach the east. If someone’s following us, they’ll run into the Solar monster spirits before reaching this place. Let’s take stock of the situation first!”

Li Hao wanted to retreat. Could they really make their way past Ash Mountain and keep heading east? This place was sending chills down his spine. Thank goodness for his eyes or they’d be dead a long time ago!

That flower seemed to be a treasure. Ordinary martial masters or supernaturals might try to take it if they saw it. Li Hao didn’t go because he saw the balls of light. Those monster spirits might be existences like Hou Xiaochen—their presences were retracted. Regular people wouldn’t sense anything amiss and might treat them as regular monster spirits. That would make for quite a show!

Li Hao put this out of his mind and quickly led his team elsewhere. Traveling through such perilous conditions was also a type of training. Sweat drenched backs when the Demon Hunters cautiously crept through another Solar monster spirit’s territory. They’d seen this level of monster spirit before and weren’t that afraid. The true fear was that if the monster spirit discovered them and attacked, would that arouse the attention of the major monster spirits that were on par with Director Hou?

That was a truly horrifying proposition that even Li Hao was concerned about. Therefore, he didn’t dare do anything to the monster spirits they came across. He carefully steered everyone out of danger before finding a suitable spot to rest.

There was a buffer territory between Solar monster spirits that nothing resided in. It was possibly the demarcation between their domains. Li Hao led the Demon Hunters to a massive nest formed by a copse of trees growing randomly. Vines trailing down shrouded it from view and created an enclosed space beneath them.

Panting sounded only when everyone settled down. The group kept their voices low.

“Will we catch the attention of that monster spirit?” Liu Long muttered. They’d been less than one thousand meters away from the spirit overseeing the territory that they’d just traveled through. Those with keener eyesight had seen the monster spirit—it was a lion that was either sleeping or napping. Whatever it was, it hadn’t moved, but its presence was formidable. The Demon Hunters were terrified to be so close to it.

“It’s fine, we’re martial masters and the armor further conceals our presence.” Li Hao shook his head. “I’ve observed it, it’s fine.”

He observed the monster spirit’s supernatural ripples as opposed to its form. The appearance of supernatural ripples would mean that the monster spirit had discovered them. Lack thereof would mean that it hadn’t. This was an ability that the others did not possess.

Major monster spirits might also pretend to not notice the group, but their energy would give them away. However, who could read supernatural ripples?

Li Hao could.

The young man was finding his eyes to be supremely useful. They were sometimes more useful than sword energy. So... what had happened to the others who could see the scarlet shadows? There’d been multiple in Silver City, at least ten in one million. Even if some had died, one per one million meant that Silver City could produce one hundred.

Where had they all gone?

No one among the Night Watchers mentioned these people. If they possessed the same abilities as he did, it would be a snap of the fingers for the agency to uncover supernatural hideouts.

Despite the questions running through his mind, Li Hao didn't intend to probe into the matter. He'd just ask about it obliquely.

“Chief, you guys stay here. I'm going out. Don't go out without reason. If you need to answer nature's call, do so here!”

Liu Long looked solemnly at the young man. Where was he going?

Li Hao didn't explain himself. He wasn't going to fish in troubled waters or shadow the major monster spirits. He just wanted to see if anyone was following him. If so... he wouldn't mind stirring up some trouble and luring them all to that place!

The young man didn't consider the notion of being a fisherman that benefited from a fight between snipe and clam. There was no such possibility with those four monster spirits present. The only potential was for his pursuers to be killed and him to wait around to collect their corpses.

Did monster spirits eat people?

They seemed to.

Did they eat storage rings?

Who knew, but maybe the rings would pass through their systems.

Li Hao's thoughts were traveling too far, but they were also very simple at the same time. What if the monster spirits didn't eat his pursuers after killing them? What if monster spirits produced fecal matter? They didn't use storage rings, right? In that case, he might be able to pick up something once the monster spirits left.

It was more convenient to operate alone; dark mysterious power helped restrain one's presence. He also had the bronze mirror on him.

Li Hao suddenly stopped and took out an energy ring, preparing to absorb more dark mysterious power. He'd found it useless before as he didn't think himself in the insidious business of ambushing others. Martial masters took the fight to the enemy's face! What need was there for dark mysterious power!

But now he felt that he should absorb some—not for ambush, but to further weaken his presence so that he wouldn't clash with the monster spirits. Humans and monster spirits could coexist peacefully.

He quickly absorbed the mysterious power and crushed another two stones, leaving only eight in his storage ring. The young man had absorbed nearly five hundred cubes of dark energy by now. He didn't lack it as peak Solar Yue Pu had supplied nearly two thousand cubes. He'd only absorbed half of his gains.

The sky darkened when he finished absorbing five hundred cubes. Li Hao's figure shifted like a shadow before blending into the darkness. Dark energy didn't strengthen him, but it did decrease his sense of being.

Chapter 409: One After Another (III)

"Solar!" Half Mountain proclaimed. "There's a Solar monster spirit ahead!"

A luopan-esque object rested in his hand. Light sparkled over it as it functioned like a supernatural probe. It wasn't normally that accurate, yet was more or less reliable if the other did not conceal their presence.

"A Solar major monster spirit..." Tidal Wave's eyes gleamed. "It's not easy to get up to the Solar level. Perhaps it's the one that sent us the minor spirits harassing us along the way. We might be able to obtain some treasure if we kill it."

Half Mountain, however, was on guard. “Tidal Wave, it’s better not to take rash action. The further in we venture, the more dangerous I find this place. Perhaps... there are Nova level monster spirits present! We’ll easily create trouble for ourselves if we do anything.”

Tidal Wave frowned fiercely. This Half Mountain was afraid of this and that. How did he manage to get to Nova?

“Half Mountain, we’re already here. Are we supposed to just pretend we didn’t see anything? Are we giving up the chase? Stop scaring yourself. Even if there are Nova monster spirits, you and I are both Novas as well. Is there a need to be so wary?

“We haven’t seen the bodies of Li Hao and his team yet. If they can avoid trouble, is there a need for us to be afraid?”

Sunderers were freely walking ahead of them, what was a Nova being so scared for?

“Solar level monster spirits will have some mysterious power stone reserves at the very least. If not, their flesh and blood are treasures too. I’ve heard that their blood can sometimes unseal some special origin weapons! You know just as well that there are souls within the origin weapons—weapon souls! They’re very similar to these origin weapons and it’s said that blood from the same origin can activate them!

“Most origin weapons are inert these days and can’t be activated. There wouldn’t be so few of them otherwise. But if blood from major monster spirits can rejuvenate them... There are those in the central region who specialize in these monster spirits. They focus on the trade of activating origin weapons and each transaction brings a fortune!”

Monster spirits were walking treasures. These origin weapons seem to have something to do with them.

Half Mountain was silent for a while before nodding. “Go take a look then. It’s best to stay away if there’s trouble, however. Let’s try not to kill anything if possible.”

“Don’t worry!” Tidal Wave laughed and flew into the air. She soared one hundred meters before seeing a snake next to a marsh in a copse of trees. It was enormous and churning through the marsh. This was the Solar monster spirit they’d sensed before.

Greed glinted in Tidal Wave’s eyes. A Solar monster spirit was an excellent find! Some mysterious power stones were also being churned out of the marsh with the snake’s exertions. They shimmered with light.

The busy snake seemed to sense something and swung its ponderous head around to look into the air. It abruptly rolled itself and swam rapidly through the area, vanishing into the jungle and swiftly getting away.

A powerhouse!

“We were discovered!” Tidal Wave laughed. “It ran off... Should we chase after it, Half Mountain?”

The man didn’t respond, so the woman continued, “I saw it swallow some dirt when it slithered off. There were at least twenty stones glittering in the muck...”

Twenty mysterious power stones was no small sum to them. And yet, Half Mountain still elected to quiet.

“Let’s take care of it along the way.” Tidal Wave had already flown away. “Perhaps Li Hao is over there. It would be a waste to not claim this unexpected fortune since it’s presented itself!”

Some words were on the tip of Half Mountain’s tongue, but he followed the woman in the end. Hopefully, nothing happens. No other points of light appeared on the luopan. The snake spirit seemed to be the only monster spirit in the area.

.....

The big snake thrashed furiously through the forest at top speed. It sensed danger and proceeded along the path that would lead to the sheared off mountain. Plainly, it knew that safety could be found there.

Li Hao saw three balls of light approaching at a quick clip; he rapidly backed away. One of the balls was of the Solar level—it was a monster spirit that he'd seen before. It was time to get out of its path!

The other two balls of light... were very large! Novas!

People from the three great organizations?

One of them seemed slightly familiar—there was some darkness in the ball of light. Celestial! He'd seen a Celestial Nova the day he emerged from the ruins of Battle Heaven. Was this... Half Mountain of Celestial?

This fast? Li Hao's heart was his throat. He'd made quick time with his people and his pursuers were tracking him, not simply following him. And yet, they'd found him so quickly! He'd underestimated their methods by far.

Are they hunting that Solar monster spirit? Li Hao avoided them and waited for the monster spirit to get away. Two balls of Nova light flashed in front of him moments later. They vanished in the direction of the sheared off mountain.

Oh? They're going to their own deaths without needing me to lure them there? A strange look entered the young man's eyes; he came to a sudden halt just as he was about to follow them. A mild breeze blew through the area before long as balls of light manifested.

"Court Master Revolution, those two seem to be chasing a major monster spirit. Is there treasure to be had?" Voices could be heard on the wind.

“Shall we follow them? We’re not afraid of them—there’s sixteen hell masters here. Who cares about two Novas? They may not be able to match us!”

“Let’s follow them, treasure can always be found where monster spirits are. Celestial’s Half Mountain is not bad, though. He’s headed in the same direction that we determined before Li Hao disappeared. We’ll find the kid sooner or later if we follow them!”

A group of people vanished from sight as Li Hao sucked in a sharp breath. The fuck?? Yama has so many Solars to call upon? Seventeen of them!!

Indeed, there were seventeen balls of light. The number scared the wits out of Li Hao. He’d thought that people might come from Yama, but he’d anticipated one Nova. Seventeen Solars was an astounding number. Where did the organization get so many Solars from?? And they were all peak Solars with the Revolution King leading the group. The man wielded an origin weapon! If they worked together as one whole, the two Novas might not be a match for them.

Are they crazy? Li Hao found it incredulous. He could understand Red Moon sending a Nova after him and... probably understand Celestial sending a Nova. Yama, he couldn’t wrap his mind around. Did those seventeen Solars want his head or that of the two Novas?

The young man frowned ferociously. Those fellows had tracked him here and proceeded at high speed. Based on their progress, they might catch up to him tomorrow.

But are they all crazy? They’re all running for that place, do they want to die? Li Hao wondered to himself, seriously doubting their sanity. Even with all of these powerhouses on the scene, there were four major monster spirits that rivaled Hou Xiaochen in that direction. The trespassers were still dead without a doubt even if they were bolstered by another Nova or two!

The young man didn’t want to watch the inevitable chaos for fear of being dragged into the mess. His ears twitched just as he was about to leave. Another figure flashed across his vision, one that came with some hints of blood qi. There was no accompanying ball of light. Li Hao blinked, who was this?

A martial master?

They were too far away for him to sense the other clearly, but it felt vaguely familiar. Umm... Southern Fist?

Was it that fellow? What was he doing here?

Li Hao remained motionless and locked his auras away. When it came to martial masters, they relied on sensing their opponent's aura if they wanted to identify where the other was. His were locked in his organs. These people would find it nigh impossible to detect him if he kept a firm grip on his auras.

What a party! Li Hao could sense that Southern Fist had already disappeared and inwardly shook his head. Things were certainly lively, so many powerhouses had barged in all of a sudden. Southern Fist... wouldn't follow them, would he? If he did, he would be in for quite some trouble.

But the young man wasn't kindhearted enough to reveal himself to give the man a word of warning. Southern Fist came from the royal family and his attitude was ambiguous. It was impossible that he didn't have designs on Li Hao with his foray into Ash Mountain.

Perhaps he was here to kill the young man, who knew? As for saving Li Hao... how would he be so kindhearted? The young man didn't believe that the other would take such a risk to save him. Their relationship wasn't to that degree.

Was there anyone else? Li Hao remained still and quietly waited. One minute, two minutes...

He tensed to leave after ten minutes when a very faint sensation arose and promptly vanished.

Confusion appeared on the young man's face. Had he made a mistake, or had someone truly passed by just now? Southern Fist had been accompanied by the sensation of blood qi, but this last hint was quite imperceptible. It was like a furl of wind had brushed by.

Li Hao furrowed his brows. If that had been a person, they were like a martial master—and a very strong one. He could sense a thing or two about Southern Fist, but the one who just came only gave him a very faint feeling.

There's no such martial master in Silver Moon, is there? And yet, Li Hao suddenly thought of someone. No... way? That one's in closed door cultivation! And, is that one really that strong? He had a ball of light around him before, he was a supernatural. It's not him.

The young man was well familiar with the light of initial Solars. Martial masters came devoid of light. Therefore, Li Hao overturned his hypothesis. It wasn't the one he thought of, another powerful martial master had come.

Golden Spear?

Very possibly!

Warmth flooded Li Hao's heart. Had Golden Spear come to save him? How nice of him! Li Hao couldn't think of anyone stronger than Southern Fist in Silver Moon. If that person had had light around him, he would've guessed Hong Yitang.

Golden Spear...

Urgency suddenly gripped Li Hao. Although he wasn't familiar with that person, he couldn't let the man go to his death if he was here to save his subordinate.

Li Hao quickly rushed off in the relevant direction.

.....

Up in front.

Hong Yitang suddenly looked back with confusion. Was there... someone nearby? No, right? Is there anyone who can evade my senses? Supernaturals can't, and what martial master can hide from me?

There was no time to think further on it. He quickly departed the premises to catch up to the people ahead. Those fellows were so impetuous and reckless. Hopefully they didn't lure out any stronger existences and doom his daughter.

Chapter 410: A Great Show (I)

At the same time.

Rift Canyon.

Four major monster spirits remained lazing on the banks of a lake. The giant snake suddenly lifted its head and looked upward. The others followed its motion with surprise and bafflement. They weren't afraid, just confused. Were these humans crazy?

The monster spirits couldn't be bothered with the one that'd just left, but now more were here? What was going on? And they seemed to be attacking the descendants of Snakey—poor little snake.

The other monster spirits looked at the giant snake. It straightened its body and rose upward until it drew level with the mountain valley and appeared above the sheared off surface. This geographic feature that was one hundred meters deep wasn't as long as the monster spirit!

The head hovered over the platform of the broken mountain and looked into the distance with two massive eyes that looked more like shining discs. A dirty python was frantically slithering this way. It was extremely fast, but it couldn't shake off the enemy.

How fast were two Novas? A Solar level monster spirit would never get away! A water arrow blasted a bloody hole through the python's durable skin with a fearsome explosion.

The giant snake watched from the valley of the broken mountain. Silent, still. The other three spirit monsters looked at their reptilian brethren.

The snake churned to action a few seconds later. Its ponderous body slithered up the cliff face and vanished in the blink of an eye without making a sound or reflecting the weight of its bulk. The abrupt motion left the other three surprised.

Snakey had run off? But the Golden Lotus was about to bloom.

The enormous ape slapped the ground, as if laughing at their reptilian brethren for being distracted. Oh well, one less was one less portion to be divided.

The golden eagle twitched its claws with indifference. So what if it was gone? The little snake was very strong and would have no problem handling those humans. The problem was that the eagle liked eating snakes. If the little snake hadn't gone, it wouldn't have an issue with the eagle eating the corpse of its descendants, would it?

What a pity!

The ferocious tiger crouched on the ground, not bothered with any of the happenings. It didn't matter if the little snake had gone or not. It was best if they all left!

.....

Bam!

An explosion left the python overturned on the ground, bleeding profusely. Tidal Wave frowned and collected the blood with a casual grab in the air. It gathered together and shot toward her. Monster spirit blood was precious and should not be wasted.

She wanted to leave an intact corpse to this monster spirit, but the python was so thick-skinned and densely packed with flesh that it might get away if she didn't utilize her more lethal techniques. The mountain forests were its territory, after all.

Explosions sounded anew as water arrow followed water arrow. The python rasped hoarsely, fury and madness in its eyes—everything but fear. Why should it be afraid? These two human bastards were taking advantage of the fact that its father was away because the Golden Lotus was close to full bloom. How would they hurt it otherwise?

It was very close to the valley of the broken mountain, its father should've sensed its plight. The only thing that the python was concerned about was that its father might not come. The Golden Lotus was soon to bloom and if its father wasn't there... The other powerful existences would certainly seize all of the flower and not leave anything behind.

The Golden Lotus was an ultimate treasure!

The python screeched, it didn't know... if father... would come... but it wanted to live!

Rumble!

More blood flowed; Tidal Wave smiled. The defenses of a Solar were truly immense. She'd attacked so many times to finally wound the monster spirit. All the flesh, blood, and mysterious power stones made this trip worth it even if she couldn't catch up to Li Hao.

They hadn't had time to search the marsh where the python had been earlier. She could go back for a look after securing the monster spirit, there might be more stones there.

As she relaxed in delight, Half Mountain suddenly said, "Something's off..."

"Hmm?" Tidal Wave had already coalesced numerous water arrows to finish off the python. She paused, not understanding her counterpart. What was it now?

Meanwhile, Half Mountain's heart nearly stopped beating. He could barely breathe. There was a sensation of a brewing storm that was stifling. He breathed out softly and was about to respond when he vanished from the spot with a flash of his body. The darkness shattered with a boom as soon as he left!

Light seemed to have returned to the mountains. A pair of enormous eyes—if they were eyes—illuminated the premises with green light. It was light that resembled ghostly fire!

A mammoth snake tail that towered like a pillar of the heavens broke through the void and cracked into something with a loud snap, sending a figure flying back.

Pfft!

The bloody figure spat out a mouthful of blood, its cloak laid in tattered shreds. A wan face looked out.

Half Mountain!

The man reeled from shock; a small shield manifested in front of him. The soul floating upward from it seemed a bit distracted.

An origin weapon!

Tidal Wave likewise froze with shock. Was this... a snake? Only now did she fully see the other's appearance—an incredibly ginormous snake that was several dozen meters tall even when coiled together. Its eyes were huge!

It'd retracted its tail—this had been the item that'd flicked the fleeing Half Mountain. The man vomited blood while the shield hung in front of him. He cursed inwardly as he looked at Tidal Wave. This old woman only knew to create trouble, alright!

He'd thought that something felt amiss when the python slithered forward at all costs to a barren mountain. It was much safer in the jungle, but still the monster spirit proceeded in this direction. It plainly had another goal in mind. As he thought, the old one came in search when they beat up the younger one.

This snake was terrifying!

Half Mountain looked on solemnly. He'd wanted to run because he thought the newcomer would attack Tidal Wave first. It was the woman who kept attacking the snake, but no, he was the target instead. This meant that the big snake wanted to kill them all!

He instantly comprehended the meaning behind its actions and no longer complained. Working in tandem at this time was the only way to withstand this trouble.

Tidal Wave also looked on solemnly, fully alert against the snake. She swiftly closed the gap with Half Mountain and looked around them out of the corner of her eyes, trying to identify an avenue of retreat.

The big snake made no further moves after sending Half Mountain back to his starting point. Killing intent entered its eyes only after the python slithered behind it with great difficulty.

Half Mountain deeply regretted his actions! He and Tidal Wave had been on guard as they were worried the snake would continue to attack. That it was waiting for the small snake to convene was beyond his expectations.

Snakes were cold-blooded animals, weren't they? Even as monster spirits? Why did this snake care about the survival of the smaller one?

The giant snake looked at the two Novas only after the small snake arrived behind it. A unique influence locked onto the two as massive eyes glanced at the shield. It also reconsidered Half Mountain. Half of the force behind that tail whip had been defused by the shield. The human had taken the remaining half.

Nerves were beginning to set in for Tidal Wave. She knew that they'd disturbed a den of snakes this time, and that the major monster spirits could understand human speech.

"Venerated powerhouse, this is a misunderstanding," she began. "We didn't know this was your territory... We will immediately back away. As compensation for harming another of your... race, we offer this!"

She took out a few mysterious power stones. The great snake was too fast, she wasn't confident of escaping before it reacted.

The monster spirit looked coldly at the mammoth before a mammoth tail abruptly broke through the air and landed toward her.

"Fight! Talking's not going to work!" Half Mountain roared. Tidal Wave was trash that couldn't do anything right, what was she talking for? Would she be willing to trade a few stones for the lives of her children? Idiot!!

Half Mountain disappeared, shifting into the darkness. A small sword the color of darkness appeared and stabbed toward the snake tail!

Tidal Wave shouted angrily. The great sea bestirred herself in the form of water as the power of the element churned through the land.

BOOM!

The tail whipped through the water energy and was about to hit Tidal Wave when she transmuted into a water current and reformed behind the tail. The might of a Nova was on full display! Although the monster spirit was very strong, the two Novas were confident in their abilities. They could not easily give in to their urge to run away even if they didn't prove up to the task. Half Mountain had wanted to run before the monster spirit could react, but failed. It would be gambling with his life if he tried to do so again.

He would be gambling whether the snake would kill Tidal Wave or him first, or if it could catch up to him after killing Tidal Wave. He was not willing to take this bet, so he chose to strike back instead.

The black sword slashed across the snake's tail with a massive screech, giving rise to fiery sparks. The durable scales were as impenetrable as armor.

Half Mountain shook—what incredible defenses! He was a Nova! How could he not break the other's defenses even with an ambush?? This snake was at least a peak Nova!

Terrifying!

But the snake was so big, meaning that it might sometimes be clumsy. As nimble as it appeared to be, the large mass would create opportunities for the humans. The two Novas were much smaller, a possible indication that it would be easy for them to get away.

Half Mountain disappeared again after a spray of fiery sparks. The snake tail whipped through the air again and struck nothing.

The man disappeared as Tidal Wave coalesced tens of thousands of water arrows, directing them at the snake's eyes!

The great snake closed its eyes, clang clang clang...

A series of collisions sounded amid a rain of sparks. All of the arrows broke, leaving Tidal Wave open-mouthed with shock. Too strong! She turned into a water current again and retreated further away.