

Star Gate 481

Chapter 481: Judgment (III)

Hong Yitang thought for a while when he saw that the two had disappeared. “Let’s be prepared. Hou Xiaochen and Kong Jie have probably gone to cut them off. They’re going to force the supernaturals into the city so we can band together to kill them all.”

“How are... the martial uncles seeing this?” Li Hao blinked. He didn’t read that intention from Hou Xiaochen.

“We’re old acquaintances and well familiar with each other,” He Yong said dismissively. “That guy is Sickly—he was the most calculating out of the three commanders, which was why he was born with a feeble constitution. Even the heavens found him too evil and penalized him in other ways.”

“Didn’t you say that there aren’t many bad guys who know the spear?”

“Yes, and he’s one of those few!” He Yong chuckled. “He deserves to cough everyday!”

“That’s enough, cut the nonsense and rumormongering,” Hong Yitang said gruffly. “It doesn’t matter whether or not he’s evil. The Broken Will Spear that he practices contains such a strong mind intent that his body cannot support it. That’s why his health has lagged ever since he started martial dao.

“That mind intent turned even more unbearable when he started strengthening his organs. He actually ran the risk of becoming supernatural before as he broke his lock, which later healed by itself. I will probably be no match for him if he truly unsealed himself. He’s terrifying!

“He Yong is nothing compared to him. Although He Yong sent him flying with one punch, Hou Xiaochen would run him through with one jab if he did that again!”

He Yong curled his lip. Who are you looking down on? One jab? Of course not! It'll take three to five!

Startled, Li Hao stared at the two. "Are you saying that he's... stronger than you guys?"

"Stronger than me, at least," He Yong had to grumble despite his reluctance. "He's not necessarily stronger than Ole Hong though. They might be the same. Kong Jie is slightly weaker, but that bastard is a hair stronger than me. However, I dare unseal myself, do they? So if it really comes down to it and our lives are on the line—I'll die, but they won't be any better off for it!"

Li Hao looked at He Yong. So... you're the weakest!

"What about Light Sword?"

"Her?" He Yong mused for a bit before replying. "She's not bad, generally on par with Kong Jie. She cultivated very quickly, but there's drawbacks as well—ones that are much more obvious than ours. You can tell from her current appearance. Other than those four, it's me, Yu Luocho, then Golden Spear. Berserk Blade... is a bit weaker."

"Yu Luocho isn't weak, I think she's converted back." Hong Yitang gave a half smile.

"Pfft!" He Yong snorted. "Yu Luocho should find her own path first. What's so impressive about relying on Hou Xiaochen! Have her unseal her strength and see if she's as strong as me. I'll kill her in three punches!"

He was very willing to admit someone was stronger than him. But if someone was weaker, he would never speak well of their capabilities. He didn't think much of Yu Luocho since she depended on Hou Xiaochen. Granted, she was strong in her own right.

From this, Li Hao drew the conclusion that the manager was probably weaker than Southern Fist. Or they matched each other at best. Otherwise, He Yong wouldn't speak in such firm tones. Even so, she was very strong. Perhaps she could unseal her strength like the others. If that was the case, then she was not to be underestimated.

“Can Golden Spear and the others not unseal themselves?” Li Hao asked.

“What do you think?” He Yong half rolled his eyes. “Not all martial masters can unseal themselves. Golden Spear has yet to reach the limit of his path—he needs to attain the peak of a certain aspect, whether it’s blood qi, the physical body, or mind intent. A martial master strengthens his supernatural locks only when he is no longer able to improve himself. The locks need to be at a certain level before they can be undone.

“Otherwise, it’s not an unsealing, but a direct crossover to the supernatural. If Golden Spear breaks his, he’ll be a supernatural. He won’t bring out more battle strength from himself!”

“You need to reach a certain level and a certain strength of supernatural lock before you can unseal it.” Hong Yitang inclined his head. “Golden Spear is a little below that level. But if he breaks Hou Xiaochen’s mind intent, then the possibility is there!”

“Him? I say zero possibility.” He Yong shook his head. “It happened too early—his thoughts were affected so many years ago. He might have some hope otherwise, or he can imitate Yu Luocho and fully abandon his own system. He can just follow Hou Xiaochen in everything—he might have a chance then. This guy is stubborn and keeps flip-flopping between wanting to make his own way or putting his hopes in Hou Xiaochen. Even his concentration is a bit inferior to the rest.”

Li Hao knew a little of what they spoke of, but not really. It seemed that Golden Spear and Berserk Blade were unable to unseal their strength, more was the pity.

“So do you two mean that they wish to work together to eliminate the three great organizations?”

“Yes!”

“That’s good then!” Li Hao laughed. “From my observations, it seems that the three great organizations don’t lack for Novas and Solars. Just us or the official authorities alone won’t be able to take them. Together, however, there shouldn’t be a problem!”

He looked at the three Silver Armors with contemplation. “Then Director Hou probably means for us to attack with the three troop leaders and director general of Security. If the two martial uncles and me are included, that should grant us an easy victory!”

“It is somewhat difficult for the three Silver Armors to face Novas if they do not reawaken,” Hong Yitang chuckled. “They probably hope for you to convince the Gold Armor. Hou Xiaochen doesn’t wish to unseal himself as he’s afraid of complications arising. Otherwise, he would do it himself.”

Li Hao understood the situation and jumped off the city walls instead of saying anything else.

“Where are you going?”

“To ask Director General Wang for help!”

“We’re just guessing, you...”

Li Hao didn’t care; he ran toward the city lord manor. Just a guess was enough. His own logic resulted in these conclusions as well. It wasn’t just the director general, but he was also prepared to look for the commander!

Indeed, the commander who’d punched him.

The Gold Armor’s purpose would be straightforward and easy—stay in hiding to guard against Hou Xiaochen and the others! Such were Li Hao’s thoughts. Who knew what Hou Xiaochen and the others thought? Perhaps they would turn their eyes toward Battle Heaven after eliminating the three great organizations. If the Gold Armor made its move then, even the province’s highest authorities would be captured!

No one knew that there was another Gold Armor inside the city. It would be quite a shock when it appeared! Although He Yong had said to do whatever he wanted, Li Hao had to keep something back if he needed to.

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Half an hour later.

A satisfied Li Hao walked out of the manor. The director general hadn't had any other opinions. If it wasn't for the fact that he couldn't leave the city, he'd want to eradicate the outsiders himself. Since that opportunity was on the table, there was nothing to refuse.

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The military barracks.

Li Hao entered that office again with the Red Armor in the lead. The commander seemed to be busy with work; what kind of work was there to be had when the soldier was dead? The young man didn't know whether to play it cool or not. This Gold Armor didn't seem as friendly as the director general.

"Speak!" barked the commander in cold tones.

After Li Hao explained himself, the soldier raised his eyes for a look at Li Hao. "You mean for me to hide and take action only when those people show signs of attacking?" His voice was exceedingly calm.

"Yes."

“Then why don’t we make the first move? Why must we wait?”

Li Hao blinked before saying, “They are Silver Moon... officials of the province that I currently serve in. Silver Moon is a decent place and their Director Hou has saved me before. I cannot break with him before he betrays me.”

That had been his mindset all along. So long as Hou Xiaochen treated him in a friendly way, so would Li Hao show him the same courtesy back. The young man was abruptly confused when questioned—was this a good way of thinking?

The commander contemplated as Li Hao thought. “Alright then, that is indeed the case! I would like to not take action if I can help it. Me and the one inside the city lord manor expends a great deal of the city’s energy whenever we engage in battle. Compared to killing people, decreasing our consumption is more important.”

“Oh, thank you commander!”

“You need to correct this bad habit!” the commander snapped. “Next time you say understood! Or order received! This means you’ve heard it and understand your orders. Do not be so cavalier in front of your superiors, understood?”

“Got it!”

“...get out of here!” The Gold Armor waved him off and couldn’t be bothered with him.

Li Hao blinked, then quickly realized. “Understood!” He left with a neat turn of his heel. This guy’s got such a huge temper! Director General Wang is much better. That was just a subconscious response because I was still processing. He’s so mean!

The commander thought for a moment and pulled out a sheet of paper—the one discussing Li Hao's condition. He added a line after some thought. "Possesses an intuitive discernment of right and wrong. Adequate potential. Intelligence... remains to be seen!"

He thought for a moment longer and added a final line. "Impudent of regulation, disorderly without clarity. He must undergo training when the New Recruit Hall recovers function!"

Li Hao was plainly oblivious of what had just taken place and knew even less that the commander had added some additional lines of assessment. He'd clearly written that Li Hao must undergo new recruit training to understand what true rule and regulation were.

If he knew, he would probably regret ever going to this guy. Right now, he was in good spirits. Agreement from both Gold Armors meant he was highly confident of the operation to come. He would earn a round of merits too. Would they be doubled again this time?

He returned to the city walls and looked into the distance, ready to await the next happenings.

Chapter 482: Commencing (I)

Night had fallen. Day and night were similar in the ancient city—the Tortoise Pagoda's light dimmed slightly at night. The expedition team had entered the ruins on the morning of the 28th. It was now the second day and the night of the 29th. The third day would be up tomorrow evening and everyone would be free to leave.

All was quiet. The three great organizations no longer wished to enter the inner city. They just wanted to leave as soon as possible.

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At the platform at the end of the tree tunnel.

Hou Xiaochen looked at the wall. It sparkled with luster when midnight arrived. That meant that people could leave the ruins so long as there were those outside working in tandem to open the way.

However, the Night Watcher director didn't make a move. He waited and watched. The illumination would vanish after half an hour, leaving those inside to wait until tomorrow evening. That was twenty-three hours in between that the ruins would be entirely sealed off, giving no chance for anything to leave.

There seemed to be some movement in the surroundings—the three great organizations had sent scouts to follow the Night Watcher director. Some wanted to try the wall when they saw it sparkle, but had to give up the inclination when they saw Hou Xiaochen standing there.

Those following the man gave up entirely when the wall no longer shimmered and returned to being an ordinary wall. There was nothing else they could do!

However, some of their fear abated when they thought of how everyone would leave tomorrow.

On the platform.

Hou Xiaochen watched silently and smiled faintly when the wall returned to an inert state. No one was leaving the city in the next twenty-three hours. The rest was up to the fellows that'd become part of the Battle Heaven Army. He turned and walked toward the tree hole. Those that'd followed him quickly dispersed. Hou Xiaochen didn't care about them—earlier, later, it didn't matter.

Kong Jie suddenly appeared when he walked out. Hou Xiaochen glanced at him. The latter's arms were crossed and flashed a smile in response.

"Aren't you afraid of the three great organizations ganging up on you in the central region after this?" he transmitted. "Their wealthy patrons are also likely to be in a rage."

"What does that have to do with me? It's just so very dangerous inside the city."

"Who's going to believe that?"

“Who cares? We just need an excuse.”

Kong Jie laughed and said nothing more. He turned to look at the inner city and sank into deep thought. “Things will be fine on Yu Luochoa’s end, right?”

“They should be fine. It all depends on what Li Hao thinks.”

“Him? Can’t Hong Yitang and He Yong make the call?”

“No.” Hou Xiaochen shook his head after some thought. “Don’t forget that the Silver Armor is Li Hao! That guy looks easy to talk to, but he really isn’t. He acts timid, but he’s actually rotten to the core.”

Kong Jie nearly burst out laughing. Who are you to say someone else is rotten to the core? He didn’t respond to that point and continued chatting with Hou Xiaochen.

The three great organizations and wandering cultivators looked in their direction, watching the two discuss something. The three temporary leaders of Green Moon, the Parity King, and Elder Crimson, as well as the young man from the Liu family of the Ministry of Finance and the wandering cultivator from the Director General Office in Near River held their own conversation.

“Hou Xiaochen and Kong Jie are definitely plotting something. Everyone be careful!” Their side was very strong with the three great organizations, wandering cultivators, and nine Novas. Although they lacked Light Sword and Yuan Xingwu, there were thirty-two of them in total when the Solars were included. Theirs was a formidable group.

The remaining five hundred wandering cultivators were nearly all Sunflares; the weak ones had died long ago. Many elites had come from various northern provinces and the central region. Sadly, the number of circulating northern wandering cultivators would ebb after this excavation.

Green Moon was well versed in the ways of the world and was dismayed to see the two chatting. She quickly transmitted warnings to all sides.

“Hou Xiaochen, Kong Jie, Golden Spear, and Yu Luochoa are all on par with Novas. While Berserk Blade is less than them, he still manages to count as a Nova. There’s also Hu Dingfang and other strong powerhouses from the military that are peak Solars... If Qi Gang and Hu Qingfeng are added to them, their Nova level battle strength is fearsome despite their small delegation!”

While the Silver Moon official delegation was small, every single person was a heavyweight. Their weakest was late Solar. The group went on the alert after Green Moon’s words.

“Um...” Blue Moon suddenly transmitted. “Hu Qingfeng has contacted us to ask that if he... He and Qi Gang are wondering if we’ll accept them in crucial moments. What do you say?”

“Can Hu Qingfeng be trusted?” Elder Crimson quickly asked.

“We should be able to,” responded the Parity King. “I don’t know about Qi Gang, but Hu Qingfeng is obsessed with accomplishing something great, yet is as timid as a mouse and deeply afraid of death. He previously thought that he could take down Hou Xiaochen and contacted us for a joint operation. At the very least, he wanted to force Hou Xiaochen into open rebellion.

“He then felt that Hou Xiaochen was too strong when two of his men were killed. He immediately abandoned the plan when he sensed danger. He is under Yellow Dragon’s banner—Yellow Dragon doesn’t actually wish for Hou Xiaochen to enter the central region as that would mean another competitor...

“I’m not too familiar with Qi Gang, but Hu Qingfeng should be well aware of his circumstances so long as he is no fool. He’s seen too much and won’t make it out alive if he doesn’t throw himself on our mercy.”

The three great organizations were more or less familiar with Hu Qingfeng. The youngster from the Liu family of the Ministry of Finance transmitted, “That’s right, Hu Qingfeng is someone who

fawns over those superior to him and steps on those beneath him. It's true that he'll do anything to survive. His first reaction upon running into danger is to hide. All of the Novas know a little about him."

The various sides focused on Hu Qingfeng, thinking that the man must be scared out of his wits. And that indeed was the case. If it wasn't for Hou Xiaochen recruiting him, Hu Qingfeng would have no other thought in mind other than to turn to the three great organizations and seek protection. Thus, the group wasn't terribly surprised about his expression of loyalty.

"Does anyone know Qi Gang well?" Green Moon was more curious about this person. "He's from the provincial government, will Hou Xiaochen touch him? He's here on behalf of Silver Moon and if he's the only one to die while the others are fine..."

"I don't think there's a need to think about that. No matter what, it's best if we can all settle on a united front at this moment! I'm most worried about Earthturner Sword and Southern Fist allying with Hou Xiaochen from within the city!"

Hou Xiaochen's side was very strong, but he would suffer losses all the same if the two camps met in a clash. The only way that would be avoided was if Hou Xiaochen exploded with the same ferocious strength that Earthturner Sword and Southern Fist had.

"Those inside the city can't come out. We need to be cautious of Earthturner Sword, Southern Fist, and Li Hao..."

"....." The group chattered one after another, not knowing what the best course of action was. But after comparing their strengths, they felt that it was best to placate Hu Qingfeng and Qi Gang for the moment.

Meanwhile, Green Moon tried contacting Light Sword. The latter was likely to ignore whoever reached out to her, but Green Moon had been a Silver Moon martial master. Although she hadn't been that famous, they could at least exchange a few words. She hoped to bring the illustrious swordswoman over to their side.

Light Sword was exceedingly powerful. Southern Fist had gone on such a thorough rampage, but she'd only flown backward with minimal injuries when he punched her. She seemed fine at the moment, a testament to her formidable strength.

As for Yuan Xingwu... no one bothered reaching out to him. The three great organizations knew of his background as Yuan Shuo's eldest disciple. While this person led a few Solars from the Skystar Troops and quietly hid off to the side without joining the Silver Moon delegation, the three great organizations wouldn't trust one of Yuan Shuo's disciples. They would take He Yong over one of Yuan Shuo's line any day. The three great organizations didn't trust a single person from the old man's faction.

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The inner city.

Manager Yu silently crept over. The Black Armors at the gates didn't move against her, they remained very quiet. Even the three Silver Armors on the city walls watched her silently. The key in her hand was the proper token. She hadn't caused any trouble in the fight against Hong Yitang and had refrained from killing soldiers of the army. Thus, although the three troop leaders knew that she was an outsider, they elected to ignore her.

The rules were that simple at times. The Silver Armors did not have the authorization to modify the rules of the Visitor Pagoda. No one apart from the city lord and commander-in-chief could accomplish that.

Manager Yu looked up at Li Hao on the wall instead of continuing to move forward. The young man smiled at the woman hidden in the darkness. Hong Yitang and He Yong were right on the money.

"Manager, we'll strike if you can force them into the outer city! The Gold Armor will attack those inside the city, as will the three powerful Silver Armors..."

Manager Yu considered Li Hao. The young man looked quite at ease. She thought for a while and transmitted, “We need the three of you to assist us outside the city!”

“We can’t!” Li Hao declined. “We have the army supporting us when we’re in the city, but it’s too dangerous if we leave. I don’t mind, however, the two martial uncles aren’t at ease when it comes to the director. There’s nothing I can do.”

Leaving the city to help created the biggest problem of the Battle Heaven Army being unable to help the three. They would be in grave trouble if it was a trap. What if Hou Xiaochen colluded with the three great organizations to eliminate the trio first?

Was that possible?

Very likely!

This kind of result was unacceptable to the young man.

Manager Yu was speechless. What martial uncles not being at ease? You’re the one worried! Li Hao was too paranoid!

“What are you suspicious of, Li Hao? The director would’ve acted long ago if he wanted to. You wield the true sword of the Lis. He’s known that for a while and still lent you the Flaming Phoenix Spear and killed Red Hair for you. You think too much!”

“I just told you, I can leave the city, but the two martial uncles are worried. They both attacked the director earlier, so Martial Uncle Southern Fist refused to work together. I spent a long time convincing them and resolving the martial uncles’ worries. Don’t make things tough for me, please. I, for one, trust the director.”

Chapter 483: Commencing (II)

“.....” Manager Yu didn’t want to say anything else. Li Hao continuously name-dropped “martial uncles”, “Southern Fist”, “making things tough”, and “trusting the director”. In reality, those two hadn’t made a peep. She understood there was no room to negotiate. “Await our signal!”

The woman vanished on the spot.

He Yong chuckled on the city walls and transmitted to Li Hao, “Kid, do you lie at the drop of a hat without even breathing hard?”

“I did that for my martial uncles.” Li Hao grinned. “Not to mention, I want to see how strong Director Hou and the others are. They aren’t weak. Even if Light Sword joins the skirmish, I think they have a chance of holding the battle in the outer city. Martial Uncle Hong simply needs to suffer some consequences when he unseals himself some, can’t Director Hou and Inspector General Kong do the same?”

He Yong didn’t respond. The group of them stood silently on the city walls and waited for the Silver Moon authorities to make their move. They did indeed need to be careful—Hou Xiaochen was too cunning.

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Outside the city.

Hou Xiaochen looked into the distance, then glanced back at Kong Jie. “Then let us begin. I’ll leave the three Yama Novas to you while I take care of Green Peacock on Red Moon’s side. She still has some strength left to her. Little Yu and Golden Spear can take care of Celestial. Qi Gang will face the guy from Near River, and Hu Qingfeng... can play with the kid from the Lius.”

All of the Novas had their targets, but Kong Jie transmitted, “What about Light Sword?”

“We can ignore her!”

“How are you that confident?” Kong Jie was worried. Hou Xiaochen plainly felt that the swordswoman wouldn’t intervene. However, wasn’t she concerned about the possibility that they’d all turn on her once they eliminated the others?

“Trust me, Light Sword hasn’t completely lost her mind!”

“Then what about Yuan Xingwu and those from the Skystar Troops?”

Hou Xiaochen frowned at this possibility, but abruptly grinned. “Don’t care! We can leave that to Li Hao!”

Indeed, he had a plan for that as well. Yuan Xingwu was hard to manage, so he could be left to Li Hao! Hu Dingfang was also here, he should be familiar with Yuan Xingwu. Perhaps the two had worked together before. It was indeed a difficult proposition to neutralize the man. Therefore, he could be Li Hao’s problem. It would be an opportunity to assess Li Hao’s methods and his thoughts as well.

“Then the wandering cultivators and Solars...”

“We’ll just disperse them, they can’t get away. What do you think they’ll do once Novas start fighting?”

Attack en masse?

Absolutely not! If a bunch of terrified fellows could mob supreme powerhouses at a moment like this, that would make them elite troops instead of wandering cultivators. Even the Silver Moon Guards might find it difficult to keep their footing in similar circumstances.

Meanwhile, the army inside the city still possessed their morale and mettle. They could probably strike back if faced with such a development. When it came to the wandering cultivators... Hou Xiaochen thought nothing of them.

Their numbers weren't the strength that the three great organizations thought of so fondly. When so many wandering cultivators were gathered, they could probably beat several dozen Solars to death. However, strength wasn't a simple mathematical equation. Five hundred wandering cultivators might not bring the strength of fifty supernaturals to bear. They could fight when they were on the winning side, but when the odds were against them?

Kong Jie smiled. All there was left to do was to wait for Yu Luocho's return.

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On the outskirts of the other city.

Light Sword kept looking into the city, permitting Green Moon to chatter on. She ignored the Red Moon member. When she saw a shadow flash past out of the corner of her eye, Light Sword focused to see that Yu Luocho had appeared close by. These people were plainly about to make a move.

Green Peacock was too unfamiliar with them! She was still trying to sway her counterpart when Light Sword coughed gently.

"Ying Hongyue is as confident as ever," she sighed softly. Green Moon blinked, why were they talking about the leader?

"I'm going into the city for a look, you guys have fun!" Light Sword coughed again and darted into the outer city, her movements catching people by surprise.

How did anyone dare enter the city now? Wasn't she afraid of the Gold Armor and Earthturner Sword? She'd been sent flying by one blow from Southern Fist earlier, wasn't she just going to her death now?

Green Moon blinked, unable to comprehend Light Sword's actions. Even if revenge was on her mind, she should wait until they resolved certain problems together or reached another accord. Waiting for that moment would be much safer than now.

Light Sword said nothing; she strode straight toward the inner city gates.

Hou Xiaochen was poised for action not too far away, but abruptly paused when he saw the development. Confusion swam in his eyes as he looked at Light Sword.

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The inner city gates.

Li Hao and the others were likewise surprised by Light Sword's decisive momentum. What was she doing inside the city, not having taken the second passageway? Of course, martial masters could fly so long as they didn't let their power leak. Li Hao had tried that before. The key thing was, this was Li Hao's territory.

Light Sword reached the inner city gates moments later and looked up at those on the city walls. Her gaze ultimately settled on Li Hao; she smiled at the young man. "Li Hao, Yuan Shuo's disciple, is that right? Perhaps Earthturner Sword and Southern Fist has told you about my strength. Do you think I can kill you if I snap all of my supernatural locks? Or do you think those two can stop me before I get to you?

"They can recover their locks and they dare not snap them all to release all of their potential. I, however, dare."

Li Hao frowned.

“You shattered some of my hopes, which is no different from taking my life,” she murmured to herself. “You should not have killed Xu Feng. Or rather, I wouldn’t mind if you’d waited a bit longer to exterminate all of the Xus. You should not have killed Xu Feng in this moment.”

“So what if I did?” Li Hao raised a brow. “Does the senior wish to kill me? Or fight to the death right here and now? You are very confident and I believe that senior is formidable, but you think too little of Battle Heaven if you think you can kill me here!”

“It’s not that I think too little of the ancient city—but aren’t there people waiting for you outside the city?” Light Sword coughed, her presence began growing. “Promise me one thing, Li Hao, and I will drop the matter of Xu Feng’s death.”

“A condition?” Li Hao looked at the androgynous elder. “Please go ahead, senior.”

Light Sword was quiet for a moment before beginning, “It must have something to do with you that both Southern Fist and Earthturner Sword are willing to erupt with full strength. There’s no need to deny anything. Southern Fist has kept to himself all these years in the central region, but he finds his courage as soon as he comes here. You or the city must be the key, but overall, it must have something to do with you.”

Li Hao thought for a bit and nodded. That was true.

“I know that you might not be willing to do anything else, but I only have one request. If there comes a day in which I have to break my supernatural locks, I’ll do my utmost to prevent them from snapping all the way through and come to you. You must help me suppress them that one time!”

Li Hao blinked. What... was this? What did she mean?

“Not now, but perhaps... sometime in the future!”

“And if I don’t agree?” Li Hao frowned.

“That’s not a big problem,” Light Sword laughed. “Your enemies will just increase by another martial master who can break her locks at any time and unleash power that is double or triple what He Yong brought to bear earlier. This is both a threat and not a threat! You have severed my path and if you continue to refuse me, you will force me down another path!”

Li Hao remained silent. Was it a difficult condition?

Not really, it was just expending resources. The crux of the issue was, he was being threatened into helping the other. Light Sword’s meaning was clear—him dispatching Xu Feng disrupted some of her plans or solutions to her problems.

Off to the side, He Yong curled his lip. What are you carrying on about? Double or triple my strength? Bullshit!

Granted, the woman would be very strong if she broke all of her supernatural locks. He Yong and Hong Yitang decided to hold their peace and see how Li Hao would respond.

“Senior’s condition is not a simple one!” Li Hao breathed out gently. “I fought Xu Feng in open combat, he deserves his death! But an older one comes along after I killed the younger one... Fine, I bow to the situation! But since the senior is acting this way, we shall follow the rules of the martial world. You bully the weak and I cannot measure up to the senior. Let us wait for my teacher’s return! If my teacher desires a match after he returns, I hope the senior will accept the challenge!”

A light glittered in Light Sword’s eyes. Li Hao was being very clear—he acquiesced to the situation he was in, but she was bullying the weak. If Yuan Shuo came back, he was certain to exact revenge from her. Whether it was a fight to the death or not would be determined then.

Yuan Shuo was very weak at the moment, initial Nova at most. But he wouldn’t be weak forever—everyone believed that!

Light Sword didn't anticipate that Li Hao would send out his teacher instead of declaring that he would seek revenge himself. In fact, both He Yong and Hong Yitang were rather surprised. Li Hao had just killed a mid Nova, after all!

Though all of them looked askance at Li Hao, the young man didn't say a word. There was nothing to it! He wanted to give his teacher some motivation and pressure. Your disciple's being bullied by others who've come calling. Are you done melding the five auras together yet? If not, I'm going to take revenge myself!

Li Hao had already thought things through—he was going to release the news when he left the ruins so that his teacher knew that Light Sword was bullying him. Yuan Shuo wasn't willing to come back to Silver Moon yet. If he did, Li Hao had a lot of sword energy to share with him. The old man could meld five auras anytime he wanted to. In contrast, how many Red Moon members would he have to kill to obtain sufficient blood energy to complete the five auras?

Chapter 484: Commencing (III)

"Alright!" Light Sword said nothing else. Since Li Hao had said so, then let it be so. She would wait for Yuan Shuo!

He Yong laughed and looked meaningfully at the swordswoman. Veteran martial masters were all highly confident in Yuan Shuo without considering how strong he actually was at the moment. Light Sword had likely just created enormous future trouble for herself.

The woman took in a deep breath and turned without a word. She would wait! If she succeeded, she wouldn't be afraid of Yuan Shuo even if he completed training that so-called Summoner of Spirit.

"She looks to be in a hurry!" Hong Yitang suddenly laughed out loud when she left. "And Li Hao, you're going to release the news, aren't you?"

"Yes."

“Then... things will be interesting. Your teacher will likely have to fight Ying Hongyue to the death in the days to come. I don’t know if your news is forcing yourself, your teacher, or Ying Hongyue down a narrow path.”

Li Hao smiled as well. “It’s all the same. With pressure comes motivation. My teacher is thus, I am thus.”

As Light Sword walked out of the city and the group conversed, a massive explosion rang through the air!

“You’re crazy, Hou Xiaochen!” Green Moon howled. “How dare you attack us! Do you think those in the city will really help you?!”

Decisive to a fault, Hou Xiaochen had made his move. He couldn’t be bothered to wait after Light Sword left. Battle commenced in a split second.

Rumble!!

Consecutive explosions blasted through the air and a flaming red spear illuminated the void. It swept through the air and suppressed the late Nova Green Moon and mid Nova Blue Moon.

Kong Jie’s fists slammed down, forcing the Parity King backwards. He kept the three Yama Novas at bay all by himself!

The battle was on!

Just as Hou Xiaochen thought, the wandering cultivators scattered in all directions when the Novas clashed. No matter if there was another way out of the ruins or not, they fled in panicked horror!

.....

He Yong itched to join the action. “It’s merits as far as the eye can see!” He looked down the wall. “Li Hao, are we really not going out there?”

Li Hao landed on the ground inside the city and swiftly flew toward the gate. “Let’s wait by the gate, but stay inside. Be careful that our director might take us down with the rest of the enemy.”

The trio swiftly flew to the gates, followed shortly by the three Silver Armors. Director General Wang did not make an appearance. Panther ran with the group, excitedly following his human.

.....

BOOM!

While the battle had erupted with abrupt ferocity, both sides were prepared. The three great organizations had been afraid of the Silver Moon authorities taking action, so they were ready to respond. Even so, Green Moon and the others came under enormous pressure when actual battle was joined!

Hou Xiaochen ripped through all of their defenses with jab after jab. Blue Moon and Green Moon could not withstand the awful pressure and threw caution to the wind, summoning their origin weapons.

The Party King was the same. An origin weapon shaped like a house floated to the fore, enveloping the area and turning it into a sinister hell. Countless minor ghosts appeared in the hell and pounced on Kong Jie!

Kong Jie’s blood qi was ferocious enough to rip through innumerable ghosts with one massive explosion. “I was yet to clearly sense Yama’s bloodlust before,” he sighed. “But now, I can feel some of it. Parity, your origin weapon is nothing good. These dead souls are your victims, aren’t they? There are thousands here, did you once massacre a city?!”

A vicious expression hung on the Parity King's face as he cursed to himself. If it wasn't for the lack of his sixteen hell masters, it should be them wielding the origin weapon. Combined with the Avici Iron Net, his strength would be sufficient to overcome even a peak Nova! But now... damn it!

How he raged at his circumstances! Yama had been quite confident in sending him here as he was very strong and reinforced by the sixteen hell masters. He was stronger than Green Moon, but now he was a far cry from that. It was all Li Hao's fault... Where had his hell masters gone?! Were they dead?? He quite regretted letting Revolution leave with them.

"Stop forcing me, Kong Jie!"

"Looks like that's what I wanna do!"

BOOM!

Another punch blasted forth as Kong Jie sent blood qi soaring to the heavens! He was as if a roaring lion, a ferocious tiger broken out of its cage!

Li Hao turned to He Yong with surprise. "Is he Northern Fist?"

"No." He Yong shook his head. "Northern Fist doesn't fight like that. His fists are like Ole Hong's sword—boundless, majestic, and vast. Kong Jie's fists are those of bloodlust. Mine are of domination! If this guy hadn't joined the government, we would've been the Three Fists of Silver Moon. Since he did, we didn't give him a place on the ranking."

"Is he one of the three commanders?"

"No." He Yong shook his head again. "Hou Xiaochen is one of them, the other is like Huang Yun. The last... could be your Director General Zhao. We're not sure."

“Deputy Zhou also seems to be a powerhouse...”

“Him?” He Yong thought for a bit. “Who knows? He’s worked with Zhao for many years. Perhaps the third commander is two people?”

Li Hao blinked, that was a possibility he hadn’t considered before. But, considering their many years of partnership, that was possible. As a royal instructor, He Yong knew a lot of inside intelligence. Since he had said so, he must have his reasons and theories.

As they chatted, the first to flare with power was none other than Yu Luochoa!

Manager Yu’s presence was like a demon’s—sinister and malevolent! Her opponent was Elder Crimson of Celestial, a mid Nova assassin. He’d disappeared into the void, but suddenly reappeared with an ominous air around him. Yu Luochoa slammed her palm outward, delivering a nauseating sensation with a pungent scent of gore so dense that it was putrid.

Li Hao’s eyes widened. Her killing intent was so strong! How many had she killed to accumulate that?

“Yu Luochoa’s Luochoa Palm is honed through killing. She was no kind soul either in her day. Without your teacher commanding attention after killing some famous martial masters, the demon of the martial world would be her!”

“The three commanders didn’t kill her?” Li Hao asked with surprise. Her hands were covered in blood. Had Hou Xiaochen shown her mercy just because she was a woman?

“Her story is complicated,” He Yong chuckled. “She joined the martial world for revenge. She comes from a family of martial masters, but her family was butchered by others. She forged her way in blood, reaping the lives of her enemies. Although she killed many in the name of avenging her family, Hou Xiaochen likely had his own rules of assessment. He didn’t kill her.

“Old lecher Ying Hongyue then set his sights on her, she left with him when the supernatural rose. She doesn’t cleave to a sense of right or wrong and joined Hou Xiaochen probably because he was a handsome lad back in the day. He showed her mercy, she became his fangirl, and so you have your Manager Yu.”

Li Hao said no further, simply watching Yu Luochoa’s bloody palm. Its killing intent was so strong and the scent of gore so dense that even the premier assassin’s cloak was ripped to shreds. A young face came into view—Elder Crimson was rather young!

“Yu Luochoa...”

BOOM!

Crimson wanted to say something, yet Yu Luochoa was in no mood to talk. She thrust palm after palm in a frenzied fashion, at complete odds with her usual calm. She stopped when a black origin weapon manifested in front of the other. When his battle strength soared, Yu Luochoa grunted and summoned a pair of thin, scarlet gloves to her hands.

The scent of gore increased by thirty percent when she slammed her hand down and the nauseating sensation permeated throughout the outer city.

BAM!

Elder Crimson could not withstand Yu Luochoa! This powerhouse that’d assassinated Novas before hardly seemed the part now. He quickly fled into the void again, wanting to escape. Li Hao turned to watch other parts of the battlefield.

Golden Spear faced a Celestial initial Nova. The latter was being beaten away by the man’s spear and had no room to return blows.

The young man wasn't surprised. Golden Spear was a pure martial master with extra battle strength. As agile and unpredictable as the other's movements were, he was fenced in when meeting Golden Spear. The tremendous spear intent pierced through the darkness and reflected through the gloom, leaving no place for the other to hide.

Off on the other side, Hu Qingfeng seemed to be just going through the motions. He approached Kong Jie as he fought the Liu youngster, possibly wanting to ambush the man. Qi Gang fought the Near River general to a standstill. Hu Dingfang and the others were chasing after some wandering cultivators...

Li Hao raised an eyebrow at the sight, it seemed that the Silver Moon authorities didn't need them. They could dispatch their opponents all on their own. Granted, difficulty would still be high if they wanted to kill their targets.

Light Sword did not act. After delivering some threats to Li Hao, she'd walked out of the outer city and was leaving with the wandering cultivators. Li Hao wasn't sure what the old woman was thinking.

It was then that the unexpected occurred.

Chapter 485: Commencing (IV)

Hu Qingfeng likely wanted to find an opportunity to ambush the Liu youngster. The two went through the motions of fighting as they moved toward Kong Jie. But before Hu Qingfeng could find his chance, he was sent flying by the Liu youngster!

Heavily wounded, he spat out blood and looked at his opponent with incredulity. Didn't we agree on ambushing Kong Jie together? Why did you change your mind?

The Liu youngster looked at him coldly. Idiot! Do you think I'd really believe you? He about-faced and rushed Qi Gang. Coordinating his efforts with the one from Near River's Director General Office, they jointly beat back Qi Gang.

Off in the distance, the busy Hou Xiaochen wordlessly registered the scene. Damn, he's trash!

Hu Qingfeng was trash among trash. He couldn't lie or be an undercover agent. Something must have gone wrong somewhere and he'd played right into the other side's hands. He hadn't even been on guard against them and was so arrogant that he felt they were absolutely convinced by his act!

Wasn't this nice, he was sent flying in the blink of an eye! Even Qi Gang teetered on disaster now. If Hu Qingfeng wasn't a Nova... Hou Xiaochen thought that he wouldn't be bothered to look twice at the man.

.....

Within the city.

Li Hao was likewise at a loss. Was Hu Qingfeng the weakest Nova that he'd ever met? I feel like I can beat him right after melding my three auras together!

"Li Hao, Earthturner Sword, Southern Fist, let's make this quick!" Hou Xiaochen called out. "I don't have any other plans in mind. I'm not in a condition to unseal too much as my situation is worse off than yours..."

His Broken Will Spear was too strong, the spear intent continuously suppressed his body to the point where he coughed all day. He was in much worse shape compared to Earthturner Sword and the others. This also indicated that he might be stronger when he unsealed himself. But in regular fighting, he found it difficult to kill the martial master converted Nova Green Moon.

Li Hao still wasn't very comfortable with Director Hou, but Hong Yitang transmitted at this time, "Let's make our move as well! At the very least, we're confident of retreating back into the city. That guy hasn't recovered from his fight with me yet."

The young man considered possible courses of action⁴, then broke through the air without another word! Although he wanted to wait longer, he would take action because Hong Yitang had said so. There were two Gold Armors inside the city, Hou Xiaochen and the others wouldn't be able to do anything against them.

Li Hao threw himself at the Near River general; the latter was a mid Nova. While there'd been elements of surprise on his side when Li Hao killed Xu Feng, this general was his best training partner at the moment!

His sword cut through the air!

Sword light glittered and four auras melded together. Qi Gang had been doggedly hanging on as he faced two people—the scene brightened in front of his eyes and sword light slashed across the void!

He Yong smashed his fist at the Yama origin weapon, shaking the weapon that'd trapped Kong Jie. Hong Yitang was even more direct and pierced through heaven and earth with his sword. He killed the Celestial elder battling Golden Spear with one strike!

Golden Spear stared dumbly at him, Hong Yitang looked calmly back. "Think on it, your fighting is growing ever more disorganized. Silver Spear and Bronze Spear are dead out of the Three Spears, you're the only one left. And yet, you don't seem to have made the Three Spears known throughout the world!"

Golden Spear lowered his head, appearing quite helpless and agitated. He looked to the four corners and suddenly felt a mental breakdown coming on.

The Two Fists of North and South, Seven Swords of Silver Moon, Four Blade Kings, Silver Moon's Three Spears...

The others all had representative characters, but the Three Spears seem to have truly declined!

Li Hao was in his element as he stabbed again and again. The injured Qi Gang breathed out with relief and ran off to challenge the Liu youngster, leaving the general to Li Hao!

The young man thought of nothing else other than to practice his sword! Sword qi raced through the area, the Five Styles erupted, he struck with sword, fist, and foot... It appeared a bit of a muddled mess at first, but the various methods gradually found harmony with each other and melded together.

He hadn't had a chance to experience the fusion of four auras when he killed Xu Feng. Today, he relished it firsthand.

As the three joined the battlefield, the three great organizations knew that victory was slipping through their fingers! The martial masters of Silver Moon were too strong!

Green Peacock roared and let loose with her blood qi amid a rumble. Her strength increased by thirty percent, but her face was pale. "Red Moon will not forgive you if we die here!"

Did she speak of Ying Hongyue or Red Moon? Hou Xiaochen knew that she actually spoke of Ying Hongyue. He coughed gently with a smile. "It'll have to wait if Ying Hongyue won't forgive me. Who knows, maybe it's me who won't forgive him!"

BOOM!

A spear erupted with radiant light sparks as it cut through the void. A phoenix ripped through everything and bore down on Green Moon!

"Isn't it normal for a peacock to die in a phoenix's hand?" Hou Xiaochen laughed softly as a massive phoenix erupted with domineering mind intent. It felt that the firmament was torn asunder as it pierced through everything!

Green Moon visibly wilted and she looked at Hou Xiaochen with some dejection. "Why... haven't any of you... declined?"

Why had Silver Moon's martial masters retained such formidable battle strength? She'd left with Ying Hongyue all those years ago because martial masters had begun to taper off. When the supernatural rose, she chose that and relinquished the path of martial masters.

"Because... Ying Hongyue hasn't given up either!" Hou Xiaochen grinned. "He's a martial master too, isn't he? Silver Moon martial masters have dominated the land for many years and will not go away so easily. You... are a bit of a fool!"

Boom!

Green Moon exploded into pieces. Hou Xiaochen sighed, "There is one less Silver Moon martial master in the world now!"

But Green Peacock had long lost her martial master heart, so it wasn't a pity that she was dead. She was just a fake martial master!

Blue Moon was beside himself and utterly despairing. There was no hint of his former ease to be found when he looked at Hou Xiaochen. Violet Moon was likewise lost. Her strength wasn't even worth mentioning at this point. If Green Moon was dead, so were they.

Hou Xiaochen looked at the two with another sigh. "You're the descendants of old friends and I didn't want to bully you. What a pity that I'm about to leave Silver Moon and cannot leave you to trouble the province. You should go with her!"

Boom!

The spear pierced through heaven and earth again. The look in Blue Moon's dejected eyes immediately dimmed. He toppled over, but his mind had long been torn to pieces. Violet Moon looked around in confusion—how was she still alive?

"I'll save you for Little Yu and Li Hao!"

One of them was her mother's friend and the other's teacher was being chased by her mother. Hou Xiaochen simply injured her gravely, but didn't kill her. He smiled, vanished, and reappeared in the Yama section of the battlefield!

These people had no hope when a group of premier Silver Moon martial masters joined hands! Novas dropped like leaves. Li Hao roared with fury and ignited the Incantation of the Blade of Blood, cleaving the other into two with mighty effort!

He then threw himself into the outer city without another look back, leaving everyone staring. Hou Xiaochen laughed after a moment. The kid held a very deep misunderstanding of him!

Li Hao panted, then shouted, "Chief, stop running around!"

Liu Long was still sprinting with the wandering cultivators, he might be killed by accident!

Li Hao looked in another direction after he yelled. The quiet Panther suddenly popped up in a strange fashion. It clawed outward with nine layers of force!

Bam!

Chi Ming was busy evading Yu Luochoa when he gaped at the claws that suddenly appeared in front of his chest...

He turned his head and saw the back dog vanish with his storage ring and black longsword. Yu Luochoa jerked with shock as well and looked at the fleeing dog. She could barely recover from her surprise!

Although she'd suppressed Chi Ming, the man could still fight. In the end, he was ambushed by a dog!

Li Hao's jaw dropped—that was a mid Nova! Panth had killed him with one swipe! That shouldn't have happened even with Yu Luocho present!

Panther ran as fast as the wind. It shot through the entire battlefield and collected some battle spoils that their owner hadn't had a chance to collect. It quickly reached Li Hao and threw everything at the young man's feet. The dog looked up with expectation and anticipation. Was this enough for some sword energy?

It seemed to know that Li Hao was very weak, so it'd seized a lot of storage rings. It knew that there was good stuff inside that could feed the sword!

Li Hao stared in a daze. Holy shit! The dog's pretty good! Panth is stronger than I imagined! It clawed Chi Ming to death with one swipe—it definitely has the strength of a mid Nova! How is that possible?!

When he killed the Nova, he had to utilize the Incantation of the Blade of Blood! But the dog... Li Hao sighed, suddenly doubting his own strength.

Chapter 486: Departure (I)

The three great organizations were a lost cause after Hong Yitang and He Yong joined the fray. Earthturner Sword, Hou Xiaochen, Kong Jie, Southern Fist, Yu Luocho, Golden Spear...

These martial masters known throughout the world were united as one today in killing the enemy. All of them had reached exceedingly high levels with their cultivation. They faced middle-of-the-pack Novas of their respective organizations. How were these supernaturals supposed to match them?

One of Kong Jie's fists blasted a massive hole in the Parity King's body. He stared at Kong Jie with reluctance, even in his final moments. "My sixteen hell masters have yet to return..."

"They're all dead!" Li Hao called out in the distance.

“.....” The Parity King looked at the young man and closed his eyes, fully departing the world. They were all dead! That in itself was a comfort. They would’ve come back otherwise, which lessened the grievances and muttering in the Parity King’s heart.

“Strength comes from the self,” Kong Jie snorted. “So what if your sixteen hell masters had returned alive?”

He Yong killed the two remaining Yama powerhouses with one punch after the Parity King died. That marked the end of all of the powerhouses from the three great organizations. Qi Gang captured the Liu youngster and looked hesitantly at the crowd. “He’s from the Liu family of the Ministry of Finance...”

The Liu family oversaw the ministry. Although the youngster wasn’t the core of his generation, he was still of the nine ministries. The youngster’s face was pale; Hou Xiaochen flicked a glance at him.

“As I said before,” he responded calmly. “The nine ministries can join the Silver Moon delegation, but he decided to join the three great organizations... Therefore, kill him!”

Qi Gang’s heart jolted—were they really going to kill him? This wasn’t the three great organizations or a general from a neighboring province that they were talking about. This was one of the masters of the nine ministries, a member of the Lius!

“You and Hu Qingfeng take care of him!” Hou Xiaochen looked at him calmly, then at Hu Qingfeng playing dead off to the side. The latter turned as pale as a ghost. His injuries weren’t that severe, but it was too dangerous to fight a Nova. Thus, he pretended to be comatose when Li Hao and the others joined the battlefield, but now...

Hu Qingfeng swallowed hard when he read Hou Xiaochen’s aloof gaze. He quickly got up, no longer toppled over from his injuries. The Liu youngster that Qi Gang injured made a desperate plea and heaved for breath as he looked at Hou Xiaochen.

“You won’t have an easy time of things if I die! The three great organizations do not dare kill a direct descendant of the nine ministries—an agreement was made long ago! With everyone from the three great organizations being dead, the world will know that you’re behind this as soon as this expedition is over!

“All of the debt will fall on your head!”

Hou Xiaochen was calm in the face of such threats. He remained looking quietly at Qi Gang and Hu Qingfeng. The latter grit his teeth and slammed his palm down on the young man!

Bam!

Gravely wounded to begin with, the youngster’s meridians and tendons snapped from the blow. Qi Gang’s blood ran cold, but he didn’t dare say anything. He set his jaw and grunted with a punch!

Bam!

The young man’s organs exploded, his eyes widened and he froze stiff. All of the Novas were dead now, except for Light Sword and Yuan Xingwu.

Yuan Xingwu had been standing off to the side all this time. He didn’t run as he wouldn’t get away either, but neither did he participate in battle. He didn’t help Hou Xiaochen and the others, but neither did he help the three great organizations. No one knew what he was thinking.

Logically speaking, the Skystar Troops could’ve absolutely joined the operation against the three great organizations. With Yuan Xingwu’s identity and taking advantage of the situation, they could ensure that Hou Xiaochen wouldn’t easily move against them.

A declaration of loyalty was required, but they didn’t make a move from beginning to end.

“Little Yu, take care of the others!” Hou Xiaochen’s command sent Manager Yu vanishing on the spot.

Sounds of battle traveled in from the distance as Hu Dingfang and others had also come on the expedition. The Solars went off to pursue the panicked wandering cultivators. There were numerous Solars among their numbers as well.

Hou Xiaochen didn’t say anything. On Li Hao’s side, Hong Yitang and He Yong retreated to the city as well. The two sides were quiet, separated by dozens of meters.

.....

After roughly half an hour, a group of people returned, bathed in blood. Hu Dingfang’s crew seemed to have suffered some injuries. Li Hao ignored them and focused his gaze on one person in the crowd.

“Chief, c’ mere!” He raised a hand at none other than Liu Long.

The man was also covered in blood, possibly his, possibly someone else’s. Panting for breath, the man silently approached the inner city. Hou Xiaochen glanced at him, but didn’t say anything.

The Silver Moon authorities had come with approximately a dozen people for the excavation—they’d lost only two. They were Hu Qingfeng’s subordinates. The others had only suffered injuries, not casualties. It was an enormous victory for Silver Moon.

Manager Yu came back after a while. “Light Sword says that she will leave as soon as the ruins open. She won’t reveal anything and requests for Li Hao to remember his promise!”

Li Hao furrowed his brow and looked at Hou Xiaochen.

“It’s not that we can’t kill her.” The man grinned in seeming knowledge of an unspoken question. “If we want to, all of us stand a chance together even if she unseals herself. But there’s no need for that! She won’t reveal any secrets and will accomplish certain deeds for us if she’s alive. There will be much less pressure on you, too, Li Hao. The Xus might have to expend a lot of energy because of her.”

Li Hao sank deep into thought. The Xus... So she wanted him to suppress her locks once because she was going to cause trouble for the Xus?

How strange!

The young man wasn’t aware of the particulars, but he didn’t ask. There were four people and a dog on Li Hao’s side and thirteen total on Hou Xiaochen’s. There were ten with the Skystar Troops, Light Sword, and a Violet Moon prone on the ground. There were only twenty-nine humans and one dog alive in all of the expansive ruins.

There’d been almost two thousand in the beginning!

Martial masters were vicious when they made their moves and completely eradicated anyone they attacked. They fought without reservation and without consideration of who they could not or should not kill... To Hou Xiaochen, anyone not on his side in the ruins was an enemy and could thus be killed!

“What do you plan to do with Yuan Xingwu?” He grinned at Li Hao.

Yuan Xingwu looked on expressionlessly, his thoughts impossible to make out. Li Hao didn’t understand what he had in mind either, to be continuously standing here. The Solars under his command were slightly nervous and afraid. How could they not be, after watching so many die in front of them?

“Is Director Hou asking me?” Li Hao smiled.

“Yes,” Hou Xiaochen responded calmly. “You make the decision. If you think they should die, then they die. While they didn’t join the three great organizations, they sat idly by when the official authorities eliminated the evil supernatural organizations. That in itself is crime!”

Li Hao broke out in a grin and didn’t continue that train of thought. “Brother Second Mu, please give me a hand.”

Mu Lin was an exceedingly nondescript existence within the crowd. He was surprised by the sudden attention and asked, “With what?”

“Moving the bodies...” Li Hao pointed at the corpses. “Throw them into the city!”

It would be a waste to leave them outside. Far better to throw them into the city so that the ground could absorb life energy and awaken more of the city. There were so many Nova corpses!

As for mysterious power... To be honest, there wasn’t much of a point in mysterious power from killing others. It wasn’t worth expending energy on. One Nova was at most ten thousand cubes, but one mysterious power stone was one thousand cubes. Ten stones were the equivalent of one Nova, which was just a regular sum used for cultivation. Additionally, one merit could be traded for them!

Thus, fighting tooth and nail to kill a Nova, and a late Nova at that, would result in only one point worth of mysterious power. No wonder nearly no powerhouses of this level killed people for the sake of mysterious power. It wasn’t worth it!

Li Hao hadn’t seen much of the world before and was so poor that he wasn’t even aware of mysterious power stones. Killing others for power had been a natural course of action then, but now he could be more generous.

Mu Lin looked at Hou Xiaochen, who looked at the young man and then at the city. After he inclined his head, Mu Lin swiftly picked up bodies and threw them into the city. They swiftly began melting when they hit the outer city and were absorbed by the ground. This was a city that devoured people!

No matter how many people died, the ground would be renewed before long and clear without a trace.

Hou Xiaochen looked at the petrified Violet Moon on the ground, then at Li Hao and Manager Yu. “Little Yu, I leave her to you.”

Manager Yu glanced at Violet Moon; she responded with a look of pleading. Yu Luocho seemed to be good friends with her mother. She wanted to live!

Yu Luocho knew Hou Xiaochen’s thoughts, so she looked at Li Hao. “You make the call!”

“Me?” Li Hao repeated with surprise. Me again? How interesting.

Since Orange Moon wasn’t here, that meant she was still chasing his teacher. Orange Moon had been a martial master back in the day, one of the thirty-six in fact. Known as Black Spider, she was either a late or peak Nova. Green Moon was a late Nova, so Black Spider was possibly peak Nova or even stronger.

As one of the thirty-six, she wouldn’t be weak. Could his teacher evade Orange Moon’s pursuit?

Chapter 487: Departure (II)

Li Hao smiled at Violet Moon on the ground. “I have a question for you, Leader Violet Moon. Will your mom take revenge on us if you die?”

Violet Moon didn’t know how to respond and didn’t dare give the wrong answer.

“Are you still in contact with your mom? Will she save you if you send word?”

Incredibly nervous, Violet Moon still didn't know how to respond. Li Hao looked at her for a while before saying, "Let's just kill her!"

"....." Violet Moon blurted, "My mom will come save me if she knows I'm captured. She'll pay any price!"

She understood now!

"Very well." Li Hao grinned. "You can have her, Director Hou. Lock her up at the Night Watcher headquarters. What use would I have for her? Put her in the city and let all the soldiers take a turn slicing at her?"

He looked at Yuan Xingwu not far in the distance. "I'm not too familiar with the Skystar Troops, so I don't know the name of Yuan Xingwu either. My teacher has never mentioned him. But since you guys are acquainted with each other, you decide! As it's official authority business, I don't have the right to say much since I'm only a chief commissioner."

He wasn't going to get dragged into this! What am I supposed to say? That he can live? I'm not saying that!

Hou Xiaochen was skilled at selling favors to others and wanted to create a situation that put Li Hao in his debt. Li Hao refused to take the bait as he wasn't familiar with Yuan Xingwu. Not to mention, there was Hu Dingfang from the military present as well.

As expected, Hu Dingfang hastily interjected, "Director Hou, Yuan Xingwu is... Yuan Shuo's first disciple and Yuhua's senior brother. He's always supported the Silver Moon military..."

He was familiar with Yuan Xingwu. Not only that, but they exchanged communication with each other on a regular basis. One was in Silver Moon, the other in Skystar City. One was in the borderlands and the other in the central hub. They found support in each other.

It was a complex network of connections that supported Hu Dingfang. The Bai family had helped him to his position, as had Huang Yu and the Skystar Troops. However, Hu Dingfang knew that the

most reliable was Yuan Xingwu. The latter was on very good terms with Chen Yuhua. The Bais helped him for their own benefit and Huang Yu was purely showing him face. The man also wanted to suppress the Bais somewhat. Thus, Hu Dingfang had no choice but to beg for mercy on Yuan Xingwu's behalf!

"My apologies, Director Hou," Yuan Xingwu finally said. "It wasn't that I was unwilling to take a stand, but that I knew it was useless to do so. It would only interfere with your plans. I come for several reasons this time—obtaining treasure is just one of them. The most important is that I represent the Ministry of Armed Forces to discuss partnership with Silver Moon, and to determine everyone's strength. Since Silver Moon is so strong, our partnership can be moved forward..."

"You? You are too weak and lack the qualifications to talk to me," Hou Xiaochen laughed.

"Yes, I know." Yuan Xingwu wasn't surprised by the reaction. "The ministry sent me for many other reasons as well. First, I am from Silver Moon. Second, my master is the Five Styles King. That title still holds weight in the martial world. Third, I am familiar with Dingfang and thus can speak to Commander Yu. Fourth, the ministry knows that Li Hao serves the Night Watchers and is my junior brother.

"I simply didn't anticipate that Silver Moon's martial world would still be so formidable! The brothers I've brought with me have fought by my side for many years. They will not divulge a secret. If you are interested, Director Hou, I can relay some messages even if I can do nothing else."

Li Hao listened quietly in the distance. He didn't care if Yuan Xingwu was really here on behalf of the Ministry of Armed Forces to discuss a partnership or to search for treasure. Perhaps he was even here to act against Hou Xiaochen. Whatever it was, it had nothing to do with the young man.

All he did was watch as Mu Lin threw bodies over; he occasionally extracted some special energy, such as Celestial's dark attribute. He didn't lack for energy of the five elements anymore, but didn't have much of the unique attributes.

Li Hao then inspected the storage rings that Panther delivered and conducted a simple cleanup. The dog had grabbed the Celestial delegation's origin weapon, which meant Li Hao now owned five.

Kong Jie claimed the Parity King's little house and Avici Iron Net. Hou Xiaochen took Blue Moon and Green Moon's origin weapons. Qi Gang collected the Lu youngster's origin weapon, and Li Hao didn't care enough to ask if he would be giving it to Hou Xiaochen.

The young man thoroughly looked over the storage rings in his hands. He now had forty of these items that only Solars and Novas were equipped with. He'd gained quite a lot on this trip! He focused his attention on the energy rings and mysterious power stones. At the moment, he possessed eight hundred stones! That was a horrifying sum!

One had to know that he hadn't claimed many of the storage rings from the premier powerhouses. Just the wealth from the various Solars he'd killed and this last battle had resulted in eight hundred stones! Combined with more than one hundred stones from before, this meant he possessed one thousand stones total.

This was just in terms of ordinary mysterious power stones. He'd obtained forty-six from Military Supplies and still held his original ration of ten. Those were high level stones that were the equivalent of five hundred sixty regular mysterious power stones.

Therefore, Li Hao currently had 1560 mysterious power stones, five origin weapons, and more cubes of mysterious power than he could count. He had energy rings by the handful and almost all of their capacity was one thousand cubes. There was no need for the rings to hold more as Novas cultivated with stones, very rarely mysterious power.

Li Hao currently possessed roughly two hundred energy rings that made for a total capacity of two hundred thousand cubes. He'd used some, leaving more than one hundred and fifty thousand cubes left.

This was insane riches!

Li Hao transferred all of the items to his storage ring. He didn't care about those outside and moved all of the stones and energy rings to the largest storage ring—it'd belonged to Xu Feng. Being a

young master of the Xus, his storage ring was impressive, despite his mediocre strength. Regular storage rings were the size of coffins, but the space inside Xu Feng's was the size of a house.

Apart from mysterious power stones and mysterious power, Li Hao found a few more secret tomes. He didn't have time to take a look at them and shoved them all into the storage ring. He also found multiple blood pearls in different storage rings. Plainly, people were secretly killing Red Moon powerhouses.

The Seven Moons that Red Moon had sent to the ruins weren't equipped with scarlet shadows. There'd been some on the Nova level elder, but unfortunately, the Gold Armor had smashed the shadow to pieces along with the elder. Hou Xiaochen might have collected the ones with the Solars. Li Hao didn't see any sight of them.

After taking inventory of his war spoils, Li Hao found some other treasures held in various bottles and flasks. He didn't know what they were and was in no hurry to open them. Such were the items in Xu Feng's storage ring.

The young man also possessed a petal of the Goldensky Lotus and a lotus seed. Those were treasures that he'd obtained at Ash Mountain. Li Hao then took stock of his merits. The Nova that he'd just killed gave him another ten points.

"Troop Leader Li Hao of the Twelfth Troop in the Ninth Division courageously met the enemy in battle and destroyed them outside the city," the mechanical voice sounded by Li Hao's ear. "His achievements are exemplary in his leadership of the Twelfth Troop to withstand invaders. He is awarded one hundred points!"

"....." Li Hao blinked. This was likely his highest singular instance of earning merits. Plainly, the city felt that he was responsible for destroying the enemy outside the city. Although he wasn't the main contributor, it had been under the agreement that he'd reached with the other side.

He'd been awarded one hundred points, and that wasn't all!

“Troop Leader Li Hao of the Twelfth Troop has supplied life energy with which to reawaken the city. His deeds are commendable and hereby awarded with one hundred points!”

Li Hao’s merits abruptly reached two hundred and ten points in the blink of an eye, this time because he had someone throw bodies into the city! He looked back to see that the three Silver Armors were still there, but there was no sign of Director General Wang and the commander. Li Hao suspected that he was so rewarded because those two had seen his deeds. Who would’ve thought that a careless thought would result in one hundred points?

These points could be traded for one hundred high level stones, the equivalent of one thousand regular stones! That was more valuable than the dozens of storage rings he’d obtained!

He was making out like a bandit and couldn’t help the grin that stretched from ear to ear. Two hundred and ten merits! Too bad there’s no announcement about doubling them... Li Hao was slightly regretful.

He swept a glance over He Yong and Hong Yitang, those two had received significant gains as well. One had fifty, the other seventy—Hong Yitang. It looked like they’d been rewarded for some valor as they hadn’t killed seven Novas.

He Yong was smiling happily when Li Hao suddenly transmitted, “Martial Uncle He Yong obtained a lot of merits, didn’t you? Then the ten I lent you before...”

The smile dropped from He Yong’s face. What the heck? How did that turn into a loan? Didn’t you say that was the reward I received for protecting you? The Supervisory Guard approved it, which means it’s set in stone. I’m not giving anything to you!

He’d finally accumulated fifty points and wasn’t about to lose any to Li Hao.

The young man laughed and didn’t mind He Yong’s derisive snort. Hou Xiaochen and Yuan Xingwu seemed to have reached an agreement elsewhere; the young man didn’t care.

“Manager Yu, you have a key right? The key is Battle Heaven’s token and needs to be returned. Why don’t you give the key to me?”

Yu Luochoa blinked and looked at Hou Xiaochen. The man smiled meaningfully. “The keys are awarded based on individual skill. I wasn’t aware they would be taken back.”

Li Hao needed the item. One could join the army only with the key, or else one had to go through the new recruit training. However, that part of the barracks was yet to be activated again. He needed the key as he wanted Liu Long to join the army. As for Manager Yu and the others... he didn’t want them in his troop.

Chapter 488: Departure (III)

“Then you hang onto it,” Li Hao said decisively. “But I am a troop leader of the Battle Heaven Army, so the only choice you have with that key is to join the army. You would be joining under my banner! It’s a stern hierarchy within the Battle Heaven Army and battle orders must be followed to the letter. If the director doesn’t mind, you can have Manager Yu join. I won’t set her any hard missions!

“As for refusing orders... it’s one thing if you leave the ruins. But if you stay in the city and defy orders, the entire army will hunt you down!”

Hou Xiaochen raised an eyebrow. So it looked like Li Hao had accomplished quite the achievements in Battle Heaven. The key wouldn’t be that useful if they kept it instead of giving it to him. Did they dare join the Battle Heaven Army?

Manager Yu would likely be a Black Armor, could a Black Armor refuse a troop leader’s commands? All new recruits would likely join Li Hao’s troop.

After some thought, Hou Xiaochen smiled. “Fine, give it to him!”

Manager Yu tossed the key to Li Hao without a word. The young man promptly gave it to Liu Long. He would only be a Black Armor, but at least his equipment would be activated armor. His

defensive ability would be remarkable, to say nothing of anything else, and he would be able to conduct long distance communication.

Li Hao had inquired about the capabilities of the armor and learned that they had a large communication range. When the army used to conduct external missions, a troop leader's equipment could reach at least five hundred kilometers. It was difficult to say if that was still the case, but there shouldn't be that big of a difference.

The targets were eliminated and the mess cleaned up. Hou Xiaochen looked at Li Hao. "What are your plans?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you intend on staying in Battle Heaven?" the man asked serenely. "You must leave at some point. I am heading out for the central region after this expedition, so what are your plans?"

"You're really leaving, director?" Li Hao blinked with surprise.

"Of course!" Hou Xiaochen smiled. "All factions have suffered heavy losses in Silver Moon this time and probably won't dare to enter Battle Heaven again. They may not dare try any place else either. This is not the right time for our other ruins to open, they know that.

"The central region houses the headquarters of the three great organizations, the nine ministries, seven divine mountains, powerhouses of the four seas, royal family, and three founding families. There are many, many heavyweights to be found there and some chosen children of the heavens.

"You should not underestimate the supernatural domain. Although there are many drawbacks to that path, that's because most supernaturals cannot control their impulses or desires. True geniuses will not lose their composure even after abruptly gaining power. Are you not one of them, Li Hao?"

It'd been a very short period of time since Li Hao gained such prodigious strength.

“There are those among supernaturals who’ve broken the barrier beyond Nova. They are much stronger than us and at the very least, we do not dare easily cross our threshold. In the supernatural domain, breaking six locks places one above Nova. The ones of the four limbs are easy to open, opening one of the five organs grants an elemental attribute, opening a second poses a great difficulty—but that doesn’t mean it’s impossible! There are still those who accomplish it.

“As for the five organs... everyone has their own way when it comes to their balance. Some even use the Water of Life to fix the problems so the organs won’t explode.”

Li Hao glanced sharply at Hou Xiaochen.

“You will only be able to passively respond to stuff if you continue to stay in Silver Moon,” the man continued. “Are you interested in traveling to the central region with me after we leave?”

Now this

was wholly unexpected.

“It is true that Silver Moon is the center of this land, but that was a long time ago. Silver Moon now... unless you explore the ruins, it’s not much of a challenge to you! You can already kill those on the Divine Masters Ranking. Will more experts on the ranking come to you if you stay here? It’s quite interesting in the central region as all sides have a large number of active personnel there.

“They don’t come here because they want to grow stronger in the central region first! That is the key to everyone’s rise. Silver Moon is where the premier experts come for their final metamorphosis. You have not reached that step yet. There are many opportunities in the central region—mysterious power stones, Water of Life, and ancient ruins.”

Hou Xiaochen was inviting Li Hao to the central region with him! Based on his words, he was likely going to prepare for his metamorphosis as well.

“Your master may not be willing to return in the short term,” the man chuckled when Li Hao didn’t respond. “He’s well aware that it’s very difficult to swiftly develop to the same level as Earthturner Sword and the others if he stays in Silver Moon. Only in the central region does he stand a chance.

“It’s a very, very big world Li Hao! Silver Moon will take its place again sooner or later. But for now, let it be quiet for a while. With you here, it will be tough for the province to be at peace...”

“I...” Li Hao started with resignation.

“You’re the last known descendant of the eight families, after all,” Hou Xiaochen chuckled. “There will be endless trouble if you stay here. It’ll be better for you to be in the central region. The various factions are a counterbalance for each other! That actually gives more chances to the young—the older generation rarely attacks the youngsters of the Divine Masters Ranking. That’s because the various sides offset each other.”

The young man didn’t say anything. He wouldn’t have second thoughts if it was Hong Yitang issuing the invitation. But Hou Xiaochen... He might be eaten alive if he followed the man to the central region!

Indeed, Li Hao was still on his guard when it came to this one. He wouldn’t stay inside the city otherwise and refuse to go out.

“What are you afraid of?” Hou Xiaochen seemed to read his mind. “Li Hao, you should go see the world while you’re young. Silver Moon martial masters have an exaggerated view of their battle strength. People like me can be found throughout the central region. You’ll never know how wide the world is if you don’t go out of your comfort zone. There are some geniuses among the Night Watchers who are unparalleled, to speak of nothing else. Although they are supernatural, they are so strong that I may not be a match for them if I don’t unseal myself.

“And don’t think that the three great organizations are crippled after killing Green Moon and Yellow Moon either. You’re thinking too simplistically of the situation if you do that! Who’s Ying Hongyue? Apart from him, the rest of the Seven Moons is just his harem.”

Li Hao glanced at Manager Yu; the woman stared frostily back at him. What are you looking at me for? I left many years ago!

The young man coughed gently and swiftly looked away. “Does the director mean that there are still powerhouses among the Red Moon elders?”

“Of course!” Hou Xiaochen smiled. “Not only the elder council, but there’s another secret organization among Red Moon called the Ancient Guard! They rarely make an appearance as their only mission is to explore ruins! They’re very similar to our Skystar Guards, but they’re much stronger with a higher proportion of heavyweights...”

A blank look appeared in even Violet Moon’s eyes. She didn’t know about this...

“Some of the Ancient Guard are martial masters, another portion are Ying Hongyue’s experiments. There are also some Heaven’s Eyes that are quite formidable! Heaven’s Eyes are cultivators with their heavenly eye opened. Their mental strength is indomitable—you should know about that, it’s a bit different from our mind intent, but equally strong. All of the three great organizations and nine ministries have some of these people in their ranks!

“How will you get to know these people if you don’t travel the world? If you keep waiting here, the only thing that will come to you is being completely left behind!”

“You can indeed visit the central region,” He Yong spoke up. “There are many powerhouses there in addition to the factions we know. Some of them obtained heritages from ancient ruins early on or excavated ancient secret arts like your master. There are also some old families of martial dao. While they’re not as mighty as Silver Moon martial masters after the rise of the supernatural, they are still a force to be reckoned with.”

“You should indeed consider it,” Hong Yitang also transmitted. “It’s good to experience the central region. I made a trip when I was young, as have most of the martial masters in Silver Moon. Whether it’s to build their reputation or to observe more powerhouses, one has the right to come back and dominate Silver Moon only after sweeping through the central region!”

“I’m just worried about Hou Xiaochen scheming against me...” Li Hao transmitted back in a forthright manner. “This one has too many plots and plans in mind.”

“Are you afraid of him?” He Yong’s transmission came with a laugh. “He won’t do anything to you straight off the bat, and who knows who will be scheming against who? As young as you are, you’ve improved rapidly, kid. I’ll protect you in the central region, what are you afraid of?”

“.....” Pfft, it’s not like you can beat him!

“Fine, I’ll consider it!” Li Hao didn’t immediately refuse. “I’m going to head in and ask the generals for their opinion. Would you like to come for some tea, director?”

“.....” Hou Xiaochen broke out into laughter. “That’s alright, you do as you wish.”

The little guy’s still on guard against me!

.....

Li Hao swiftly left without further ado. Four humans and one dog entered the city. He needed to cement an identity for Liu Long. They would certainly leave the ruins at some point, they wouldn’t stay here forever. He had He Yong take Liu Long to the barracks while he headed straight for the city lord manor. Director General Wang was easier to speak to, so he would talk to that one first.

.....

The city lord manor.

It was unknown if Director General Wang had observed any of the earlier fighting. He was still sitting in his chair.

“Report!”

“Enter!” The director general was surprised. The little guy was interesting, he’d learned some of the rules.

“General!” Li Hao cut straight to the chase. “I’d like to ask if I can enter again after I leave Battle Heaven?”

“You can. You are a member of Battle Heaven and can come and go at all so long as the Silver Armor is on you.”

Li Hao beamed, as he thought! A city of my own people won’t restrict its own!

“Will Battle Heaven continue to be open to the public? Can we refrain from the monthly three days?”

“Why should we? Are you worried someone will seize the city?”

“.....” Ahem, well, that was indeed the case.

Chapter 489: Departure (IV)

“I’m just worried that there will be no one to defend the city after we leave.” Li Hao naturally wouldn’t express his real thoughts. “Those bandits might find an opening...”

“There is nothing to be worried about!” Director General Wang responded calmly. “They’ll just be coming to their deaths! If the bandits you speak of are on the same level as the trespassers that have come this time, then this city is not a place where they can come and go at will!”

That's good then!

"General, the new recruit camp has not reawakened. I'd like to recruit some people in the outside world to join the Battle Heaven Army, but I have no keys..."

"That is not under my jurisdiction."

Li Hao was at a thorough loss for words, he didn't want to talk to that commander. However, he also had a batch of black armor outside that he'd like to activate and equip the Silver Moon Guards with.

"There have been instances of troop leaders recruiting their own people when their troop wasn't full," the director general still gave him some advice. "Everyone must undergo new recruit training, but since that part of the barracks has yet to reawaken... You can go to your commander and ask for special privileges. You will see the same results after he bestows upon you temporary authority to activate some suits of armor."

Li Hao greeted his suggestion wordlessly. The key thing here is that the guy's not easy to talk to, or I would've gone to him already. Fine then, there was no other choice available.

"General, are there any special treasures on Skystar Island?" he asked before leaving.

"Skystar Island? Do the energy mines count?"

"Anything else apart from that?"

"Of course, and many. The pity is, who knows what's left after so much time has passed?" The director general took a brief walk down memory lane and shook his head moments later. "I don't remember the specifics, but do recall that there was a residence of the Sea Pacification Envoy somewhere on the island. I'm not sure of the specifics and if it exists anymore."

“The Sea Pacification Envoy?” Li Hao blinked—what was that?

“When the human race triumphed and the Human King conquered the world, he named two monster spirit heavyweights as their race’s envoys. Their presence would promote harmony between the two races. The two were respectively known as the Sea Pacification Envoy and Monster Spirit Envoy!

“The Monster Spirit Envoy oversees all monster spirits, but the sea is so vast that another envoy was named specifically for it!”

“Were they strong?” Li Hao was curious.

“Very strong,” pondered the director general. “Of course, they don’t compare to His Imperial Majesty and the rest, but they’re much more powerful than regular heavyweights.

“Then... how about compared to my ancestor?”

“.....” Director General Wang struggled with his answer. “They’re a little weaker.”

Li Hao understood. So they’re not even as strong as my ancestor! I thought they were formidable based on their titles. The manor of the Sea Pacification Envoy...

He committed the place to memory. Perhaps there would be something there, or perhaps nothing existed anymore. It also remained to be seen if the central region was the Skystar Island of legend. So much time had passed since the ancient civilization that modern society wasn’t aware of how much time had gone by. Who knew how the topography of the land had changed?

“Then I take my leave, general. I might not return for a very long time after this departure.”

“Mmhmm.” Director General Wang was as calm as ever.

Li Hao could only leave after this response. It looked like the guy really had nothing for him, more was the pity.

“That little guy’s interesting,” the director general said after the young man departed. “He kept staring at me like he really hoped I’d give him something.”

“He can fight for it himself,” responded a faint wisp at his ear. “I wonder if he’ll complete the three missions he accepted? I can vaguely sense that the other seven cities haven’t entirely fallen. They may still exist! If the other seven can be contacted... then we might stand a chance!”

“Mmhmm, I’ll keep trying my best,” Director General Wang murmured.

The inner city fell silent once more.

.....

Li Hao carefully paid a visit to the barracks to meet the commander again and briefly detail his request. He received a curt, “Approved!” for his efforts.

“.....” The young man skedaddled!

He was ever on his guard against the Gold Armor that always seemed ready to hit him again.

The commander raised his head for a look at the young man’s back and shook his head slightly. What a pity that the new recruit training system wasn’t active, or they’d have to keep him here for a while.

The kid was not worthy of the heritage from the Eternal Sword Sovereign... The more the Gold Armor looked at it, the more uncomfortable he felt.

.....

Li Hao went to Military Supplies next, exchanging his two hundred and ten points for cultivation supplies. He was leaving the ruins and didn't know when he'd be back. There wasn't much of a point to letting them accumulate. As for the Voidbreak Incantation... that could wait.

When everything was in order, the young man was ready to depart Battle Heaven. This would be their last night here. Although he could leave at any time, it would raise less attention if he left with Hou Xiaochen. It would result in the biggest uproar if he left alone.

When he walked out of the ancient city, Li Hao looked back up at the two characters hovering over the gates. Next time... he'd come back next time. He wanted to study those two characters in greater detail, but there was nothing more he could glean in his current state. Perhaps there would be greater opportunity waiting in the future. Words from the imperial majesty could not be meant to just offer a peek at the scenes of yesteryear.

.....

Li Hao did nothing else in the remaining time but cultivate. There was still a bit of time left that he wanted to put to good use. The easiest parts of himself to improve were his organs and physical body. These were hard for other people to develop, but entirely too easy for Li Hao. Nothing was a problem with sword energy available.

He exchanged two hundred and ten merits for one hundred and ten energy stones—the equivalent of eleven hundred mysterious power stones. When his own were added to the count, he had more than twenty-six hundred stones. The remaining one hundred points were traded for ten Mind Fruits. He had twenty now.

Each energy stone could convert to sword energy worth approximately two hundred and eighty cubes of mysterious power, or just shy of three hundred. In other words, if Li Hao used his energy stones sparingly, he could utilize the equivalent of nearly seven hundred thousand cubes of mysterious power.

He also had five origin weapons that could be convert to one hundred mysterious power stones. Of course, an origin weapon shouldn't be wasted in this manner. Their energy was best used to nurture itself for better effect.

His five organs and physical body had previously absorbed roughly five thousand cubes of power. He now embarked on the path to ten thousand cubes. It sounded like a lot, but that was just mysterious power, not mysterious power stones. One stone was worth one thousand cubes, but it contained only three to five hundred cubes worth.

If converted to mysterious power stones, that meant Li Hao had absorbed a dozen pieces per organ. The grand total of his entire body added up to more than one hundred pieces. But total absorption alone didn't directly map to how much the body would improve. He Yong and the others had absorbed a great deal of mysterious power stones as well, but their bodies did not fully reflect their intake.

.....

After the melding of four auras, Li Hao's requirements of his organs grew higher. Although his body and organs needed to endure the fusion of four auras, he wanted to prepare them for five. Melding five auras might be an explosive accomplishment—if he didn't handle it properly with the strongest body possible, he might become the next Sickly.

He swiftly pulled on cube after cube; the young man possessed an abundance of energy rings and mysterious power. He focused on the dark attribute when he could. Of the five elements, wind, and thunder, the light attribute remained the only one he'd yet to encounter. There wasn't much of it to be found. Dark energy improved his concealment ability, wind and thunder enhanced his body and skeleton, the five elements improved the organs. Li Hao was very curious about light energy—what did that improve?

He collected many types of mysterious power and even owned numerous cubes of mutated forms such as ice and stone. But light... he didn't find a single cube after prolonged rifling through his stores. The young man had to give up the idea.

Did light energy have something to do with life energy? Wood energy could heal, but it wasn't as suited as light energy in this regard. Perhaps absorbing light mysterious power would make one younger?

Who knew.

He had wealth to spare and should use it on himself—such was Li Hao's principle. He didn't normally hoard treasure unless he had no use for it at the moment.

In an ancient house in the outer city.

Li Hao spent almost a dozen hours absorbing energy until someone called outside the door, "Li Hao!"

It was He Yong. They knew that the young man was in here and were summoning him to tell him time was up. The ruins were about to open again.

Li Hao assessed his organs and body to find that they were roughly at six thousand cubes each. He'd absorbed almost eight thousand cubes during this period of time—a much faster absorption rate than before. Otherwise, it should've taken at least a day.

This consumption equated to thirty pieces of mysterious power stones—a drop in the bucket compared to his current wealth. He would have to wait before trying the Mind Fruits. There was also the Building Five Bridges method that would deliver the enormous benefit of not needing to pay attention to specific energy attributes. Any energy could be directly absorbed without having to cater to each organ. It would save him a lot of time and automatically balance his organs for him.

There were some specific details that he'd yet to make sense of, however, so he wasn't in a rush to experiment.

Chapter 490: Borrowing Books (I)

Three humans and a dog were already waiting outside when Li Hao emerged. Liu Long conversed with Hong Yitang in a low voice. He stopped talking when he saw Li Hao. Although the young man heard a murmured word or two, he didn't ask about their discussion.

Panther stuck to Liu Long in Li Hao's absence. The dog was deeply fond of Liu Long as the man had taught it the Nine Forged Force, and had done so in a very thorough manner. Therefore, Liu Long was its favorite human when the young man wasn't around. It couldn't be bothered with Hong Yitang or He Yong.

"Have you improved again?" Hong Yitang laughed when he saw Li Hao. The young man's presence still emanated from his being as his cultivation session had just ended. A hint or two could be gleaned from it. Plainly, Li Hao had taken another step forward.

"I'm just laying down some foundations!" Li Hao shook his head. This was indeed all foundational work for him. The physical body, organs, and skeleton were part and parcel of growing stronger. For him and Yuan Shuo, the key lay in mind intent and aura!

Only when mind intent was strong and the aura perfect could they grow stronger! If the body wasn't strong enough, they could supplement with a spontaneous eruption of the five summoned spirits. The body was the base—mind intent and aura were the eruption points. Without those, Li Hao would be much more mediocre even if his body was strong.

What the young man wanted most at the moment was to swiftly comprehend the wood aura. But after grasping four auras, he suddenly wasn't in a hurry to manifest the fifth despite knowing the Weeping Willow Sword. He still reeled from how difficult the water aura had been.

"Foundations?" He Yong grumbled. "We'd love to have your foundations, too bad we can't. With qualities like yours, I would've long opened my supernatural locks."

Li Hao was curious about this maneuver as well, so they chatted about this as they walked.

“Martial uncles, I understand some of your condition in the sense that snapping your locks releases your accumulated potential and spontaneously boosts your strength. But what next? You can’t just keep yourself sealed forever, can you?”

They seemed to have reached an odd loop in their cultivation. The locks had to be broken for them to grow stronger, but that might turn them into supernaturals or cause their outright death. Even if the five organs were strong enough to support the broken locks, a very likely outcome was that they’d cross over to the supernatural domain. They wouldn’t be martial masters anymore, which would be an enormous spot of trouble.

“That’s why we’re very conflicted as we haven’t found the proper path and method yet!” He Yong sighed. “A lot of people are in the same stage. Since we don’t wish to become supernatural, Ole Hong and I have discussed some ideas.

“Firstly, mysterious power appears after the locks are broken. We might be able to avoid becoming supernatural if we shatter that power. I hear that your teacher has done so before?”

“Yes!” Li Hao thought rapidly. “There was a time in Silver City when he wanted to ascend to being supernatural, but sensed the mysterious power devouring his internal force during the attempt. He quickly detonated the power and gave up becoming supernatural.”

“We’ve considered doing this too,” He Yong continued in a conflicted tone. “But Yuan Shuo was very weak then and his internal force strong since he’d just ascended. He immediately supplemented his internal force when his lock broke, making it stronger than the lock. That’s why he could do it. We might not be able to because our locks are very strong!”

“Then does that mean my teacher... can break his locks without worry in the future?”

“That’s not it, but that he can break one of them with peace of mind—the one that he first broke. The organ that it corresponds to will not produce more mysterious power if its lock breaks.”

Li Hao nodded.

“That’s the first idea. The second is to break all five at the same time. It’s our speculation that some unusual circumstances may occur in that case. The combination of five types of mysterious power may give rise to a special energy instead of making the martial master a supernatural.

“The third idea is to continue to strengthen the locks, body, and organs... The locks represent potential. Both Ole Hong and I speculate that at a certain level, the locks may become part of the body instead of breaking. They’ll naturally release their potential then, or they may open by themselves if we reach a certain level. We won’t have to force them open like we do now!”

Li Hao nodded. The two had come to some valuable theories through their discussion.

“My teacher and I have discussed this before. He says that we need to summon our spirits and nurture our auras first, then meld the auras together. My teacher didn’t go into specifics because he only had a general concept back then. I think he was considering combining the aura with the supernatural lock and then breaking through it with the aura!

“That will propel the cultivator to the next stage in a very natural manner and undo the seal created by the supernatural lock.”

The two men listened intently to the fledgling theories from Yuan Shuo. The man had just entered Summoner of Spirit then, so many of his theories were bound to be immature. But perhaps there was something they could glean from his knowledge.

“Also, I somehow feel that with the current Summoner of Spirit, we have not reached the peak of this level even after melding five auras together,” Li Hao continued. “We have to nurture them, but I don’t feel like I’ve had a chance to do something really like that. I don’t know if I’m using the wrong method or if I don’t have the proper tools. Hence, I want to try the Mind Fruits.”

Summoner of Spirit was a level that focused on nurturing the aura, but Li Hao had noted with the exception of the newly born aura, it was very difficult to continuously enhance one. For example,

melding three together enabled him to kill peak Solar and possibly match initial Nova, but if this continued, the strongest he would be able to kill with three auras was initial Nova. That would remain the same even if he improved his body to the most he could. This was due to the auras not being strong themselves.

The auras were strong only if they were newly born—that was wrong!

His teacher must've noticed something similar, which was why he hadn't combined his auras yet. Once he did, that would be their limit and peak. He would have to break through in another manner then.

"To strengthen mind intent and the aura..." Hong Yitang pondered. "These are more arcane concepts as they can't be easily strengthened like the body can be through pills, treasures, and mysterious power stones. For martial masters, one way to strengthen the aura is through more fighting, tempering, and reflection!

"The stronger the heart is, the greater the aura! This is a process of nurturing the aura, the kind of invincibility that the ancients worked on. You didn't sense a difference before because it's been too soon since you set foot into this level.

"I don't know if the five organs can nurture the auras to stronger versions of themselves. You'll have to ask your teacher about that as we all gradually did it on our own, walking a different path from you."

Li Hao thought for a bit and nodded. That was true. Everyone's path was different and he didn't understand too much about this either. He would have to wait and see if his teacher found anything new or thought of a different way.

As for himself, he'd come to a deep realization that he knew too little of the world and understood too little of martial dao. Some ancient tomes came to mind—he needed to quickly convert them to practical knowledge. Not only that, but he suddenly changed direction and headed elsewhere.

The others blinked. Where was the young man going?

“Li Hao, that’s the wrong way...”

“Nope!” Li Hao laughed. “There’s a place in Battle Heaven that we’ve yet to visit all this time, a very important place! The library! Apparently the city has a massive library with countless books inside. While they don’t speak of specific methods, there will be ones regarding martial theory.

“Although the ancient civilization has a different system from ours, a lot of modern people practice their secret arts. Since they can find some success, that means there must be similarities between the two. I’d like to borrow some of their basic theory books. If teacher was on this expedition, he would’ve visited a long time ago.”

The others exchanged glances without saying anything. It was normal that none of them had gone because they couldn’t read any of the content inside. They just hadn’t thought that Li Hao would pick this moment to borrow books. ...were there still books there?

Who knew?

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Moments later, they arrived at a large building that wasn’t too tall—only six floors. It was called a building because it occupied a large plot of land. It was close to the city lord manor, but felt much bigger than it. The characters of Battle Heaven Library were written on it.

Not only that, but there were guards at the door—not Black Armors, but Green Armors. Li Hao had never seen them before. A new type of soldier?

He saw the words “Security” etched on their chest when he took a closer look. Ah, I see. They’re from Director General Wang’s division! Li Hao recalled that internal security was usually managed by security guards. So there was another troop of Green Armors running around?

Clang! The guards at the door saluted when Li Hao approached. Their salute differed from military salutes. Instead of pounding their chest, they pointed at their heads. Li Hao didn't know how many courtesies existed in the ancient civilization. At the very least, none of these were present in the modern day Inspectorate and army.

The guards ignored Li Hao after their salute. They were mute—whether out of inability or lack of desire to speak, no one knew.

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The first floor was a cavernous lobby upon entering. Some darkened screens were scattered around them; one abruptly brightened. Perhaps the structure sensed the arrival of visitors or a powerhouse in the city had granted him some authorization.

Li Hao swiftly walked up to the active kiosk.

“A Guide to Borrowing Books” was written on the screen. The young man poked it curiously, bringing up small pages that spoke of “martial dao, technology, civilian livelihood, education, novels, arts and culture, science, storytelling...”.

Another row of text flashed: Identity confirmed. Leader of the Twelfth Troop of the Ninth Division in the Reserve Defenders of the Battle Heaven Army. Officer level personnel can read any book below the fifth floor for free. Three books may be borrowed to be returned at...