

## Star Gate 521

### Chapter 521: Making His Name Known (II)

Li Hao walked out of the ship's hold to find the Demon Hunters swiftly cleaning up the battlefield. Scanning the area, he dove into the sea without a word. People clad in black armor were tossed out of the sea moments later. A dozen martial masters had fallen into the sea in the earlier battle; some were already unconscious. If Li Hao didn't search them out, they would likely die in the depths.

Yun Yao started treating some of the injured martial masters. The Demon Hunter supernaturals had been cocooned in fantastic protection when the skirmish raged, which filtered out unnecessary trouble for them.

"We killed roughly five hundred supernaturals in this engagement," panted Liu Long when he returned moments later. "It's tough to gauge the exact number. I gathered nine storage rings and some of the Sunflares were also carrying them. I didn't look into what exactly they held."

"There's a place like a warehouse in the ship that holds some mysterious power stones, they might be general property. We collected roughly twenty thousand cubes of mysterious power. It would've been more, but too much dissipated and there's also the bodies that fell into the sea..."

The twenty thousand cubes were personal possessions of these supernaturals. There was also an unknown amount in the storage rings to consider. Li Hao had two from the Novas; there might be a significant amount in the nine that Liu Long held.

"Chief." The young man didn't mind these findings, he was just a bit confused. "Although Silver City is small, the Inspectorate is still an institution worthy of trust in the people's eyes. The province also finds the army trustworthy. People are excited to see inspectors or soldiers when they run into trouble. Why... has it turned to this?"

"Near River, or many places rather, are locales where soldiers do more harm than bandits," Liu Long sighed. "You would think the soldiers are the bandits! The bandits might let you live, but the soldiers might take off your head and pretend you're the enemy so they can earn merits!"

“Near River isn’t one of the three northern provinces...” Li Hao’s jaw dropped. “It has the Director General Office overseeing things, it hasn’t fully fallen apart...”

“It’s all the same!” Liu Long shook his head. “Besides, it’s just civilians dying, who cares about them? The nine ministries started off well enough, but they gradually spiraled out of control. It has to do with the rise of the supernatural as well. If this domain didn’t develop, the situation might be better after another few decades. But reforms stopped after the supernatural came to be, tying the hands of those at the ministries...”

The nine ministries had cherished a laudable heart for reform at first. Silver Moon was one of the beneficiaries—the nine ministries weren’t all bad, at least they were better than when the royal family ruled. But before their reforms could be completed, the supernatural appeared twenty years ago and broke everything in the process.

Thus, the age shifted to chaos!

Li Hao felt momentarily defeated, sensing that kind of darkness for the first time. No wonder these people cowered at the sight of soldiers... so soldiers could be worse than any alternative at times!

Then, Silver Moon was in a good state. The army in residence operated under strict regulation with Huang Yu at its head.

The young man breathed out, completely unaware of what he should be thinking about. His mind was a mess and he didn’t want to think of anything at the moment. The enemy may not be completely defeated.

“Mind the situation here.” He looked at Liu Long. “I’m going to the front for a look. Perhaps there are more pirates there!”

“Be careful!”

Li Hao set foot into the air without another word. He just wanted to get far away from here. There were many new revelations fighting to upend his worldview. So the world outside Silver Moon was

even more frightening. So it turned out that Silver City was in decent straits. The scattered supernaturals that made their way over to the province were dispatched by Liu Long and the others. The three great organizations didn't dare run too rampant, the army kept unrest under control, the Silver Moon Guards exterminated pirates...

The provincial government that he'd found so impotent seemed to be quietly operating well. The people's livelihoods were stable—at the very least, he hadn't heard of anyone dying from hunger in his lifetime.

"So... Silver Moon is a paradise?" Li Hao murmured incredulously to himself. Didn't they say that being a borderland province, Silver Moon might be the poorest out of the ninety-nine? That the province was populated by savages? Didn't they say that Silver Moon's martial world was the most sinister of them all?

Why did it suddenly seem so much better than a lot of places?

There was unrest in the three northern provinces and Near River was said to be much richer than Silver Moon... but many of his notions were abruptly shattered in this moment. So this was all there was to Near River!

All sorts of thoughts floated to the forefront as Li Hao shot ahead. A dog tossed and tumbled over the sea, biting one last supernatural to death with a massive chomp.

"Can't you imitate the major monster spirits and talk with your mind?" Li Hao looked at Panther. It was tiring not being able to communicate.

The dog looked blankly at him and shook its head. It couldn't do that.

"Why not?"

Panther continued shaking its head. No was no, it didn't know why. It could understand speech wanted to talk, or imitate the old turtle and communicate through mental ripples. However, it always felt a bit short, possibly because it was too weak!

Indeed, weak monster spirits couldn't talk. As for when they could... they needed to grow stronger. They just needed to continuously grow stronger, much stronger than it was now. Perhaps speech would be possible then.

Li Hao was slightly disappointed. He waved a hand and picked up speed. Panther padded swiftly over the water surface, waves undulating beneath its feet. It felt very much like the aura of the Nine Forged Force.

The dog seemed to have reached an exceedingly high level of comprehension with the Nine Forged Force. It didn't know anything else, just surface level knowledge of the Five Styles. When it came to the Nine Forged Force, it seemed to have grasped the method's true meaning.

One human and one dog proceeded smoothly. Li Hao glimpsed another ship roughly a few dozen kilometers out. There were flags fluttering from it, but no lights. However, Li Hao saw approximately one hundred balls of light in the darkness!

One hundred pirates, and their caliber seemed very high! The ones he'd dispatched before contained even Starlight, but here, their weakest was Darkmoon. Most of them were Sunflare and there were three Solars. Although there were a lot fewer people compared to the previous ship, their overall quality was much higher.

The White Shark Raiders!

Li Hao read the group's name from the flag snapping in the wind. So these were also White Shark Raiders. He hadn't thought there'd be two groups of them here tonight, one led by a mid Nova and another by a late Nova.

It would seem that they placed quite some value on Silver Moon!

“Kill them all!” Li Hao transmitted to Panther as he soundlessly landed on the ship. Like an assassin, he locked onto a Solar and struck soundlessly. Pfft!

He sliced a throat open!

“We’re under attack!” someone shrilled.

Li Hao roved throughout the ship like a king of the night. Stroke after stroke followed his steps. Being a martial master in silver armor, he was undetectable by his enemies. They only knew where he was after he killed someone.

“The enemy is too strong, run!” came a roar before the speaker jumped into the water. He promptly vanished as Panther ripped him to pieces. He couldn’t call out a warning, so pirate after pirate threw themselves into the water. Someone flew into the air, dropping as a corpse in the next second as sword light flashed through the void.

“We are the White Shark Troops, which esteemed personage...”

Pfft. The man split apart into pieces before he could finish talking. The White Shark Troops? How dare a bunch of cannibalistic pirates label themselves part of the military?!

Li Hao found the notion ludicrous! He attacked with abandon from the darkness. Even though he was gravely injured, he just wanted to kill these people as fast as possible! It wasn’t until he kicked open the ship’s hold six minutes later and killed a supernatural hiding inside that a smile spread across his face.

Where do you think you’re hiding?

Panther also hopped onto the ship. A human and a dog wandered around the ship, raising ghastly shrieks wherever they went. Some hoped to be lucky enough to evade their pursuit and retracted

their mysterious power, but they were still as visible as ever to the duo. One used a pair of special eyes, the other sniffed out particular scents to track their targets.

The ship was quiet after a few more minutes; more storage rings collected in Li Hao's hand.

"Deputy Liu, does anyone know how to steer the ship? Bring that ship over to me, we've captured another one here!"

"We do! We'll be right there!" Liu Long quickly responded.

.....

After approximately ten minutes, a tattered ship with some holes in its side drifted to the ship that Li Hao was on. Both ships were enormous and very durable, likely reinforced by mysterious power. There might even be other treasures refined into the large ship, making it impervious to supernatural attacks.

Liu Long and the others noted the corpses on the body. People jumped over and began cleaning up the battlefield without needing to be instructed to do so. Liu Yan joined them before long to make her report.

"We comforted the women for a while, but they're still in an unstable emotional state." She looked at Li Hao. "There are too many bodies on the first ship and they belong to civilians, so they shouldn't be thrown into the sea. Leader, can we transfer them here?"

"Yes." Li Hao inclined his head.

Liu Yan quickly returned to the first ship to make the provisions. Hong Qing walked over with reddened eyes and took off her armor. "Leader, they're... in such a wretched state and have no home to return to. Can I bring them back to Silver Moon and take them back to the Sword Sect?"

“.....” Li Hao blinked.

“We often have cases like these at the Sword Sect,” Hong Qing quickly added. “They’ll suffer lasting damage if they’re not properly looked after. We have the experience necessary. Otherwise, just giving them food and money will still result in them going mad after a period of time.

“At the Sword Sect, people who’ve gone through similar experiences can take care of them and guide them. They’ll survive their experience better this way and go on to a new life. If not... they’ll likely die no matter where they go.”

Li Hao nodded. He really didn’t know how to handle this kind of situation. He was much more at ease after Hong Qing’s words. The Sword Sect might be able to handle what he could not. He could kill, but it was very difficult for him to do anything else.

#### Chapter 522: Making His Name Known (III)

“I chatted with them,” said Hong Qing. “They said that we killed one of the three commanders of the White Shark Raiders in our earlier battle. The pirates broke into their village this afternoon and killed everyone in the village. Women that were passable when it came to appearance were spared, especially as there were children that needed to be nursed. These situations have happened before and always end up with all of the women being killed. The children are often raised into pirates...”

Li Hao frowned, not wanting to say too much or understand any of this in greater detail. Despite the victories, he still felt a knot of emotion churning in his stomach in the aftermath.

“The White Shark Raiders have lost six hundred supernaturals, two Novas, and eight Solars in this skirmish,” he said instead. “How strong do you guys think they still are?”

Li Hao took a deep breath before receiving a response. “Forget it, let’s not talk about this yet. We have more people now, so let’s head back first. Get all the pirate corpses back onto the first ship and hang them up!”

Some eyes widened!

“Hang them on the ship and sail them back!” A cold light glittered in Li Hao’s eyes. “The news will spread at daybreak and the White Shark Raiders can come as they wish if they want revenge! If they don’t seek vengeance, then I’ll go find them when I’ve settled these people in and fully rested!”

“Leader...” Liu Long frowned. “Why don’t we keep a lower profile? We might stand a chance of ambushing them then...”

“No!” Li Hao shook his head. “There’s no point in keeping a low profile. These animals get more vicious the more humble you are! The only way to stop them is through equal violence, equal slaughter! That Nova pirate leader wasn’t afraid even when I wanted to kill him. He was afraid only when I used a more brutal method against him. Not only do we need to kill this kind of person, but we need to strike fear into their hearts!”

The young man knew that it might be better to sink the ship and pretend ignorance. It would create a more advantageous situation for their next ambush. But in that case, these fellows wouldn’t be afraid.

“But if they attack us and penetrate Silver Moon...” Liu Long worried.

“Hmph!” The look in Li Hao’s eyes was cold. “If that’s the case, the ones in White Moon City better make their moves. There’s nothing worth pining over for Silver Moon if they don’t! Which out of Kong Jie, Director General Zhao, Deputy Zhou, and Commander Huang Yu isn’t a premier powerhouse? And don’t forget Earth...”

He wanted to say Earthturner Sword, but decided not to upon seeing that Hong Qing was still present. With so many powerhouses in the province, would they all bide their time unto their deaths if they still didn’t take action when pirates attacked? Li Hao didn’t care what they were planning. He just knew that the White Shark Raiders might not have the courage to come for revenge.

If they did, he’d kill them!

Liu Long nodded after some thought. He didn’t try to speak other sense into the young man.



Li Hao was suffering from an impact he'd heretofore not experienced; he'd begun to lose his composure. Someone normally as low profile as him suddenly wanted nothing more than for everyone to know his strength. Hanging all of the pirate corpses on the ship was also a warning to the White Shark Raiders.

Liu Long said nothing else and called out, "Hoist all of the pirate corpses over the sails!"

"Understood!" shouted the Demon Hunters. Some of the Sword Sect disciples were thrilled by the command and didn't find anything inappropriate about it. The disciple who'd told Li Hao about the cruelties of the pirates felt his blood run hot and luxuriated in the sweet thrill of vengeance. He leapt into motion and pierced through multiple bodies, threading them with a rope and hanging them on the sails!

The women being transferred out of the ship emerged with children in their arms. Liu Yan wanted them to back away and wait for a while, but they insisted on burrowing out and glaring hatefully at the pirates draped over the ship's sails. Great enjoyment spread over their faces, but they ultimately covered the children's eyes out of pity.

Li Hao watched silently until the scene was cleaned up. "Return to the city!" he ordered.

The two ships headed south, crewed by the Demon Hunters. The sky was beginning to brighten. Li Hao ripped apart the pirate flags fluttering in the wind with a single punch!

After some thought, he hung a piece of long black cloth on the sails and directed his mind intent to brand it with a bloodthirsty tiger, one that seemed ready to break out of a cage. He wrote with his fingers and emblazoned a bloody "Li" character on the newly made flag.

It hung high in the air and undulated in the wind. Li Hao regarded it with quiet contemplation. A ferocious tiger breaking free of its cage! He wanted to say something, but didn't know how to say it. Thus, he created the first flag of his life—the Li flag of the ferocious tiger!

Darkness faded away from the sky. The flag fluttered in the wind, snapping like a tiger howling through the mountain and ready to pounce on its next target!

.....

Southern Ford.

Kong Jie had arrived. He furrowed his brows in a look of tired concentration at the coast. He'd traveled through the night, finding a prolonged sprint wearying even at his level of strength. Originally planning on heading out to sea, he paused when Wang Ming stopped him to say that Li Hao and the others were returning.

The inspector general frowned even more fiercely at that. How could Li Hao set out in the middle of the night?! What would they be able to do if he was lost at sea??

Thankfully, there hadn't seemed to be much of an issue. The young man had returned. Perhaps he hadn't run into any powerful existences.

Kong Jie wasn't that concerned about pirates attacking. Silver Moon wouldn't be completely caught off guard in Hou Xiaochen's absence. If pirates really did come to Southern Ford, the city would be able to defend itself for a while. Reinforcements would quickly come along—it wouldn't immediately fall to the pirates like Li Hao imagined.

"What is that?" someone gasped on the shore.

Kong Jie quickly looked into the distance and saw two ships loom into sight. One of them had a flag streaming in the wind. It wasn't too big, yet seemed close at hand. It seemed that a ferocious tiger was ready to erupt with a roar. A "Li" character the color of blood was written on it with a foreboding air, like it was going to rip straight through the void!

Li Hao?

Kong Jie paused; his pupils constricted violently. There were some things swaying on the big ship—he'd thought it was the ship's moorings. However, his eyesight was keen and that was when he reacted.

Corpses!

Numerous corpses, likely hundreds of them and all tattered or in pieces, were hung on the ship!

In the distance, Li Hao seemed to recover himself and suddenly boomed, "The Demon Hunters of the Silver Moon Guard have exterminated a branch of the White Shark Raiders. We executed hundreds of supernaturals and display them as a warning. Residents of Southern Ford. There is no need to panic!"

His voice was resonant and carried throughout the four directions!

A disturbance grew in the city and a group of people quickly rushed over. All of them were astonished by the two massive ships. Hundreds of supernaturals?

"The Demon Hunters of the Silver Moon Guard?"

"Haven't heard of them before..."

"I know a thing or two, they're led by Li Hao. There's very few of them and they killed a lot of members from the three great organizations near Rift Canyon a while ago. So he's gone off to kill pirates this time..."

"The White Shark Raiders! That's one of the eight pirate factions! He's so... so bold! Won't this result in vengeance from the pirates?"

“.....” Discourse bubbled up as those of Southern Ford knew much of the world. Part of them often sailed the seas as merchants, so their horizons were indeed broad. This was far beyond the capabilities of the people in a tiny Silver City in the north of Silver Moon.

Southern Ford residents knew about the eight pirate factions, the three great organizations, and the existence of supernaturals. As a port, their knowledge was expansive. Regardless, some were still horrified when the two ships drew near.

“They say that Li Hao is the Demon Sword and kills without blinking. Who would’ve thought that he’s even crueler than the legends! My heavens, how many people has he killed? This...”

“Pfft, he killed only pirates. Why don’t you talk about how cruel they are? But he’s certainly bold. Isn’t he afraid of retribution from the White Shark Raiders? Apparently they have Nova experts. Li Hao’s killed Solars, but when it comes to Novas...”

“Idiot, there was probably a Nova leading a crew of this size. Can Li Hao kill Novas now?” Intense discussion circulated as some grappled with the implications of this operation.

“That’s... a... ship belonging to one of their commanders. It’s Sea Shark’s ship! He’s a mid Nova. Is he... is he dead?” Color drained from some faces.

“If Sea Shark’s ship is here, was he ready to attack Southern Ford?” gasped those who thought further. “Why would they run into the Silver Moon Guard otherwise? My goodness, were the White Shark Raiders preparing to ambush the city last night??”

“You’re behind the times, I heard this morning that the town of Near Sea was razed to the ground yesterday. It’s a town close to us in Near Sea province, everyone was butchered. I wanted to evacuate my family this morning, but now we see Sea Shark’s ship.”

“.....” People were looking at the scene from all sides and also discussing the black-armored warriors on the ships.

The Demon Hunters!

More were looking at Li Hao, the young man standing at the bow. Some were afraid, others envious, and some worshipful. Kong Jie was also staring at Li Hao with shock and at the ships with incredulity.

Sea Shark... was dead? And not only Sea Shark, but he recognized the second ship as well. “Faceless Shark?!”

“Huh?” Wang Ming started next to him.

“The second commander of the White Shark Raiders. He always appears in a mask, so people call him the Faceless Shark!”

Since Kong Jie recognized the ship, as did others. A supernatural in the city sucked in a sharp breath. “That’s... that’s Faceless Shark’s Seabreaker! How is that possible for Sea Shark’s ship and Seabreaker to both be here?! They’re the two Nova commanders of the White Shark Raiders, how is this possible??”

Incredible, impossible! These two were tyrants of the sea and a large reason why the White Shark Raiders were ranked number four out of the pirate factions. But now... they were both... dead? How else would their ships be towed back here if they weren’t??

Chapter 523: Yuan Shuo’s Resentment (I)

Li Hao pushed off the ship’s deck and landed on the shore. Kong Jie couldn’t contain himself and looked at the young man. “You killed Faceless Shark and Sea Shark?”

“The one in the mask?” Li Hao looked at the inspector general.

“Yes.”

“I don’t know if that was him... he’s dead, anyhow.”

Kong Jie sucked in a sharp breath and suddenly thought of something. He looked at Panther; understanding dawned. Had the dog worked with the young man to bring down the enemy? This dog was quite strong, he’d watched it ambush Elder Crimson and kill the powerhouse.

“You... how... are you coming back like this?” Kong Jie recovered his calm after his initial surprise. It was one thing to kill the pirates, but to return in this manner... wasn’t that creating trouble for himself?

“These people’s cruelty is endless. They even eat their victims! I want to display their bodies as a warning to others! If the White Shark Raiders dare show their faces around here again, the Demon Hunters will naturally meet them in battle. If you are worried, Inspector General Kong, I will bear the responsibility for all of the consequences!”

“It’s not that... I mean you... Operating in this manner...” Kong Jie started and stopped in a fit of resignation. “You... forget it. You’re in a lot of trouble to begin with, so this bit more doesn’t matter. You better not set out to sail any longer, and don’t leave Silver Moon. Southern Ford is a port city and there are a lot of agents here from other factions. News of you killing Faceless Shark and Sea Shark will soon spread. They weren’t ordinary characters as they were both Novas, so you need to be careful...”

Li Hao didn’t care and called out, “There must be pirate scouts in this area! Tell White Shark that I, Li Hao, killed Faceless Shark and Sea Shark! Have him clean his neck and wait for me to behead him! Silver Moon is Li Hao territory and there’s no place for animals like these bandits!”

Kong Jie could barely restrain his eye rolls. You really don’t care about creating trouble for yourself, don’t you!

Li Hao, however, grinned. He’d thought things through in this moment, he really had. Why should I be afraid of trouble? I’m not at all! The more the merrier! He suddenly recalled records from ancient tomes that spoke of how the Human King had razed countless cities and killed endless enemies when he was a fourth rank cultivator.

Despite being surrounded by ninth rank enemies, he never fell in battle and narrowly escaped from death many times. The more he fought, the stronger he became before ultimately growing into the invincible powerhouse that was known throughout the ages.

He hadn't been afraid of death even when the gap between him and his enemies was so great. I rival mid Novas now and the enemy has at most reached the metamorphosis level at the end of Nova. We're in the same cultivation level, just late and peak Nova separate us. Why am I so afraid of them?

Let the storm rage a bit fiercer!

Sharp gasps abounded from the city as the mundanes or superhumans hiding in Southern Ford were immensely taken aback. Li Hao had killed two commanders of the White Shark Raiders? Didn't that mean that Demon Sword could kill late Novas now?

That was impossible as it was too fast! It was shocking enough when he killed six Solars two days ago, not much time had passed since then!

Off to the side, Wang Ming was overcome with joy; he quickly thought of something else. "Set up a banquet and a celebration!" he roared. "We must celebrate the Demon Hunters and General Li!"

What a pity that he hadn't been able to participate this time. He needed to make up for his absence and make sure that people knew he was still around! The vendors that he'd bought out for the day looked at each other with some fear and panic. However, they put together preparations soon enough.

Silver Moon nurtured a fierce culture. Although people were scared by the corpses in the distance, the provincial army was a decent enough institution that their reputation was passable. Added to that the circulating explanations that if the Silver Moon Guard hadn't destroyed the White Shark Raiders, the pirates would've attacked Southern Ford last night... They put one more at ease.

Delicious fragrance soon drifted through the air; news also began to spread in all directions. The somewhat known Li Hao was famous overnight. News of Demon Sword Li Hao originated from Southern Ford and fanned out like wildfire. The leader of the Demon Hunters crossed a thousand kilometers last night to kill two Nova commanders and several hundred supernaturals of the White Shark Raiders!

.....

On the beaches of Southern Ford.

A group of people dug into a delicious spread of food. Li Hao ate ravenously; no one made a sound. There were only sounds of people chewing and swallowing.

Wang Ming and Kong Jie tried to talk a few times, but ultimately didn't say a word. The director of the local Night Watcher branch also wanted to break the ice a few times, but ultimately chose to stay silent.

"A toast to you, Inspector General Kong!" Li Hao suddenly raised his cup at Kong Jie.

The inspector general started. It was the young man who was strong! But surprisingly, Li Hao didn't say a word apart from his initial explanation after he exited the ship. And now, he suddenly offered a toast.

No matter that Kong Jie was unparalleled and a dignified inspector general, making him two levels higher than Li Hao in the bureaucracy, he was flattered by the attention. Strange kid to suddenly want to toast me... Kong Jie almost suspected that he'd misheard.

"You and your compatriots keep Silver Moon safe in this rotten day and age." His cup held high, Li Hao tossed the contents back with one gulp! "While my parents and friend died due to Silver Moon's incompetence... The laws were laughable, the official authorities were incompetent. The supernatural creeps through our land and no one can keep the three great organizations in check..."



“I hated the useless authorities of the province!” The young man chuckled self deprecatingly.

An awkward Kong Jie found himself at a loss, but Li Hao slammed his hand on the table and cried out, “But in this rotten day and age, I found that I was still able to attend my studies, take revenge, have food on the table and a roof over my head, and join the Inspectorate... What a damned honor!”

Kong Jie couldn’t make out if this was sarcasm anymore. Was this sarcasm?

No! It would’ve been sarcasm before today, but now it was not. Prior to what Li Hao had just undergone, it was easy to jeer at official powerhouses for being incompetent and allowing the province to fall into a morass of awfulness. All they knew was to pretend weakness and not to clean up the three great organizations.

But today... the young man found that Silver Moon wasn’t that badly off in this horrendous age. The three northern provinces were such extreme examples of trash, as was the Near River neighboring them. The central region was equally the height of lousiness, especially compared to what they could be. They wouldn’t care if a major city was raised to the ground.

In contrast, Silver Moon was a paradise of happiness. At the very least, he was able to attend school and study after being orphaned. He could eat and drink his fill. Part of it was due to his inheritance, the other part was due to Silver City reducing his tuition.

It hadn’t felt that significant before—it really hadn’t! Li Hao only had resentment and hatred occupying his mind. Why didn’t these pieces of trash find out early on that it was Red Moon behind his parents’ death and eliminate the organization?!

But now that he looked at it... Mm, things were fine. Comparison was the thief of joy, or in this case, the backdrop of appreciation.

“I toast all of you!” Li Hao raised his cup at the director of the local Inspectorate. “As a junior and a rookie, I am also your new deputy director. I only have a few words to say. It is normal to be afraid of death. I’m afraid, everyone’s afraid, there’s no one who isn’t. But I only hope for everyone to

accomplish one thing—do not be the first to run when the enemy comes. Do not be the first to surrender, do not be the first to break down...”

The middle-aged Sunflare director looked at Li Hao and drained his cup without another word. He said softly after the toast, “Don’t worry, Deputy Director Li! We are born and raised in Silver Moon. We may not be a strong people, but we are not to the point of fearing death and latching onto life at all costs. Martial masters rose from Silver Moon and we all carry sentiments of the martial world in our bones! The martial world might lack in all things, but the only thing it does not lack is hot bloodedness!”

This was the sacred land of martial dao and the martial world! Everyone born of Silver Moon grew up on stories of the martial world. Perhaps it’d become a thing of the past after the rise of the supernatural, but Yuan Shuo’s emergence and the reappearance of the Five Styles King meant that the martial world was back!

Twenty years of drifting along with the waves... Some of the veterans present recalled the martial world of twenty years ago. It had been a time of blood and gore, but also satisfaction of gratitude and revenge. Those of Silver Moon were not down for the count yet.

Kong Jie vaguely grasped Li Hao’s sentiment and looked at the young man again, then at the lone table of women and children not too far from them. He ended with a glance at the bodies hanging by the sails.

“Don’t worry, we’re not that guy in Near River!” He raised his cup at Li Hao. “He’s strong enough, but he’s just a dog with no fight in him and only knows to bark like mad!” Derision colored his voice. “His greatest mission is to seal off Silver Moon, not to move against the pirates. He might even be secretly backing the Sea Monster Raiders among the eight factions! Don’t compare us to Near River, that’d be looking down on us!”

He understood Li Hao’s meaning and heard the subtle undercurrents within. It looked like the young man had suffered from exposure to Near River.

“Other than small scuffles among our thirty-six cities over the years, have you ever seen civilians slaughtered on a mass scale in the province? We rose up in resistance when the Skystar Dynasty

invaded two hundred years ago. It was only out of consideration of further invasion from Great Li that Silver Moon decided to capitulate and join Skystar. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been easy for the dynasty to capture Silver Moon.

“Skystar has always been wary of us and thus banned martial dao, but for what? They were forced to bring Silver Moon people against Silver Moon in the end. Unfortunately for them, the three commanders weren't that docile. They were tasked to destroy the martial world, and while they did kill some martial masters, they only killed the ones who didn't follow the rules!

“Your master is arrogant, domineering, and kills people in droves. But he stayed within the rules, so the three commanders didn't move against him!” Kong Jie roared with laughter. “It's a good idea to set Silver Moon against Silver Moon, but the dynasty doesn't understand us or the martial world. At the end of the day, the Skystar Guards became the Silver Moon Guard. Apparently, the Steppe Prince who founded the Skystar Guards vomited three liters of blood and almost died from anger when he heard the outcome. He hates the three commanders!”

Li Hao flashed a smile and drank another cup of wine, finding the mixture of bitterness, spiciness, and sourness hard to describe.

“Inspector General Kong, I have a question that I'm not sure I should ask,” Li Hao continued without waiting for a response. “What do they want?”

“Hmm?”

“I ask what these people want!” Li Hao rumbled. “Don't they have any other goals in mind other than dominating the world? The people suffer, bodies are strewn through the countryside and the dead float in the sea. People die of starvation everyday, is this what they want?”

“Yes, there are no external enemies anymore or the Earth Dwellers that the ancient records speak of, but wasn't it just as well when the nine ministries undertook their reforms? The royal family enjoyed special privilege, the nine ministries ruled the world. Why must they declare themselves sovereign of a certain direction when they have the strength to? What's the point of that?”

Chapter 524: Yuan Shuo's Resentment (II)

“What’s the point? Go ask them!” Kong Jie blinked with a soft sigh. “It’s always either power, profit, fame, or strength. There is no lack of ambition in this world, Li Hao, and no lack of evil characters in an age of chaos. They release the evil in their hearts when they come into power! The nine ministries are dragon slayers. When the royal family crushed the people beneath their iron boot, the ministries stepped forth to slay this evil dragon. Although they didn’t fully succeed, the ministries were heroes eighty years ago. Sadly, it’s only taken them a few years to go off from their original intent.

“The nine ministries oversee the world and various clans control the nine ministries. Perhaps the first generation of ministers had great aims eighty years ago, but their controlling families are very different eighty years later!” Kong Jie sighed heavily.

The first generation of ministers had nursed great aspirations. But when each ministry came under the sole control of one family, such as the Lius for the Ministry of Finance, they deviated from their original mission statement.

The human heart was in a constant state of flux. The dragon slayers ultimately became dragons themselves and started guarding themselves against each other. Wary of their brethren and worried that the price would be too heavy to pay after the three great organizations grew in strength, the various ministries made different choices that set them on different paths.

“When the supernatural rose twenty years ago, the three great organizations were still in their infancy. We could’ve swiftly suffocated them,” Kong Jie laughed. “The Ministry of Armed Forces was very strong then, to say nothing of the others. However, they were concerned about depleting too many resources if they faced the three great organizations, so they decided to shy away from conflict! The royal family’s Black Armaturas were equally strong, but they worried that they would lose too many if sent out in battle.

“The other ministries had their own forces to deploy. There were still martial masters in places other than Silver Moon, and we’d excavated some powerful weapons from the ruins. However, everyone was very cautious that if we used up our aces, what would we do against the other eight ministries or royal family?

“That was the most important reason why the supernatural rose swiftly and the three great organizations were not eradicated. Leaders like Ying Hongyue were very smart and knew that this would be the result...

“Ultimately, the Inspectorate decided to establish the Night Watchers and received support from the other ministries and royal family. Since no one wanted to take action, we would establish a new organization and recruit powerhouses from all sides to work for the dynasty.

“At that time, no one fathomed that the supernatural would grow so quickly in twenty years. They surpassed martial masters in the blink of an eye and even became stronger than some powerful hot weapons...”

Li Hao listened silently to the background of the world. He drank a few cups of wine and looked at the feasting Demon Hunters around him.

“Let’s set this aside!” The young man smiled. “There’s not much meaning to it anyhow. I was confused about this before because I felt it was unfair. I hated the situation and refused to accept it!

“But when the inspector general said that this age is just this rotten and that even the nine ministries are rotten, I suddenly feel that there’s no need to listen to anything else anymore.”

Indeed, there was no need. This era was rotten to the core. The royal family was possibly in cahoots with the three great organizations. Favors traded hands with each other and no one was willing to take a definitive stand against the three great organizations. Various hegemonies in other provinces wished for the three great organizations to curtail the central region, so they secretly supported the supernatural heavyweights.

It was laughable, but very true. The three great organizations had a wonderful time in their operations. They didn’t suffer or scurry in the shadows like mice, as was so commonly thought of them.

Not by far!

The true situation was that minor scuffles appeared with regularity between the two sides, but never a major skirmish. As for the city annihilation missiles trained on them... how many powerhouses would that really kill?

It was far more likely that the civilians would suffer instead.

As for the Night Watchers, it was said that some troublemakers fooled around, killed Yama's grandson, and stole the Heavens Dictate to elevate the fights into all-out war. It dragged in Novas and caused the deaths of supernaturals of that level.

Before that, the Night Watchers had been in retreat on all fronts and doggedly stuck defense. They didn't dare take proactive action.

When Li Hao first heard this information, he'd been speechless. With the scale of the mess that those troublemakers had created... they weren't spies, were they? Now that he looked at it, perhaps they were just acting according to their will and not paying attention to the nine ministries and royal family. They turned everything into shambles because they didn't have any other thoughts in mind. It was the others who had their own schemes and plots in mind.

Kong Jie said nothing further.

.....

Li Hao relaxed after everyone finished eating and announced, "Now that we've eaten and drank our fill, let's have fun in the city! Everything's on me! However, remember to conceal your identity. Do not reveal that you are a Demon Hunter. If you are exposed, don't start any conflict and contact me for anything!"

"Leader, we're not going..."

"Go!" Li Hao roared. "Why not?! Everyone into the city! It's just one day and we might not have the chance for vacation or rest tomorrow. There might only be never-ending battle and a standing mission to exterminate the pirates!"

“I hung up the White Shark Raiders today, White Shark himself is still alive and wishes to maintain his control over the seas. He’ll come for us sooner or later! Otherwise, the other seven factions will eat him alive if he doesn’t dare respond after we killed their number two and three. No matter what, he’ll come for revenge. He’ll come even knowing that Silver Moon is not a faction to antagonize!”

Kong Jie inclined his head. Li Hao read the situation very clearly sometimes. If White Shark wished to maintain his footing in the North Sea, he would have to find a way to eliminate Li Hao, whether for intimidation, to cement his own reputation, or for revenge. Otherwise, his White Shark Raiders were done for.

If he didn’t dare even scream with outrage after losing two of his commanders and six hundred supernaturals, who would dare join his banner in the future? Perhaps he would suffer desertions as his men joined other pirate groups.

No one protested after Li Hao’s words. Perhaps... perhaps they wouldn’t have a chance to relax in the future. Thus, no one refused the leader’s suggestion.

“You take everyone into the city and pay for everything first!” Li Hao looked at Wang Ming.

“That’s easily done!” Wang Ming quickly responded. Super easy! I have so much money!

“You two have another mission.” Li Hao looked at Hong Qing and Hong Hao. “Have the local army send one hundred people to escort you and the women to the Sword Sect.”

Hong Qing bobbed her head rapidly.

“Let’s take care of the remaining corpses on the ships.” Li Hao looked at Liu Long. “If any of them are the women’s family... ask them if they wish to be buried at the Sword Sect. If not, bury them here with the rest.”

“Understood!” Liu Long answered crisply, looking at Li Hao differently from before.

The young man didn't mind and turned to Kong Jie. "Inspector General Kong, please keep me notified of any intelligent reports..." He thought for a bit and took out a set of black armor. "Please keep this for now. You can use it to contact me if we are within five hundred kilometers of each other."

Kong Jie's eyes widened and he stared at Li Hao. "I hadn't thought that you'd obtain authorization... That's very rare!" Plainly, he knew a bit of the ancient armor's purpose.

"Does the inspector general mean to say that others have obtained it before?"

"Yes, the royal family's Black Armaturas!" Kong Jie intoned. "They seem to have this kind of armor and it should come with some authorization. When the Black Armaturas conquered the ninety-nine provinces, they were able to coordinate their efforts within five hundred kilometers through a superior communication system..."

The Black Armaturas!

It wasn't his first time hearing this name. Li Hao thought of the Skystar Garrison and the one hundred thousand troops on duty there to protect the island of energy. Perhaps the royal family had obtained authorization over that troop. That indicated they really had discovered the garrison's ruins.

Would there only be one of this army back in the day? There might be others, such as the other seven families' cities. There were certain to be other mid-sized cities as well. Some people had explored other ruins before and may have obtained armor there. Granted, they wouldn't have necessarily received the same authorization.

Li Hao continued giving his instructions. Wang Ming left with the Demon Hunters. Hong Qing and her fellow disciple escorted the survivors to the Sword Sect. Liu Long directed burial efforts for the rest of the bodies.



Delicate sensibilities were not considered when the bodies were shifted out. The Southern Ford citizens observing from the distance paled with horror. They hadn't felt this way when they saw the pirates' bodies, but color drained from their faces when they saw the civilians' corpses.

They'd been like Li Hao before, rather indifferent to news of places being razed to the ground. Silver Moon was a wonderful environment. But now as they saw corpses devoid of organs and the grisly way that children had died... Many looked on with ashen faces while others flushed with fury.

"Animals!" they cursed, hot-blooded natures at the core of their being.

They watched gruesome corpses being carried out and thought of these bandits killing untold numbers of people. That had only been abstract numbers before as they hadn't personally seen the victims. Now that they did... the crowd bitterly hated the pirates!

Thank goodness the Demon Hunters had been nearby last night, or this would have been Southern Ford's fate. Attitudes shifted from their previous fear and wariness when they looked at the soldiers in black armor again.

"Well done!" Someone raised their thumb. "Silver Moon's army is the foremost throughout the world, already! We scattered those animals upon the wind, well done!"

"It's Silver Moon's martial masters that are the best!" An old man gnashed his teeth in the crowd. "Such was the case back in the day. Who dared bully Silver Moon's people? Our martial masters walked uncontested through the world. It's one thing if we beat each other to death, but there's no way that outsiders could profit at our expense! Foreign martial masters would be chased to the ends of the world if they dared seize a cup of water from us!"

The old man didn't say that Silver Moon martial masters back in the day were not the benevolent sort. He still recalled some martial masters—they ate and drank without paying. Stubborn as goats, they would ask the old man if the latter wanted their lives or money. If the old man wanted their lives, the martial masters would cut off their own heads for payment!

Right, the old man still recalled one of his old customers with a loud voice and big beard. Another person came for him later, calling him Southern Fist. This Southern Fist still owed his little restaurant three hundred coins! That was a lot back in the day. I wonder if Big Beard is still alive or not?

The newcomer eventually sat on Big Beard and smashed his face into the ground. The old man had applauded with glee and forgotten to demand payment. The martial master to beat up Big Beard had been such a good guy that he still couldn't forget it! That one seemed to have been called... Big Monkey Demon King!

The old man took a walk down memory lane and jerked out of it, sighing when he saw the ghastly state of the Near River corpses. As annoying and strong as Big Beard had been, he'd only refused to pay his debt. If payment was demanded, he simply blustered to offer his head instead. None of those people were as cruel as these pirates as to slaughter an entire town of people just because they were in a bad mood.

#### Chapter 525: Yuan Shuo's Resentment (III)

Li Hao looked on from the sidelines as his people busied themselves. He watched as the crowd gradually livened up from their lethargic apathy. They were filled with righteous indignation, as opposed to petrified insensitivity.

"So it turns out... that people are kind after all." The young man suddenly smiled. "Or rather, they are empathetic. Not everyone is indifferent to the circumstances."

Kong Jie looked at Li Hao, then at the crowd around them. "Silver Moon wasn't as apathetic in the past. Thanks to the nonstop feed of bad news over the past couple of years and disturbances here and there, the provincial government has its hands tied. There is no money for reforms and no people or source for improvements. There's countless factors to keep in mind when taking any action.

"The dynasty still exists—we can easily draw their scrutiny if we go about things haphazardly. After a sustained decline in the external environment, even Silver Moon lacks some of its previous vitality and enthusiasm."

“I understand.” Li Hao nodded. “Therefore, the world needs a transformation!” He looked into the distance and located where the Sword Sect was. “The land needs innovation and revolution! We can naturally turn over a new leaf when we kill all of the ambitious souls, local tyrants, royal family, influential clans, nine ministries, soldiers that are more bandits, evil organizations, supernaturals creating trouble, and martial masters that are butchers...”

“.....” Kong Jie stared like he was looking at a madman. He was completely bowled over. Are you crazy or am I crazy? What are you talking about?

Li Hao ignored him. I’m not the one saying this, it’s written in the ancient tomes and referenced by Hong Yitang and the others. I don’t understand it! But I do understand one thing—kill everyone causing trouble and there will be no more trouble.

Conquer the world first, then push reforms. No one will stop me then and I can change things how I wish. Everything will naturally play out according to my desires.

There was so much sophisticated technology in the ancient civilization, but only so many being popularized. Those in charge stood in the way of such changes because they did not wish for the people to awaken their minds.

Comments from Hong Yitang and the others had ultimately taken root in Li Hao’s heart and germinated. If the world could be not pacified, then he would pacify the people. Of course, he couldn’t do so at the moment. These were just words spoken in a fit of rage, but they did reflect the sentiments of his heart.

He thought back to who he suspected was the Human King. Are you going to listen or not? I’ll kill you if you don’t listen, I’ll kill until there’s no one left!

Kong Jie fidgeted a bit uncomfortably next to him; Li Hao vanished from the spot and reappeared on the pirate ship in the distance. He’d said enough today, that was all for now. He was used to keeping a low profile and didn’t want to step into the limelight, but some things were assaulting his mind too strongly.

He vanished from the pirate ship moments later and soundlessly threaded through the waters on the small ship, Panther by his side. They disappeared into the sparkling expanse of the sea. There was one final thought on Li Hao's mind—he wanted to see...

See what?

The town that'd been razed.

He still didn't believe that the world had become so dark. He wanted to visit Near River to take a look. The provincial government should be aware of what'd transpired after a day and should be mobilizing a response. The young man wanted to observe what the situation was now.

The Vast Kun Ship shot through the seas at high velocity, moving faster and faster until it reached its peak speed. He passed by their earlier battlefield after an hour, continuing forward for another hour as he passed through the Moon Sea. He stayed close to the next branch of the North Sea; it also connected to Cloud River.

Li Hao could see fires rise up in the distance and leaping flames blazing everywhere. He jumped into the air like a bird and vanished in the sea, alongside the little ship.

.....

Moments later.

Li Hao hovered in the air and looked down below him. A group of soldiers was setting fire to a ravaged town. Some supernaturals were present as well. The corpses were already charred husks and whatever valuables the pirates didn't make off with were now in soldier hands.

They searched each house individually, going from door to door.

“Hurry up and finish your search before night falls!” someone roared. “Upstairs has ordered us to retreat before night arrives. Fire supernaturals, be ready to burn Seabrink Town to the ground and don’t leave a single trace behind...”

Don’t leave a single trace behind.

Li Hao’s ears twitched as the voice on the ground grew smaller. A supernatural outside the town was having a hushed conversation with a military officer. “We must clean up all traces and draft the report that a fire broke out in Seabrink Town. That’s why only ashes remain of it. Skystar City is already dissatisfied with the northern territory as things stand. If word gets out that pirates invaded and killed all ten thousand in a town, we’ll have to bear responsibility for that!”

“There’s no need to say anything else, I know what to do. Don’t worry, there were no survivors in Seabrink Town, they all died in the fire!” murmured the general. Whoever was alive would end up dead.

It was a grave crime that a town had been razed by pirates. Although everyone understood each other, they could not proclaim it officially. They had to claim that it was errant fire that led to the town’s loss. As for whether or not the civilians believed them or if word of the true happenings got out... Who the hell cared!

It was enough if upstairs believed them. What, were they going to fight the White Shark Raiders? That’d be an utter joke!

The White Shark Raiders numbered more than one thousand supernaturals, multiple Novas, and a bunch of Solars. Near River could not do anything to them unless they mobilized everyone from the province. That would just be a death wish!

Their only hope was that the White Shark Raiders would not have their eyes set on other towns or small cities when the pirates returned. Near River would be in grave trouble then.

But upon thinking of the connection between the Director General Office and some of the pirates... It was one thing for the White Shark Raiders to eliminate a small town. They should show some face afterward and not move onto the major cities. Hence, the personnel present relaxed.

One supernatural and one officer continued their murmured conversation. They were both Sunflares. Not a single Solar was on the scene. Plainly, they didn't intend on chasing down the pirates. They were just going through the motions.

Li Hao swept a glance from the air and noted that there were still survivors in the town. They were hiding in various secret caches, opting to stay hidden despite the presence of soldiers. Some were occasionally dragged out howling and screaming from the secret passages.

"Mercy, sir, we don't know anything... We really don't know anything..."

"She's just a child, milord... Take me and let the child go..."

"Shut up and get out here. You're gathering up ahead. What are you hiding for? We didn't say that we're going to kill you!" These soldiers were vicious, pushing and kicking a group of survivors out of hiding. Nearly one hundred survivors swiftly gathered on the plains outside the town.

The soldiers walked out with varying bundles of goods that they'd collected. More fires burned throughout the town. Very soon, hundreds of soldiers and a dozen supernaturals reconvened.

The Sunflare officer and the Sunflare supernatural were still conversing. Moments later, the supernatural announced in a barely audible voice, "Let's clean this up since we've got everyone. I'll have the fire supernaturals turn this place to ashes. As for the stuff inside the town... you and I will split it?"

"Sounds good! Let's be quick in case the pirates come back."

“They won’t, they’ve certainly moved on to Silver Moon and won’t be back for a while...” The two negotiated rapidly and quickly moved on to giving orders to their soldiers and supernaturals to tidy up the remaining residents. Even though they didn’t care about word getting out, backlash was inevitable if the news spread.

But if everyone was dead, it was up to the official authorities to spin the tale.

.....

In the air.

Li Hao heaved a sigh of relief, suddenly feeling like a great weight had been lifted off his shoulders. Indeed, that was the feeling. He’d despaired when the women cowered and begged him for mercy. Later on, he felt that perhaps they were just being silly and that those of Silver Moon were exaggerating things, making the outside world seem like hell.

He wanted to believe them, but felt that believing them so easily may be too foolish. The young man himself couldn’t articulate what kind of reality he wanted to see. Was it one of the military helping the wounded and chasing down pirates, or was it the scene in front of him...

He’d seen what he wanted to see and laughed. This was good! Indeed, this was the outside world. It was a living hell in which soldiers were bandits. Then there was nothing else to be said here.

His sword slashed forward in the next second! Countless rays of sword light descended!

Pfft pfft pfft!

Sword light rained down; the strongest of the soldiers and supernaturals were but Sunflares, they couldn’t withstand the barrage. Almost all of them died in the first wave. The two Sunflares were the only ones left standing.

“Lords of the White Shark Raiders!” shouted the horrified supernatural leader. “You can have everything, we’re from the Director General Office....”

His head exploded with a loud pop. Terrified out of his mind, the other Sunflare whirled around to flee. He also exploded with a loud bang before he ran five meters.

Some of the residents were still in a daze. They’d only known that they were doomed, that these bandit soldiers were about to kill them all. This wasn’t the first time and it wouldn’t be the last time...

But now, they were suddenly all dead!

They came alive and looked at the sky. Was it powerhouses or... the White Shark Raiders?

Li Hao didn’t respond. He waved the ship into view and called out from it, “Get on, I’ll take you to safety. You’ll be dead sooner or later in Near River!”

“A god must have saved us!” The overjoyed crowd knelt on the ground and burst into tears of joy.

Li Hao couldn’t be bothered to listen to their praise. There were only so many people in a town of thousands, he could just ignore them and go on his way. But if he did, these survivors were likely not long for this world since so many of their people had died.

#### Chapter 526: Yuan Shuo’s Resentment (IV)

Li Hao didn’t say anything. He simply overshadowed the town survivors with his ship, bringing everyone on board. He even took all of the bundles of belongings that the soldiers had put together. That was perfect, it would prevent the Sword Sect from being in the hole with their new expenses.



Indeed, he was going to dump all of the people onto the Sword Sect. It was out of sight, out of mind for Li Hao. He would explode if he had to handle it all himself. Hong Yitang could deal with everything.

The young man grinned. Sorry... Hong Yitang. This is the first and I don't know if there will be a second. Perhaps, perhaps not. But if there are, I'm sending them all to you!

There was no helping it, the Sword Sect was very well versed in this. Hong Yitang had rescued almost all of its thousand members. Now that he'd picked up a few himself, Li Hao was going to take them all to the sect. He wasn't in the mood to counsel them one by one, that wasn't his style and neither did he have the relevant experience.

Li Hao turned around, the ship flying with him as he left. It was quite impressive that the Vast Kun Ship could fly. He needed to catch up to Hong Qing and the others as soon as possible to save them a second trip.

The young man was smiling much more radiantly now, he didn't even mind the burning town behind him. The dead could not resurrect; it was enough that the living survived. He smiled brightly because it was enough to see and experience certain things. The last sliver of hope in his heart had been erased. Li Hao felt that he ought to thank these guys for teaching him a lesson, a very important lesson.

.....

As Li Hao quickly escorted the Seabrink survivors away from the scene, news swiftly spread of his earlier exploits. Gossip that the Demon Hunters disseminated that morning was flying by noon like it had wings. Preparing to cross the sea, Hou Xiaochen blinked and stared dumbly at a row of characters displayed on a jade pendant.

"Director..." Manager Yu reminded. "It's time to board the ship. We'll reach the central region in a few hours..."

“Look at this!” Hou Xiaochen handed the jade pendant to the woman.

She also stared blankly at it. “He... the guy...”

“Isn’t this interesting?” Hou Xiaochen grinned.

“Um...” Manager Yu couldn’t gather her thoughts. “What’s he doing patrolling the seas in the middle of the night?”

“Director!” Golden Spear caught wind of a keyword and quickly stepped forward. “What’s happened at sea?”

“Li Hao!” breathed the manager. “The kid took the Demon Hunters on a patrol of the sea last night and ran into the White Shark Raiders. He killed their Faceless Shark and Sea Shark commanders, as well as more than five hundred supernaturals.

“He then hung the bodies on the pirate ships and parked them close to Southern Ford, sending word for White Shark to clean his neck for execution. Li Hao said that he’s going to exterminate the White Shark Raiders!”

Golden Spear blinked, unable to believe what he’d just heard. Moments later, he spoke with difficulty, “How... is... that... possible? The White Shark Raiders are strong and I know of Sea Shark. He was a peak Solar two years ago and barely escaped from my hands. He made it to mid Nova in less than two years and apparently Faceless Shark is a late Nova...”

“He might be able to do so if he coordinates with the dog,” Hou Xiaochen chuckled. “I just hadn’t anticipated that he’d go gunning for the pirates as soon as I left. He was an obstinate donkey before and wouldn’t budge no matter what. He always ran away when he saw me, as if I spend my days plotting against him. How would I ever?

“What an interesting little guy!” the man laughed heartily. “I thought he was going to be indifferent to the times until the end of the world, until Yuan Shuo returned from the central region. Now look at this, I haven’t even left yet and he’s gone to provoke the pirates. How very damned interesting!”

He shook his head, unsure of whether he should laugh or cry. Many words bubbled up his throat and he suddenly didn't feel sad about leaving. Instead, Hou Xiaochen wanted to laugh or sigh with resignation. Li Hao, ah Li Hao. You're... such a strange kid!

"Let's cross the sea and be on our way!" Hou Xiaochen boarded the ship with another rueful shake of his head. The people behind him quickly followed suit. Golden Spear and Manager Yu were still incredulous. This had come from the Li Hao they knew? They could barely pick their jaws up from the ground.

According to their understanding of the young man, he should be hiding in the Guards barracks and furiously cultivating. He should be blind and deaf to events outside, waiting for his strength to develop further before emerging and surprising his enemies with their own deaths. He would then go back into hiding, continue cultivating, and continue tricking his enemies...

Indeed, that was what they expected of Li Hao. But their expectations were smashed to pieces today!

Hou Xiaochen was still laughing heartily and looked out at the churning North Sea. "North Sea pirates are fierce and look to be heavily backed by many different factions. They'll be sad to lose so many supernaturals in one go.

"What a pity that we don't have enough time. I'd love to go for a spin otherwise and visit White Shark, maybe send him on his way. But... eh, let's leave him to Li Hao!

"We should leave for our fun in the central region. The little guy can have the North Sea! I bet Yuan Shuo will be very surprised by the news if he receives it today. He might have a total mental breakdown, hahaha!" His bark of laughter was very different from his usual gentle chuckles.

Manager Yu looked sideways at him. Was there a need to be so happy even if Li Hao had taken high profile action and killed numerous pirates?

Hou Xiaochen continued laughing merrily. The rest didn't understand! Li Hao was of the eight families and, on the surface, the only living representative. Those like Hou Xiaochen who knew a bit of the significance of these families did not wish to see Li Hao purely motivated by only hatred.

Sadly, their efforts hadn't been very fruitful thus far, but today's report brought them some joy and hope. A Li Hao like this was truly worthy of the glories of the eight families. Even if it was only the glories of the ancient civilization that he inherited, they didn't wish for such scintillating personages to turn into mindless, modern day killing machines.

What a wonderful development!

A merry Hou Xiaochen continued south to the central region.

.....

At the same time, the North Sea.

White Shark listened to the reports from his men, his expression stiff as he looked into the distance. Li Hao...

Sea Shark was trash and Faceless Shark... was a son of a bitch! They were both trash!

White Shark's facial muscles twitched. It wasn't just a matter of losing face with the two bastards dead. The key thing was, the White Shark Raiders had suddenly suffered an immense blow to their strength. If he remained unmoved, the other seven factions might choose to quickly devour his group!

"Li Hao... how unexpected!" White Shark breathed out and scanned the shuddering men below. "What are you sorry lot afraid of?!" he barked out. "That Li Hao will come for your heads? Will he dare come? I'll put him through his paces before he has a chance to! Li Hao courts death! When I

put our affairs in order, I'll eradicate those so-called Demon Hunters and avenge Sea Shark and the others!"

His most pressing concern wasn't to go for Li Hao—there might be a trap waiting. He should first consolidate the supernaturals left by his number two and three. They would probably all run off if he didn't.

White Shark would naturally go for Li Hao once he obtained sufficient information and secured the right timing. He couldn't brashly set out on the spot, there were two dead Novas to consider, after all.

"We will avenge our brothers!" screamed the pirates below, as if they would vent the fears in their hearts by doing so.

White Shark sighed to himself. This couldn't stand. He had to bring back the bodies of Sea Shark and the others, at least. It was too great of a blow to morale if they continued to hang in Southern Ford. The White Shark Raiders would lose all of their prestige.

.....

The news traveled south, spreading rapidly. Many factions soon received reports and the title of Demon Sword grew ever more famous. Li Hao had already won some prominence for himself when he fought six Solars alone and killed them. He was now hailed as foremost among the new generation of Silver Moon martial masters.

After leading the Demon Hunters against the White Shark Raiders and killing hundreds of supernaturals as well as two Novas, his name was known far and wide after hanging their bodies in warning.

On this day, everyone everywhere knew Demon Sword Liu Long of Silver Moon! He was no longer affixed with the descriptor of the heir of the eight families.

.....

In the central region, the province of Southern Range.

Yuan Shuo panted heavily, overjoyed at having just killed an initial Nova. Hot damn, I've finally killed a Nova! Although it's not one from Red Moon, but from a trashy Yama bastard who insisted on causing trouble... at least I've reached my goal.

My disciple killed six Solars ten days ago. He's almost catching up to me! Today, I kill a Nova. There's a significant cultivation gap between Solar and Nova.

Beaming with delight, Yuan Shuo breathed out and wiped away the blood on his face. He looked at the heavily injured Jadelight Sword nearby. "We won! Not bad, Jadelight. That last sword stroke of yours was the equivalent of mid Solar. Not bad at all..."

Jadelight didn't want to talk, she was dealing with her wounds. Besides, it was only a mid Solar that they'd taken. She wasn't inclined to be proud of that. She was progressing too slowly! Although she was much stronger than when she first left the mountain, she was extremely dissatisfied. Yuan Shuo could kill Novas, what about her?

"Don't be in a rush," Yuan Shuo laughed. "We're in no hurry. Your Jadelight Sword hasn't quite been perfected yet. You might be able to fight Novas after a while, you just need some more blood pearls..."

A jade pendant in his pocket started vibrating.

"More big news?" Yuan Shuo chuckled. "Has Hou Xiaochen died in an ambush? Now that would be interesting..."

This jade pendant wouldn't vibrate unless it was earth-shattering news. He fished it out for a look, immediately put it away, and smashed the corpses beneath him to dust with a punch. The traces he'd left behind of their fight were obliterated.

"What?" Jadelight looked strangely at him. "Didn't you say you wanted to leave marks behind so that everyone would know that Yuan Shuo killed a Nova here today? Didn't you want the world to know of the Five Styles King?"

What an eccentric old bat! You're the one who set up the scene earlier and purposefully added the unique traces of the Five Styles to the corpses. You wanted nothing more than for people to know that you killed the Nova. Now what?

#### Chapter 527: Safeguarding Silver Moon (I)

"Let's go!" snapped a livid Yuan Shuo. "We continue down south! What's there to be proud of with killing an initial Nova?!"

"What's going on?"

"Nothing!"

"Does it have to do with your disciple?"

"I have no disciple!"

Jadelight Sword blinked, caught off guard. What... the heck? You have no disciple? You talk about your final disciple day in and day out. You're one step away from saying that your disciple is the greatest in the land. What's gotten into you today?

"Has... someone killed him?" was Jadelight's first question. It would be terribly shocking if that was the case. Yuan Shuo cared very deeply about his final disciple. If someone killed him, the old man would probably go berserk.

Yuan Shuo walked swiftly and gnashed his teeth without a look back. “No, he’s just fine and dandy!”

Then what are you gnashing your teeth for?

“I’m injured, so walk a bit slower.” Jadelight swiftly caught up. “Tell me, what’s going on?” She was utterly baffled.

A sulking Yuan Shuo stomped off before he suddenly roared, “I’m going to kill late Novas! No, peak Novas!”

You’re crazy! You just took a long time to kill an initial Nova and was injured for it. Now you want to kill late and peak Novas? You’re getting too full of yourself!

“Is something... bothering you?”

“Yes, very much so!” Yuan Shuo shouted. “When I teach disciples, I’m of the mind that they’ll never be stronger than me! Stuff like the pupil exceeding the master is just words I mouth! It was one thing years ago when I was crippled—it was only right that my disciples exceeded me then. But now I’ve recovered and improved swiftly, I kill Solars one day and Novas three months later... Damn it, my disciple was just a thief beating up mundanes three months ago! And now he’s just killed a late Nova!”

“.....” Jadelight’s eyes widened and her mouth dropped. Her mind ceased to function from the shock.

Yuan Shuo was on the verge of tears. It shouldn’t have happened this way! This was fake news, that’s what it was! It was a joke! How could someone progress so quickly!



I'm a veteran martial master with five consolidated auras, I should be the one with an incredible rate of progress. If I can kill initial Novas, that means my strength is far beyond initial Nova. I might be a mid Nova to be able to kill initial ones.

And yet, my disciple can kill late Novas!

Yuan Shuo didn't believe it, it must be fake news. It was too aggravating otherwise! I just killed a Nova and was prepared to let the world know about the might of Old Demon Yuan. Thanks to you, kiddo, I have no more of that prestige and I gotta play dumb. It'll be a joke if people hear of what I did! What are you doing strutting around after an initial Nova when your disciple's killed a late Nova?

Jadelight took a few moments to collect her wits and glanced at Yuan Shuo. "Didn't... you say... that it's only been a few months since your disciple started practicing martial dao?"

"That's right!"

The woman fell silent. "Your disciple... may be possessed by another. I've seen records of this in ancient tomes. Mmhmm, that's the most likely story..."

Yuan Shuo rolled his eyes hard. Get the fuck outta here! It was one thing for him to curse at the boy; he was very put out when Jadelight mentioned anything. "And what do you know? He has the bloodline of the eight families and witnessed a stunning sword stroke from the ancient civilization. He has the true teachings of my Five Styles, so it's normal for him to improve quickly. Your hair is long, but you're short on wits, woman. What do you know!"

Jadelight looked at him and cursed inwardly, and you need to see a doctor! I was just following what you were saying! There must be something wrong with your brain, but here I am, following you around!

Yuan Shuo snorted and grumbled a bit more; it was unknown whether he was cursing Jadelight Sword or Li Hao.

“This won’t do, it’s too slow!” he exhaled long moments after finishing his round of cursing. “It’s too hard to meld five auras together and the five organs are being strengthened too slowly. Even if the new method is effective, the results won’t be that apparent that quickly. Red Moon’s people have all run off somewhere... so I’ll take you grave robbing!”

“I know quite a few ruins and one of them might have Water of Life. I’ll take you there. It’ll be dangerous, but we might see great gains. I was going to wait for my disciple and take him on the excavation. You get to benefit instead! Damn it, he’s stronger than me, so what should I bring him along for!”

Jadelight blinked, astonished. You... She could not come up with a proper response. Grave robbing? You should’ve said so earlier!

The two swiftly departed the premises; Yuan Shuo had his jaw set. I’m not going to kill anyone for the time being. I’m embarrassed to kill anyone below late Nova! I’m going to dig up some graves, find the Water of Life, strengthen my organs, combine all five auras, then come out and kill someone impressive!

I’m gonna show Li Hao who’s the real daddy here!

.....

Southern Ford.

Li Hao returned with peace of mind after catching up to Hong Qing and the others to deliver Seabrink’s survivors to them. The young man was certain that Hong Yitang would most adequately take care of the one hundred survivors.

One hundred wasn’t that many. If it came down to it, Li Hao would just kill some more pirates and send him the funds. Wouldn’t that take care of the problem? The young man was just saving him the effort of rescuing people from the battlefield. How nice!

Kong Jie had already left Southern Ford; he wasn't at liberty to be away from White Moon City for extended periods of time. When he left, he told Li Hao not to worry too much about the White Shark Raiders.

In reality, the young man wasn't.

.....

Inside Southern Ford.

The Demon Hunters were on vacation today. Li Hao didn't cloister himself in training. On the contrary, he gave himself a chance to relax.

Inside a small tavern.

Li Hao sat in the most luxurious private room in the establishment and drank by himself. He hadn't been in the habit of drinking before. In fact, he found the beverage bitter and spicy when he tried it on occasion. He seemed to have acquired a taste for it after the past couple of encounters. Martial masters should not drink too much, but that was true only for novices. Yuan Shuo drank as much as he wanted.

This wine that he'd ordered wasn't good quality. It had a bitter aftertaste, just like everyone's lives were equally bitter in this day and age. Perhaps they wouldn't starve to death, but the people spent every day in fear. They were graciously allowed to keep their lives through the benevolence of the supernaturals.

Men, women, and children suffered alike in this era.

Li Hao took a small sip and turned over the bitter wine in his mouth. He looked out the window at the picture of ostentatious prosperity below. A great hubbub of voices rose and fell. As tough as life was, it went on and one must find joy in such difficulty.

He knew that so long as there was hope and goals to be seen, those would spur incredible vitality from the people. The worst case scenario was if they had no hope. Thankfully, there was some hope still in Silver Moon.

A book appeared in his hand—Building Five Bridges. Li Hao paged through it again—the golden dot of his metal aura was much stronger than before and continuously growing stronger. Unfortunately, the other three were slightly weaker and there was no sign of his wood aura to be seen. The four auras were growing out of balance.

A plate of tiny fruit appeared in front of him. He'd traded for twenty Mind Fruits and wanted to take them after gathering his wood aura, but he could wait no longer. Let everything proceed as they will!

There was no need to insist on only one path in martial dao. All paths led to the heavens. The threat of the White Shark Raiders was right in front of him. From what he understood, Kong Jie had made some preparations in Silver Moon, but Li Hao had his own thoughts. He didn't want to impose on outsiders if he could help it. Whatever he could resolve himself, he would resolve himself.

He drank the bitter wine, read his book, and swallowed one Mind Fruit. A tendril of refreshing power poured into his body. The effects were much weaker compared to the Goldensky Lotus—it didn't forcefully make improvements. This time, he did not choose to strengthen the metal aura.

He wanted to strengthen the other three if possible and achieve a balance between the four. Would seven Mind Fruits be the equivalent of one Goldensky Lotus petal? Based on the fruit's pricing at Military Supplies... It didn't seem likely.

The Lotus required one thousand points for a flower and 125 points for a petal. Only ten points were needed for a Mind Fruit, that was more than a tenfold difference. But sometimes, price wasn't indicative of everything.

Li Hao swallowed a Mind Fruit and quietly perceived its effects. He sensed the improvements in his aura—there was still a difference between aura and mental strength. Mental strength was just pure force of mind, the aura was a more sophisticated form and usage of force.

Li Hao had read many ancient tomes regarding the martial master aura and compared it to the cultivation system within these books. The modern martial master aura was a brand new system. Only some people would mention the aura in the ancient civilization, bringing it to their cultivation system and eventually popularizing it.

The young man washed down the Mind Fruits with wine—that was a delicious concoction! He absorbed some water, earth, and fire energy. Li Hao paused to sense the changes again. Just having stronger energy was not enough. Aura was not pure energy, but also a reflection of comprehension and personality.

The more one saw and experienced, the more sufficient one's prestige was. If one sat at the bottom of a well to grasp the aura, their aura would still be that of one single type, despite absorbing endless energy.

After some reflection, Li Hao continued to eat and embark on his journey of strengthening. He needed to reach ten thousand cubes each with his five organs and body. He'd sensed it when he fought Sea Shark. Even with the armor on, his organs shook from the force of his opponent's blows.

Supernaturals were very strong to have reached this kind of level. Li Hao was unable to fight a powerful mid Nova, despite it just being a match of internal force versus mysterious power. He was constantly relying on the Incantation of the Blood of Blood. However, that method raised one's strength. As his strength grew, its usefulness declined and it wasn't as helpful as before.

In his current state, Li Hao should nurture his wood aura if he wished to increase his strength. He was bound to become much stronger after the five auras became one.

Unfortunately, the Weeping Willow Sword had not given him much inspiration. He knew how to deploy it, but didn't grasp its essence so it was hard to comprehend anything.

Apart from understanding the wood aura, his second task at hand was to strengthen his physical body. The third was to saturate his supernatural locks with energy. If he could do as He Yong and the others did to unseal himself and reseal himself... he would grow stronger as well.

However, that required reaching the peak capacity of his locks. He'd taken in plenty of energy before, but failed to reach that level. His locks could still take in more.

The last method he had to improve with was the Demon Hunters!

## Chapter 528: Safeguarding Silver Moon (II)

Indeed, the Demon Hunters.

After the last battle, Li Hao could sense that some people's auras were almost formed. He had the troop rest for a day because he wanted those people to relax. Continued battle had swiftly increased everyone's strength to the point where all members were late Sunderers, but there wasn't a single peak Sunderer among the group!

In the battle with the pirates, Li Hao discovered that the Demon Hunters were more enthused about this enemy than the three great organizations. Plainly, people had their own thoughts, especially those of the Sword Sect. If things developed according to his expectation, there might be a first batch of half step Dominators in a few days.

He hadn't let anyone try the dao comprehension weapons thus far. Now, he wanted to give them a chance when the Demon Hunters returned to base. Using them without any inkling of the aura was not a wise decision. Once one had some understanding, the dao comprehension weapons were more of a catalyst.

One or two of the Demon Hunters being strong might not be that impressive, but fifty of them assembled in the Ten Rings Mountain Seal Formation with Li Hao as the core... It would certainly strengthen his internal force. As for how much, that was up to how strong they were.

Fifty Sunderers were not that impressive, but fifty Dominators? That would be incredible.

Li Hao read his book and mulled over various thoughts in his mind. He also ate quite a few Mind Fruits. The sky began darkening outside, the day was almost over. This was the second day of Hou Xiaochen's departure—October 5.

On this day, Wang Ming made complete arrangements for the Demon Hunters. Some went to eat and drink their fill, others went singing. He even took some to special places... Li Hao could lock onto their location if he wished to, but he didn't want to keep them under such tight control. They were all adults and hot-blooded martial masters. They'd just undergone a battle. So long as all parties involved were willing... the young man didn't want to interfere too much.

When he finished reading the Building Five Bridges booklet, he started on another, the third book he'd borrowed—Fundamentals of Sword Theory.

Li Hao raised his eyebrows when he glanced at the author's name. This was a special book that he hadn't noticed before. There were some notes on the cover.

Editor-in-Chief: Eternal Sword Sovereign.

Senior Editors: Nether King, Prince Hong, Headmaster Chen.

There were only four names, but they sent the young man into a trance and even a fog. The Eternal Sword Sovereign again! The names listed beneath his also seemed to be quite the characters. There were kings and princes, and that headmaster... Their full names weren't listed—whether out of taboo or respect for noble personages.

The first line of the first page sent Li Hao into a daze again.

“The sword is a keen weapon of killing. What is at the end of slaughter?”

What was there? Li Hao didn't know, but also seemed to know a little. This was just fundamental sword theory, what was the point of making it so profound? The next line sent him into another trance.

"Some say that it is responsibility, protection, and tolerance. That is incorrect. The sword is a keen weapon of killing! To cultivate the sword is to have a pure heart. To kill the enemy first and cleanse one's heart and soul. Everything can be considered after the killing is complete..."

"Ahem, cough cough!" Li Hao coughed violently. From the first line, he thought this was a book that taught one how to comprehend the dao. From the second line... he felt that the editors scoffed at the notion. They seemed to be saying what was the point of thinking so much.

Swords were used to kill. As for talk of responsibility and protection, that had nothing to do with sword methods. That had to do with humans. The sword was dead, humans were alive. These concepts came from the human mind and not the sword.

Li Hao suddenly found this very interesting and kept reading. These editors had an exceedingly deep understanding of sword dao. They didn't simply describe the core essence of sword methods; depictions of their own unique theories were also recorded.

The young man was somewhat familiar with the Eternal Sword Sovereign's sword dao. The sword of severing the self meant that blood must be spilled when the sword was unsheathed. The book didn't speak much of Prince Hong's sword dao, simply noting a few concepts and how his sword took a sweeping, domineering path.

The Nether King's sword dao was that of pure slaughter. His killing intent grew stronger the more he killed. It seemed to be a military sword method suited for the troops. Headmaster Chen was different in that his was a gentle and tender method. His sword was like a babbling brook, first weak, then strong. It was calm when it was a river and erupted with spontaneous fury as a waterfall.

The last method held a certain resemblance to the theories behind Jadelight Sword. That was another method that was first weak, then strong, and focused on spontaneous eruption. There wasn't much written about these powerhouse's theories, but they led to the same paths and the end goal was the same—to kill enemies.



.....

Li Hao munched on Mind Fruits as he perused the book, occasionally taking a sip of wine. This book of elemental sword methods was fascinating. It was very deep as the easier some concepts were, the deeper they were. It required an exceedingly high level of mastery to describe concepts to the point where everyone could understand them.

The young man could understand a book of advanced sword theory, but to explain it? He could not. He lacked the sufficient foundation—what would a novice need with such deep theory knowledge? However, was theory required in martial dao?

Yes!

There were some things in the book that were worthy of further research and study. Some unique methods resulted in varying strength from the same sword if deployed at different angles in different environments. This was Li Hao's first time hearing of such theory and knowledge. A difference in angle, stance, and eruption point would all affect the force behind the blow. Simply striking fast didn't necessarily result in peak strength.

Li Hao nodded as he cross-referenced the material with some of his own practical experience. His metal sword aura was the peak of speed before it erupted, but sometimes, one could not attain that speed. In that case, the force it erupted with was weaker. It had to be accumulated first.

The book gave another minor unique technique of nurturing the sword! Just as one nurtured an army for a moment of action, one could also nurture a weapon. The swordsman could use his mind, intent, blood qi, internal force, and killing intent to nurture the weapon. Upon encountering strong foes, he could unsheathe it for a definitive blow. He needed to keep one breath in reserve in ordinary times—killing intent!

The book spoke of some stories related to the Eternal Sword Sovereign. Li Hao had read about them in the Battle of Southern Jiang

, of how his ancestor had killed an enemy above his rank with one stroke.

“Nurturing the sword...” The young man took out Stellaris and considered it thoughtfully. The book mentioned swords as weapons, but that swords also had their own thoughts of killing. They should not be constantly kept in storage rings or in the body. They could just be worn on the self.

“This theory is interesting.” Nurturing a sword would result in greater battle strength? Was that possible?

It wasn’t that easy to nurture a sword. Li Hao followed the instructions in the book and agitated his blood qi, sending it into the sword. There was no response. The book had mentioned that this was a long, gradual process that was not to be rushed.

Ordinary people could not nurture swords. Swordsmen would use their swords sooner or later, unless they didn’t fight. If they did not, they would not be a swordsman. The Eternal Sword Sovereign had refrained from picking up his sword for a decade only because he was injured. Real swordsmen needed to constantly battle.

Li Hao didn’t think about this and considered the notion, sending a surge of sword aura into Stellaris. It trembled and hummed, as if celebrating with delight. Then came the earth sword aura, fire sword aura, water sword aura...

Various auras entered the sword and lazily circulated through the weapon. Li Hao read through the book again, finding that it didn’t mention particular sword auras. Perhaps the ancients were different from modern people, but the book mentioned this as a tempering for swordsmen. Maintaining a constant output of blood qi and mental strength was a honing of the self as well.

In the same vein, prolonged output of sword aura should be a tempering of his auras.

Radiance sparkled in the small sword of his hand as various auras flowed through it. Li Hao frowned slightly at it—sustaining his effort for a while was fine, sustaining it for a few hours was

feasible. But continuing in this vein over a prolonged period of time... he would probably die first. The sword auras consumed too many resources that may not be recovered in a short period of time.

“It’s too hard to nurture a sword this way!” But since he’d read about the method and the book spoke highly of it, Li Hao decided he wanted to give it a try. He could always give up if it proved impossible. His sword auras could also be supplemented by sword energy.

Additionally, he hadn’t sensed his organs nurturing the spirits or auras yet, but it was a concept that his teacher spoke of. Li Hao knew that he didn’t fully understand it—perhaps the five organs could nurture the auras, but he didn’t have much sensation from it at present.

“What a pity that teacher isn’t by my side,” Li Hao remarked with regret. It was his teacher who’d created the Summoner of Spirit cultivation realm. He’d left so quickly that the young man needed to fumble for some things by himself.

Nurturing spirits... his teacher wouldn’t have mentioned that haphazardly. The five organs could certainly strengthen the aura—but how?

“Ai... teacher should have finished his thoughts... Or perhaps his own theories weren’t perfected then.” After some thought, Li Hao felt that it might have to do with the supernatural locks.

The supernatural locks sealed potential away out of concern that martial masters were too strong for their organs and bodies. Their extraneous power was stored for later release. Such were ether supernatural locks!

Human bodies contained a certain strength to begin with in the locks. When his teacher spoke of nurturing the spirit, he likely borrowed the theory of supernatural locks nurturing the auras.

“Summoner of Spirit is a stage of releasing potential, a methodological process that strengthens the organs while strengthening the aura. That can avoid a lot of trouble and even prevent a condition like Hou Xiaochen’s and the others—strong potential but hesitance to unseal themselves.”

Li Hao thought over the implications, feeling that his teacher's path was much more complicated than he'd thought! Perhaps his teacher had certain thoughts long ago and only manifested them later on.

### Chapter 529: Safeguarding Silver Moon (III)

"Supernatural locks and aura... The supernatural locks restrain the aura, but do they do that purely to immobilize the aura?" Li Hao sank into deep thought. Locking the aura away may not be just to confine it, but also to nurture it!

But how could he release some of the power sealed in the locks to nurture the aura? Partially snap them like He Yong and the others did? That seemed... so unreliable!

Various thoughts flashed through his mind after reading through the Fundamentals of Sword Theory. He had many more reflections regarding martial dao as well as his teacher's theories. It'd looked so simple to him before, but seemed quite deep and profound upon further consideration! Summoner of Spirit was not as straightforward as Li Hao had previously thought. Of course, Yuan Shuo himself may not have perfected the realm either.

"Forget it, there's no sign of teacher to be seen at the moment and his theories may not be complete. Perhaps I can try to complete them myself."

His teacher had given him some precursors and theories. All Li Hao needed to do was to overcome certain difficulties, such as how to use the strength inside the locks to nurture the organs and aura. They couldn't just take in energy indefinitely, could they!

If that was the case, regular martial masters wouldn't have the right to set foot into this level if they couldn't utilize blood pearls. Li Hao could do it only because he could borrow sword energy to strengthen himself. His teacher had said that only a path that everyone could walk was a true path of martial dao. That was what made a real cultivation level!

Therefore, the peak of current martial masters ended at Dominator. The paths beyond it were not the normal order of things. Only Yuan Shuo and Li Hao utilized Summoner of Spirit. No one else was qualified to walk it.

The key lies in the supernatural locks. Li Hao had eaten most of the Mind Fruits by now and his four auras were stronger, but he wasn't satisfied with that. That wasn't enough. If his body also reached the ten thousand cube level, then he might fully surpass the previous Sea Shark. However, he would still fall short if he encountered a late Nova.

Faceless Shark had been a late Nova, which meant that White Shark was either a peak Nova or at metamorphosis like the golden eagle and other monster spirits. The latter didn't seem likely. Those he knew of this level were Hong Yitang and others. He knew the limits of their strength before being unsealed—metamorphosis was a stage of change.

With Li Hao's current strength, he wouldn't stand against White Shark. As for the dog, he could tell that it might not be able to kill late Novas on its own. But if it ambushed those close to this level, it would be able to take out the target. Panth appeared to be slightly stronger than the young man, but not by much. It would be difficult for the two of them to accomplish anything against an enemy that already knew he'd killed a late Nova.

"Not to mention, there may not be just one Nova. There are also the Solars to consider. A plentitude of ants will bite an elephant to death. Causing trouble for the White Shark Raiders at this current stage is to court death." Li Hao flicked the little sword around like willow leaves drifting through the wind. The motion brought a frown to his face. Grasping the wood aura through the Weeping Willow Sword might take a very long time. After strengthening the other four auras, it somehow felt a bit awkward to use the Weeping Willow Sword.

"The Five Styles..." His thoughts traveled to the first method he'd learned. According to Yuan Shuo, the deer style corresponded to the wood aura. How that exactly mapped to the wood aura was up to each person. Yuan Shuo's thoughts differed from Li Hao's—the young man felt that the deer style should map to the wind aura. How did it match the wood aura? One couldn't say the deer style was of the wood attribute just because deer ate grass.

It was up to individual comprehension. Just as Yuan Shuo's tiger was one of water, Li Hao's was one of fire.

"It makes sense that the ape style corresponds to the wood aura as this animal is expert at traveling through the mountains via climbing trees..." Li Hao smiled at this. He returned to the book instead of thinking about it further. Perhaps the ancient book could give him some hints or other comprehension.

The sky was fully dark outside and the owner of the tavern didn't dare rush the customer that'd taken over the best room. He'd recognized who the person was and couldn't wait to fawn over the young man—how would he ever dare say that they were closed for the day?

Granted, there was no end of internal muttering that the young man was seriously miserly. A small jug of wine and some pastries were all that he ordered... The one in the room was an important heavyweight, after all, is there a need to be so stingy?

If it wasn't out of concern that the other would dismiss him out of hand, the owner wanted to send up a plate of fruit or something similar. The young man was so miserly to order so few dishes after sitting in the room for the entire day!

Li Hao didn't walk down the stairs until the night was fully dark and neon lights flickering brightly outside.

"General, would you like a bite to eat?" The owner quickly stepped forward in welcome.

"That's alright." Li Hao flashed a smile and took out one hundred Skystar coins. "Is this enough for a jug of wine and a plate of pastries?"

"....." The tavern keeper paused. That is... definitely enough... but... ah forget it! It's not like I charged you a private room fee. "That's enough, more than enough!"

"It's tough running a business, so I ought to pay this amount." Li Hao left after settling his bill, sighing with appreciation at the cost of living in Southern Ford. One hundred coins for a meal? When he'd been a new inspector at Silver City, his wages during his probation period had been one thousand coins a month. It'd be gone after ten small flasks of wine.

The young man shook his head. No wonder the city's tax revenue could sustain thirty million throughout the province! The cost of living is so high here that I would be able to feast in Silver City for the price of that meal.

Li Hao wasn't in a hurry to head to the beach after he left the tavern. He wandered through the city, in a rare mood and frame of mind to take in the streets and lights of Southern Ford. It would be nice to utilize this free time to cleanse his thoughts and heart. What he saw at the Near River town today was also fresh on his mind...

Li Hao smiled, a new sensation in his heart. Silver Moon was wonderful now that he looked at it!

.....

As Li Hao roamed through Southern Ford, the Demon Hunters partied it up in the city.

.....

At the same time, White Moon City.

Several senior executives were hosting a video conference. Several figures were projected on a crystalline screen. Kong Jie leaned back on his office chair with weariness. "Did none of you sense Li Hao running off last night?"

"No." Huang Yu raised an eyebrow on screen.

"Then that means there are problems with our system!" Kong Jie said brusquely. "We've been on guard against supernaturals, but martial masters are the true latent threat! If Li Hao and his people could leave with no one the wiser, that means martial masters can soundlessly invade us!"

Huang Yu inclined his head and didn't argue. After a while, he said, "We can indeed be stricter against martial masters. I'll take this into consideration and have the army enhance our preparations for martial masters." He promptly set the concern out of mind. "So Li Hao killed Faceless and Sea Shark?"

“The black dog was also there, it might have participated.”

“That’s a major monster spirit...” Huang Yu hesitated. “What are they doing in Silver Moon? It doesn’t feel to be of the supernatural system either, it seems rather like the martial master system.”

Director General Zhao coughed; his figure superimposed on Huang Yu on the screen. “Perhaps it’s a descendant of an ancient monster spirit and has had its bloodline awakened. The bloodline heritage of the monster spirits is slightly stronger than that of the human races. We might have some ancient monster spirit descendants in our midst.

“You’ve seen the data, too, that Li Hao inadvertently took in the dog. It comes from Silver City. Since the heritage of the eight families is in that city, it’s to be expected that there are descendants of ancient monster spirits there.”

Everyone nodded slightly.

“Hou Xiaochen’s departure means that some issues will crop up with our system of the four institutions,” Kong Jie said after momentary consideration. “It was Ole Zhao in charge of internal affairs, Ole Huang for external enemies, me for domestic security, and Ole Hou being a mobile unit to cleanse us of random nonsense.

“But the Night Watchers lack sufficient strength after Ole Hou’s departure. We also lack critical powerhouses to make decisions. Hao Lianchuan is too weak...”

“I recommended Wang Henggang as a replacement, but Ole Hou didn’t agree and caught us off guard when he left by promoting Li Hao. The lad’s not weak, but I... didn’t think he would do before!

“He’s like his master, a proper vagabond. They’re not reliable if you want them to shoulder any responsibility. If Hong Yitang had been willing to take over... I think he would’ve been the best candidate. Sadly, he wasn’t willing.



“Thus, I am hopeful after seeing some new developments. I’m wondering whether we should bring Li Hao into the fold and revive the four institution system of Silver Moon.”

The Inspectorate, Night Watchers, provincial army, and provincial government had overseen Silver Moon for many years. Bringing Li Hao into the fold meant acknowledging his position, that he would eventually replace Hou Xiaochen and become the leading figure in the province’s violent law enforcement agency.

“No, it’s too soon!” Even Director General Zhao frowned at the suggestion. “You’d be pulling the sapling up by the root to help it grow. We can’t think that Li Hao is ready for responsibility after one operation, that’s not appropriate! As the bloodline of the eight families, we hope that he can safeguard this ancient sacred land. But right now, he completely lacks sufficient strength, experience, thoughts, and foundation.”

“You’re being a bit frivolous, Ole Kong,” Huang Yu declared solemnly as well. “Li Hao did well this one time, but he only did well. It’s not a good idea to put his name forward after a single operation.”

“That’s true!” Kong Jie nodded after some thought. “But I think we can consider it. The White Shark Raiders won’t give up so easily. They’re strong and also backed by the Jiangs, correct?”

“We’re not sure, but there’s a distinct possibility,” Huang Yu answered. “What are you saying?”

“The pirates will come for revenge no matter what, or they won’t be able to stand within the North Sea. The other seven factions will divvy them up sooner or later. Therefore, I’d like to see how Li Hao handles the problem. He’s created it, but says that he will resolve it. I’m thinking that if we don’t make a move and leave it alone, shall we bring him in if he successfully handles the situation?”

## Chapter 530: Stillness (I)

Kong Jie and Huang Yu looked at Director General Zhao. After a while, the man smiled. “We can do that, but the caveat is that Hong Yitang cannot be involved. Li Hao has a good relationship with Hong Yitang and his daughter is part of Li Hao’s troop. There’s not much meaning to things if Hong Yitang helps out.”

“We need someone who can resolve issues and swiftly eliminate trouble,” Huang Yu declared solemnly. “Not someone who creates trouble and is unable to clean up after himself. That will only bring trouble to Silver Moon. The higher his position, the greater the trouble!”

The director general was in agreement, but he wanted Li Hao to manage the White Shark Raiders himself. It would be a test of his abilities.

“Do you think... he might actually be unwilling to join?” Kong Jie suddenly laughed.

“That doesn’t matter, we only take voluntary recruits,” Huang Yu responded indifferently. “A forcefully plucked fruit is not sweet. We will not have him join if he really is unwilling!”

Director General Zhao inclined his head.

“Additionally, Ole Hou...” Kong Jie changed the subject. “There will probably be a lot of trouble waiting for him. While Ole Hou took Golden Spear and the others with him when he left, Yellow Dragon in the central Night Watchers probably doesn’t want to see him land on solid footing in his new post. Ole Hou hasn’t said anything, but should we do something?”

He glanced at the two, as if waiting for their decision. Huang Yu furrowed his brows and sank into deep thought. The director general seemed to be writing something down. He raised his head when he sensed the quiet atmosphere and saw the other two looking at him.

“What are you guys looking at me for?” The old man smiled.

“Don’t you have any ideas, Ole Zhao?”

“Me?” the director general answered with resignation. “What ideas can I have? Little Hou isn’t weak either, so don’t be worried...”

“You and small mind...” chuckled Kong Jie. “So you guys had a few arguments. He just has different opinions from you! So he doesn’t like the idea of being all inclusive and the four institutions working together—just ignore him! Why must you have him share the same opinion as you?”

“What?” laughed Director General Zhao. “When did I ever want him to think the same way I do?”

“Fine fine fine!” Kong Jie didn’t say anything else. “Do you have any ideas or not? You’re so busy that one would think you have some great enterprise in mind, but there’s been nothing major in the province recently...”

“That’s all you know!” rebuked the director general. “All you know is to run your mouth and not pay attention to anything else!”

Kong Jie couldn’t be bothered to respond.

“He is beyond our reach in the central region,” Director General Zhao said after some thought. “I don’t have any good ideas... How about this, I’ll send a personal letter to Sky Sword as Silver Moon’s highest ranking officer. As a fellow Silver Moon denizen, maybe he’ll be willing to help if Little Hou runs into any trouble.”

“That guy...” Certain things came to mind when Kong Jie heard this. “He’ll do! Apparently Tyrant Blade is still alive too, do you know where he is?”

“No.” Director General Zhao shook his head.

“Almost everyone who’s seen him has died,” Huang Yu offered. “He’s hard to locate. But he might go seek out Yuan Shuo.”

“Hmm?”

“Don’t forget, Yuan Shuo has the blade of the Zhangs!” Huang Yu smiled meaningfully. “With Tyrant Blade’s domineering personality, he might be interested in that blade and look for a sparring match.”

“Yuan Shuo... probably isn’t a match for Tyrant Blade at the moment.”

“Who knows?” Huang Yu shook his head. “Yuan Shuo will stand a chance if he perfects his Summoner of Spirit realm. The five styles meld as one to nurture the five organs. Tyrant Blade won’t necessarily win without unsealing himself if he’s like us!”

“Then forget it, he’s tough to track down.” Kong Jie gave up that possibility. “Let’s write to Sky Sword first. Who else is in the central region apart from him...”

“Is Northern Fist in the central region? Or has he gone somewhere else, like Great Li?”

“Don’t know.”

“Not sure.”

“Forget it, you guys lack sufficient information.” Kong Jie couldn’t be bothered to make fun of them. “But these Silver Moon guys seriously get around. The only one we’re sure of is Sky Sword. At least he’s been conspicuous enough these years that we can find him.”

The rest were all mysterious figures hard to track down.

“I don’t think we need to be overly worried about Hou Xiaochen,” Director General Zhao offered casually. “Yu Luocho and Golden Spear are with him. Yu Luocho is still in full command of her strength, whereas Golden Spear...”

The old man hesitated. “Golden Spear remains to be seen. He’s in a stage of self doubt at the moment. If he can’t snap out of it, he’ll be half crippled and this will be all that he amounts to.”

He shook his head, finding it a regretful situation.

“I’m ready to have Berserk Blade leave for the central region,” Huang Yu suddenly offered. “He’s as good as crippled if he keeps staying with me.”

The other two didn’t say anything, that decision was up to their compatriot.

“What about Light Sword?”

“She’s gone to the Xus... probably to address the issues with her cultivation method.” Kong Jie thought over the matter. “Although we don’t know the inside story behind Xu Feng’s death, it might have something to do with one of their rumored treasures. Will she do something?”

“Again, this is beyond our reach!” answered the director general. “Forget it, she doesn’t want to come under our hand either. We can only take each day as it comes. We need to set all this aside for now. Southern Fist came to me before he left to have the province prepare itself. The Sword Sect wishes to expand. Everything within five hundred kilometers of its mountain is to be sect territory. He Yong and Hong Yitang seemed to have reached an agreement. What do you all think?”

The two blinked, Huang Yu frowned.

“This is hard to say and I’m not certain of Hong Yitang’s goal.” Kong Jie thought for a bit. “There is certain room for discussion. As for our representative... let’s send Li Hao. What do you guys say?”

The other two looked at each other and nodded. An agreement had been reached on all Silver Moon matters in the near term.

“I have the army cordoning off Rift Canyon,” Huang Yu concluded. “No one is allowed in or out for the moment. There’s been some developments at Battle Heaven. I think it’ll take Li Hao to take care of those problems.”

The trio swiftly concluded the call after discussing these matters. Li Hao was temporarily viewed as part of the four institutions in the capacity of the Night Watcher leader. The young man remained in the dark about this and was even less aware that he was about to be promoted again.

At the moment, he was still in Southern Ford, watching a group of long-legged beauties dancing in the night. He was impressed at how they didn’t seem to be freezing in the chilly air.

.....

A day of merrymaking passed. The Demon Hunters gathered back at the beach on the second day. Hong Qing and Hong Hao were yet to return as the Sword Sect was further away. It wouldn’t take them longer than two days by car for a return trip, however. Everyone else was present apart from them.

Li Hao took a close assessment of them. Many in the crowd showed faint signs of an aura. That wasn’t a true aura yet, just a prototype similar to when Li Hao comprehended the earth aura. It meant that they weren’t too far off and would soon be half step Dominators.

Approximately five among the Sword Sect showed such indications, whereas Liu Yan, Wu Chao, and Chen Jian of the Inspectorate were also the same. Aura prototypes also flickered around them.

Li Hao breathed out gently. The effects had been good. Battle was indeed the premier cultivation method for martial masters. There might be ten half step Dominators in his small team after a few days. As for officially setting foot into the stage, they would need to strengthen their aura.

They'd attained all of the other requirements whether it was the body, organs, blood qi, or bones. They were far stronger than ordinary martial masters. Having one-fifth of a crew of fifty becoming half step Dominators was a fantastic record. In all the years of the Silver Moon Guards' formation, only one-tenth of them had reached the same stage. They'd also had to rely on the dao comprehension weapons to do so.

"We've had our day of fun, it's time to go." Li Hao looked at his people. "We'll go back to White Moon City first to rest for three days. I'll grant general access to the dao comprehension weapons that the Guards left behind. It's up to you if you make use of it or not. Some of the auras within may not conform to your thoughts. They can only be used as reference, but still useful to comprehending the aura.

"I'll take you on an excavation of a ruin after three days! And to the seas again within ten days. The White Shark Raiders are probably consumed by the confusion of consolidation at the moment. We might have some advantage in making trouble for them now, but that's not important in my view. We won't be afraid of them finishing their consolidation so long as our strength increases as well."

He had two options at the moment—head straight for the pirates and kick in their front door. The Divine Kun Ship was fast and could hunt them down easily. The second option was to explore the ruins that Golden Spear had left behind.

Li Hao chose the latter. The White Shark Raiders were a known entity that he was in no rush to address. They wouldn't brashly undertake action over the next couple of days, it would be a while longer. They would also be worried about Silver Moon laying a trap for them.

Therefore, the young man wanted to take advantage of this gap to explore the ruins that Golden Spear left behind. He might gain something. It wasn't a convenient time to attempt Battle Heaven at the moment. The army was strong and strictly speaking, the cities of the eight families were all his. He shouldn't go about randomly digging them up.

Of course these were just his thoughts.

“Some of you have never been to a ruin before, so this will be a good experience! You might gain something if you’re lucky, or run into some danger if you’re not. But martial masters should take risks in the end.”

No one had an opinion, there was just general excitement! Most of them were yet to explore ruins before. They knew there was a lot of treasure inside, but were unaware of what ruins were actually like.