

Star Gate 491

Chapter 491: Borrowing Books (II)

The line of small text hovered for a bit. Li Hao scratched his head—he seemed to be limited to three books.

The young man looked at He Yong and the others. When He Yong approached, it appeared that the machine could see him or sense his identity in other ways. His information appeared moments later. Lieutenant level personnel could borrow two books. Liu Long stepped forward for a try. Regular soldiers could borrow one.

When Li Hao looked up, he realized there were no stairs or access points to the upper floors! That was odd.

“Borrowing books.” Another line appeared on the screen. “The system will automatically transmit books to the Battle Heaven armor upon selection. The physical copy is sealed to protect the heritage of civilization. This library is temporarily closed to the public. The Battle Heaven Army can receive their selections through textual transmission!”

“This must be the legendary smart system!” He Yong sighed with appreciation. “Impressive! Sealing away physical copies for record keeping—the ancient civilization was skilled in not only martial dao, but in other areas as well!”

Hong Yitang bobbed his head rapidly, that was indeed the case. Physical books could be archived to protect the civilization’s legacy, but the knowledge within could be transmitted to the armor. This also prevented enemies from stealing information.

Interest piqued, Li Hao quickly paged through the screen selection. Various titles appeared, each genre populated by an endless selection. Just the number of results to choose from was startling.

Li Hao scanned the screen and saw that there was a keyword search at the top. He immediately understood its function and sighed with amazement. “There’s a library at the Veteris Institute in Silver City as well, but the organization is very haphazard. It’s really hard to find a single book and

sometimes we need to go through countless titles before locating it. Only experienced members can quickly hone in on specific books...”

“This is the power of knowledge!” Hong Yitang exhaled with similar sentiment. “Skystar Dynasty also values this, but there are too few intellectuals in the land. Upstairs doesn’t wish to expend too many resources in this area either. It’s just a library, a token effort and simply having books is enough. It’s the ancient civilization that properly values this area.”

Li Hao nodded and thought for a bit, then wrote two characters in the search bar. Martial dao. Countless titles immediately filled the screen, bedazzling the young man. There were so many! How was he to find what he needed? He couldn’t borrow that many titles.

Fundamental theory entered the young man. That quickly cut down the number of books on his screen. There were roughly twenty books on a page and only several dozen pages left, as opposed to the thousands of pages before. That meant there were approximately one thousand books of fundamental theory in the library.

That was still an impressive sum for the basics! Li Hao clicked his tongue with amazement. The library at Veteris Institute in Silver City was the biggest library in the city. It stored the most varied collection of thirty thousand books, a splendid figure indeed. And yet, it paled in comparison to the one at Battle Heaven.

Li Hao decided to look at the fifty pages he could choose from instead of further narrowing the field with more keywords. Since there was no way to see the specific contents of the books, he scanned their titles for inspiration.

“Fundamentals of Palm Methods... Fundamentals of Boxing Methods... Blade Methods...” There were all sorts of basic methods. He didn’t know which to choose and rather wished he could take all of them, but that wasn’t possible.

Li Hao started—one of the book’s names was golden in color. That set it apart from the rest. Fundamental Martial Dao Theory at the Martial University.

The young man blinked. He'd heard about this university several times already, it was a place that taught martial dao during the ancient civilization. That made it similar to the Veteris Institute, only that the institute didn't teach martial dao.

The fundamental theory classes of this university... should be quite comprehensive, right? Li Hao added it to his selection and continued browsing. Since the book's title was a different color, it might represent a different level of importance. He saw another book with a peculiar name as he flipped through the pages.

Differences Between the Energy and Blood Qi Systems.

Li Hao's eyes widened—was the energy system the supernatural system? The Silver Armor had mentioned during his previous visit that supernaturals walked the path of energy. The young man quickly chose this as his second selection. He had one spot left. The others could choose five books total; he would help them with their selection. They might not be able to read the ancient text, but Li Hao could.

He made his final choice a few moments later. Just the titles alone didn't give him many clues, so he made the selections in accordance with his thoughts. He chose Fundamental Martial Dao Theory at the Martial University, Differences Between the Energy and Blood Qi Systems, and the final title of Fundamentals of Sword Methods.

As a swordsman, he chose a book regarding sword methods as his final choice. There was nothing regarding specific cultivation techniques—this type of content didn't seem to exist in the library. Li Hao didn't mind this lack as he didn't want to bite off more than he could chew. Some general theory was sufficient.

"Martial uncles, chief, come choose your books too!" Data flickered through the screen after he finalized his titles and connected with his armor. He saw lines of numbers inside his armor a second later, indicating that the three books had been stored within and could be accessed at any time.

How convenient! Li Hao truly marveled at the ancient civilization—this technology was incredible! If it existed in modern times, his teacher wouldn't have to force him into memorizing all sorts of

books. He just needed to transmit it as data. The suits of armor were tied to one person and completely confidential. Others would not be able to use them if they laid hands on the equipment.

Many secrets were lost in modern times due to confidentiality clauses. Many secret arts were missing pieces here or there. When the legacy was lost, so was the art. But when it came to the ancients, they could directly transmit their data.

Liu Long swept a glance at the screen; it was unintelligible rubbish to him. “You pick one for me, I can’t read the words!”

“That’s easy enough,” He Yong guffawed. “Differences in title color means differences in importance. Two of the ones that Li Hao chose are in gold. I can go by that!”

Apart from the Fundamentals of Sword Methods, the other two were indeed in golden font.

He Yong wouldn’t stand on ceremony. Although he couldn’t understand anything, he tapped randomly until he saw a book with a golden title. “This is good! The color is bright! I’m choosing this one, Li Hao. What do you think?”

The young man took a casual glance, then sharpened his gaze when surprise registered.

“An Illustrated Collection of Monster Spirits!” he read out. So the man had accidentally tapped his way into the genre of general subjects? “This is a good choice. While there aren’t major monster spirits in Silver Moon, they exist in Ash Mountain. We don’t know much about them. Perhaps there’s points of similarity between the ones now and the ones in the ancient civilization.”

They would be better prepared next time if they were armed with knowledge.

“Told you it was good!” He Yong laughed. “It’s fantastic, there’s a lot of monster spirits in the central region. I may be able to learn about their weaknesses or some things that they don’t know

about themselves. The monster spirits in our age haven't awakened for long. If they were present in the time of the ancient civilization, then the ancients would know a lot more than us!"

Li Hao nodded. The man quickly chose his second book that was also in golden font. A Pictorial of the Treasures of Heaven and Earth.

The young man looked at He Yong. How come you're choosing these kinds of books?

"This is a picture book that records the treasures of heaven and earth..."

"Fantastic!" He Yong roared with laughter. "This is good too! We don't recognize all of the treasures we find now and it's such a pity to overlook them. We don't always know how to utilize a treasure we find in the ruins, so what's the point of even finding them? We might accidentally treat treasure as trash too, so this will do!"

Li Hao nodded as well after some thought.

"Of course he's satisfied," Hong Yitang said calmly. "These are all illustrated, you just need to look at the pictures. He wouldn't be as happy if you had him choose something without diagrams..."

Li Hao blinked, while He Yong snapped with irritation, "Stop looking down on me! I'm going to learn the ancient language as soon as we leave!"

But that was indeed the case. All the same, He Yong was overjoyed. Two picture books were better than two he couldn't read. These books didn't seem to be communal property, so he'd have to memorize the characters, write them out for Li Hao, and wait for the young man's translation... that was too difficult!

Picture books wouldn't have as much text in them and when it came to drawing, He Yong possessed a fair bit of skill. He wasn't illiterate, after all. He could read, write, and possessed certain skills such as drawing. He just didn't know the ancient language.

Li Hao smiled and didn't say anything else.

"Can you help me find books on raising crop yields?" Hong Yitang asked after some thought.

The young man blinked. What did he want that for? Li Hao quickly entered the keyword and pulled up a list of books. There was one in golden font.

"An Encyclopedia of Raising Crops..." he read out. Hong Yitang quickly chose it.

"Now search for a similar encyclopedia for the people's livelihood."

Li Hao continued to look and found another before long. "A Log of Basic Infrastructure..."

"That's it!"

Li Hao quietly selected the book, rounding out Hong Yitang's selection.

"Li Hao, you choose for me!" Liu Long said nothing else. After some thought and finagling with keywords, Li Hao pulled some one that discussed A Record of Mountains, Rivers, and Terrain. It seemed to be an introduction of major landmarks in the ancient civilization.

Li Hao wished to obtain a better understanding of ancient topography, but there didn't seem to be a full map anywhere. Or perhaps his clearance wasn't high enough. Those books might be on the sixth floor out of reach.

They'd all made their selections, rounding out Li Hao's final wish. Time was of the essence, so they quickly left the library.

Chapter 492: Borrowing Books (III)

A shadow appeared in the library a while after the group left—a turtle. When it looked at the screen, some additional titles blinked into existence. They were written in red and more conspicuous than the golden names.

“It’s enough to peruse those at this stage. The rest can wait!”

Titles such as the Education of the Martial King, Regulations of the Nether King, Compendium of the Cast God... Many of them were incomplete and were the library’s most valuable collection. Li Hao and the others lacked the proper authorization to access them. They were purposefully kept away from these books due to the content’s complexity; they were beyond Li Hao’s reach. With the group’s identities, they would easily change the course of action for the martial masters of this age if they read these titles.

The old turtle waved a foot to dim the entire library before its shadow vanished.

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At the same time, Li Hao’s group was quite satisfied. They quickly walked out of the ancient city; Li Hao waved to the three Silver Armors on the walls when he passed through the gates.

“Troop leaders, I’m heading out. I’ll come back to visit later!”

“Be careful and good fortune!” the leader of the Seventh Troop said calmly. He didn’t express much reluctance as this wasn’t a place for the living to remain long. Undesirable effects might occur if they did.

While the leader of the Seventh Troop didn’t say much, the normally quiet leader of the Ninth Troop suddenly transmitted, “Twelfth Troop Leader, you can try placing some energy stones in the old exchange point when you pass by General Pagoda on your way out. Perhaps... you can trade for some essence of life. General Pagoda may be simply asleep and not dead.”

“I see, thank you!” Li Hao nodded. He’d seen that mentioned on the travel guide. Essence of life... was probably Water of Life. The hot spring had contained some and the ancient city was inert due to a lack of this energy.

General Pagoda... a plant spirit... was it the tree? A tree could be made a general? A tree spirit, was it?

Li Hao waved goodbye again and departed the perimeter of the ancient city. The three Silver Armors watched them go.

“Ole Nine,” said the leader of the Seventh Troop when the group was fully gone. “You had a lot to say just now. It’s been so many years since your great-grandfather graduated from Demonic Martial, but you still curry favor with a descendant of the Sword Sovereign. Do you have no shame?”

“Curry favor?” Ole Nine responded calmly. “I just gave a friendly reminder to a fellow comrade! Not to mention, there’s no need to curry favor with anyone. The commander is a direct disciple of Demonic Martial, take it up with him!”

“No way!”

The three troop leaders were more sentient than before and spoke of events past after a bit of conversation. They were much more awake and alive now, and more stabilized existences after becoming weapon souls.

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Outside the city.

A group of twenty-eight humans and one dog convened. Yuan Xingwu might have reached an agreement with Hou Xiaochen and the others. Li Hao didn’t know and didn’t care. They were one less—Light Sword. She was likely waiting at the platform.

Li Hao ignored that detail as well and fell in step beside Hou Xiaochen.

“Director, are you giving up on the Black Tortoise Seal?” he asked after a while.

“.....” Hou Xiaochen couldn’t be bothered to answer a question that was so obvious.

“What if there’s more people from the three great organizations waiting when we exit?”

“We’ll just kill them all!” Hou Xiaochen replied decisively. “Most of the powerhouses entered the ruins, the ones left behind are weaklings. It’s not like the three great organizations will send a continued flood of personnel to Silver Moon, so we don’t need to worry about that.”

“Did you kill the General of Northern Pacification?” He Yong suddenly asked. Even Yuan Xingwu’s footsteps faltered; the death of that personage was causing extreme unrest in the three northern provinces. Were Hou Xiaochen and the others behind that?

They’d only somewhat suspected it at first, but now everyone was more or less certain because Hou Xiaochen’s group was very strong. They were very likely to have killed that peak Nova that was protected by thousands of troops.

“What, do you seek revenge?” Hou Xiaochen smiled. That one had been from the royal family.

“No, but if you killed him... I’ll need to stay away from you.” He Yong raised an eyebrow. “While that guy caused a lot of complaints and grumbling, him being alive was far better than him being dead. The three provinces are unstable because you killed him, which will impact the nineteen northern provinces and Silver Moon.”

“Think whatever you’d like.” Hou Xiaochen grinned. “I did it if you say so.”

“Pfft!” He Yong snorted and said nothing else. Li Hao listened quietly off to the side. He was a Silver Moon denizen who didn’t know much about his home province, much less the three northern provinces. It didn’t matter who’d died or if someone killed someone, it had nothing to do with him.

They soon reached the tree tunnel and the young man sought out what should look like an offering table. Tourists and Battle Heaven denizens liked to come here back in the day to present offerings that might be accepted for Water of Life. It might be out of order now since it looked like the tree was dead.

After a while, Li Hao noted a table in the darkness. It was very small and covered in dust. One could easily overlook it if they weren’t paying attention. He swiftly approached to look it over—there was a tiny hole on it. He regarded it hesitantly, should he put some energy stones on it?

Based on his understanding, regular mysterious power stones wouldn’t do. It had to be the energy stones that he’d received from the army. He only had 166 pieces—his own portion of ten and 156 from merits. If there was no response from the tree, he wouldn’t be able to get them back. Just like when He Yong paid for the hot spring, it was a complete waste if one didn’t offer enough.

Hou Xiaochen and the rest watched him, not knowing what the young man wanted to do.

Li Hao set his jaw. Well, one couldn’t trap a wolf without being willing to risk their child! Let’s give it a try! Perhaps he would be able to obtain some Water of Life from all those years ago. It was supposed to be a marvelous item; the hot spring from before only contained some dregs, but the effects were magical all the same. It could regrow limbs and whatnot, making it possibly better than sword energy.

One piece, two pieces...

Hearts spasmed when they saw Li Hao shove energy stones onto the table. The kid had so much wealth that they wanted to rob him! Those stones looked different from regular ones!

Six in a row did nothing. Li Hao began regretting his actions. Six energy stones were the equivalent of sixty mysterious power stones. What a waste! This tree was a bottomless pit... If it wasn't for what the leader of the Ninth Troop had said, he really wouldn't want to give it a try.

"Let's do another ten. I'll leave if there's still no reaction after sixteen!" Li Hao grit his teeth and started placing stones on the table again.

There was no reaction after ten stones. Tears in his eyes, the young man prepared to go. He couldn't keep betting on this bottomless pit! He'll just view those sixteen as paying his dues. If not, it might be his life demanded later! It looked like General Pagoda was dead.

Just as Li Hao was about to withdraw, Hong Yitang suddenly said, "Try a few more!"

"Hmm?"

"There are some... ripples forming!" Hong Yitang sensed something. "Put some more in."

Li Hao's tears dried up and he put in a few more... then looked at Hong Yitang as he wanted to cry again. Five more!

Still nothing.

"Continue!"

The young man wanted to vomit blood, but Hong Yitang must have truly sensed something. He had to continue.

Twenty-five... twenty-eight... Li Hao also sensed something at thirty pieces. The table seemed to tremble. Pausing, he placed another six pieces on the table. That made for thirty-six, a massive depletion of his stores.

A drop of water slowly formed above the offering table. Hou Xiaochen's eyes widened; Hong Yitang flicked a glance at him and tossed a flask to Li Hao. "Put that in there!"

Li Hao quickly collected the droplet. Was this Water of Life? He didn't sense anything from it!

"It's sealed. you'll know when you use it," Hong Yitang explained. "Let's go, stop giving it stones. This seems like it's from the reserves and there may not be more if you continue. This tree... seems to be fishing for more. Don't shove in so much that you end up with nothing!"

Li Hao blinked. Fishing? He didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Surely... not?

"Li Hao, will you like to trade that with me? I can offer an origin weapon..." Hou Xiaochen suddenly asked.

"No thanks!" Li Hao said flat out. I'm not short on origin weapons. What do I need those for?

Hou Xiaochen blinked wordlessly. That had been a... damned decisive no. He wanted to give the offering table a try too, but he lacked the stones of that purity level and he could sense some of the ripples as well. Giving more to the tree was likely just throwing meat buns at a dog. It did seem to be fishing for more and might not offer anything no matter how much it received next.

Slightly regretful, Hou Xiaochen led the group away. After they departed, the offering table trembled and the tree hole shook, like there was someone cursing up a storm...

The old turtle in the ancient city looked over and shook its head. It looked like General Pagoda had run out of all of its wealth. Although it wasn't fully dead, it was just about. Too bad we can't go out to help you. One drop less of life essence won't do anything to you.

As for the energy stones it'd absorbed, they wouldn't have much of an effect. It would take hundreds or thousands of stones to rejuvenate it. Everything else was a waste.

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Light Sword was indeed waiting at the end of the tree tunnel. She wasn't afraid to see the group come toward her. Sweeping her eyes over Li Hao, she ended up looking at Hou Xiaochen. "We can open the door and leave now, right?"

Hou Xiaochen simply looked at the wall. It was almost time. Moments later, he waved a hand to turn the wall translucent. The Silver Moon Guard was still waiting outside and were undergoing their preparations when the time arrived. A vortex soon appeared on the wall—the exit was open.

Light Sword was the first out and quickly disappeared. The others filed out as well. Battle Heaven was sealed off once more when the outsiders departed and the ancient city sank into complete stillness.

Chapter 493: The News Spreads in All Directions (I)

Rift Canyon.

Three days passed swiftly; a crowd jostled outside of the canyon on this day. It was sizable as it contained wandering cultivators that couldn't enter the ruins, delegations left behind by all sides, and representatives from the Silver Moon official authorities.

Tension was high as people waited for the ruins to open. Today was when the expedition would emerge. Although it was midnight, the canyon was lit brightly on all sides. Standing in front of a group of Night Watchers, Hao Lianchuan fidgeted nervously. It was quite nerve-racking that Hou Xiaochen had entered the ruins himself and taken Manager Yu with him. What was the situation now? The three great organizations had entered with quite a few powerhouses in their delegations—they hadn't done anything to the director, would they?

Wang Ming was also nervous. Was Li Hao alright in there?

Only Deputy Zhou looked calmly at the exit from his high vantage point. How many had died this time? The possibility of Hou Xiaochen being a casualty never crossed his mind. That wouldn't happen. Although there were plenty of heavyweights from the three great organizations inside, their caliber was less than Hou Xiaochen and Kong Jie. It wouldn't be that easy for them even if they allied together.

If they forced Hou Xiaochen or any of the others into dire straits, everyone would be in for a difficult time once seals started being undone. Of course, Hou Xiaochen wouldn't choose that course of action if he had any other option available to him.

Deputy Zhou's eyes darted to the cliff face—the ruins were opening!

A figure flashed out and immediately rose into the air. Most didn't have a chance to see who it was before it disappeared. Deputy Zhou was afforded a clear look. He started, had that been...Light Sword?

If their surmises were correct, the one who'd come with the Xu member was Light Sword. She'd...emerged alone? Had something happened to Xu Feng?

Deputy Zhou was rather surprised. With Light Sword present, neither the three great organizations nor Hou Xiaochen would attack her ward. Why was she coming out by herself and leaving so rapidly? She ran like she was a fugitive.

Although Deputy Zhou was surprised by the first to emerge, he wasn't too taken aback. No one's death would be all that shocking unless Hou Xiaochen died.

"Who was that?"

"I didn't see them, they were so fast!"

"Was it the Xu butler?"

“Was it?”

“.....” A hubbub of discussion arose. Some were confused, others hadn’t taken a clear look, while a few managed to catch vital glimpses. More than anything, the mood was confused. How was this one the first one out?

They were less confused seconds later as Hou Xiaochen was next to appear. The man was as composed as ever. His step forward disappointed some in the crowd—he was still alive! It looked like the three great organizations hadn’t moved against him in the ruins, or had they failed?

People streamed out behind Hou Xiaochen. Manager Yu, Golden Spear, Kong Jie... Li Hao’s group, and finally Yuan Xingwu’s group. All of the humans were out; Panther’s appearance surprised the crowd. Why was there a dog here? Had someone taken it in with them? Why hadn’t they seen it before?

There was no time to contemplate as all eyes focused on the vortex on the cliff face. Where were the rest?

Hou Xiaochen coughed lightly—this seemed to be a signal. A flaming red spear manifested as his calm voice traveled outward. “The three evil organizations are too wicked for redemption! They ambushed powerhouses of the various factions while inside and were ultimately beaten back with our concerted efforts!

“Supernaturals of all sides were of one heart to slay evil, but they perished inside the ruins as well. I am ashamed to say that I could not bring back their bodies. The only thing I can do is to kill the remnants of the three evil organizations to avenge them!”

BOOM!

An enormous explosion ripped through the air as his spear detonated a team of Ghostfaces in the distance.

“No...” someone shrieked. Others were unbelieving and yet more shellshocked. What did he mean? That all of the powerhouses from the three great organizations were dead? But... so many supernaturals had entered the ruins! It wasn't just one or two representatives from each side—altogether, there were more than one hundred Solars alone! It meant that the elite wandering cultivators of nineteen northern provinces had been completely eliminated in one fell swoop!

Where were they??

This couldn't be all the survivors, could it?

“Ahh!!” Ghastly wails rose and fell as the spear swiftly dispatched a dozen Ghostfaces. Some horrified beyond belief tried running for their lives while others shouted with disbelief.

“That's impossible... Hou Xiaochen, you guys did something in the ruins!”

“The ruins are fake, they're a trap!”

BOOM!

The spear eviscerated another batch of supernaturals as it ran through heaven and earth.

Hou Xiaochen rose into the sky, his expression calm as his voice rang in the four directions.

“Every one of the three evil organizations is to be executed on sight! I had not sought to do so previously as cultivation is difficult and yours is a precious path. However, the three evil organizations continue to seek the downfall of our wondrous dynasty! I am a loyal subject of Skystar Dynasty and the proper course of action under such circumstances is to cleanse the land of these wretches! Kill!!”

BAM!

A spear churned in all directions like a phoenix and immolated the sky, reflecting a crimson light onto the land.

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Over the canyon.

Deputy Zhou looked down with widened eyes of incredulity. Not even he dared believe that these were the only survivors out of such a large expedition. He'd thought that the three great organizations would lose some people, not all of them!

Hou Xiaochen is as vicious as ever... and it looks like he hasn't been injured...

Some supernaturals fled toward Deputy Zhou; he glanced at them and subconsciously influenced them to alter direction around him.

BOOM!

Supernaturals died every time the spear stirred to action. The victims were always those of the three great organizations. Celestial's powerhouses... Red Moon's heavyweights... There were still some Solars left from them at the moment.

"Hou Xiaochen, you demon!" screamed one of them. "That's impossible, they can't all be dead! You'll burn in hell for this, you demon!"

This was incomprehensible! So many powerhouses had entered from the three great organizations, just Red Moon alone sent three of their Seven Moons. Some knew even the secret addition of Yellow Moon, so that was four! Apart from Red Moon, Orange Moon, and Indigo Moon, the rest of the Seven Moons had joined the expedition as well as an elder. All of them are gone??

On Yama's side, the Parity King and two Novas had entered. Celestial had also sent three elders... but every single one of them was dead!

"How is that possible!?" someone else yelled within the crowd. "Is this everyone? Where's my Liu family representative?!"

"We're also missing General Mu of the Director General Office from Near River! Can someone give us an explanation??" echoed a Near River heavyweight. Varying numbers of representatives had remained in the canyon; not many had entered the ruins. They were all stunned beyond belief. Where was everyone? Was this it??

Hou Xiaochen's voice rang through the sky again, this time with apology and regret. "Other than us, the rest were murdered by the three great organizations. There are still those from the Skystar Troops, provincial government, and central Night Watchers, however. Ah, Southern Fist from the royal family is also alive and a powerhouse left from the Xus..."

The survivors were many and from numerous factions as well. We're not the only ones to walk out alive. Look, there's people from the royal family, the provincial government, the Xus... Those who didn't make it out just suffered from bad luck!

The Flaming Phoenix Spear swept through the void again; Hou Xiaochen's voice cut through the general fear, panic, and horror.

"Night Watchers, the military, Inspectorate, and Silver Moon Guards will immediately mobilize to exterminate all members of the three great organizations within provincial borders. They are to be executed without exception!"

“Understood!” Hao Lianchuan and the others finally came back to their senses and swiftly scattered to the four cardinal directions. The strongest members of the three great organizations had nearly been eliminated in one joint operation. They still had personnel located in various hideouts; their doomsday was truly upon them.

Wandering cultivators were also swiftly fleeing the scene, each of them ashen faced. Some were gibbering messes while others were too horrified to speak. Heavens above! Something big was about to happen in the world. Thousands of supernaturals had entered the ruins and they’d all died, that was incredible!

Many important people seemed to have died as well. The Lius of the Ministry of Finance, a general from the Near River Director General Office, core members of the three great organizations, and a young master from the Steadfast Duke’s household...

These people were all known in the central region, their family backgrounds and factions were first rate. And yet, they’d all died in Silver Moon!

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Below.

Li Hao watched silently, impressed by Hou Xiaochen’s words. Talking black into white and reversing right and wrong... Everyone was quite skilled at this!

The three great organizations had lost too much this time. Meanwhile, Hou Xiaochen wasn’t inclined to kill the wandering cultivators. There was no need and he wanted them to spread the word for him. As for whether or not they believed him... who cared? Was there any evidence? Were they going to enter the ruins to look for evidence?

Mu Lin led the Silver Moon Guards to hunt down the fleeing organization members. Golden Spear hadn’t said a word from beginning to end.

Hou Xiaochen had killed a few people only at the beginning. As he landed, he reverted to his genteel and urbane manner with a cough. Despite looking a bit frail, no one dared underestimate him. What a terrifying person!

“Let’s go up!” he coughed. Li Hao grabbed Panther by the nape of its neck and flew up with the dog in hand. It wouldn’t do for Panther to raise attention through its skills. Granted, it’d already drawn attention for having walked out of the ruins.

Hou Xiaochen rose shakingly into the air with Manager Yu’s help. He’d flown around proudly before, but now needed someone to support him. They landed in front of Deputy Zhou, quickly joined by Director General Zhao, Huang Yu, and some other Silver Moon executives.

Chapter 494: The News Spreads in All Directions (II)

Hou Xiaochen coughed gently when everyone was present. “Give the order to exterminate the three great organizations! They were so cruel that they slaughtered innocents in the ruins. Unfortunately for them, their luck was poor and the existences in the ruins killed many of them in return...”

Director General Zhao didn’t say anything. He looked at Hou Xiaochen, then at the people behind the Night Watcher director. “It’s good that you guys are alright!” He turned to Deputy Zhou. “Report the news to upstairs and notify Skystar City that the three great organizations are causing unrest in Silver Moon. We need reinforcement!”

“Will do.” Deputy Zhou inclined his head and didn’t say anything.

Huang Yu verified that his people were alright when he looked at them. “Those from the military will go back with me. Yuan Xingwu, will you and your men come with me or immediately return to Skystar City?”

Yuan Xingwu had wanted to stay a bit longer in Silver Moon and visit Chen Yuhua; he blinked at the commander’s words. There were subtle undertones of telling him to leave!

“We have missions to undertake and will not trouble Commander Yu further,” he said after some thought. “We will immediately set out for Skystar City!”

“Be careful!” Huang Yu said indifferently. “Don’t wander around on your way back. Hurry and tell the Ministry of Military Justice that we really need more personnel in Silver Moon. If possible, deploy some heavyweights to us to assist in defensive efforts.”

Yuan Xingwu nodded and turned his attention to Li Hao, possibly wanting to say something to the young man. Li Hao had a calm expression on his face and inclined his head at Yuan Xingwu. His response was measured and showed a distinct lack of intent to engage in conversation.

There was no helping it, he really wasn’t familiar with the man. He would’ve made his greetings if his teacher had mentioned Yuan Xingwu often. The thing was, Yuan Shuo had never spoken of this name!

This senior brother of his might’ve done something to hurt his teacher’s feelings—such was Li Hao’s guess. Otherwise, Yuan Shuo should’ve mentioned him at least once, as even his surname was Yuan. Being his first disciple as well, it didn’t make sense that he was never present in conversation.

Yuan Xingwu sighed and guessed at some of the thoughts running through Li Hao’s mind when he saw the expression on the young man’s face. He transmitted, “Little junior brother, I’ll be going back now. We didn’t have a chance to chat this time. I’ll try to help our master the best I can. If I can convince the powerhouses of the Skystar Army to take action, that will naturally keep our master safe!”

“As for yourself, try... to stay away from the central region and especially don’t travel with Hou Xiaochen. He’ll be besieged by strong enemies when he reaches his post—his actions in setting up a separatist regime in Silver Moon have aroused prolonged dissatisfaction. Once he enters the central region, he might be attacked on all sides. The nine ministries and royal family might move against him as well. He is poised on the precipice of disaster, so think carefully, junior brother!”

“Thank you for your reminder!” Li Hao transmitted politely.

“Then... I won’t say anything else.” Yuan Xingwu ended the conversation when he saw that Li Hao didn’t seem interested in talking to him. He turned to Hu Dingfang. “Be careful, the situation is complicated in Silver Moon. Go back and discuss any thoughts with Yuhua, don’t be in a rush to

take action and definitely don't get any other ideas in mind. You also saw what happened today. I'm heading back, so be careful and don't get overly involved with the Bais..."

Hu Dingfang nodded without a word. Yuan Xingwu and his men swiftly departed.

"Director General Zhao, Director Hou," Qi Gang suddenly said. "Hu Qingfeng and I will be leaving as well then..."

"You're going the same way, so traveling together will be safer!" Director General Zhao looked at Hou Xiaochen—he nodded with a cough.

"Very well, safe travels! Traveling together will give you strength in numbers."

Qi Gang heaved a slight sigh of relief and looked at Hu Qingfeng. The man was also relishing surviving a calamity.

"I'll be taking my leave then, Director Hou, and await your arrival in Skystar City. I'm heading back first to prepare the way for Director Hou. I'll be sure to make ample preparations so that everything is ready for you!" Hu Dingfang didn't care that Qi Gang was regarding him with a derisive look. He backed away only after bidding everyone farewell.

The group of twelve quickly moved out. A combination of three Novas and nine Solars had nothing to worry about on their way back. At the same time, Hong Yitang transmitted to Li Hao, "Then I'll be off too. As for whether or not you should head to the central region... There's no rush. If you do, you should consider whether you want to go with He Yong or Hou Xiaochen. My suggestion is that you go by yourself. That will ensure a lower profile, you'll draw too much attention with them. I might need to enter closed door cultivation for a while and won't be able to look after you..."

Closed door cultivation?

Li Hao looked strangely at the man. He seemed to understand and smiled ruefully. "It's real seclusion. I need to think about the path to come and some other matters. Don't read too much into my words."

He did need to sequester himself a bit to contemplate his next steps. Although he'd made some decisions, he wasn't fully at ease with them. Not to mention, he needed to be prepared if he was to truly undertake those moves.

"I understand, then take care, martial uncle..."

"Ah yes, I'll make a copy of those two books and the Building Five Bridges method. Send their translations to me when you're done—I should be at the Sword Sect, which is less than five hundred kilometers from White Moon City. That should be within the armor's range." Hong Yitang prepared to leave, then continued transmitting, "You might be safer with Hou Xiaochen if you do go to the central region."

"Hou Xiaochen is crafty and cunning, but he has his bottom line. He likes to, or is passionate about, making deals of equal value. He Yong... you should know as well that he's not as foolish or honest as he appears to be. However, he won't brashly take action against you either. You're his hope to suppress his five locks. But remember, anyone who secures their footing in the royal family has conducted their fair share of devious plots as well. Don't be fooled by what he projects."

Li Hao nodded, he had certain thoughts in mind. He'd felt some of this in Ash Mountain, that He Yong might not have so easily let him off the hook if Hong Yitang hadn't been present as well. Granted, the young man also might not have saved He Yong if he'd been the only one there.

Hong Yitang was a decent person at the end of the day. He'd taught Li Hao some things on the first expedition. While the young man still didn't know why he'd done so, he felt that Hong Yitang was a more generous person. In return, Li Hao was more willing to deal with him.

Hong Yitang turned to the others and raised a cupped fist salute. "I have a myriad of tasks to attend to at the Sword Sect, so I shall not bother you any longer. Director Hou, Commander Yu, everyone... I take my leave!"

He turned and left. Hou Xiaochen watched him go without saying anything. Kong Jie followed his movements as well, before suddenly saying, “Are you interested in coming to White Moon City? Ole Hou’s about to leave soon. I’ll guarantee you some sort of deputy position at the Inspectorate or Night Watchers if you come...”

“No need, my thanks!” Hong Yitang was gone.

The director general and others silently watched the exchange. “That guy... has reached that step,” Kong Jie transmitted. “He trounced even Ole Hou in the ruins!”

Eyes widened at his words!

“Why are you so happy that I was trounced?” Hou Xiaochen laughed in his return transmission. “But it is indeed surprising that Earthturner Sword has reached this step. His sword intent is vast and majestic—it contains hints of great virtue. We don’t need to worry about him doing anything untoward. He probably has personal ideals and goals in mind. Earthturner won’t be committing wrongful acts.”

“How is Southern Fist?” Huang Yu’s voice echoed by their ears.

“He’s alright, good enough.” Hou Xiaochen’s assessment was mediocre. “Seal off the ruins. Some of the existences inside may have fully reawakened!”

Expressions shifted once more at his words. Reawakened! That was terrifying. No matter who or what it was inside the ruins, so much time had passed that no saint or villain was who they once were. Their sides no longer mattered. All that was relevant was that they were from another era, and hence should be regarded as a different race than modern humanity.

“Then Li Hao...”

“The eight families are indeed those eight families. Silver City is far more than meets the eye! Li Hao might’ve gained a lot from the ruins, but he doesn’t need to be placed under guard. We don’t want to cause unexpected consequences!”

“.....” The group discussed the expedition in a general sense without delving into specifics.

Li Hao didn’t offer anything. He left with Liu Long and Panther when he saw that no one was paying attention to him. A casual beckon was enough to summon Wang Ming. The latter ignored his grandfather’s look and quickly followed Li Hao.

.....

On the way back.

Li Hao didn’t say a word. After they walked for a period of time, Li Hao looked at Liu Long. “Chief, when we were in the city, Martial Uncle Hong spoke to you about working for him, didn’t he?”

Liu Long nodded.

Li Hao thought for a bit and said hesitantly, “I can understand some of your thoughts, but I obviously don’t share the depth of your feelings. Martial Uncle Hong says I’ve seen too little of the world and don’t understand certain things. He’s right.

“When we were in Silver City, you said that the Demon Hunters’ mission was to protect the city. To be honest, I still don’t really understand it.”

“It’s fine, everyone has tread a similar path,” Liu Long responded. “No one is born being kind with a sense of justice. My experiences formed my thoughts. After my father passed away from illness when I was a child, our enemies came calling. Silver City gave me a lot of help, making it possible

for me to grow up and join the Inspectorate. It's because of their help and trust that I am where I am."

Hence, he wanted to give back to the land and people that'd nurtured him. This was why he hadn't been in a rush to leave the city after he filled out his wings.

Chapter 495: The News Spreads in All Directions (III)

In the wake of Silver Spear's death, his innumerable enemies had come calling. Martial masters of Silver City had stepped forward to protect his son, as did the great personages of the city. The Silver character in Silver Spear was also the Silver of Silver City!

He had been Silver City's pride and glory. Thus, the older generation of martial masters in Silver City had fought for his son again and again. This was a very different experience from Li Hao's childhood.

"Chief, I might go to the central region," Li Hao breathed out. "I'll be further away from Silver City. I summoned you here from Silver City, but now I might leave again. I'm getting farther away from home!"

"Martial Uncle Hong is strong and I can tell that some of his ideals are to make what changes he can. If he thinks you're suitable to go with him, I think you can give it a try."

Hong Yitang had extended an olive branch to Liu Long. Li Hao had heard it, and was possibly meant to hear it. Liu Long wouldn't gain much following Li Hao around as the young man ran through the world. His personality and mind intent would not improve from killing more. Sometimes, a kind of faith and motivation were needed in addition to battle experience.

Hong Yitang would need the help of people like Liu Long if he wished to establish his little utopia. He wouldn't be able to accomplish it by himself.

Water was gentle. Liu Long comprehended the water aura because his own personality wasn't that of violent might. This was a tender mind intent—his waves veered on the ferocious side because Li Hao and Yuan Shuo had given him that suggestion, but it wasn't necessarily the most suited for him.

Liu Long frowned and didn't say a word.

"Are you worried about Sis Liu and the others?" Li Hao asked. "If you're worried about them, bring them with you. Or if you trust me enough, they should come with me."

He didn't want Liu Long to come with him, but rather Liu Yan and the others instead. That drew a surprised look from the man.

"They can only go to the Sword Sect if they follow you, chief," Li Hao continued. "That is a safe place good for retirement. But their personalities aren't like yours! I can see it—whether it's Brother Chao, Jian, or Sis Liu, none of them are willing to spend a lifetime cowering in Silver City. They want to rush out onto the battlefield and vent the resentment in their hearts. They bear bitterness, just like I do, and don't know how to release it."

Celestial had slaughtered Wu Chao's entire family, but even now he'd yet to take revenge. Yama had killed Liu Yan's husband. Although Hu Po was dead, she didn't seem to have let that go. Chen Jian's history was unknown, but he seemed to be having a good time in the Silver Moon Guards.

These people might be more suited to travel the land with him. Residing in danger might inspire them more, whereas Liu Long wished to stand guard over Silver City. They were people with different personalities.

"Are you really going to the central region?" Liu Long asked instead. "You have room to improve here too..."

"I haven't made up my mind yet." Li Hao gave it some thought. "Maybe I'll wait a bit longer for news from my teacher. I'll go if he still doesn't come back. I was too weak to go with him before, so he left alone. But now that I have some skill to my name, how can I just sit by while Red Moon chases him?"

"Only chief and my teacher were willing to take a stand for me when I was at my most helpless and surrounded with the most danger. Once chief is settled in, I'm going to go look for my teacher!"

“Chief fought Red Moon cultivators for me that day, despite knowing the danger.” Li Hao smiled. “Teacher risked his life to kill a Solar. My parents are dead and my best friend was murdered in front of my eyes. I have no other ties apart than you two! Martial Uncle Hong’s heart is boundless and majestic. I may not be as benevolent as him, but I know that a drop of kindness should be answered by a spring of gratitude!

“I must look in on my teacher.” The young man traveled to the central region not to see the wider world or meet powerhouses of all factions, he primarily wanted to find Yuan Shuo. His teacher could not die out there. Everything else was a secondary, minor reason. He could battle Novas now—he was no longer the weakling who couldn’t even hold down a chicken.

Liu Long said nothing more.

“You’re going to the central region?” An excited Wang Ming had been listening quietly off to the side. “Are we going to look for teacher? Take me with you!”

“You seriously aren’t afraid of death!” Liu Long rolled his eyes at the young man.

“Who isn’t, Director Liu?” Wang Ming cackled. “But being mediocre is even worse than death! To be honest, I like some thrills, so being commonplace is worse than death for me! I see how my grandfather struggles between being ordinary and superhuman. He expended most of his strength to enter peak Solar, but will likely never take another step forward. Look at Director Hou and the others—they’re all dashing figures in their fields. If a man doesn’t live like them and lives like my grandfather instead, they’ll drown from their own suffering!”

“Won’t your grandfather beat you for saying this?” Li Hao laughed.

“I don’t know,” Wang Ming chuckled. “But I do know that this kind of opportunity is rare. I may never leave the region if I don’t grasp it! I don’t understand the path of martial masters, but I do know that the supernatural path might be a viable one if we continue to walk down it...”

Li Hao didn't say or promise anything. It was unexpected that Wang Ming wanted to go with him, but also reasonable. The guy was quite bold. He had to be, to attack a Solar in the ruins. He had to be, to be bait. He had to be, to run around with Li Hao and ignore Hao Lianchuan and Hou Xiaochen's orders. Didn't that mean he wanted more opportunities when he followed Li Hao around?

The handsome supernatural was fearless!

The group walked toward a town in the distance. The Demon Hunters were waiting for them.

.....

News swiftly spread on this day. Silver Moon supernaturals had completely perished! Thousands of supernaturals had died in one fell swoop and the number of Novas dead were more than could be counted on two hands!

The three great organizations had sent nine Novas—ten counting Yellow Moon. They were all lost, including some wandering Novas, someone from the Xus, Lius, and a general from the Near River Director General Office...

Added to that Half Mountain, Tidal Wave, some Solars, and the Revolution King that'd disappeared earlier, plus Red Hair from even longer ago... More than twenty Novas had died or gone missing in Silver Moon over the short span of a month!

It was even more frightening when it came to Solars as more than one hundred of them had died! It was an incredible loss, too many powerhouses had died in the Battle Heaven ruins!

The news elicited an uproar from all sides when it spread. Some Novas had died in the central region war after all these years, but never on a scale as seen today. One excavation of an ancient ruin had caused the deaths of multiple Red Moon leaders! Yama was the same, the Parity King was dead and the Revolution King missing!

Some other details spread in the wake of the news—the Xu representative who escaped was the Light Sword of old. This detail came from the Night Watchers, along with the full story that Light Sword had threatened Li Hao over Xu Feng’s death. She sought to capture the young man to use him against Hou Xiaochen...

Indeed, that was the story in circulation. As for why she wanted to use Li Hao to threaten Hou Xiaochen... who knew!

Some guessed that Hou Xiaochen might’ve killed Xu Feng—actually, it wasn’t a guess, but the truth. This was the common sentiment. The three great organizations wanted to be active in the eastern provinces, which was Xu territory. There was no need for those organizations to pit themselves against the Xus.

It was rather Hou Xiaochen who was completely unscrupulous, unprincipled, and wouldn’t necessarily care about much. The general public was ninety-nine percent sure that he was behind Xu Feng’s death.

Hou Xiaochen’s brutal reputation spread throughout four corners of the land as a terrifying fellow to be wary of. No one knew what the inside scoop was, but everyone knew that Silver Moon’s official authorities had barely lost any personnel. They’d only lost two of Hu Qingfeng’s men.

Something was afoot here, a fact easily detectable by those sharp enough to keep their wits about them. Another piece of news traveled out at the same time—out of the Seven Moons, Violet Moon of Red Moon was not yet dead. She was being held in the Inspectorate dungeons, not the Night Watcher headquarters, as it was the Inspectorate who’d shut her away. The Inspectorate was spreading the news so that Orange Moon would turn herself in!

Otherwise, it would soon pass judgment on Violet Moon. As one of the leaders of the three evil organizations, she would ninety-nine percent be sentenced to death. There had never been an instance of a powerhouse from the three great organizations being tried and sentenced, Silver Moon might set the precedent.

These pieces of information swiftly spread through the land, crossed the North Sea, and entered the central region! Even the heart of the dynasty was in a hubbub over the happenings.

Hou Xiaochen chose this timing to announce that he was heading to the central region to take up his post. He had accepted the Night Watcher redeployment order and was going to be a deputy director at central headquarters.

That sent another wave through the land. The man who'd just intimidated the world had forsaken forming his own kingdom and raising the flag of independence in Silver Moon. He'd given up being a traitorous king. Instead, he would take up his post at Skystar City. How astonishing!

Everyone's attention immediately shifted from those who'd died to Hou Xiaochen. That person was coming to the central region!

.....

In the far off Skystar City.

Lights were on throughout the night at various agencies when they received word.

"While Hou Xiaochen has agreed to redeployment... who will actually dare make use of him?"

"That's right, it's a huge problem as to where he'll be placed."

"The three great organizations won't show him mercy. He was so ruthless as to kill more than a dozen Novas, one hundred Solars, and thousands of supernaturals in Silver Moon. As expected of one of the three commanders, he reeks of blood!"

"Heh, we'll just sit by and watch two tigers fight. The Night Watchers need to resolve their internal conflict. Yellow Dragon's wanted to control the agency for a while now and I think the one in charge was weaker than him. Now that reinforcement has come, I think Yellow Dragon has the biggest headache!"

“Haha, that’s true! But I wonder if the Ministry of Finance will erupt with anything. Hou Xiaochen was too brazen and arrogant as to kill one of the Lius!”

“.....” No sleep could be found throughout Skystar City tonight. News from the border, from the savage wasteland swept throughout the dynasty. Some were hopeful, some were indifferent, and yet others clenched their fists with fury!

Chapter 496: The News Spreads in All Directions (IV)

At the same time, in a hotpot restaurant.

Yuan Shuo breathed in fragrance from his pot and slathered his mouth with grease as he ate. He took out an item from his pocket—a tiny jade pendant that had some characters floating on it. He didn’t pay much attention to the information scrolling at the beginning, but snorted coldly when he saw the last line.

Across from him, Jadelight Sword curiously fished pieces of meat out her pot. She found this method of eating quite novel. The woman asked curiously at seeing him snort, “What is it?”

“Nothing.” Yuan Shuo wiped off his mouth with a sneer. “The Seven Swords of Silver Moon are very arrogant!”

Jadelight looked wordlessly at him. Who are you talking about? She didn’t mind as the old man was certainly not talking about her. Starting a slaughter in the central region was only one of the reasons why she followed Yuan Shuo. Jadelight was more interested in the various changes that had taken place in the region. Their food and drink were different; she followed Yuan Shuo in partaking of various delicacies.

The old man was very bold as he sauntered around to enjoy delicious fare every time he killed someone. It almost made Jadelight feel that she’d wasted her life all these years, that she should’ve conducted herself as carefree and easily as Yuan Shuo.

Contrary to the picture of suffering under a bitter grudge that she'd imagined, Yuan Shuo quite enjoyed life. He lived in hotels, enjoyed fine dining, employed all sorts of identities at the drop of a hat, and was very convincing in everything he portrayed. He completely led Red Moon around by the nose.

Yuan Shuo picked up a piece of meat and munched on it. "That old witch Light Sword is still alive! I didn't kill her back in the day because I felt that her method is unique and couldn't bear for the martial world to lose her legacy. But she's got some nerve to bully my disciple!

"How dare she bully Li Hao in Silver Moon!" A cold light glittered in his eyes. "Li Hao's trained in martial dao for only a few days, but she's an old thing who's trained for several decades. How dare she interfere with the Five Styles discipline?! I'll kill her sooner or later!"

It wasn't hyperbole when he spoke of killing someone—he really would do so.

Jadelight glanced at him and lowered her head to continue eating. Light Sword had made a foolish decision! It was far better to issue a challenge to Yuan Shuo than to cause trouble for Li Hao. If one must, one could send one's disciples to fight Li Hao. Despite being a killing fiend, Yuan Shuo was a stickler for the rules. He wouldn't say anything about a scrap between the younger generation. But if Light Sword did the deed herself... there wouldn't be a good ending in store for her.

Yuan Shuo quickly recovered his composure and continued eating. "On the other hand, the little monkey has some ability to his name, eh. He managed to kill a lot of people on this expedition—a ton of Novas are dead. He seems to be coming to the central region next."

"Okay."

"Let's talk about happier things," Yuan Shuo changed the topic with a chuckle as it suddenly felt like he was preaching to deaf ears. "Little brat Ying Hongyue should be in a panic losing Green Peacock and the others. I wonder what he's thinking."

"Do you think he'll care with that personality of his?" Wu Hongshan wasn't concerned. "He's long past that period, but he'll definitely take revenge. He's got quite a vengeful streak to him."

“That’s true.” Yuan Shuo laughed as he started eating again. “I’d like to go have some fun with Sky Sword. I wonder how strong he is now? Light Sword’s whereabouts are unknown, but Sky Sword is a known entity. What do you think about beating up Sky Sword?”

“.....” Wu Hongshan couldn’t be bothered to respond. Do you think you can defeat Sky Sword? He could kill Novas with one stroke a few years ago, he’s terrifying! You should first make it through Black Widow’s hunt!

Yuan Shuo bent his head to his bowl without further word, feeling somewhat dejected. They’re coming straight at me! It seems like I’m not nearly as intimidating as before. If this was twenty years ago, they wouldn’t dare come directly at me even if they borrowed courage from elsewhere.

What a pity that his organs weren’t fully strengthened, that the melding of his fourth aura was just a little off the mark. Just you wait, you bastards! He wouldn’t return to Silver Moon just yet, he wouldn’t go back until he combined five auras together!

Li Hao seemed fine. I wonder if he’s improved at all? He could kill a peak Solar before, he can’t possibly have improved so quickly that he can kill Novas now, can he? There must be a reason for Light Sword seeking him out, and it certainly wasn’t to threaten Hou Xiaochen with the lad. It more likely involved the Xus; apparently, the old witch had joined their banner. Xu Feng had died in the ruins, hadn’t he? Some guy on the bullshit Divine Masters Ranking. Li Hao couldn’t be behind it, could he?

Countless thoughts flashed through Yuan Shuo’s mind, some of them unbelievable. A sense of urgency rose in his heart! This wouldn’t do! The saying of the pupil exceeding the master was just nonsense that he’d fed Li Hao. His student always had to be weaker than him, it’d be too humiliating otherwise!

.....

News and gossip of the Battle Heaven ruins circulated madly. The entire dynasty discussed it so hotly that it overshadowed the unrest in the three northern provinces. As chaotic as the situation

there was, it didn't result in the loss of thousands of supernaturals and dozens of Novas in one battle. And when it came to ordinary people, no one cared no matter how many of them died.

More continued to suffer and die as the unrest continued, but nothing was as shocking as the death of a Nova.

.....

In a small town.

The Demon Hunters listened to Liu Long summarize the situation in the ruins. After a long while, Hong Qing couldn't help but blurt out, "Deputy Liu says that several immensely powerful sword cultivators appeared in the ruins on this expedition, and that Light Sword is the equivalent of peak Nova? My father was stronger than her among the Seven Swords..."

She sounded a bit jealous! So Light Sword could fight peak Novas now? My daddy was one of the Seven Swords of Silver Moon and ranked second among them!

Jadelight Sword now followed Yuan Shuo in rampaging through the central region. Light Sword appeared on the scene in domineering fashion. Sky Sword dominated the central region. The others were dead. Out of those alive, her father was the worst out of the bunch. It... made for unpleasant hearing.

It felt awful! And stoked some jealousy. I thought my dad was amazing when he was a Solar, but now look at him. What's a Solar worth? He can't even fight the leader.

Liu Long suddenly found himself at a loss for words. The biggest shock to him on this trip was the eruption of power from Earthturner Sword and Southern Fist. And yet, he couldn't speak of it because Li Hao was playing dumb and seemed determined to see the act through. There was nothing that Liu Long could say to refute Hong Qing's words.

Seeing how envious and disgruntled the girl was, he really wanted to tell her that her father was incredible. He beat off a crowd of provincial officials by himself! What a pity that the man's daughter was oblivious of his feats and thought that her father was still an ordinary Solar.

Li Hao smiled as he flipped through an ancient book. "Martial Uncle Hong is pretty strong. It's good to keep a low profile. People like Light Sword are too much in the limelight."

"I wish my father was more in the limelight," Hong Qing said enviously. "What a pity..."

Forget it, she was better off not saying anything!

"However, Light Sword is so shameless as to bully the weak! She's a fellow Silver Moon martial master, but doesn't follow the rules at all. Although my father is weaker than her, he often says that we need to conduct ourselves according to custom. If everyone disregarded the rules, the world would be a chaotic mess."

Li Hao grinned and Liu Long couldn't help but ask, "What does Swordmaster Hong usually do at the Sword Sect?"

He was suddenly very curious and wanted to learn more about Hong Yitang's character. This was also a sign that Liu Long was tempted. It went without saying how strong the man once was, but that was all Liu Long knew about him. He wanted to know more about the man through the eyes of other people. One of the best venues was through his daughter and disciples. They happened to be everywhere here.

"What does he do?" Hong Qing blinked. "He doesn't seem to do much. He usually teaches some martial dao, plants flowers and vegetables... Oh, and sometimes takes us out on missions. We accept the missions posted by the neighboring cities. Some of them come to us for help when harassed by supernaturals. The Night Watchers are too busy at times, which gives us a chance to earn some money to maintain our daily training regime."

“They sometimes give us some money and other resources. There’s a lot of people at the sect, so that’s a lot of mouths to feed.”

“Earn money?” Liu Long blinked.

“Yep.” Hong Qing nodded. “We have a lot of members and quite a few children to house, clothe, and feed. Father likes to wander around outside and brings back children when he sees they have no home to return to. This has created nearly one thousand members at the mountain.”

“But... you only have maybe forty martial masters and roughly the same equivalent of supernaturals. That’s not even one hundred superhumans.” Thirty martial masters from the Sword Sect had joined the Demon Hunters in one go! That left almost no martial masters at the sect apart from Hong Yitang. Even if there were, those who were yet to set foot into Slayer of Tens couldn’t count as martial masters.

“But we can feed ourselves now!” Hong Qing said excitedly. “And we’ve gained a lot from this mission, a lot more than we usually earn from the small missions around the neighboring towns! We can send back some of our salary when we’re paid next month. Father can pick up some more kids if he wants to then.”

Liu Long looked at her with sympathy, as did Li Hao. Was this the worst off martial second generation they’d seen thus far? She had a domineering father, but didn’t know about it. She had to earn money through minor missions to feed herself and even send money back home after leaving home to work. She wasn’t the only one, but all the Sword Sect martial masters seemed to undertake the same tasks. They were waiting for their monthly salary to be deposited and then sending money back to support Hong Yitang...

Damn, that sucked.

Chapter 497: A New Era (I)

“Isn’t Earthturner a bit out of line to act like this?” transmitted a shocked Liu Long to Li Hao.

“Even if he hides his true strength, he shouldn’t send his daughter and disciples out to work for a living when he’s a Solar!”

It'd gotten to the point where they waited every month to be paid! Liu Long hadn't given thought to his wages in years. This was... a laughable situation.

Li Hao chortled and looked at Hong Qing, then at the others. "You don't stop Martial Uncle Hong from randomly picking up orphans off the side of the street? It's hard enough for martial masters to cultivate themselves, much less raise other people as well."

"It's alright," Hong Qing giggled. "Some of them are really cute. They swarm around me when I'm home and call me big sis. You know, leader, sometimes they're very interesting."

"We were picked up off the side of a street too," Hong Hao piped up. "If it wasn't for the Sword Sect... Master pitied us and took us in, teaching us how to read and write and practice martial dao. Those who could not train were instructed in other aspects. They could thus make a living for themselves even if they left the mountain."

"There aren't many adults in the sect these days, most of us are kids. Many who grew to adulthood left the mountain to eke out a livelihood in the vast Silver Moon. Some became officials, some joined the Inspectorate. Others started their own business or worked for others. Most who leave the Sword Sect are willing to give back to it. A lot of people send money back to the sect once they start earning money, keeping only what they need for themselves..."

Hong Hao looked at Li Hao. "Therefore, we support all of master's decisions and preferences. If it wasn't for his casual care back in the day, where would any of us be now?"

There hadn't always been a Sword Sect in this world! This faction was just a function of one person's outpouring of generosity in taking in a group of people. After Earthturner Sword accumulated some money, he gradually enlarged his operations until he formed the Sword Sect.

Therefore, there weren't many powerhouses in the sect. Apart from his senior disciple Hongxiu breaking through to Solar, there weren't many Sunflares in the entire sect. The martial masters were even worse off as there wasn't a single Dominator.

Such a roster of strength was less than the Light Island of old, the faction that Yuan Shuo had easily destroyed before the first expedition. Hong Yitang didn't purposefully search out Heaven Favored or martial dao geniuses. He simply went with the flow and taught those he took in if they were suited for martial dao.

Thus, Sword Sect members were an even-keeled, peaceful bunch with solid foundations. Their skills weren't all that stunning; there would've long been some Dominators among them if they were that remarkable.

Hong Yitang's expectations for them weren't that high either. He just wanted them to be able to protect themselves in an era of chaos. It was enough that they didn't commit wrongful acts when they left the sect. As for whether or not they admitted they were a Sword Sect member, changed their background, or joined another faction—he didn't care.

Liu Long listened quietly. "Has the sect taken in a lot of people over the years?"

"I don't know." Hong Hao shook his head. "Sometimes people come, sometimes people go. Master doesn't stop them. People can leave whenever they want. We can go out and work once we're of age, get married, or do whatever. Master doesn't levy that many rules on us. He's an easygoing guy and rarely leaves the sect apart from accepting some Night Watcher missions. But it's got to be at least... eight thousand kids over twenty years, if not ten thousand?"

Who remembered? There were steady waves of people coming and going; currently, there were roughly one thousand people in the sect. While many came back to visit, there were those who never returned after they left.

Hong Hao was used to this. If they left permanently, so they left. At least there were still plenty of people willing to come back and give the sect some support. Much of their daily supplies and necessities were sponsored by people who visited.

"This is my father's only hobby," Hong Qing laughed. "My senior sister... ahem, fanned the flames and has continuously supported my father in picking up more children. We've taken in even more over these years. Otherwise, I remember that the sect maintained a constant roster of five hundred people back in the day. Now it sits at almost one thousand.

“My senior sister even encourages my father to bring back adults. Thankfully, our new additions are all decent as they come from war torn areas. They help with chores around the complex, such as cleaning, cooking, washing, and the like. We’re generally much cleaner than we were before. We have too many people these days and most of them are children, so it’s a dirty mess. Even I had to wash clothes once in a while...”

Hong Qing wanted to cry at this point. When the Sword Sect was predominantly children, she had to roll up her sleeves when dirty clothes overflowed, even though she was the daughter of the sectmaster. It was one thing if she washed the clothes of the older children, but the younger ones who weren’t potty trained yet... Those were memories she didn’t want to recall.

“Master says that when you marry in the future, you’ll know how to do everything and won’t suffer in your new home,” Hong Hao laughed. “You’ll know how to wash clothes, cook, take care of children, martial arts...”

“I’m not marrying.” Hong Qing rolled her eyes. “Martial dao is the best. Will I need to depend on someone else’s favor if I become as strong as our leader?”

Next to them, Li Hao said nothing and continued reading his ancient tome of the Building Five Bridges method. Liu Long’s interest was piqued, however. “Are all of the kids in the Sword Sect from Silver Moon?”

“Not all, many of them are from other places. There are children from the central region, other northern provinces... Silver Moon is well enough since we don’t see much fighting. There’s more from the three northern provinces since they’ve experienced continual unrest.”

“Does Swordmaster Hong teach anything else other than martial dao?”

“That’s all my master teaches, my senior sister teaches the other subjects. She knows a lot and is apparently from a rich family. Ahem, who knows? We don’t talk about this. She teaches the girls some other skills such as cooking and cleaning, but also the zither, chess, calligraphy, and painting. She also knows how to weave...”

As Liu Long continued his questioning, Hong Qing had nothing else to do but keep responding. These weren't major secrets. Hong Hao listened beside them, coughing discreetly when Hong Qing mentioned subjects relevant to Earthturner Sword's martial dao. He didn't care about anything else.

There weren't many secrets at the Sword Sect. Apart from his master and senior sister's gossip, everything else was regular day-to-day living for the outside world.

.....

This kind of conversation was very boring, but Liu Long, Hong Qing, and Hong Hao chatted until dawn. The crowds were gone and the Demon Hunters would travel back to White Moon City today. When everyone left, Liu Long looked at Li Hao. The young man had spent the night reading—a rare sight.

"If you go to the central region..." Liu Long took a deep breath. "I'd... like to stay."

"Are you sure, chief?"

"Yes!" Liu Long rumbled. "One should seek out the uncommon in the common! I wasn't too familiar with Swordmaster Hong before and knew only a little of his stories in the martial world. They paint him to be a timid, weak-willed person who didn't dare fight Professor Yuan. That was the martial world's greatest criticism of him.

"But after hearing his accomplishments at the Sword Sect, I cannot help but think that maybe this is what he seeks instead. He drifts around the clouds like wild geese, but has shouldered some responsibility in the process. Now he wants to do more, and I think I should... stay and help him. It is a cause for pride that I have been invited by Swordmaster Hong.

"My strength is mediocre in the central region. Here, I can help Silver City at times. Although there is no war in Silver Moon and the three great organizations have been exterminated, I worry that they'll seek revenge sooner or later..."

He'd decided to stay. Liu Long hadn't made up his mind at first, but the night's conversation had helped him come to a decision.

"Then stay!" Li Hao nodded.

"Are you sure about heading to the central region?" Liu Long breathed out.

"I'll hold off on that for a little bit. We have a lot of resources at the moment, so I should digest them all first. Even if I go, it won't be for others to hunt me or to go to my death. If I go, I go to kill!"

His eyes narrowed as hatred sharpened his tone. Who was he going to kill? Ying Hongyue was his first choice! Some hatreds were unable to be erased—that of his parents' and best friends' death. Even his parents' bodies were gone. This kind of hatred would be hard to wipe out even if the four seas were emptied. My heart will not rest until Red Moon is no more!

Liu Long could stay, but he could not. Since Red Moon's people would not come, he would go to them. But not right now. He would continue to strengthen his body, blood qi, organs, and build the five bridges. He would then use the Mind Fruits to enhance his aura and practice the Weeping Willow Sword to its utmost. It would be best if he could comprehend the wood aura as well. If not, he was even of the mind to consume the Goldensky Lotus and strengthen his other auras first.

As for whether or not that would cause an imbalance when he eventually grasped the wood aura... that was a problem to solve in the future. Thus, he had a lot to attend to at the moment. He didn't have that much free time. Hou Xiaochen could leave in such a dashing manner because he was strong. He was so strong that he would still be a titan in the central region. The same did not hold true for Li Hao.

.....

The Demon Hunters headed for White Moon City right after breaking their fast when the sun rose. It was October 1st.

They crossed through Rift Canyon again—there was barely anyone there. Everyone else had either left or died. There were only a few Night Watchers or Silver Moon Guards on duty at the entrance to the ruins.

When Li Hao and his people crossed Rift Canyon, they happened to run into a frazzled Hao Lianchuan. The man quickly rushed over when he saw the Demon Hunters.

“Are you going back to White Moon City?” he panted.

“Yes, where are you going, director?”

“To chase down the remnants of the three great organizations!” he huffed. “We haven’t stopped all night. There are so many Red Moon members and a lot of them have run. More than a thousand Red Moon supernaturals have gathered from the nineteen northern provinces. Many died and quite a few more ran off. I need to lead the team to the north of the province as I hear some have escaped into Ash Mountain...”

“Forget the mountain.” Li Hao frowned. “You can ignore that area.”

Chapter 498: A New Era (II)

“Why?”

“I made a trip to Ash Mountain before—it’s very dangerous. Half Mountain, Tidal Wave, the Revolution King, and sixteen hell masters all died there!”

“.....” Hao Lianchuan sucked in a sharp breath. He hadn’t known about this. No wonder those people hadn’t appeared at the ruins. He’d thought they’d gotten lost chasing Li Hao or were still making their way through the mountain. So they were all dead! That was terrifying!

“There’s major monster spirits there, very strong ones,” Li Hao explained upon seeing that the man didn’t know. “I made it out by the skin of my teeth. Since those Red Moon members have barged in... let them. They’re dead meat! Well, since Director Hao is on the move, why don’t you stay in Silver City for a few days? You’ll be right there in case defeated members of the three great organizations seek to attack Silver City.”

There was only a Sunflare in residence at Silver City. Although the three great organizations were scattering everywhere, fleeing for their lives, they might commit some unspeakable acts if they decided they were out of options.

Li Hao had wanted to send Liu Long back for a few days, but upon further thought, perhaps he should give Liu Long something even better. The young man himself was due to leave the province as well, meaning that he and Liu Long would part ways for a while. He had to strengthen the chief’s organs before that happened.

“Me, go to Silver City?” Hao Lianchuan blinked. I’m a deputy director, you want me to hold down the fort in Silver City?

“I have some treasures on hand that may be useful in helping the director locate his fifth supernatural lock.” Li Hao smiled.

“Mmhm, then I will lead the team there.” Hao Lianchuan abruptly swelled with righteousness. “Silver City is in a remote location and close to Ash Mountain. There may indeed be danger!”

“Then I must trouble the director!” Li Hao grinned.

“Of course, all in the line of duty!” Hao Lianchuan chuckled. Going anywhere was all the same. He could visit Silver City and come back in a few days when everything was settled elsewhere in the province. It would be for the best if Li Hao could locate his fifth lock.

Hao Lianchuan quickly set course for Silver City.

“Our Deputy Director Hao is a man of action,” Liu Long burst into laughter. “No wonder Director Hou ignores everything all these years and leaves it all to him.”

Look at how proactive he was! His blood nearly frothed with eagerness when he was offered some benefits.

Li Hao’s grin deepened, but he also properly contemplated that he really ought to help the deputy director locate his fifth lock. If the deputy director’s strength didn’t improve after Hou Xiaochen’s departure, he might have a difficult time in things to come. Manager Yu would likely leave with Hou Xiaochen, Golden Spear and the others might as well.

In that case, while there would still be plenty of powerhouses in Silver Moon, Night Watcher strength would immediately plummet to a low.

.....

The group rushed back to White Moon City in the afternoon. It was as peaceful as ever. No one would present themselves here at this moment unless they had a death wish. Hou Xiaochen and the others were back, which meant that the provincial capital was more dangerous than any place else in the province.

“You guys head to the Silver Moon barracks while I make a trip to the Night Watchers...” Li Hao issued a string of instructions before heading to the Night Watcher headquarters himself. As a member of the Silver Moon Guards, he was still Hou Xiaochen’s subordinate for now. He could claim other duties called when they were out in the field, but a report had to be made now that they were back. Such were the rules!

Li Hao wouldn’t care about this if times were as before, but as he thought back to a certain golden commander’s insistence on the rules... He needed to be careful of Hou Xiaochen giving him a punch to the face!

.....

Night Watcher headquarters.

It bustled with people in a very energetic fashion. Some quickly greeted Li Hao when they saw the young man. Here was a person who'd killed six Solars! Even if his feats weren't impressive in the ruins and the particulars were hazy, he was still formidable to escape pursuit from the three great organizations and make it into the ruins.

Smiling, Li Hao nodded at people and made his way upstairs. Hou Xiaochen's office was on the sixth floor—his was the only office on that floor.

The door was open, Hou Xiaochen was inside. Manager Yu was present as well. Li Hao knocked on the door, "Reporting in!"

"....." Hou Xiaochen and Manager Yu looked at him, startled. We know you're here and that you're right outside the door... What's the point of yelling so loud?

"Come in." Hou Xiaochen sat down behind his desk. He lifted his chin after Li Hao entered the room and indicated for the young man to sit.

Li Hao stomped his foot with a resounding crash and sat down, ramrod straight with a stern expression on his face.

"....." Hou Xiaochen smiled. "Are you showing off the Battle Heaven Army customs?"

"No, I just felt that it looked cool and wanted to give it a try!" Li Hao grinned.

Hou Xiaochen's smiled deepened and he looked at Manager Yu. "You head over first, I'll be there shortly."

“Alright.” The woman nodded and paused when she reached the door. “Don’t forget, your mission is not complete. Remember what you agreed to when you borrowed the Flaming Phoenix Spear.”

She left with a turn of her heel. The kid was getting too big for his britches! Remember what you promised!

Li Hao coughed drily without protest. He had indeed made a promise and said that he would help Hou Xiaochen obtain the Black Tortoise Seal in the ruins. That would pay off two favors—one left by Yuan Shuo, the other by himself.

I do remember my promise... but you might as well kill me instead if you want me to seize the seal from Director General Wang.

“Don’t listen to her,” Hou Xiaochen chuckled. “I do not seek payback when I do someone a favor. Just think of it as you owing me a weapon on par with the weapons of the eight families. The Black Tortoise Seal might be the weapon of the Wangs. Just remember that you owe me one.”

“.....” Li Hao was at a complete loss for words. His silence didn’t perturb Hou Xiaochen.

“Did you come to me for something?”

“No, I just wanted to give a quick report.” Li Hao marshaled his thoughts. “We killed a few people and were chased to Ash Mountain for it. I met four major monster spirits inside the mountain. They were incredibly strong—Half Mountain and the others died to them.”

He sketched out the events of the past couple of days, not knowing if Hou Xiaochen was familiar with these major monster spirits or not. He might be.

“The monster spirits of Ash Mountain...” Hou Xiaochen inclined his head when the young man was done. “Ash Mountain is much more than meets the eye. There are a lot of treasures deep in its depths and even some ruins. Great Li on the other side is a thorny issue as well. It’s good that there are monster spirits in the mountains—they prevent Great Li heavyweights from invading us.”

So the director did know about the monster spirits, and he also knew a lot about the mountain.

“The world thinks that Great Li has fallen, but we know better. Not only does it still exist, but it is very strong! They are stymied only by Ash Mountain, by the monster spirits that call it home. Otherwise, they would’ve invaded en masse a long time ago.

“Great Li might also possess some heritage from the ruins. That is why they have a lot of powerhouses, and ones that walk the path of ancient martial dao. It’s different from modern day martial dao, making for strong bodies and blood qi, but very weak mind intent. They also have high numbers of supernaturals and experts among their martial masters...”

Li Hao was slightly surprised. Why did it seem like Hou Xiaochen had been to Great Li before?

“Have you visited that kingdom before, director?”

“Once...” Hou Xiaochen nodded. “It’s very dangerous, don’t go if you can help it. But sparring in martial dao when you’re there will help your cultivation as well. You can learn from other’s strong points, distill the essence and discard the dross. They’re all ways to improve yourself. Great Li will not be able to reach us in the short term, we just need to be on guard against them reaching an agreement with the monster spirits of Ash Mountain...”

“But we have our strength as well, so there’s no need to be worried. It’s just that we’ll be in trouble if they do invade, war will be inevitable then.

“You don’t need to worry about the Ash Mountain monster spirits for now. I’ll set out after three days and depart Silver Moon. I won’t bring too many with me, but neither can I not bring anyone at all. That will leave me completely without proper footing in the central region. Little Yu and the

Silver Moon Guards will be coming with me. That will be their new land of opportunity. How do things look on your side?”

“Are you taking all of the Guards with you?”

“Yes.” Hou Xiaochen nodded. “All of them! It is hard for people to break through to Dominator if they stay here. There will be more battles in the central region and thus, more opportunities for tempering. Only then will they stand a chance of advancing to Dominator and creating an army of Dominators!”

So the director was bringing the Guards with him, and all of them at that! That was quite unexpected.

“What about the pirates?” What would Silver Moon do against the pirates if the Guards left?

“Do you think the Silver Moon Guards is our only effective unit of force?” Hou Xiaochen laughed. “Don’t underestimate us. The Inspectorate, army, and provincial government aren’t just lying around. The Guards and I are the only ones leaving, they’ll still be here.

“And you have the time to worry about pirates. I thought you’d care more about the Guards leaving and your compensation package.”

“It’s just that I’ve heard people talk about the pirates being strong,” Li Hao started and quickly responded. “But since the director has said so, then there is naturally no issue.”

“So what are your thoughts?”

“I haven’t decided yet. Before he left, my teacher told me to keep a low profile. Leaving with the director... might be too high profile.”

“It’s up to you.” Hou Xiaochen didn’t try to persuade the young man otherwise. “Don’t keep going to the ruins. You are of the eight families, yes, but keep in mind that it’s not a good thing to enter too many ruins. You might be overly affected. You can learn the ancient heritage, but not all of it and find yourself lost within. Otherwise, you’ll just be the next ancient cultivator.”

“Those who practice the ancient arts are very strong, but it is not a formidable undertaking to socialize in ancient martial dao. Jadelight and Berserk Blade walk the ancient paths. They are strong, but they are a hair weaker compared to the others.”

Li Hao nodded.

“Go on then and be about your business!” Hou Xiaochen waved a hand.

“Understood!” Li Hao rose with a sharp snap, stomped his foot, and left.

The display actually made Hou Xiaochen slightly uncomfortable. He shook his head with a laugh after the young man was gone. Who was Li Hao putting on this act for, eh?

Chapter 499: Cultivation, Promotion, Farewell (I)

After some thought, Hou Xiaochen dialed a number. “Li Hao may not go to the central region for the time being. If he doesn’t, have his Demon Hunters stand guard over the Moon Sea.”

“The Demon Hunters number less than fifty. Is he able to adequately protect the shoreline?” asked a voice on the other side.

“We’ll see.”

“Understood.” The call ended. Hou Xiaochen rose and walked over to the window. He looked down to see Li Hao leaving the building. The look in the man’s eyes shifted rapidly, his thoughts unknown. He watched Li Hao leave headquarters before sighing. The eight families... the guardian clans... Perhaps they were long forgotten after countless eons.

.....

Li Hao quickly returned to the Silver Moon Guards barracks. Golden Spear and the others were absent—possibly hunting the three great organizations. There was only one troop of one hundred left at the complex.

The young man sought out a large training hall and summoned the Demon Hunters. He took up residence in the small central room and had the others sit outside. Li Hao prepared himself to extract elemental energy. This time, he wanted to thoroughly improve himself and use all the treasures that he could.

With the departure of Hou Xiaochen and the others, he needed to be fully ready even if he wasn't going to leave in the short term. Compared to Hou Xiaochen, he was less acquainted with those such as Kong Jie, Director General Zhao, and Huang Yu. At the very least, Hou Xiaochen was more reliable than them.

With the director gone, who knew if the only troop left of the Silver Moon Guards would run into trouble? What if the frequently mentioned pirates attacked when they learned that Hou Xiaochen had left with his subordinates?

All sorts of thoughts swirled in Li Hao's mind as he began absorbing elemental energy and studying the method of building five bridges. If he didn't craft the bridges, he had to absorb equal amounts of energy each time he strengthened his organs. This balancing process was too troublesome and would gravely impede his cultivation speed.

.....

At the same time.

The Sword Sect headquarters.

This was a large mountain that the Sword Sect had established a large section of living quarters on. People came to and fro from the complex in lively fashion. The sounds of children reciting from textbooks traveled out of some of the buildings. There were fields on the outskirts and people tending to the crops.

It was as if a paradise removed from the world.

Hong Yitang silently looked out from the second floor of his building. He'd stood there ever since returning to the mountain and watched his people for a very long time.

"You've been there for a while, you must be tired. Do you want to eat something?" Hongxiu asked worriedly from behind him. It had indeed been a very long time. The magnificent man in front of her was very rarely in such a mood, as if he was about to make a major decision.

The last time he'd resembled this state... it'd been when he married her. That had been a challenge to societal convention. Hong Yitang had hesitated for a very long period of time before making his decision.

He continued looking out the window before saying, "The ancients say that we should not commit a small act of evil just because it is minor, and that we should not refrain from a small act of kindness just because it is insignificant. A small act of kindness is still a deed of good. If we are capable, then we should seek to do so.

"Such has been my personal philosophy all these years, to put forth a tiny amount of strength for the good of all if I am able to do so. I am willing to nurture an additional degree of kindness if it does not affect myself."

Hongxiu quickly nodded her head. This wasn't just a small act of kindness, it was a heart of ultimate benevolence in these times. That was why she admired and worshiped the man in front of her. She was willing to give up everything for him because people like him were all too rare in modern society.

“But I also hold the notion that it is better to focus on the self when lacking in resources, and to share the abundance with others when possible. I am not able to reach the state of worrying over matters before they are a problem for the world, and to find joy in life simply because the people are happy.

“I am not an ultimate powerhouse of this world. I may not even rank in the top five of Silver Moon. I am probably not top one hundred in the land. Such is strength.

“As for power, we are a tiny Sword Sect with several dozen supernaturals and martial masters, and me who is not worthy of mention. The tyrants of our world wage war and throw around great expectations to dominate part of the land. What talents or virtue do I possess to mend the holes of our world and patch up some of its wounds?

“When others contend for supremacy and you focus on being a person of kindness, you become a hypocrite in their eyes even if you have no wish to be involved. To them, I am just building a reputation and brewing a great plot! Having a good reputation in a time of chaos is an original sin! If the harmonious Sword Sect brashly involves itself in these matters, where will our disciples go?”

“Real men follow their principles and undertake what should be taken, bypassing what should not be,” Hongxiu said softly with understanding. “The Sword Sect disciples are willing to follow you, whether into war or into seclusion. We are but drifting wood in this chaotic era, without root, without connection, without ties or concerns. Whatever you wish to do, my husband, no one will gainsay. We will only support you! The people of the world were originally of one destiny, but many are those who do not know gratitude or pity. And so, our roads will not lead to the same ends.”

Hong Yitang was silent for a very long period of time before turning to gently pull over the beauty next to him. He looked at those working in the fields for a while before smiling, “Then... I shall follow my heart!”

The earth aura churned, enveloping the massive Sword Sect Mountain with a certain influence. Voices reciting from textbooks, joy, and laughter echoed throughout the mountain and spread outside of the mountain as sparks of hope.

Someone should step forth to take a stand when the world changes. These times should not be as they are!

.....

Cultivation, endless cultivation. Mysterious power, elemental power, mysterious power stones...

Li Hao wasn't planning on using any of them sparingly. His thoughts were that he should use what should be used. If he didn't use them, someone else might if he died tomorrow. If he sought revenge, he needed strength. At the moment, he didn't care about lofty ambitions or grand vision. All he cared about was vengeance.

The day he slaked his thirst for revenge might be the day that he finally set everything aside. How many could walk into his heart when it was sealed off?

Hong Yitang, Hou Xiaochen, and the Battle Heaven Army were all seeking to change him. He was no fool, he understood. He understood every word they spoke and the meaning behind such words. What they didn't know was that revenge could cause one to lose themselves.

Li Hao was an accepted student of the Veteris Institute. Someone who could accomplish such a feat in this day and age, and be accepted by Yuan Shuo, was no fool. On the contrary, he was very smart. However, the smarter he was, the more likely he was to tunnel in on something and find it difficult to set aside.

Intelligent people were unable to live blithe lives. He'd bided his time at the Inspectorate, spending a year keeping such a low and humble profile that no one found anything amiss with him. He then struck swiftly in a critical moment and shattered all of Red Moon's plans. Prior to that, likely not even Ying Hongyue had fathomed that it would be Li Hao ruining his plans. He might've considered many candidates, but the only one that didn't make his list was Li Hao.

Dense elemental energy wafted through the hall; Li Hao didn't absorb much, he left it for the Demon Hunters. He was attempting to build the five bridges between the five organs. The more he tried, the more amazed he was.

These bridges weren't simple connections of energy and neither were their effects merely enhancing the five organs together at the same time. The more he experimented, the more Li Hao found that there were profound mysteries to the organs. The organs summoned the five spirits and nurtured the five auras! The five auras could meld as one and the five energies combine together.

When he tried to utilize the supernatural locks as bridges, they erupted with iridescent power the moment the five bridges seemed to touch. It was similar to internal force, but not entirely the same.

"Five organs, five auras, five elements, five energies... What a pity that I haven't formed my word aura yet!" Li Hao was rather regretful—he might have some other thoughts and reflections if he also grasped the wood aura. At the moment, all he vaguely felt was that he might know what his teacher meant by melding the spirits together. And for the spirits to emerge from the organs afterwards... he was beginning to form the inklings of those thoughts as well.

A row of numbers hovered in front of him—they came from the Silver Armor. He'd selected ancient tomes containing knowledge that he needed the most and borrowed them from the Battle Heaven library. He opened the first book.

Fundamental Martial Dao Theory at the Martial University.

Indeed, a fundamental class. It spoke of how to strengthen the body, the limbs, temper the bones, and then the organs. One eventually entered the grandmaster realm and manifested mental strength—also known as mind intent in modern cultivation.

According to the book, Li Hao and the others were grandmaster level powerhouses when they became Dominators. They were possibly even stronger. Grandmasters could not do what Dominators could do—demonstrate their mind intent in physical form and use it to kill. At the very least, they wouldn't accomplish it so easily. The physical body could not support such immense mind intent.

The ancient times were indeed different from modern times. The ancients seemed to have weaker bodies, which made it easier to strengthen them. The weaker organs could be strengthened and tempered at an early stage. They didn't need to worry about mind intent being so strong that it burst through the organs.

The book also mentioned that human bodies of the ancient civilization resided in a half sealed state. There were also the three cavities that transferred vast quantities of energy to a special place. [1] This was in stark contrast to modern humans, where the body was strong and there was no place for energy to go other than the organs and body itself...

The supernatural locks!

Li Hao suddenly thought of the supernatural locks. They locked away energy, the organs, limbs, and concentrated power in the body. Thus, the supernatural locks weren't just simple locks, but also a self protection mechanism. Opening them meant releasing potential and relinquishing protection of the self, so there were many drawbacks to being supernatural.

Li Hao quickly opened the second book, Differences Between the Energy and Blood Qi Systems. What he read gave him much food for thought. The path of energy for the ancients was the equivalent of the path of supernaturals in modern times, yet there were some differences. The ancients could turn the entire body into energy, especially the fragile organs. Those could be directly converted to energy!

No wonder! The ancients didn't need to worry about energy invading the organs because the latter was already assimilated. I am energy, energy is me.

"Modern day supernaturals possess mortal bodies and give up their natural defenses when they break their supernatural locks. Of course they're a lot weaker. Then... the supernatural domain is much more disadvantaged compared to the path of energy and its practitioners are likely destined for death!"

Chapter 500: Cultivation, Promotion, Farewell (II)

Li Hao had many thoughts after reading the ancient texts. There were still differences between the two systems. The key difference was in terms of physical constitution. The ancients could utilize the three cavities to transmit energy outside of the body. Modern humans, however, concentrated all of their energy on themselves. There were no so-called three cavities.

The three cavities were a weakening and a protection. The supernatural locks functioned in the same way, but they would ultimately erupt in the body. That caused modern humans to suffer even greater backlash and pay a greater price.

Why is that? Li Hao wondered. Why had the three cavities vanished? Following the proper order for gradual advancements might be easier if they were still present.

According to the ancient books, proceeding down the proper order might make for easier and stronger cultivation. The young man didn't understand why the three cavities of the books had vanished in modern society. Although the supernatural locks provided similar function, it created enormous trouble for martial masters as they accumulated energy that was continuously funneled into the body!

The stronger they were, the harder they were to break in the end. Releasing the self resulted in what had happened to modern day martial masters. There was so much power contained in the supernatural locks that the body and organs couldn't withstand it. The organs of the ancients weren't necessarily stronger, their tempering seemed to be easy training in Li Hao's eyes. It wouldn't necessarily measure up to Yuan Shuo's decades of nurturing, but even Yuan Shuo couldn't withstand the power of summoning spirits in all five organs.

A variety of thoughts ran through the young man's mind. Some of the knowledge that his teacher had passed on also floated to the forefront. Li Hao thought of the Black Armors, how these soldiers' souls remained unceasing and their obsessions undying millions of years after their death. They weren't the novices that the ancients spoke of. Instead, they were likely the so-called grandmaster level martial masters since they'd formed mental strength.

This was an innumerable sum of grandmaster! This was an army formed of grandmasters. Otherwise, they would've faded away after the physical body died. There would be no lingering obsession.

Li Hao continued to read as energy flowed into his body to strengthen his organs.

“The ancients simply needed to open their passages of blood qi and construct a circulation system of energy to build the five bridges. But if we do so now, our fragile passages won’t possibly support the domineering power of the five organs. This is particularly true for those of us who have strong supernatural locks and auras. A circulation system of the five organs won’t work at all.”

The more Li Hao thought about it, the more he felt it was the supernatural locks that could truly support such an endeavor. But could supernatural locks permit the flow of blood qi and energy? They absorbed energy. If blood qi passed through them, perhaps they’d just devour that too. In that regard, the locks would continue to grow stronger until they reached an ultimate peak and stopped taking in energy.

Was there such a limit to the locks?

Li Hao frowned, he didn’t know and had never heard about one. Perhaps other people were trying to find it, but he’d yet to do so or reach a point of finding that his supernatural locks weren’t taking in more energy.

The young man suddenly thought of someone.

“Paging Company Leader He Yong!”

“.....” He Yong’s signal traveled out of the silver armor after a while. “What?”

“Is Martial Uncle He still nearby?”

“I’m leaving after a few days, what?”

“I have a question, martial uncle. Is there a limit to the locks? Is there a point in which they don’t absorb energy anymore and stick to a certain state without changing...”

“Yo, not bad kid! You’re already studying that step? Of course there’s limits. I told you before that those who can break their locks and unseal themselves have reached the extremity of a path. There’s a sign of that limit—the locks no longer taking in energy!” He Yong hadn’t thought that Li Hao would start studying this system so quickly. “If we ignore the lock in the head, we’ve discovered nine locks in the human boy.

“Setting aside supernaturals, martial masters like us have filled the locks of our limbs to their limits. That is the cultivation level we sit at. When the locks of our four limbs are fully saturated, that puts us on par with Nova level battle strength!

“If we continue to strengthen the locks of the five organs... that makes for the hardest step. Strengthening the locks does not also mean strengthening the organs, so the organs tend to be very weak. Not a single one of my locks of the organs are at that ultimate stage yet. Someone like Hong Yitang may have accomplished it with one of his locks, so they normally display peak Nova strength. I can only display mid Nova!”

He Yong gave a detailed overview. “This is a bit far removed from you since I sense the locks of your four limbs have yet to reach saturation. Hence, Ole Hong and I didn’t say anything. To think that you’d be researching this so quickly!”

A light danced in Li Hao’s eyes. I see! He finally fully understood what it meant for a martial master to unseal himself. The supernatural locks!

“Then why don’t we unseal the locks of the four limbs? Why do we open the ones of the five organs?” This was a question that still floated through his mind.

“I don’t know about the others as our paths may differ. As for me, I tried and couldn’t. While the locks of my limbs are saturated, I find that the ones of my organs are easier to budge. The ones of the limbs seem to have solidified and cannot be broken. No battle strength can be released. All you’ll get for your efforts is a massive fart, which would be hilarious!”

Li Hao laughed as well. “So, this means that the locks of your five organs are saturated because the ones of your limbs are, right?”

“Not necessarily. Some may choose to strengthen the ones of the five organs first—it’s all up to individual choice. Some may even go straight for the one in the head. That’s what Tyrant Blade did. His mind intent is incredible, so it’s possible that he focused on the head first...”

“So what my teacher is doing is focusing on the five organs first?”

“Yes!” He Yong affirmed. “They are the hardest—or rather, they’re as difficult as the head. The four limbs should be the easiest, which is what most martial masters choose these days. I am so, Ole Hong is probably so. We end up at the same destination, the only difference is how we reach that final stop.

“There’s another point of difficulty to the five organs, and that’s that the locks aren’t completely independent of each other. They possess five different abilities, ones that conflict with each other! This conflict is the greatest source of trouble as it easily causes the five organs to break apart. It is why we have yet to find the proper method to progress beyond this difficulty.

“Your teacher’s Breathing Method of the Five Styles may resolve this limitation, so we’re all waiting and hoping!”

A sigh ended his words—it looked like he was quite tormented by this conundrum. Strengthening the five organs was a very difficult path to walk.

“Even if your teacher succeeds, he has five auras while we have one. That’s another major point of difference. So you tell me, do we have any hope even if he succeeds?” He Yong was very pessimistic.

“Don’t forget the Building Five Bridges method,” Li Hao reminded. “There might be some problems with teacher’s breathing method that may be resolved when we train the five organs as one!”

“You’re studying Building Five Bridges already! Have you had any gains?”

“Yes, but I’ve run into some difficulties that may require some of my teacher’s theories...” And the difficulty there was that his teacher’s organs likely hadn’t reached full capacity yet. Then would his organs continuously reside in a weakened state if his teacher tempered them, with only the supernatural lock being made stronger instead?

There were still main points that his teacher didn’t mention. Perhaps he’d discovered them only after he left. Had he resolved them? If he hadn’t, Li Hao would have to strengthen his locks to their utmost before building the five bridges. In that case, He Yong and Hong Yitang might as well abandon hope! Who knew how long that would take?

The knowledge that Li Hao currently possessed was insufficient for him to make some changes. Perhaps only his teacher could modify the breathing method so that the energy would be balanced and avoid being absorbed by the supernatural locks.

The young man cut their communications short. He couldn’t locate his teacher at the moment, anyway, so he might as well continue strengthening his organs and their locks. Since he had sword energy, it was much easier for him to do so than anyone else. Otherwise... one supernatural lock might take him many years to fully strengthen. It was much easier with sword energy at hand.

With that in mind, Li Hao began absorbing elemental energy. Rays of energy melded into his body, mimicking the efforts of the martial masters outside. Endless energy seeped out for them to digest. A black dog occasionally took in a few mouthfuls as well. It was noticeably fatter than it was earlier and was drowsy from overeating. This place was the best!

Apart from Liu Long, the other forty-nine martial masters had almost all entered late Sunderer. There were two or three who’d yet to do so, but it was only a matter of time. The captains were beginning to hone their mind intent.

There was one exception among them—Wang Ming. He was different in that he didn’t need to comprehend mind intent. He absorbed vast quantities of elemental energy to baptize his

supernatural lock before absorbing it into his organs. His metal energy was noticeably stronger than the rest and he reached late Sunflare in the blink of an eye. He even began progressing toward peak Sunflare.

There were both advantages and disadvantages to supernaturals. A major point in favor was that they didn't have particularly significant bottlenecks at the moment. They simply needed to locate their supernatural and slowly wear away at it to grow into their strength. Their rate of progress was superb!

However, he wasn't in a hurry to break his next supernatural lock. He only saw five at the moment, which would theoretically take him to Nova. But he recalled what Yuan Shuo had said, that his potential would be greater if he strengthened his supernatural locks!

When he broke his last lock, he'd fused the fragments into his other locks. That was one strengthening. Now he absorbed more elemental energy to continue fortifying them and not just wear away at them. Since he couldn't be a martial master, he would be a powerful supernatural! There was so much energy for him to choose from. If he'd followed the proper order of things, he might be making his way to Solar already.

But after some thought, Wang Ming decided to slow his progress down. Even if he couldn't withstand martial masters of his cultivation level, he wanted to be invincible among supernaturals!