

Star Gate 421

Chapter 421: All Parties In Attendance (II)

As the two on the cliff face conversed, someone else waved at them—a plainly dressed woman who was rather young. She chatted with another group of people on the cliff face.

The young man inclined his head in return and transmitted to the old man, “Madame Bai is certainly a social butterfly. Isn’t her husband in Silver Moon? What is she doing being involved with the Lius?”

The Lius of Skystar Dynasty were quite famous and known by the nickname of the God of Wealth. Of the nine ministries, the inspector general of the Ministry of Finance was the old man of the Lius. He was incredibly intimidating, but it should be only some side branch members of the family who’d come to the province. While they were also noteworthy, the young man didn’t care since they weren’t from the main branch.

“The woman is not a simple character either,” the old man transmitted back. “Although she is not one of the thirty-six, she is still a renowned Silver Moon martial master from back in the day. She married into the Bai family and her husband is the vice commander of the Tiger Wings. The other Bai branch is on good terms with the Ministry of Armed Forces in Skystar City. It’s said that they’re involved with the royal family... They are absolutely not what they seem.”

The young man inclined his head once more.

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Heartjab Daughter Madame Bai was chatting with a few other young men and women. She waved a greeting to a young man with frost in his hair and murmured, “What is that one doing in Silver Moon?”

A young man next to her took a look in the relevant direction and responded with casual contempt or possible jealousy, “Perhaps he’s too heavily suppressed in the central region by those people and came here for a breather.”

Another younger woman next to him—or rather, a girl—asked curiously, “Brother, who is he?” She didn’t seem to be aware of this person.

“Xu Feng.” The young man didn’t want to respond, but did so curtly when his younger sister remained curious.

Xu Feng.

The girl thought for a bit, puzzled, then thought of something. “Is he... is he the Icefrost Swordsman Xu Feng on the Divine Masters Ranking?”

“What Divine Masters Ranking!” grumbled the young man. “It’s just an unofficial ranking that some amateurs put together. Look at you treating it like a real thing!”

“Brother, are you jealous?” giggled the girl.

“Why would I be jealous of him?”

“He’s one of the ninety-nine dragons and phoenixes on the ranking!” she giggled. “The Divine Masters Ranking records ninety-nine of the best powerhouses younger than thirty. One major province typically only has one person on the list. Although Xu Feng is ranked in the rear—I think ninety-seven a few days ago? He’s still very strong!”

Or it could be better put as super amazing strong! Although it was only a listing of those below thirty years old, it still included a lot of powerhouses as the supernatural had only been around for twenty years.

The girl was immensely excited. Madame Bai smiled next to her and didn’t say a word. The Divine Masters Ranking was similar to the Record of Heroes back in the day. It wasn’t an official ranking, just something cooked up by interested parties. It wasn’t a definitive ranking either as there were

those who preferred a low profile while others basked in the limelight. Not everything could be taken into consideration.

When it came down to it, the Ranking was not as famous as the Record. The Record of Thirty-Six Heroes was acknowledged by the entire martial world, while the Ranking was popular only in the central region. The provinces of the four directions would not recognize it. None of their powerhouses had fought in the central region, how would they admit that the youngsters there are stronger than them?

The Central Youngsters Divine Masters Ranking might be a more appropriate title.

Xu Feng was an ice Heaven Favored of the mid Nova level. Incredibly domineering, he was only ranked ninety-seven. Plainly, there was still some merit to this ranking despite its limited popularity. Someone like Hu Qingfeng had not made the list.

A loud rumble overhead interrupted the thoughts of Madame Bai and the rest of the group. They raised their eyes overhead to see Yu Luocha thrust her palm out. Thunder and lightning erupted with a roar and forced Blue Moon and the others back.

A thunder powerhouse!

There was something special about Yu Luocha's power as it appeared purplish-black. It exploded with extreme force. The clap of thunder brought everyone's attention back to their clash.

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Over the canyon.

Manager Yu's expression was as frosty as usual. She didn't follow up her palm thrust with another move. Instead, she coolly denounced, "Have all of Red Moon's hidden personnel come out, Blue Moon! There can't be just one Tidal Wave from the elder's council. She was already in the three

northern provinces. You alone are not worthy since Red Moon has decided to go against the director!”

You are not worthy!

Blue Moon flushed with indignation and anger crept into his eyes.

“Has Indigo Moon come? Or is it Green Moon?” An aloof Yu Luochoa looked in the four directions, speaking slowly. “Since you’re here, why not come out? Blue Moon and Violet Moon are respectively their second and third generations. That’s fine against the youngsters, but I am not young anymore.”

“We’re all young, younger sister Violet Moon.” Laughter traveled in from the distance, along with a complaint. “Since when did we get old?”

Violet Moon blinked, then realized that the newcomer wasn’t talking about her. She was talking about Yu Luochoa, the first generation Violet Moon!

“Violet Moon is young, but I am old.” Yu Luochoa smiled—it was a bizarre sight for a smile to appear on such a standoffish face. “I thought it would be Indigo Moon here, but to think it’s Green Moon...”

A figure abruptly appeared in front of Blue Moon and the others. A plump body clad in a long green skirt, her green locks flowed in the wind. The sunny smile on her face appeared particularly inviting.

Green Moon of the Seven Moons!

“It’s... you, Green Peacock!” Golden Spear frowned. “How are you worthy of being Green Moon? I’ve often wondered how Ying Hongyue ranked his Seven Moons and why Yu Luochoa is the last as

Violet Moon. I thought I understood when I learned that Black Widow is Orange Moon. He is rather shameless to grant those who've slept with him a higher ranking!

"My theory is confirmed today, but how dare you be ranked ahead of Yu Luocho when you are less than even the Heartjab Daughter??"

Normally of few words, this string of denouncements was a clear indication of Golden Spear's annoyance!

Not only did Green Moon's expression shift, but so was Madame Bai in the distance equally resigned. What are you dragging me into this for? But... she really hadn't known that Green Peacock was Green Moon. As expected, Golden Spear was widely experienced. Green Peacock possessed some fame, but as Golden Spear said, Green Peacock was less than her back in the day.

"The times have changed, Golden Spear!" Green Moon looked frostily at Golden Spear, the smile dropping off her face.

Golden Spear answered with a surge of blood qi and roared, "No matter how they have changed, it is never a slutty peacock's turn to lecture this old man! I would curse Ying Hongyue to his face for being shameless if he was here! How dare he put a whore he's slept with over Yu Luocho?! Don't forget, he was once one of the thirty-six! He has no right to humiliate Yu Luocho!"

"....." Even Yu Luocho was speechless now. That's enough, old man! She didn't really care about this, but it appeared that he did. Thank goodness she couldn't be bothered to hold a conversation with him before, or they would've dissolved into exchanging insults long ago.

Golden Spear was furious about none other than Ying Hongyue placing one of the thirty-six heroes as the last of the Seven Moons. The ignoble Green Peacock was ranked ahead!

He could accept Black Widow since she was part of the thirty-six as well, but Golden Spear did not accept Green Moon no matter what! It was an affront to the entire Record of Thirty-Six!

“Ying Hongyue’s lost his brains with all the sleeping around he’s done!” raged Golden Spear. “I’ll chop off his empty head sooner or later!”

He suddenly seemed to understand why Ying Luo had turned on her former organization. This was too great of an insult!

Manager Yu was at quite a loss. She knew that the old man was stuffy and old fashioned, but it was her first time seeing just how far he could take the mindset. He was beside himself for just an enemy’s ranking!

Green Moon flared her presence; a domineering sensation surged over the scene. Late Nova!

Such overwhelming force shook even Golden Spear, but the old man remained unmoved and stared coldly at Green Move. So what? That was very normal! Blue Moon was a mid Nova and there was an Indigo Moon between them. It wasn’t out of the norm that Slutty Peacock had reached late Nova. He just wasn’t satisfied by the situation. Her accomplishments were all the result of Red Moon, not her own skills!

When did it come to her being placed over Yu Luocho??

Green Moon stared coolly at the man, her presence building until suddenly—wham!

A blade’s hum rang through heaven and earth! Blade light broke through the void. Standing behind Golden Spear, Wang Qing smiled.

A tall and muscular man wearing a navy blue military uniform landed on the ground. He looked expressionlessly at Green Moon. “What, do you show utter disrespect toward us just because you’re a supernatural now, Slutty Peacock?”

Blade intent soared to the heavens when he took a step forward!

“There stands three people in front of you today who were existences that you once looked up to. Do you think yourself something just because you have a little bit of strength? You would have more dignity to your name if you had the Black Widow come. You? Hah!”

An exceedingly unpleasant expression spread across Green Moon’s face! She was a right and proper late Nova, one of the Seven Moons of Red Moon. She was a preeminent existence even in the central region. Everyone showed her some face! But here, she was the target of snubs and insults!

And yet... and yet, she was also a Silver Moon martial master and knew how brazen these people once were. Who would’ve thought that they’d still be so arrogant years later?

“Berserk Blade!” she snapped back. “Don’t live in the past! It’s been twenty years since the rise of the supernatural and martial masters are relics of the past! Recognize the times you live in!”

“It’s one thing for someone else to say that,” Golden Spear sighed. “As trash as you are, you were once a Silver Moon martial master. To think that you’d say the same thing too... As expected, trash is trash!”

They could pretend not to hear it if supernaturals voiced these sentiments, but to think that a Silver Moon martial master would say the same thing, and with pride and jeering! They disdained having anything to do with her!

When others said so, they did so with a sigh, regret, or reluctance. But there was absolute schadenfreude in her voice! No wonder martial world experts couldn’t bother themselves with her. Only Ying Hongyue liked the taste of her.

Chapter 422: All Parties In Attendance (III)

Green Moon snorted coldly and didn’t deign to respond to the criticism. Neither was she willing to discuss events from the past.

“I feel there’s no need to continue senseless slaughter! The ruins are about to open, or are you talons of the government ready to claim it all for yourself?”

If they insulted her, she would curse them back! You're not that much better off if I'm shameless! Aren't you all dogs and hunting birds of the dynasty? This is just the pot calling the kettle black!

As expected, even Golden Spear didn't respond after her comment. He stared forward frostily and spoke no further. They had all once held the Guards in contempt, but now were part of the group. Golden Spear was even their leader. He was ready for others to jeer at him for this; there would be nothing he could say in return.

But thank goodness it was Green Peacock doing the cursing, he could accept that. He likely couldn't accept it if it was one of the thirty-six insulting him. That would be too mortifying. Golden Spear didn't mind that his strength didn't measure up to Green Moon's. There was a discernible direction for the path of martial dao. They would surpass the powerful supernaturals of the day sooner or later, so what was there to be afraid of?

Manager Yu didn't mind either that attention had been taken away from her. She spoke calmly when they were done. "Green Moon, summon Tidal Wave before we start discussing business. Otherwise, the extermination of your faction will not stop! So what if you've come? The director just isn't willing to leave the city. Do you think you would have any chance of victory otherwise?"

"Also, Half Mountain seems to have gone as well..." Yu Luochoa looked at the cloaked powerhouse. "Which Celestial elder are you?"

"My surname and given name have long been forgotten." The man's voice was hoarse. "They are too unrefined for these august circles. I do have a moniker, however. I don't know if Yu Luochoa has heard it before—I am known as Crimson Light!"

Crimson Light?

Yu Luochoa pondered a moment when she heard the name and smiled faintly. "I believe... I've heard it before! There was a rumored peak Dominator assassinated in the central region seven years ago. Apparently a Celestial powerhouse was behind it. The killer was... Crimson Light, that's you, right?"

“Yu Luocha is indeed clear sighted!” the elder laughed in raspy tones. “That my humble name can be recalled by others is my honor!”

He’d assassinated a peak Dominator seven years ago and was now a Nova. In the era of supernaturals, powerhouses improved at a rapid clip. One had to possess stunning battle accomplishments to become a Celestial elder. Whether it was assassinations or fights in the open, Crimson Light would be formidable at both.

Manager Yu didn’t say anything else. There were four Novas in front of her and possibly more in the shadows. While everyone regarded Green Peacock with contempt, she was a bonafide late Nova. The manager didn’t continue fighting these people as she may not come off better in the trade if a true fight broke out.

The Parity King was very strong and Crimson Light would not be weak as well. They were just watching the show earlier and hadn’t taken a stand, resulting in Blue Moon losing face. While the three great organizations worked together, sometimes they competed against each other as well.

“Have Half Mountain and the others return before we discuss the ruins!” Manager Yu declared, not wanting to say too much. “The director has also given orders that he wishes to see Li Hao stand here in perfect health. Otherwise, none of you will be entering Battle Heaven!”

The Novas frowned slightly.

“Violet Moon…” Green Moon began frostily.

Yu Luocha stared her down.

“Forget it, I’ll call you Yu Luocha since you’ve thrown our prior relationship away,” Green Moon chuckled. “Hou Xiaochen does not call the shots for the Battle Heaven ruins. Look at how many powerhouses are present! There are those of the nine ministries apart from us, some young geniuses from the Divine Masters Ranking, various overlords of nearby provinces, as well as princes and dukes.

“Is Hou Xiaochen prepared to offend everyone in the world? Or is he really treating himself as the king of Silver Moon? When did the province become his?”

Malicious intent heavily laced those words! Yet Manager Yu remained coolly composed.

“So what if he is the Silver Moon King? He is the king of Silver Moon! What of the nine ministries or royal family? They have to tuck in their tails in Silver Moon! Just try us if you don’t accept that!”

“.....” The premises were frighteningly quiet. This was someone close to Hou Xiaochen, and she was speaking such words!

Unbelievable! Was this what Hou Xiaochen himself thought? Or was Yu Luochoa digging a hole for him?

Green Moon was astounded. Had this person in front of her lost her mind??

“What are you all looking at me for?” Manager Yu remained calm. “If the director goes to Skystar City to petition for a title of nobility from the royal family, will they not give it to him? They cannot wait for the director and nine ministries to be at odds with each other! Being the Silver Moon King is nothing!”

Now that was arrogance! However, it made the crowd quiet down. This... was a distinct possibility!

Green Moon frowned, not wanting to go down this path of nonsense. “Tidal Wave and the others have gone to Ash Mountain. They’ve been out of contact for many days. Perhaps Li Hao will return in a while. Are you going to offend everyone in the land for a mere Li Hao?”

Losing contact was true, not wanting to retreat was also true! No one wanted Li Hao more than Red Moon. They also least desired for him to have more time to grow and develop. If they couldn't capture the boy, then they would kill him!

This was the true issue that no one wished to give way on.

Another group of people walked in from a distance at this time. They weren't that strong and were escorted by a group of soldiers. A panting old man quickly presented himself, taking a while to catch his breath.

"Good, you're all here!" He smiled. "Listen to me, everyone. Silver Moon is caught in the grip of chaos. Casualties from battle have been high and the hardships are too great for the people to endure. The provincial government has given orders for all sides to cease hostilities and focus on negotiations!"

"The ancients left us the ruins of Battle Heaven, they do not belong to one house alone. The essence of ancient civilization is available to all regardless of region or strength. Do not easily think to take up arms in this pursuit..." The old man swayed back and forth, reciting a speech in front of these powerhouses. "Director General Zhao has given orders that all sides can enter the ruins. But since the ruins are located in Silver Moon, that makes us the host. If other parties enter... suitable compensation must be rendered. The exact details can be discussed with the Night Watchers."

"We hope that all powerhouses think carefully before taking action! The provincial government commiserates with the people and does not wish for the flames of war to burn on. If any dissatisfaction lingers, the director general has also given orders to shoot ten city annihilation missiles at Rift Canyon every month. They will be fired each time the ruins open. Therefore, please reconsider if you'd like to force your way inside!"

The old man smiled after his speech and exhaled a long breath. "Such are the orders from the Silver Moon authorities. Please take them to heart!"

"Deputy Zhou," Golden Spear grumbled. "The three great organizations are hunting one of my centurions. Do we let them off the hook just like that?"

“Every bite and every sip is preordained,” sighed the deputy. “Li Hao... drew first blood and has now entered Ash Mountain. That does not fall within Silver Moon purview, so we can only hope for his continued good fortune.

“But if the three great organizations insist on continuing the hunt after he re-enters Silver Moon territory, the provincial government will certainly report it to the nine ministries. Anyone of the Silver Moon government will jointly execute the transgressors!

“Silver Moon is still of the dynasty!” Deputy Zhou declared righteously and looked around him. “We of the provincial government may not pay attention to other matters, but if those of the nine ministries do not follow our lead in our territory, that marks them as traitors! That designation will not be overturned unless someone else conquers Silver Moon. Those of the nine ministries will still be wanted throughout the lands even after returning home!”

Some powerhouses hidden in the darkness cursed softly. That old fart was excellent with official jargon! And they had no choice but to go along with it. Their only alternative was to join the three great organizations or be wandering cultivators. Otherwise, being employed at the nine ministries, they could not afford to be deemed a traitor by an official government authority of the dynasty. Even though that designation could be appealed, it was very troublesome for their careers!

“I leave it at that,” Deputy Zhou panted. “Everyone, a bad peace is better than a good fight! Although the three great organizations are evil organizations, Silver Moon is willing to let bygones be bygones. So long as you are willing to see the light and turn over a new leaf, we are willing to open a door and extend an olive branch to the three great evil organizations...”

Being repeatedly termed evil made their powerhouses grind their teeth!

“Violence and bloodshed is not the way to resolve problems,” Deputy Zhou continued. “The provincial government does not wish to see further conflict break out. From today forth, the official arrests of the three great evil organizations are temporarily halted! We hope that you will respect Silver Moon’s laws and do not impede your own futures!”

With that, he turned and left. The deputy left the three great organizations, observing powerhouses, and even Night Watchers speechless. How... unexpected that the government had gotten involved!

Was this giving a way out for both sides? It... was a situation difficult to resolve otherwise.

Deputy Zhou left as quickly as he came. He climbed into a car waiting in the distance and looked back at the scene with a shake of his head. "Bunch of brutes! Killing each other from day to night... There's no end to that, so why kill each other?"

Kill all of the enemy in one go if it came down to that. Otherwise, were they really going to fight each other to the bitter end when it was clear that they were evenly matched? Both sides had dug their heels in and there was no one to smooth over the situation. Then the provincial government would be the lubricant. Hopefully with this way out, everyone's attention would refocus on the ruins.

They could settle any grudges in the ruins. There wouldn't be much of an effect if they raised hell or all died in there.

The old man thought that it was better to let these fiends all enter the ruins when his thoughts traveled here. The unrest would stop as soon as they were inside. Their perfectly fine Silver Moon was being ruined by all of these devils!

Chapter 423: South Below and North Above (I)

Ash Mountain.

Li Hao and the Demon Hunters made swift time. As expected, there were few major monster spirits residing in the woods after they passed the territory of the four they'd encountered earlier. However, the hawk in the sky continued to accompany them. It might be to follow them, and it might be to protect them. Or it might be worried that the group would cause another clash between the two premier martial masters. The four major spirits already knew that the swordsman's daughter resided among the group.

That was of secondary importance. The primary importance was that the demon's heir was among them!

When it came to Yuan Shuo, three of the four major monster spirits were fearful of the man. They could not forget how strong he was. Surely he was a force to be reckoned with even though Hong Yitang said that he'd slightly fallen behind the other thirty-six.

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The Demon Hunters walked for a full day and night, traveling two hundred and fifty kilometers. That was their limit on these winding and twisty mountain paths. Li Hao could continue, but the others could not. He called for a halt when he heard breathing grow heavy.

"Stop and rest!"

Many sagged to the ground as soon as he stopped. Their nerves were stretched taut and they'd traveled at a punishing speed. Most of the Demon Hunters were exhausted.

Hong Qing walked over, completely drenched with sweat inside her armor, yet holding up beneath the discomfort. She normally avoided conversation with Li Hao as the young man intimidated her with his brusqueness. However, she approached with some apprehension at this time. "Leader!"

"Yes?" Li Hao raised an eyebrow. Did this martial dao second generation find the pace too grueling?

"Um, ah... My sword method seems to have improved lately, but I still fall short when it comes to the aura. Since the leader is a swordsman and the greatest in Silver Moon these days, could you... give me a pointer or two?"

Li Hao looked askance at her. Give you pointers? And me the greatest swordsman? Your dad's way stronger than me. But it made sense seeing how deeply Hong Yitang hid himself.

“You can ask me any questions you have.” He nodded. “Not only you, but any of the others as well.”

Hong Qing beamed! Li Hao was a grandmaster alright!

“My sword technique is well-honed and I have some thoughts when it comes to the aura. However, the key to the aura lies in presentation of mind intent. I have many ideas in mind, but am never able to fully act on them and present the sword aura that I envision...” Hong Qing understood the sword aura and had certain theories about it, but she was unable to really display it.

Li Hao immediately identified where the crux of the problem was. It wasn’t a difficult issue. He thought for a moment before responding, “You lack a stimulus.”

“A stimulus?”

“You lack a battle in which you will find full satisfaction. The enemy cannot be too strong or too weak. They must be equal in strength to you. You saw how my battle with Sun Moxian went. That was when I coalesced my sword aura...”

“Wasn’t that an act?” Hong Qing blinked.

“.....” Li Hao blinked back at her, understanding her meaning only after a moment. He grinned ruefully when he looked at the rest of the team. Plainly, they all thought that he’d been pretending in that battle, that he hadn’t been a Sunderer then. They thought he was just presenting the same level of strength as his opponent.

He didn’t bother explaining himself. “Many of you lack this opportunity, and it is indeed a kind of fortuitous opportunity. You need to find an evenly matched opponent who happens to be an enemy. They must disregard their own life and be willing to fight to the end with you, to bring forth everything they command and know!

“It won’t be difficult for you to manifest your auras if you meet this kind of opponent. Of course, there are other ways apart from that.

“You can observe stronger auras, but that might not result in the kind of aura that you wish. You might reap some other gains if you witness a sword aura of the same origins.”

Li Hao thought of Hong Yitang. If the man displayed his aura to his disciples, some of them might comprehend the sword aura. The reasons that he hadn’t were also vaguely apparent to the young man. Perhaps Hong Yitang didn’t wish all of his disciples to follow his path. In martial dao, particularly when it came to the aura, one’s own enlightenment was stronger than observing someone else’s.

However, Li Hao also knew that not everyone was Hong Yitang. The pupil could not always exceed the master. Hong Yitang’s expectations for his disciples were too high. It would be most ideal if he could personally demonstrate the sword aura for his disciples.

Hong Qing was hesitant, but still asked, “Leader, can you demonstrate your sword intent for us? Show us how powerful a sword aura can be from a real powerhouse.”

Li Hao looked speechlessly at her. If he didn’t know that she didn’t know her father’s true condition, he’d think that she was mocking him. She was choosing not to learn from her dominating father and wanting to learn from him instead!

Well, it wasn’t impossible for him to demonstrate his sword intent.

“I can.” Li Hao nodded after some thought. “But you might not gain anything from it. My sword intent hasn’t reached perfection yet either. It might be more inspirational when I improve. I was there when my teacher set foot into Dominator and gained a lot from it. Therefore, my recommendation is for you guys to wait a bit longer.”

The Demon Hunters might comprehend more from his aura once his five swords were one and the perfect swords of the five elements.

“Then we await the leader’s perfected sword intent.” Hong Qing had no choice but to conclude. In reality, she felt that Li Hao might not be willing to teach them. That was only to be expected and nothing out of the ordinary.

The young man said nothing further. He spoke the truth, that Hong Qing and the others wouldn’t receive much if they studied his sword intent in its current state.

The topic was dismissed and the group focused on their respective cultivation again. Late Sunderers turned their attention to sensing the aura. Mid Sunderers took advantage of the respite to improve once more and set foot into late Sunderer.

Li Hao began training as well. His training happened to push the rest forward on their martial path as unattributed mysterious power wafted from him as a result of distillation by sword energy. It was stronger than regular unattributed mysterious power and fortified the constitutions of the Demon Hunters.

The young man was hard at work at the pile of mysterious power he sat on. If he just let it be, it would become another person’s spoils sooner or later. Thus, he distilled elemental energy out of it.

Each of his organs already stood at fifteen hundred cubes. One mysterious power stone produced nearly three hundred cubes through sword energy under ordinary conditions. The range of deviation wasn’t great.

He’d gathered a large sum of stones this time, but consumed most of it to save Hong Yitang and He Yong. There were one hundred and sixty pieces left. Based on his previous distillation efficacy, that would result in forty-five thousand cubes of power.

Li Hao might not be able to absorb so much energy as there were still limits to the body. His goal was to reach five thousand cubes in each organ, as well as his physical body and bones. That meant the organs required seventeen thousand and five hundred cubes, and that the body and bones required eight thousand.

That would ensure that his body, bones, and organs were at five thousand cubes each. It would make him three times stronger than current. In that way, even if his sword aura didn't improve, he himself would show massive advancement.

Twenty-five thousand cubes of mysterious power... Not even a premier Nova would be able to absorb that sum under normal circumstances. But since martial masters constantly resided in a state of enhancing their supernatural locks, that didn't hold true for them.

The young man sat down cross-legged, thinking of his teacher again while perusing these thoughts. Yuan Shuo's heart had absorbed one thousand cubes of fire energy when he left. While he'd nurtured his organs for a few years, his heart had been damaged then. Therefore, his teacher's organs might not be that strong.

It now looked like they were only at the fifteen hundred cubes level. While he'd killed some Red Moon members these days and extracted their blood pearls, Li Hao felt that his teacher's absorption efficacy would be limited without the aid of sword energy. It would be providence from the heavens if his teacher could reach two thousand cubes each.

Li Hao could not surpass his teacher in terms of aura for now, but the foundation of his body and organs would likely completely outstrip his teacher after this incident.

A smile spread across the young man's face; energy percolated through the crowd. Whether it was Li Hao, Liu Long, or the others, all of the Demon Hunters quietly absorbed the drifting energy. To them, strength of the body didn't seem that useful and any potential strengthening was limited. However, they knew that Summoner of Spirit had something to do with the strength of the organs. Thus, they were slightly hopeful that after they comprehended the aura... perhaps the path of Summoner would be accessible to them.

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Time passed second by second. It was another day in the blink of an eye. September 22nd now, the little valley that Li Hao and the others were in was now obscured by energy. A hawk circled

overhead a few times, but didn't dare land. It watched with confusion and surprise from afar. Were these humans cultivating? That miasma of energy was so dense!

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Rumbles echoed from Li Hao's body! Bolts of thunder and lightning shook his bones while the power of wind strengthened his body. Of the five organs, all of the supernatural locks gleamed with reinforcement. The lock of the lungs that'd barely managed to lock the metal aura now clamped firmly over it. The metal aura could no longer struggle free!

Close to Li Hao, Liu Long's organs shook and his blood thrummed furiously without rest. Waves reared near his kidneys. The man had wanted to lock the waves into the kidneys a few times, but always fell a bit short.

His organs weren't strong enough and he'd yet to reach the level of locking his auras. Once he did, that was a precursor to Summoner of Spirit. It would mean that the martial master's cultivation level was the equivalent of a Solar, but that his actual battle strength might be stronger than an initial Solar.

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Liu Long absorbed a great deal of energy as he sat next to Li Hao. Unattributed mysterious power strengthened the entire body without focusing on a particular area. What he would take in from Li Hao over the day would immensely fortify his physique. But... it still wasn't enough!

In his current state, he was yet to reach an average of five hundred cubes per organ. No matter how much unattributed energy he took in, it didn't have the targeted effect of quickly enhancing the five organs.

Just as Liu Long grew irritated and wanted to give up with regret, a new surge of energy entered his body. Shock gripped him and he opened his eyes with a jerk of his head. Li Hao happened to open his eyes at the same time and glanced at the man, not saying a word. Liu Long shut his eyes again, but sensed energies of the five elements surging toward him from the young man.

Plainly, Li Hao had sensed something and extracted the five elements to help Liu Long nurture his organs. The latter's face ran through a variety of expressions, but he didn't say anything. Emotions assailed his heart.

He knew a little of the Summoner of Spirit level, and that possessing auras for each of the organs was the best. Would a Summoner with just one kind of aura be strong? Perhaps he'd rival a Solar, what next? Did he continue to strengthen just that aura? What should go into the other organs?

He knew that Li Hao's ultimate goal was to combine five sword auras. Yuan Shuo's goal was to summon spirits with all five of his auras as well. But he... only had the water area of the Nine Forged Force.

Liu Long suddenly felt quite depressed and aggrieved. Was there no future for a Dominator with one aura? Must he reach perfection?

He suddenly recalled his father, the second spear of Silver Moon—the formidable Silver Spear. His father had been known throughout the land due to his command of a fire dragon spear.

That means... the Nine Forged Force isn't just meant for the water aura, that one aura may be able to split into five!

It was all theory to Liu Long. In his current state, he wouldn't possibly turn one aura into five without relevant comprehension and additional gains. It was better to set foot into Summoner of Spirit first.

He ignored the issue and energy flowing into his body. Whatever Li Hao was giving him, he would store it for now.

As Li Hao's strength improved, he began meeting more opponents that were each more terrifying than the last. While he improved quickly as a Dominator, to the point of being able to defeat a late or even peak Solar, that was still far from enough!

If he could successfully lock the water aura into his kidneys, he might be able to stand toe-to-toe with Solars in conflicts.

.....

Li Hao was devoted to his meditation, but took note of Liu Long's condition during the process and sent the man some elemental energy when appropriate. He ignored everyone after that.

The team captains knew how to lock the auras into their organs, but it was another matter entirely if they would succeed. After all, they hadn't been Dominators for long. They weren't like Li Hao and could use sword energy as a shortcut. Massive quantities of sword energy had enhanced the young man's body beyond imagination. He was possibly second to only Southern Fist.

He Yong's blood qi was forceful, indicating that his body wouldn't be too weak. It wouldn't be able to endure such fierce blood qi otherwise.

Li Hao absorbed, distilled, and digested cube after cube of energy. Shards of mysterious power stones continuously added to a pile on the ground. Large sums of energy flooded his body as his organs swiftly grew stronger.

.....

Another day passed in the blink of an eye.

Many on the team were saturated with energy and walked out of the cultivation circle, electing to practice their boxing routines and sword techniques to work it off. Some mid Sunderers depleted as much energy as they could when they left so they could return to absorb more, hoping to set foot into late Sunderer if possible. Many were those who'd taken that step over the past two days.

Apart from Li Hao and Liu Long, late Sunderers were the majority of the Demon Hunters. There were more than thirty of them now, with a few martial masters stuck in mid Sunderer. Late

Sunderers could release their internal force from the head. That still proved difficult for a few people.

They'd been Slayers to begin with and left White Moon City with Li Hao on September 15. It was now September 23—remarkable progress in less than ten days.

Some who'd been late Sunderers to begin with were working on their auras. That included the originally mid Sunderer Li Hang, Wu Chao, and Chen Jian... Everyone was trying hard to comprehend the aura.

Liu Yan had been late Sunderer at the start—she waved her twin blades around. There was no sound from the group other than that of training. The Demon Hunters occasionally snuck a glance at their leader who was still furiously absorbing energy. The only other was Liu Long.

The sound of chains dragging occasionally sounded from Liu Long's body, raising questions in the others. The sound of chains? Where did they come from? These people had yet to probe the depths of Summoner, that was a bit too far from them.

This instance was Li Hao's longest one of absorbing energy.

.....

September 24. Night.

Li Hao breathed out a long sigh before opening his eyes. He felt almost reborn after three days and nights of continuously absorbing mysterious power. His organs were now approximately five thousand cubes each. His Five Styles might not be any weaker than his sword aura now.

His auras hadn't grown any stronger—they just felt fuller.

The group as a whole had consumed a great deal of mysterious power over the past day. Li Hao himself depleted twenty thousand cubes, whereas Liu Long also absorbed thousands of the five elements thanks to his care. That made for almost thirty thousand cubes of mysterious power and one hundred and ten pieces of mysterious power stones. There were only roughly fifty left in his storage ring. Plenty of mysterious power was left—more than forty thousand cubes of all attributes.

Li Hao rose to his feet and took a deep breath, punching out with a fist!

Boom!

A massive collision sounded—it was stronger than expected. However, the young man frowned. The initial burst of force wasn't as strong as he wanted it to be. He punched again, observing carefully as he followed through. There were some problems that he took note of.

His organs were too strong, his body and bones strong as well. However, his blood and qi had become detriments. They couldn't keep up. While his blood qi had increased alongside his organs, they didn't improve at the same pace.

Southern Fist... Li Hao thought of He Yong's indomitable blood qi. His was significantly stronger than the young man's. How had the man done it? His organs were so middle-of-the-road, so how was his blood qi so strong?

While Li Hao's body was incredibly strong, the stronger he grew, the more he discovered that there were too many places that one's body could be strengthened. It was almost impossible to not have any weaknesses.

No wonder martial masters stuck to one path. Either they focused on blood qi or the physical body. The sword aura was strong or the blade intent...

Hong Yitang's sword aura was domineering and his body not bad, but even someone such as he had only managed to strengthen two aspects of himself. His organs were weak, thus leaving a gaping hole in his capabilities.

It's too hard for martial masters to be comprehensively powerful. Li Hao sighed to himself and erupted with the metal sword aura with a gentle wave. The metal aura used to break through his body, but was now contained to his fingertip. There was only slight bleeding. If things were as before, his entire finger would be blown off.

The young man familiarized himself with his increased strength; it didn't rage out of control due to outstripping his capabilities. He was simply less familiar with his new strength. That was quickly rectified as he slowly gained full control over his enhanced capabilities.

His fortified body even led to further development of the Nine Forged Force. Li Hao's muscles writhed as he punched out gently. Once, twice... eight times in simultaneous succession. Eight layers were no burden for him anymore, but he'd yet to reach the ninth layer.

The young man frowned slightly and punched again. Once, twice... eight times once more!

He tried again and again while chains rattled out of Liu Long's body. The man was suppressing the water ripple aura and looked to have entered the stage of locking his aura. Once he did, he would count as having set foot into Summoner of Spirit.

However, Li Hao didn't know what Liu Long's next step should be. The man should focus on strengthening one aura first.

Yuan Shuo had theorized the Summoner level according to his own cultivation methods. Li Hao was currently not qualified to overturn his teacher's thoughts or change certain cultivation methods. He'd thought of having five organs nurture one aura, but he didn't know how it looked in practice.

The young man ignored Liu Long and punched repeatedly. Hints of a ninth layer were present when the night was fully dark. However, there was still something off about it. It didn't flow as the previous layers did.

Li Hao smiled. That was good enough! It meant that he could deploy the ninth layer. He just wasn't practiced enough with it and needed more time to familiarize himself. It wouldn't take long so long as he held fast. His Nine Forged Force was almost complete!

Li Hao walked over to the practicing Li Heng. The latter was practicing his sword and whirled around when he sensed someone behind him. He jumped with shock when he saw his visitor and quickly paused. "Leader!"

"Well done." Li Hao inclined his head with a smile. "The Weeping Willow Sword... turns the heavy into the light. Outsiders think this technique is soft and without force. They don't know that it really hurts to be whipped by a willow. Its softness contains stiffness and pain."

"You have a great eye, leader." Li Heng smiled; it was concealed beneath the visor. "The Weeping Willow Sword is very strong. I haven't trained it to that level yet."

"Are there different levels to the Weeping Willow Sword?" Li Hao asked curiously.

"Yes!" Li Heng held nothing back upon seeing that his leader wished to chat. He tried to gauge Li Hao's thoughts as he spoke, "There aren't that many, just four levels. The first level is the basics. One reaches it after learning the breathing method and technique. The second manifests internal force as a sword. That part's rather hard."

Li Hao nodded. This was rather impressive!

Chapter 425: South Below and North Above (III)

It'd taken Li Hao reaching half step Dominator before he could manifest his internal force as a sword. It was this feat that catapulted him into half step Dominator.

"Perfection of the second level is naturally to comprehend the sword aura." Li Heng smiled broadly. "I think I'm almost there... but even if I do successfully shape my internal force into a sword, I'm still a long ways off from reaching perfection with the Weeping Willow Sword."

“The third level is of a keen sword without an edge, and the fourth level is willows swaying in the wind!” The young man laughed diffidently. “These aren’t my words, they’re recorded in the secret manual. If one reaches the third level, that means even a sword without an edge can bring the sharpest edge into play. That is the core goal of the Weeping Willow Sword.

“The technique imitates the sway of willow branches and drifting of catkins. Utilizing it in peak condition is to flow like the catkins. One flies and kills wherever the wind blows. Where there is a catkin, there is sword intent...”

Li Hao nodded, mulling over this unique state. It must be incredible. To float gently like the willow’s catkins and move according to the wind. Wasn’t that the sensation of ten thousand swords striking at once?

“Can you teach your secret method to outsiders?”

To outsiders? Li Heng blinked and looked hesitantly at Li Hao. “Leader, do you mean...”

“I want to learn.”

Li Heng stopped. Although the Weeping Willow Sword wasn’t weak, it wasn’t one of the Seven Swords. And Li Hao? He knew the Five Styles, Ghost Shadow Sword, Nine Forged Force... These methods were from the thirty-six heroes. The strength of their wielders was a direct nod to how formidable the method was.

The more was not the merrier when it came to secret arts. Not to mention, Earthturner Sword’s heir was among the team. Earnturner Sword was also much more famous than Weeping Willow Sword. Why was Li Hao setting aside Earthturner Sword to learn from Li Heng??

“You’re Weeping Willow Sword’s only heir,” Li Hao continued when the other remained silent. “That makes you the equivalent of the boss of the discipline. You have the right to teach others. Of course, I’m not going to force you into anything. You can counter with your conditions or refuse to teach outsiders altogether. It’s fine. As martial masters, we hold as a basic tenet that the core of our secret methods should not be taught to others not of the discipline. I won’t hold a grudge against you if you refuse. Don’t worry.”

“It’s not that I’m worried about,” Li Heng laughed drily. “It’s just... Leader, you know plenty of secret arts. Why do you want to learn the Weeping Willow Sword? If my memory serves correctly, you know the Ghost Shadow Sword, right?”

“Correct.”

“That one’s much more famous than Weeping Willow Sword.”

“I have use for your method,” Li Hao answered simply.

“To be honest, that conveniently gained master of mine died not long after teaching me.” Li Heng thought for a bit. “He did mention before leaving to not let the inheritance of the Weeping Willow Sword to be lost. But...

“I can only teach it to a disciple!” Li Heng suddenly made up his mind and set his jaw. “It’s not hard if you want to learn it, leader. But... but first, you must join the Weeping Willow discipline!”

Li Hao frowned and thought of a possible solution. “Can I be an honorary disciple? I don’t need to learn the third and fourth levels, I just want to stop at the second level so I can manifest my internal force with a unique technique.”

An honorary disciple!

Li Heng mused deeply for a moment and nodded. “This will do if you don’t intend to practice the late stage levels. But you will lack the heart of the Weeping Willow Sword, so you’ll only be able to learn the motions, leader.”

This was the equivalent of Wang Ming and his comrades receiving only the most basic breathing technique of the Five Styles. They did not have a chance to touch upon the heart of the method since they were just honorary disciples.

Li Hao dismissed and explained, "My teacher still lives, so the Five Styles discipline remains. I wouldn't mind much of anything if my teacher was no longer of this world. I could even become the heir of the Weeping Willow discipline without thinking twice of it. But unless my master is killed in the central region, I can only be an honorary disciple for now."

"....." These words weren't that pleasant to the ear. Li Heng inwardly raised an eyebrow. So... do you want your teacher to be beaten to death or not?

"Additionally, I won't be taking your knowledge for free," Li Hao continued. "If I am to be an honorary disciple, I would not be yours or your teacher's. Can you accept me on behalf of your martial forefather?"

"....." Li Heng paused. So this kind of action was acceptable as well?

"I'm not taking advantage of you," explained Li Hao. "It's because my teacher is the same generation as your teacher. The Weeping Willow Sword and Five Styles King are of the same generation as well. If you do accept me as an honorary disciple... Well, I don't care about my position in the hierarchy. But if it's something that will bring dishonor to my teacher, this is something all veteran martial masters will care more about."

"None of these problems will exist if I become Weeping Willow's honorary disciple!"

It was Li Heng who greeted the suggestion wordlessly. There will be a problem, I'll have another martial uncle!

But on further thought, that wasn't to his detriment. If Weeping Willow was alive and knew of the circumstances surrounding Li Hao, no one would say a word if Li Hao was accepted as a core disciple, much less an honorary one. Weeping Willow wouldn't even mind if Li Hao was still

known as of the Five Styles discipline. How wonderful it was to have a swordsman who knew multiple sword auras join the Weeping Willow discipline!

“In order to have Weeping Willow Sword rest at peace in the other world, I can supply five thousand cubes of mysterious power and ten mysterious power stones to the sect,” Li Hao offered.

“.....” Li Heng’s jaw dropped. Was that necessary? The leader was only learning up to the second level of the sword method, was such hefty compensation truly necessary? Or were the first two levels already some stunning secret art through the ages?

Li Heng couldn’t make sense of it, but he nodded after some consideration. “That can be done, but... leader, are you giving me so much out of special consideration? Are you trying to ensure that my high potential doesn’t go to waste?”

Li Hao blinked. What was this fellow thinking about?

Li Heng decided that this must be the truth and was very touched by the sentiment. “You don’t have to do this, leader. As good as my potential may be, I was delayed by several years. There are those in the team who are younger than me and with brighter futures. It’s not right to waste so much on me. The others will think this treatment is unfair...”

Li Hao quietly watched his performance for a few moments before saying, “I need the Weeping Willow Sword to complete my sword aura. None of this... has much to do with you.”

Li Heng paused in his display of emotions. Really? Forget it, he couldn’t be bothered to think about this in greater detail. “Then very well, I accept if you insist, leader.”

Five thousand cubes of mysterious power and ten mysterious power stones was an astronomical sum! It would be worth it to teach all four levels of the method, to say nothing of just the first two. Li Heng didn’t say anything about Li Hao’s desire to adhere to martial world rules and thus his unwillingness to join the Weeping Willow discipline. He quickly relayed the rudimentary knowledge of the first two levels, as well as the core breathing method.

The material wasn't too hard and Li Hao's memory was very capable, so he quickly committed the information to heart.

Li Heng then demonstrated it a few times, ensuring that his leader fully grasped the core knowledge of the method. However, there might be difficulties in manifesting his internal force as a sword because he'd already done so once before. Li Hao might need to locate another way to complete the second layer of training for the Weeping Willow Sword.

As for whether or not he would successfully comprehend the wood sword aura from the Weeping Willow method... that remained to be seen.

Another violent clatter of chains sounded as the two practiced. An explosive roar rang out! There was no blood at the corner of Liu Long's lips, but his kidneys hurt. He frowned and roared, leaping upright and punching outward!

A massive explosion ripped through the air as a powerful wave churned through heaven and earth. It exploded in the blink of an eye! A chain broke out of the wave when it exploded and pierced through the void.

Liu Long heaved a long exhale while the Demon Hunters around him regarded him with shock. This move seemed much more explosive than before! Li Hao rushed over and took a glance at Liu Long, then sighed.

The man was puzzled. Wasn't this a feat worthy of celebration? He'd successfully locked his aura in place! Although it was just one aura and his organs being weaker than Yuan Shuo when he was of this level, he was still a Summoner of Spirit no matter what. He may not be as strong as Yuan Shuo when the old man was an initial Summoner, but Liu Long could take on Solars now!

What are you sighing for after I've improved so much in such a short period of time?

Li Hao began to say something, stopped, and decided on transmission. “Ah, chief... Strengthen your kidneys more in the future. They can barely withstand the impact from your aura. It might mean... ai!”

That your kidneys are lacking and therefore your sexual ability!

This was when Liu Long realized what the young man was implying and raised a wordless eyebrow at the young man. Why the hell was the kid thinking of this after seeing all that? What was wrong with him??

“Don’t think too much, as martial masters...” he transmitted back.

“Martial masters also need to procreate and get a wife!” Li Hao’s return transmission cut him off. My poor chief, he wanted to strengthen his water aura first, but his kidneys aren’t up to the task. Every bit of strength from that organ is used to lock his aura in place, leaving nothing left for any other function. This might have been a similar situation when teacher forcefully summoned his water tiger... but teacher is old, so it doesn’t matter. Chief is still in the prime of his life!

Liu Long was completely speechless and couldn’t be bothered with the young man. This was a joyous occasion and the kid was dampening the celebration! He took a look at the sky—it was pitch black.

“It’s the 24th, isn’t it? And almost the 25th. We’re still very far from Rift Canyon. I’ve held us here for a long time. Will we still make it before the ruins open?”

There were at least fifteen hundred kilometers from one side of Ash Mountain to Rift Canyon on the other side. The Demon Hunters had only crossed seven hundred and fifty kilometers, leaving half to be traversed. They also needed to make it to the ruins after they entered the canyon. While the roads would be easy to take then, they would still need a lot of time. There may not be enough.

They could depart Ash Mountain now and head directly toward Rift Canyon, that would be faster. There was a city near where they were. Ash Mountain made it easy to hide one's tracks, but it was too difficult to travel through.

Chapter 426: South Below and North Above (IV)

"If we enter the other side of Rift Canyon from this direction, we will be afforded maximal concealment." Li Hao gave it some thought. "If we head down the mountain from here, we might run into others and give rise to unforeseen developments..."

It wasn't that they must remain on their path, but that it was easier to hide when they did. That would avoid some trouble, and if Hou Xiaochen and the others weren't there when the Demon Hunters finally reached the ruins, that also meant there would be no large-scale battle taking place.

But now that the three great organizations had lost a batch of powerhouses, they might not have the strength to stand against Silver Moon. It was Li Hao's estimation that the ruins stood a ninety-nine percent chance of opening this month. Given Hou Xiaochen's personality and the fact that all sides had sent representatives, he would want nothing more than for the ruins to open so these guys could be cannon fodder.

Thus, given these considerations, Li Hao decided to try to make it back in time for the ruins' opening.

"Let's exit the mountain from here then. We'll conceal our tracks and hide where we can. If we continue on our original path, we might not make it in time." He decided to make the ruins their priority. As for why Half Mountain and the others didn't emerge when the Demon Hunters did... Well, what did that have to do with him?

The young man put everything out of his mind after assessing the situation. The Demon Hunters quickly threaded through the mountain forests to leave. Their escort, the giant hawk, followed them until they passed through the forests and exited the mountain range.

When day broke, the Demon Hunters entered a modestly sized city. It was one of the sixteen in Silver Moon's northern territory. Here, Li Hao commanded his people to take off their armor and place it in a large car. This turned the Demon Hunters into a team of martial bodyguards that ran missions throughout the province's northern territory.

Transport became a complex issue upon the rise of the supernatural. These days, martial masters and some weaker supernaturals might choose to become bodyguards and safeguard the wares of large corporations. Thus, this became the Demon Hunter's disguise. They were escorting a car of valuable cargo toward Rift Canyon.

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At the same time, inside Rift Canyon.

Hong Yitang and He Yong left without a backward glance when they saw the hawk return. The four major monster spirits watched them leave. The two humans had said that they would stay for just one day, but they lingered for multiple! It made the monster spirits too apprehensive to split up, lest they be eliminated one by one.

"They're gone!" A ripple traveled from the golden eagle when the two humans were out of sight.

"The demon's heir is gone too."

"It looks like these Silver Moon martial masters are all connected to each other."

"....." The major monster spirits conversed for a while. That the two stronger humans had waited until Li Hao was gone made them realize that Silver Moon martial masters were sometimes very united.

Of course, it also had to do with Li Hao helping them suppress the catastrophic changes in their body.

"Silver Moon... is a place we should tread lightly!" came the tiger's ripples. "The situation is very complicated there and there may be even more powerful existences present than those guys!"

“There certainly is,” responded the golden eagle. “There might also be monster spirit experts too! I once flew beyond Ash Mountain and entered Silver Moon territory. There was a stifling presence there not long after I entered the province! It was everywhere, so I suspect that there are many preeminent powerhouses present in Silver Moon. There are also noble monster spirits present. I seem to see a giant turtle somewhere...”

A solemn air fell over the four monster spirits. Silver Moon was too close to Ash Mountain. No wonder some of the powerful presences within the mountain refused to explore the land to the south. They would rather expand to Great Li in the north.

“It will take the Golden Lotus another five years to mature again. Do we stand guard here? Or do we travel to the north and take a look at Great Li?” This question came from the tiger as it didn’t want to remain here the entire time. There hadn’t been much pressure with their circumstances before, but now there was quite a great deal.

“The north is not safe and might be even more dangerous,” answered the eagle. “There are many experts in Great Li... I happened to see one of their heavyweights rip apart a Jademoon Rhino that was the same strength as me.”

“What are you afraid of!” A violent ripple came from the giant ape. “There are many powerhouses in Great Li, but they’re all very straightforward. They’re called savages, which means they’re more direct. You can tell with a quick look if they’re strong or weak. It’s a better option than Silver Moon, in any case! Silver Moon people all look weak, but they’re actually incredibly domineering...”

It might as well say that Silver Moon denizens were treacherous humans! That was basically what the ape meant.

“Then let’s head to the north.” The eagle inclined its ponderous head after some thought. “We need more resources and treasures, as well as to observe more experts. I can already sense that Silver Moon hides many secrets. Some of them are stirring into wakefulness. We can come back when we fully take the next step!”

Three of them resided in a state of metamorphosis. Snakey was a little behind them, but almost at the stage as well. If they could all break through, then they would count as Novas according to the Silver Moon hierarchy. Four Novas wouldn't be so easily beaten in the province, would they now?

The four major monster spirits were decisive creatures once they came to a decision. They set some Solar level guards on the sheared off mountain. It would be another five years until the Golden Lotus matured again.

The four immediately set off north. Along the way, the great snake finally couldn't contain itself and said, "I'll just take one lotus petal. You guys split up the seeds!"

Due to its initiative, it quickly received the lotus petal of its dreams. There was naturally no share of the seeds for it. It caused the snake to despair. This would only widen the gap between it and the rest of them!

Mirth twinkled in the eyes of the other three monster spirits. It was good that Snakey recognized the situation it was in. Division of the loot would be difficult otherwise.

As Li Hao headed south, the four monster spirits headed north. They entered the land of Great Li that no one mentioned in Skystar Dynasty these days.

.....

Rift Canyon.

As the moment approached for the next opening of the ruins, some buildings appeared in the canyon. Some of the supernaturals no longer wished to camp in the wild and built themselves residences. Not only that, but a group of merchants selling mysterious power and mysterious power stones appeared!

In addition, There were sellers hawking ancient weapons that were hard to verify. Antiques, ancient books, and secret martial dao methods could also be found.

A bizarre marketplace sprang up in Rift Canyon, thanks to the ruins. It was bizarre because only powerhouses had the right to display their wares here, or those with the patronage of other factions. Otherwise, one wouldn't live to spend their earnings if they tried selling goods.

The three great organizations also set up base camps in the canyon. Everyone waited to visit Battle Heaven. A figure abruptly shot into the sky, raising the attention of all supernaturals inside Rift Canyon.

"Everyone, I am Hao Lianchuan, deputy director of the Silver Moon Night Watchers! According to a multilateral agreement between the official authorities and the three evil supernatural organizations, the ruins of Battle Heaven will open on the 28th. The entrance will be open for half an hour.

"Slayers and Starlight who wish to enter must pay ten cubes of mysterious power. Sunderers and Darkmoons must pay thirty cubes. Dominators and Sunflares must pay one hundred cubes. Solars must pay one mysterious power stone and Novas ten stones. The three great evil organizations are exempt from this requirement. The funds will be used to maintain the operations of the ruin entrance!"

His words caused a general uproar. The price was fine for the weaklings—even one hundred cubes wasn't that expensive. But mysterious power stones?? Solars had to pay a stone to enter, that was too expensive!

A Solar within the canyon asked, "Director Hao, isn't it too much to require a mysterious power stone from Solars? According to what I know, Battle Heaven is divided into an inner and outer city. There are almost no treasures in the outer city, just the inner. The inner city is dangerous beyond belief and we put our lives on the line when we explore..."

"Then don't go inside!" Hao Lianchuan looked down his nose at the man. "Why enter if it's that dangerous?"

The speaker glowered, but kept a firm grip on his temper because this was the other's territory.
“Then does this mean entrance is free for three great organizations and Silver Moon authorities?”

“Of course! The three evil organizations will be paying another price. You need not worry about that!”

“Then what about the Night Watchers or government agencies of other provinces...”

“Pay up!” Hao Lianchuan yelled gruffly. “You can avoid paying if you join the Silver Moon Night Watchers. The situation is unclear in the other provinces. To prevent the admission of malevolent forces, you can join my Night Watchers first and submit to a background check. Once you pass that, your entrance is naturally free!”

No shit! The crowd looked at him wordlessly. What background check? The real trouble began after one joined the Night Watchers. Would they dare not listen to a superior then? They would be turned into cannon fodder without a choice!

“Then what if we don't have mysterious power stones?” yelled a dejected Solar.

“One thousand cubes will do too!”

That was also expensive, it was almost the value of a mysterious power stone. And if one didn't have the mysterious power... then the answer would be to not enter the ruins. What else could they say?

The loud hubbub of anticipation immediately quieted down.

“Is there a limit on the number of people allowed in?” asked a smiling young man.

“No limit!” called out Hao Lianchuan. “Additionally, the entrance will not be open until three days later!”

It used to be that the entrance was open once a day at midnight. That had been key for many people’s survival before. The announcement caused another furor of discussion. Some supernaturals frowned with dissatisfaction.

“We only want to explore for a day or two. Doesn’t that mean we have to wait until the final moments to exit?”

If they happened to lay hands on some treasure in the first couple of days, it would be much safer to exit first. If they all waited until the final moments, what good would there be for wandering supernaturals who’d obtained some treasure? They would be squeezed in with all the powerhouses at the exit and not even know how they’d died!

Chapter 427: Returning to Rift Canyon (I)

“These arrangements are for everyone’s safety!” Hao Lianchuan boomed. “If we open the entrance again halfway through, it will bring greater danger to everyone if powerhouses force their way in or sneak into the expedition. To prevent that from occurring, we will be sealing the premises after everyone enters. The Silver Moon Guards, Night Watchers, and Silver Moon army will be camped here. City annihilation missiles will lock onto the area. The blockade will be lifted only after everyone exits!

“You can forgo this chance to explore the ruins if you find it too dangerous. We will not endanger the larger group for the sake of one!” Hao Lianchuan emphasized. “In addition, Silver Moon is not responsible for any risks or danger encountered within the ruins. There are certain risks inside, so caution must be exercised during the excavation!”

That was fine. No one expected that Silver Moon would look out for their safety after entering. That was impossible and did not make sense!

All was quiet below, the three great organizations were also silent. Indeed, this had been the agreement. No one else knew what price they needed to pay.

.....

Above the canyon, in an army camp.

The area was sealed off and under the purview of the army. It was responsible for the external safety of this expedition. City annihilation missiles were supposedly ready at headquarters, ready to be lobbed at Rift Canyon anytime.

In the center of camp.

Rather than the sparse crudeness seen last time, various houses had been erected. Earth supernaturals had reinforced the structures and wood supernaturals planted flora to break up the monotony of the landscape. Greenery poked through the barren landscape.

Several important figures were gathered at the biggest house in the center. Hou Xiaochen, Huang Yu, Hu Dingfang, Ren Tianchuan, Director General Zhao, Deputy Zhou, Kong Jie, Hu Qingfeng... All of the powerful, strong, or influential heavyweights of Silver Moon were present.

Ren Tianchuan, commander of the White Dragons, was addressing the group. A darkened map was present in front of him as he explained, "This is a map of the inner city, but it's not detailed. It's just a rough sketch according to those who entered last time.

"The military has divided Battle Heaven into five sections! The city gates that we enter through is the eastern portion. Upon entering from the outer city, we come across the residential area first. There is some commercial activity here, but it is not the main focus of this area.

"Next comes the northern portion. Based on reports from last time, it might have been the military area back in the day. Some people apparently saw airplanes parked here, but that is yet to be confirmed.

"The southern portion is the true commercial district. Someone saw a lot of storefronts there.

“The western portion is the industrial area!” he explained. “Residential, military, commercial, and industrial. With the pagoda in the center as the landmark, that should be the true core of the city. The city lord’s manor and all sorts of institution headquarters are found there, as well as an archives area with a large sum of ancient tomes.

“Thus far, only one Gold Armor has been spotted in the entire city...”

Hu Qingfeng listened quietly in the crowd, making mental notes and observations. As a Night Watcher, he was collecting a great sum of secret intelligence in this meeting of senior executives. No one in the central region knew anything about the inner city, but here Silver Moon was, in possession of some information. That he now knew about the five divisions of the inner city was already cause for celebration.

The commercial district would have the most in terms of wealth, but the military district might have large stores of mysterious power stones. It was difficult to say what might be found in the industrial district. Who knew what kind of industry the ancient civilization specialized in? If it was related to the military... that would be incredible!

“How strong is this golden guy? Has Silver Moon analyzed him?” a young man suddenly asked in the crowd. Everyone looked at him, Hu Qingfeng included.

Know-it-all, why can’t you keep your mouth shut! He knew the young man. Looking to be in his early twenties the most, he was handsome and with a sunny disposition. Instead of being from the Night Watchers, he was from the Ministry of Administration. This ministry was the direct superior to provincial governments and the nominal head of the nine ministries. The young man was from the Ministry of Administration in Skystar City.

Skystar City was of a mind to participate in the expedition on a significant scale. All of their representatives joined in a clandestine manner, but this fellow had openly reported to the Silver Moon provincial government to join the excavation in the name of the central government.

Hu Qingfeng was aware of him as the young man was well known—Qi Gang of the Ministry of Administration. The latter was a Heaven Favored, the same as the perverse geniuses from the Inspectorate. He was very strong at mid Nova, making him slightly stronger than Hu Qingfeng and on par with those geniuses.

These youngsters were all names on the Divine Masters Ranking. The ninety-nine powerhouses of the ranking included members of the nine ministries, royal family, three great organizations, seven divine mountains, and the rich and powerful families around the land.

The three great organizations were indomitable factions when it came to the supernatural world. The seven divine mountains weren't that strong, but there were powerhouses in residence at them. Sky Sword from Silver Moon, for example, was one of the masters. There was a representative from his mountain today. The other mountains were spearheaded by premier martial masters who'd converted to the supernatural, or had major monster spirits holding down the fort.

Indeed, there were monster spirits on the ranking. However, their ages were hard to determine.

Many monster spirits that'd risen to prominence in the last couple of years were listed, regardless of their age. Their age of awakening was the basis by which their age was judged. Those that'd awakened less than ten years ago were assessed in terms of their strength post-awakening. In actuality, they wouldn't have been that strong prior either. Monster spirits didn't typically live too long prior to the rise of the supernatural domain.

These powerhouses from strong factions dominated the ranking. There were some wandering cultivators that could be found among the ninety-nine. They were lone wolves and Heaven Favored, having opened their locks at birth and were incredibly strong.

Hu Qingfeng was nothing compared to them. His thoughts ran wildly, first touching on Blue Moon. The latter was also on the ranking, the only one of the Seven Moons to be listed. The rest were either too old or like Violet Moon, too weak.

One of the ten court masters of Yama was also on the list. An elder from Celestial's elder council could also be found.

Some of those perverse geniuses from the Night Watchers were also emblazoned on the ranking. This Qi Gang in front of Hu Qingfeng was one of the three Inspectorate heavyweights listed. He was very young, apparently only twenty-six. He'd opened his locks nine years ago and had already made the frightening progress to mid Nova! His attribute was metal, making him a formidable force to be reckoned with.

The Divine Masters Ranking was not yet public knowledge, so while Hu Qingfeng knew about it, these Silver Moon bumpkins might not. If they did, they might not welcome Qi Gang's addition.

As such thoughts raced through Hu Qingfeng's mind, Hou Xiaochen smiled and said softly, "The Gold Armor's strength is hard to determine, Emissary Qi. From what we know, the Gold Armor should be somewhere between peak Nova and the metamorphosis beyond.

"It killed one of Celestial's Solars with one punch and broke a gold level origin weapon. Origin weapons are so durable that Novas in metamorphosis find it difficult to break them. It goes to show how fierce the Gold Armor is that it can break an origin weapon that is admittedly lower level than it..."

"Thank you for your clarification, director," Qi Gang quickly said. "Is it possible that it's beyond Nova?"

"Yes!" Hou Xiaochen affirmed solemnly. "That's possible. You must know that the ancients are not us in present time. We need to carve out the path ahead of us bit by bit. Perhaps the road we are developing above Nova was just run-of-the-mill back in those times. If the Gold Armor was powerful in its era, then it's possible for it to still retain strength above Nova now."

Qi Gang grew lost in his thoughts, then smiled when he saw that everyone was looking at him. "I have no further questions."

"Director Hou." Hu Qingfeng had questions if the genius youngster didn't. "What level origin weapon is the black tortoise seal in its hands?"

“Sky level at the very least,” Hou Xiaochen chuckled. “It’s possible that it’s even stronger. As you are all well aware of, the division of origin weapons was set by us based on our knowledge and breadth of vision. It’s not necessarily accurate. According to some ancient records, the origin weapons we have now may have just been standard issue. Take this black tortoise seal, for example. It might be the core origin weapon of a city, making it stronger than what the rank and file carried. It possibly rivals the item in the central region.”

Several expressions shifted minutely with these words. The item in the central region? The one they’d taken from Yama, right?

The war in the central region had ignited because it could determine supernatural potential. Using it on a person would quickly reveal what supernatural attribute they were a match with and what potential they possessed. Its secondary usage was that powerhouses could use it to locate their supernatural locks!

Some experts might be able to only discover six locks. This treasure, however, could help them discover more. Some souls of origin weapons could even facilitate the manifestation of the locks! That made them ultimate treasures!

Such a treasure was now in Night Watcher hands. However, it was rumored that the nine ministries were levying pressure on the agency to share the wealth and not hoard it for themselves.

The central region was in absolute disarray because of that item, but now Hou Xiaochen said that this Black Tortoise Seal might be another one... Even Qi Gang’s eyebrows shot up when he heard the claim.

“Do you mean that, Director Hou?” the young man asked hastily.

“This seal compares to the Heavens Dictate?” Hu Qingfeng gasped.

The treasure in the central region was a ruler shaped item known as Heavens Dictate. One ruler to determine the heavens! It seemed to possess other unique abilities in addition to what they knew, but Hu Qingfeng wasn't fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of it. The senior executives of the Night Watchers had said that as useful as it was, it came with some problems that they were working to resolve.

Chapter 428: Returning to Rift Canyon (II)

"It's tough to say since all things are possible," Hou Xiaochen laughed. "Who can be certain when the Black Tortoise Seal is not in hand?"

His response quieted the group. Director General Zhao interrupted the conversation with a cough.

"Let's set that aside for now. How shall things be arranged this time? We can't send too many people, but neither can we send too few. Who is to go? The province might easily descend into chaos if too many go.

"And is the director going himself?" He looked at Hou Xiaochen.

"Yes, I've already declared my intentions. There's no helping it, and it suits everyone's desires, does it not?" Hou Xiaochen chuckled. "I won't be bringing many from the Night Watchers. It will be me, Golden Spear, Mu Lin, Little Yu, and Li Hao if he gets back in time."

Reactions rippled through the crowd. Although only five were going, the list included all of the agency's powerhouses other than Hao Lianchuan.

"Just you five?" Director General Zhao went into a coughing fit. "None of the Guards?"

"Forget it." Hou Xiaochen shook his head. "Have them seal off the perimeter. They're good enough against some Solars, but will be able to do nothing against Novas. Silver Moon is too weak and we'll have to rely on the military if any Novas cause issues."

The solemn-faced Huang Yu of the military glanced at the group and said, “We won’t be sending too many from our side either. Hu Dingfang, Ren Tianquan, Bai Yuanqing, and Wang Pengju. Adding in Berserk Blade makes for five.”

The first four were the commanders and vice commanders of the White Dragons and Tiger Wings. Berserk Blade’s addition rounded out the contingent to represent the Silver Moon military. Huang Yu himself did not choose to join.

“The Inspectorate will be represented by myself and Wang Henggang.” Kong Jie smiled.

“All of you guys are going...” coughed the director general. “I’d like to send someone from the provincial government as well, but sadly I don’t have anyone to send. Ah well, Qi Gang is here. He’s said to be a premier genius in the central region, so let’s have him represent the provincial government!”

Hu Qingfeng made to speak up, then checked himself.

“Special Agent Hu can do as you’d like,” Director General Zhao chuckled. “It is to your discretion whether you would like to go or not. You can also bring your subordinates if you wish. That will also fortify the delegation of the Silver Moon authorities.”

Hu Qingfeng inclined his head.

“This means that with me, Hu Qingfeng, and his two subordinates... that’s sixteen of us?” Qi Gang furrowed his brow. That was too few! Granted, this was almost the sum total of the government’s powerhouses.

What puzzled him was that Huang Yu of the Silver Moon military wasn’t joining the expedition. He’d thought for certain that the man would participate.

“Many are going from the three great organizations,” Qi Gang continued. “Orange Moon and Yellow Moon are said to be pulling off their mission to kill Yuan Shuo and heading our way. They are premier heavyweights.”

The situation would be very dangerous then.

“Quality over quantity!” Hou Xiaochen smiled. “We have enough! Our safety is ever more assured with our latest addition! Commander Yu needs to remain in position to curtail disorder. Director General Zhao and the others are advanced in age. The provincial government truly does lack powerhouses, as does the Inspectorate. It is already the limits of what we can draw upon with Inspector General Kong and Wang joining the team.

“If we add more people who are weaker, they’ll only become everyone’s targets once inside!”

“Is Deputy Director Hao Lianchuan not joining?” asked Hu Qingfeng. “He is a mid Solar. Having him come along will be helpful.”

Although there were numerous Novas slated to enter the ruins, Solars were still the core battle strength. And yet, the Silver Moon delegation wasn’t planning on taking a single Solar!

“We can forget him,” Hou Xiaochen coughed and shook his head. “He can stay behind to guard the place. We can’t all be taken out in the ruins, after all. That would be enormous trouble. If anything happens to us, he’s still a mid Solar who can stabilize the situation. Add to that the Silver Moon Guards... we’ll be able to hold our own for a bit even if Novas come.”

Hu Qingfeng spoke no further. This meant that their delegation would be very small indeed, and Hou Xiaochen would truly be in danger. Apart from the director, only Yu Luocha was at the Nova level. Although Golden Spear counted as one, his strength was difficult to determine. Berserk Blade seemed to only rival a Solar as well. Meanwhile, Hu Qingfeng and Qi Gang would certainly not be helping Hou Xiaochen in the event of trouble.

“That Li Hao is Yuan Shuo’s disciple,” Qi Gang suddenly said. “If he really comes back and enters the ruins, won’t that raise hostile attention from the three great organizations?”

“It’s all the same,” Hou Xiaochen replied indifferently. “His battle strength is uncommon as he’s already killed six Solars. Even the three great organizations have assessed him at peak Solar. That level of strength will be of great help to us.

“Additionally, he explored the ruins during the last excavation. If Hao Lianchuan is not part of our expedition this time, that leaves him as the only one who is more familiar with the lay of the land. The rest won’t have his experience to draw on.”

Hu Dingfang had also been one of the prior participants, but Hou Xiaochen didn’t mention that detail.

“Will Li Hao really make it back?” Qi Gang asked curiously. “Half Mountain and Tidal Moon haven’t returned yet, and even the sixteen hell masters under the Parity King as well as the Revolution King have gone off to hunt him.”

He quickly explained himself when Hou Xiaochen leveled a look at him. “I’m just curious, I mean nothing else. The sixteen hell masters beneath the Parity King are quite famous, to say nothing of the others. The Parity King is active mostly in the south. He’s a mid Nova, which means he isn’t quite top tier. But he is quite renowned when acting in concert with his sixteen hell masters. Not even some peak Novas dare provoke him then.

“Although they’re just sixteen Solars, their joint Avici Iron Net and the Parity King’s own formidable abilities makes this ninth court master much stronger than Blue Moon.

“While Blue Moon is on the Divine Masters Ranking, his ranking is toward the back like us. The Parity King is not listed because he is over thirty years old, yet those who are listed near the front of the rankings dare not easily offend the Parity King...”

Qi Gang didn’t care much about Blue Moon of the Red Moon organization, but he paid a great deal of attention to the Parity King.

“They’ve gone to Ash Mountain,” Hou Xiaochen said after some thought. “Li Hao is a martial master—he won’t have much trouble if he’s careful and evades pursuit. The matters of before will be annulled after he returns. Once a few more of their Novas die inside the ruins, which of the three great organizations will recall what took place before?”

“.....” No one had a comeback to that.

“The others are just along for the ride,” the man chuckled. “It’s Emissary Qi and Special Agent Hu who are the true pillars of support that we of the Silver Moon authorities depend upon! With me and Little Yu, we’ll be able to take care of any threats even if a few more Novas come from the three great organizations. I will be leaving Silver Moon after this, so whatever trouble I can take care of for everyone, that is all for the best.”

“You think too little of us, Ole Hou,” Kong Jie laughed. “I’m a peak Solar when it comes down to it. Do you take me for empty air?”

“Let’s wait until you reach Nova.” Hou Xiaochen grinned.

“Almost! I think I see the threshold!” Kong Jie roared with laughter.

“So it’s settled!” Huang Yu said coldly, seemingly out of patience. “You guys... cough cough cough, must look after Dingfang and the others while inside. The White Dragons and Tiger Wings will be in a tight spot without them!”

“Don’t worry, Commander Yu!” Hou Xiaochen reassured. “They will receive our care so long as we are fine. We look to you and Director General Zhao to take care of matters on the outside.”

“Tell Ole Huang that,” coughed the director general. “The only thing I can do is proactively submit reports upstairs so they send more powerful reinforcements.”

And so the meeting was over. Qi Gang looked at the others as they went on their ways. After some thought, he caught up to Deputy Zhou. He trailed behind and whispered, “Deputy Zhou, it’s said that the Skystar Guards were encamped primarily in Silver Moon back in those days. The identities of the three commanders were shrouded in shadow, but word of them is now circulating...

“Does the provincial government have any files on them in the archives? I asked the Ministry of Administration—they told me that apart from the royal family, Silver Moon’s government would also have a copy. Is that true?”

“That’s... true.” A surprised Deputy Zhou looked at the man. “But those files were destroyed. When the Skystar Guards designation was canceled and the Night Watchers formed instead, Hou Xiaochen came to headquarters to take them away and destroy them!”

“So the provincial government never looked at them?” Qi Gang whispered. “Surely you must know something.”

“We do know a little. At the very least, we know that Hou Xiaochen is indeed the Sickly that he is rumored to be. There is other evidence that points to Commander Huang Yu... Ahem, that is all I will say.” Deputy Zhou kept his voice down. “There is no point anymore in pursuing whether some matters are what they are made out to be.”

Qi Gang nodded, but still couldn’t help his curiosity. “I just want to know who the last person is. Was the third commander a senior executive of Silver Moon, someone in the martial world, or Yuan Shuo as some surmise?”

“That I don’t know.” Deputy Zhou shook his head. “But the truth will come to light sooner or later! Can it be kept a secret forever? Let’s move on from these boring topics. Emissary Qi, I hear that you are quite renowned in the central region. You are formidable and a very busy man, but they’ve sent you here in person this time! So central headquarters values this expedition quite highly. Have none of the other ministries sent their powerhouses?”

“I’m not sure, they may not have taken the same travel route that I did. Maybe they’re hidden among the supernaturals...” Qi Gang laughed. “I don’t count for much either. Talents abound in the

central region and powerhouses are as plentiful as the clouds. Most keep a low profile. We are just more visible in order to suppress the three great organizations.”

“The three great organizations are a scourge and a cancerous tumor!” Deputy Zhou sighed. “I do wish for Emissary Qi to fully display your abilities inside the ruins. Please kill as many as you can. Hou Xiaochen is hotly ambitious, so thank goodness we managed to get him to agree to leave after the excavation. Whether or not he obtains the origin weapon or dies inside, he must be forced out of the province!

“If he does, I hope that Emissary Qi will stay in Silver Moon. With a titan such as you in residence, we will sleep soundly at night.”

Chapter 429: Returning to Rift Canyon (III)

Qi Gang laughed dryly without saying a word. What was the deputy blathering on about? Hou Xiaochen was a Night Watcher, not of the provincial government. Qi Gang wouldn’t be able to join the agency even if he stayed. It’d make more sense for the Night Watcher central headquarters to send new people to replace Hou Xiaochen.

Deputy Zhou continued in a curious vein when Qi Gang remained quiet. “Those guys at the central Night Watcher headquarters cause trouble day in and day out. How come they haven’t come to Silver Moon this time to watch the show?”

“Them?” Qi Gang considered his response before responding, “They’ve... probably gone to watch a bigger show, or to cause greater trouble!” He shook his head. “Those youngsters want nothing more than for chaos to seize the world! I have no idea what the Night Watchers are thinking to let them roam around freely like this. I hear that they went to one of the Seven Divine Mountains a few days ago—Sky Roc Mountain.

“They pestered the roc that’s about to advance to the next stage and said they wanted to capture its young to train as their steeds. When I left, I heard there was a major monster spirit of Sky Roc Mountain chasing them. I don’t know where they are now.”

Deputy Zhou also shook his head with a sigh. He didn’t ask further. It looked like those people wouldn’t be able to make it to the ruins. Ah well.

.....

Rift Canyon was noisy and boisterous these days as everyone waited for the ruins to open again. They wanted to see the Gold Armor with their own eyes and set foot in the inner city. There were apparently mysterious power stones littered on the ground in the inner city!

A large truck stopped at the small town closest to Rift Canyon on September 26. The ruins would open the day after tomorrow. The town was only fifty kilometers away from the canyon—the team could make that in an hour at a forced march. They made faster time when walking through the barren plains.

However, Li Hao still called for a rest. He'd avoided everyone on their way back, particularly any balls of light he saw. There should be no one aware that he'd returned.

Naturally, he did not conceal their movement to ambush a target. He just wanted to understand the current situation. After checking in at an inn, he dialed a number. It rang—as he thought, that guy was close by.

The communicators were ineffective beyond five hundred kilometers out of White Moon City. That was barely the distance to Rift Canyon, but the other needed to be close by for the communicator to work.

“Are you... here?” Wang Ming asked excitedly on the other side.

“Mmhmm.”

“Where?”

“Where are you?”

“I’m at the military camp... My grandfather has come and will be entering the ruins. He’s grounded me and won’t let me walk out of the camp!” Wang Ming grumbled with resignation. “I only went for a lark around the wilderness near White Moon City with my friends, what did anything about disappearing evil supernaturals have to do with me? What’s the point of grounding me?”

“Hey, lemme tell you something, I’m mid Sunflare! I think I’m close to late Sunflare too, hahaha!!”

“Oh, congrats,” Li Hao mumbled. “Collect information for me, I want to know all of the powerhouses in the canyon! It’s best if there’s a picture of them too. Additionally, help me find out whether the leader of the Sword Sect has emerged from closed door cultivation yet. Is Southern Fist at Rift Canyon? So much has happened lately, give me a comprehensive report on everything.”

“I... need to write it out?” Wang Ming’s jaw dropped. You might as well take my life! I’ll tell everything if you’d come in person.

“Cut the crap,” Li Hao interrupted. “I’ll pay you one hundred cubes of mysterious power. Will you do it or not?”

“Eh, um...”

“And another mysterious power stone of the metal attribute.”

“No problem!” Wang Ming was overjoyed. “I’ll have it done overnight. When do you want it?”

“Walk out of camp when you’re done, I’ll come get it from you.”

“Alright!”

Li Hao shoved the communicator into his storage ring once he hung up, severing its connection to the outside world. He thought over his next steps and walked through the door of the neighboring room.

“Chief,” he transmitted. “We go to Rift Canyon tonight. The others can stay here for now. Battle Heaven is too dangerous.”

Liu Long nodded. It was indeed dangerous. He’d gone inside before and knew full well how terrifying the Golden Armor was.

“Are you going to convene with the rest of the Guards or Night Watchers?”

“Not for now,” Li Hao responded. “We’ll put on our armor and try to blend in with the other Guards entering, if there are any. We’ll keep a low profile if there aren’t, so we don’t become a public enemy before we’re even inside the ruins! It’s best to avoid showing our faces before people know we’re back. Otherwise, the status of Half Mountain and the others will be easily exposed as well.

“It’d be best if we can fool even Director Hou. If not, we’ll just tell them the truth.”

Liu Long glanced at the young man and said nothing. He nodded; he didn’t have an opinion on the matter. After some thought, he transmitted, “You should go through the second passageway this time. Although I didn’t gain anything from it, I vaguely sensed that there really was treasure inside. I couldn’t discover it, but you might with your sharp eyes.”

Befuddled, Li Hao still nodded in acknowledgement. Very well. The second passageway wasn’t dangerous to martial masters. No martial master had died in there.

After some conversation, the two settled in to wait for nightfall.

.....

Two figures traveled swiftly as soon as it was dark, rushing toward Rift Canyon.

Approximately one hour later.

Li Hao sucked in a sharp breath, his teeth aching at what he saw. Holy fuck! There were balls of light on all sides. The canyon was filled with supernaturals! An area of several thousand meters was as bright as day to him. Light was everywhere, so brilliant that his eyes watered.

Just how many supernaturals had come to this place??

There were too many Sunflares to be counted, a few dozen Solars, and an occasional Nova that sparkled so fiercely that he was about to go blind. How many were this, thousands of supernaturals?? Li Hao was highly taken aback that the ruins of Battle Heaven had drawn so many. Weren't they afraid of death?

Battle Heaven was not safe. He strongly suspected that the city's greatest danger came not from the army in residence, but a creature with a consciousness!

When he left, he'd sensed someone observing him. He would not be mistaken in that. Although he didn't see any big ball of light, it only indicated that the other wasn't a supernatural. They might be a martial master.

All of you guys are here to die!

Li Hao thoroughly sneered at them, suspecting that Hou Xiaochen might have another goal in mind with purposefully leaking the existence of Battle Heaven.

Otherwise, with the director's strength and the abilities of Silver Moon's wily old foxes, there wouldn't have been a joint expedition last month. How would Violet Moon and her ilk be worthy of being enemies with Hou Xiaochen and the rest?

But this was just as good. Li Hao actually needed to thank the man. If it wasn't for the director's actions, supernaturals would not visit Silver Moon. The young man wouldn't have a chance to do everything he'd done.

Li Hao led Liu Long away from some heavyweights and probed further in, also taking stock of each faction's strength as he did so.

Inside Rift Canyon.

Li Hao walked around the place with Liu Long in tow. Almost no one discovered them when they concealed their presences. So long as they didn't purposefully approach the powerhouses or display enmity, martial masters were unparalleled when it came to hiding. Even Li Hao wasn't able to discover martial masters around him.

However, the young man quickly found something amiss. A grave look entered his eyes. He motioned for Liu Long to quietly climb a cliff face.

"Chief, have you also noticed something off?" he transmitted.

A stern Liu Long nodded. "There seems... to be some martial masters among the crowd!"

Indeed, there were quite a few more martial masters among the delegation this time. It would seem that some secrets had leaked from the last expedition. Whether it was the three great organizations or other factions, all of them had brought some martial masters. It was difficult to gauge the strength of the new additions, but many of them had a layer of internal force around them. That meant they were at least peak Sunderer.

Martial masters could fly inside the city and easily take the second passageway. They could also conceal their presence to evade attack by Black Armors. Although there were no more Black Armors, it could also mean that the Gold Armor wouldn't be able to discover them. Therefore, all sides had brought martial masters for this excavation.

Some were renowned veteran martial masters, others were valiant talents that the organization had secretly trained. They were certainly all powerhouses. While none of them would be stronger than Solar, there should be Dominators. And for greater than Dominator... there might be, if sufficient mysterious power stones and other treasures were poured into them. That was a difficult conclusion to draw.

Apart from that, some of the Novas immensely surprised Li Hao. He saw a very young fellow being waited on, like he was a noble scion. There were people acting like servants in a barren place like the canyon, fetching water, preparing a bath, and even warming the bed...

Li Hao heard this through instructions being given by an old man. He couldn't determine the old man's level of strength either. The latter should be a martial master; one that wasn't that weak.

The youngster was a Nova, and judging from his ball of light, stronger than Half Mountain and the others! This was crazy. Li Hao had never seen a martial master live such a pampered life, supernaturals had it good!

It wasn't that martial masters didn't like a comfortable life, but that strong martial masters wouldn't think of bringing servants under such circumstances. It was such a boring proposition.

Li Hao was completely stunned after a walk through the area. The camps of the three great organizations were the only places that he didn't investigate. Just the small patch he'd wandered through showed him three Novas and eleven Solars!

Since when did Novas and Solars become so commonplace? Didn't they say that Novas were rare even in the central region?

Perturbed, Li Hao frowned deeply. His forehead quickly relaxed when he understood. Plainly, Battle Heaven had raised a great deal of attention. The Gold Armor that'd destroyed an origin weapon with one punch was a hot topic of discussion, as was the powerful Black Tortoise Seal origin weapon.

Is it the turtle of the Wangs? Li Hao wondered. It was feted on all sides, whereas no one seemed to be paying attention to the sword of the Lis. Did they all believe that the Night Watchers possessed the sword, or were they just pretending to not know that he had one too? Were they waiting for the right timing and purposefully not mentioning it at the moment?

He held both the sword of the Lis and blade of the Zhangs, but he'd given the blade to his teacher. I wonder if teacher has discovered anything else special about it, other than its powerful offensive capabilities? It's terrifying that so many powerhouses have come... I can't even fight an initial Nova.

Li Hao sighed inwardly, quite resigned by the situation.

Chapter 430: Secrets (I)

After Li Hao melded four auras together, he would stand a chance of fighting Novas. But as of now, he only had three and the Incantation of the Blade of Blood. Despite his incredibly fortified physical body and organs, he still wasn't confident enough to declare that he could stand against Novas.

His body and organs were much stronger than before, but the auras did not fall into the same system. His auras had remained at approximately the same level, which meant that his offensive power did not improve at the same rate. It was his defensive capabilities that'd increased many times over.

Li Hao put these thoughts out of his mind and set out to look for Wang Ming. He would cross-reference everything with who was in the canyon, then supplement the information of those who weren't officially registered. That would be the best way to discover all the powerhouses that'd come. Even if he missed some, it wouldn't be too many.

.....

Half an hour later, outside the military camp.

Clad in black armor, Li Hao stood outside the entrance as opposed to sneaking in. He raised a lot of attention—what was a Silver Moon Guard doing here? Their camp wasn't here.

"I'm looking for Wang Ming!" Li Hao called out gruffly beneath the visor. "Please let him know that a friend has come."

He struck a waiting pose and also took the chance to scan the balls of light in the military camp. There were quite a few! Of the Novas, he knew Hu Qingfeng's ball of flight. There was someone else stronger than him that Li Hao didn't recognize, and there was another that was also very strong. It startled the young man.

Three Novas? When did the military have so many?

While Hou Xiaochen and the others were possibly also here, they were too far away for Li Hao to catch a glimpse of. He could only see their piercing light when they were close. He was here posing as a Silver Moon Guard—no, he was a Guard. He was here with a concealed identity to await Wang Ming.

The handsome supernatural didn't present himself, but someone else who Li Hao recognized did. He didn't look at the old man, pretending not to recognize the other. Instead, the other beckoned to him.

"Come here!" The old man waved his hand again when Li Hao didn't move after a glance. "Yes, you. Stop looking and come here!"

Baffled, Li Hao had to walk over since the old man was indeed summoning him. "Greetings, sir!"

"Do you recognize me?"

"Yes, sir. Deputy Zhou of the provincial government!"

“Good!” The old man nodded with a smile. “I need to make a trip out and require an escort. You’re perfect, the Guards are all quite strong.”

Li Hao was struck dumb! You... want me to be your bodyguard? Yo, you’re from the provincial government and I’m from the Silver Moon Guards. We don’t belong to the same system and our institutions aren’t exactly friendly with each other. What do you want with me? Get someone from the military!

...or has he recognized me?

But that didn’t seem that possible because Li Hao had withdrawn all of his presence. Under normal circumstances, no one would discover him. Deputy Zhou was the only one of the senior executives that he couldn’t read. He might be a mundane, he might be a powerhouse. Regardless, the old man shouldn’t have identified Li Hao through the layer of armor, bronze mirror, and martial master... right?

“Sir, I’m waiting for someone...”

“Let that person wait,” Deputy Zhou chuckled. “You’ll do. I can’t be bothered locating someone else at this hour. Someone from the Guards sets me at ease. Plus, you’re obviously part of the core troops since you have a suit of armor. It’s a Night Watcher dereliction of duty if anything happens to me!”

Li Hao could say nothing. He could only mumble, “Yes sir! Where would you like to go?”

Where does a moldy old fart like you wanna go in the middle of the night?!

Deputy Zhou had already set foot outside camp. “Just follow me.”

Li Hao was incredibly dejected, but he couldn’t refuse. A Silver Moon Guard had no right to refuse escorting this personage. Even though the Silver Moon Guards and the provincial government

weren't of the same official system, the latter outranked the Guards. Even Hou Xiaochen would have to bow his head.

Deeply resigned, Li Hao had no choice but to let Wang Ming wait and follow the old man. The paths were winding and twisting in Rift Canyon. The old man almost fell over when he stumbled in the dim light.

Li Hao quickly reached out to give him a hand. You should be staying in camp at your old age! What are you doing out here so late at night?? Other thoughts ran through his head at the same time. Did he seek me out, or is this really a coincidence? He couldn't afford to underestimate any of the Silver Moon senior executives. All of them were terrifying people. Thus, he wouldn't dismiss even an old man that appeared perfectly normal to his eyes.

Take Hong Yitang, for example. Li Hao had seen the light of a Solar around him before, but there was no light when they met again in Ash Mountain. Not only was there no light, there was nothing at all. Hong Yitang appeared to be a martial master.

Therefore, sometimes Li Hao's eyes lied to him. As he grabbed Deputy Zhou, he wondered—are you really not afraid of anything bad happening to you? You've asked an unknown guard to escort you alone!

"I'm old now... I used to be able to walk fifty kilometers in one night and eat five bowls of rice in one meal. I'm old in the blink of an eye..." sighed Deputy Zhou, thinking back to his youth. "I envy you youngsters."

"Surely you jest, Deputy Zhou," Li Hao said in a muffled voice. "I'm not young either, I'm almost seventy."

"Now look who's joking." Deputy Zhou continued forward merrily. "I can tell from your voice that you're not too old, kiddo. You're joking with an old man like me."

Li Hao didn't say a word.

“Don’t be thinking that it’s a bad thing to escort me. It’s a good thing, not a bad thing! You’re lucky that you ran into me tonight.”

Li Hao was instantly vigilant and highly skeptical of the man. He’s not trying to lure me to an empty place and suddenly erupt like Hong Yitang so he can kill me, is he? Regardless of what the old man had in mind, something was off with his sudden appearance in the middle of the night.

Li Hao was on high alert and poised for action.

“Kiddo, good karma results from good deeds.” Deputy Zhou smiled as he walked. “You should choose your friends more wisely next time.”

Li Hao blinked, what did the deputy mean?

“Thank goodness that I’m the one who came out.” The deputy continued walking. “If I was a bit slower and Huang Yu or the others saw you instead... you’d be in trouble.”

Nerves stretched taut, Li Hao didn’t even dare continue walking forward.

Deputy Zhou turned back and gestured with a smile. “Come on, keep up. How come a bold fellow like you is losing your courage now?”

Now Li Hao could be certain, the other knew who he was! He stepped forward, but didn’t say anything.

“You should stay away from people like Wang Ming. They’re too dumb and will only drag you down. He’s running around asking this and that in the middle of the night, wanting to know all sorts of secret intelligence. He even grabbed colleagues from Classified Affairs to pump them for information. If it wasn’t for his grandfather, he’d already been thrown into the dungeons!

“Everyone’s curious who he’s collecting this information for, or if he just wants to sell it for some pocket money. And here you come along. If Huang Yu had come out before I did, he would’ve casually run you through on the spot.”

Li Hao could find absolutely no words to express himself. Ole Wang... you’re... such a blithering idiot! I told you to gather information, but you’re running straight to Classified Affairs?? You might as well announce through a bullhorn that you want top secret information!

You absolute fucking idiot!

Granted, Li Hao also knew that Wang Ming had no other options. He was grounded, so what did he know? But he wanted to make money and satisfy Li Hao’s request for more clarification. He probably thought it wasn’t a big deal if he was discovered. His grandfather would protect him, and it wasn’t like he was truly looking for sensitive information. He hadn’t thought that Li Hao would visit him openly... and be caught in the act.

The higher-ups in the military were keeping an eye on the development, wanting to find out who Wang Ming was working for. It was most likely Li Hao, but since Li Hao had yet to return even now, he didn’t seem to be a likely candidate. A caller had come for Wang Ming, but was commandeered by the deputy as soon as he showed up.

Li Hao didn’t say a word, finding the old man to be exaggerating things. No matter what, Commander Yu wouldn’t kill him without asking a single question. In fact, the man wouldn’t do anything at all after learning that he was Li Hao. The commander would just fake the honor of doing the young man a favor!

Li Hao had appeared out in the open because he wasn’t terribly concerned about being exposed. He just hadn’t expected to be exposed so quickly. Ole Wang was such an idiot that he barged around like a bull in a china shop!

“That’s very funny, Deputy Zhou!” Li Hao replied in a muffled voice. “I’ve simply been asked by others to visit Wang Ming. I’ve done nothing and am part of the Silver Moon Guards. How would

Commander Yu kill me for no reason at all? Even if he wanted to, he would ask Director Hou first. And so... don't scare me, deputy general."

Who does this old far think he's scaring? He's trying to tighten me in the middle of the night so he can do me a favor. It's obvious from your words that you have something to ask of me.

Deputy Zhou started laughing. He kept walking and headed for an area that was illuminated. "I really do have something to take care of tonight. I brought you along as a matter of convenience. Do you know what's ahead?"

"Rift Canyon."

No shit! Deputy Zhou's jaw nearly dropped. The little guy was better at nonsense than he was!

"I mean if you know which faction's camp it is."

"Nope." Li Hao peered ahead and saw a massive ball of light. There was a Nova there! Anyone who was a Nova was a well known individual, but he was indeed unaware of their particulars.

"You have a need to meet them," said the old man as he continued walking. "There's someone there from the military, but he has not declared his identity. Do you know what the military's supernatural organization is called?"

"Yes, the Skystar Troops!" Li Hao knew of it because Wang Ming had told him about it before. The Inspectorate was the first to create an official supernatural agency—the Night Watchers. Then came the Supervisory Office of the Ministry of Administration, the Skystar Troops of the Ministry of Armed Forces, and the Trade Security Committee of the Ministry of Commerce...

As the Night Watchers grew too strong to control, the nine ministries ceased supplying them with supernatural recruits and created their own instead. They'd poured their resources into one agency at first because there'd been no other option. They needed an official supernatural agency to quickly

find its footing in the changing world. Now that the ministries were in control again, they flexed their muscles as the heart of the dynasty and quickly built their own supernatural agencies.