

## Star Gate 541

### Chapter 541: Partnership (I)

According to New Martial standards, people like Li Hao were very special. Mind intent was as simple as mental strength as it touched on the core origin of martial dao. Strictly speaking, these people had already set foot on the path of pursuing the ultimate peak of martial dao.

But when it came to strength... there seemed a massive gap between Li Hao and what the tree spirit knew. It didn't know how to describe it as it was just a monster spirit, one made thus by its heritage. It wasn't a major monster spirit through the efforts of its own cultivation. If it was, it could've answered some of Li Hao's questions.

"Mind intent?" Something occurred to Li Hao as he looked at the tree. "Aura... wood aura... you are a tree..."

The little tree snapped to alertness when the young man waved his sword around, then quickly relaxed. He was practicing the Weeping Willow Sword. He stopped after a moment and asked, "Senior, what do you think of this sword technique?"

The Weeping Willow Sword was directly connected to the wood sword aura, but Li Hao hadn't gained anything after several days of practice.

"This... seems to be a human sword method of the New Martial era," answered the little tree. "It has some of the sensation of that age. It's different from the martial dao you demonstrated before, right?"

"Right!" Li Hao quickly responded. "Will this help me in comprehending the wood aura? Ah, I mean like the concept of the ferocious tiger from earlier..."

He didn't know how to explain the notion.

“Do you want to perceive the dao of the wood sword?” asked the little tree after some thought.

“Yes!” Li Hao nodded, that was basically what he meant.

“I don’t know how to, but if you train by my side and perceive the energy and core origin of life, you might be able to do so. What a pity that my father has fallen. He would’ve been able to help you otherwise...”

Li Hao lit up—could he really now? What he was most regretful of and felt the highest sense of urgency about was not being able to deploy five auras in unison. Would he be afraid of the White Shark Raiders otherwise?

“But the strength of my core origin has dissipated slightly,” added the little tree. “I need large sums of energy stones. The amount you gave is far from enough!”

“How many more do you need?”

“I need more than I need to coalesce life essence. It’s more difficult, so I need at least three times that amount to exude just a little.”

Li Hao froze with shock.

“Thirty.... thousand stones?!” Who the hell was the tree kidding?! Three thousand stones from the army was the equivalent of thirty thousand modern ones! This was an absolute joke!

“Core origin is a type of higher level strength. Even I am hard pressed to emanate it. It’s not impossible, however. You can kill...” The tree suddenly shut up. Li Hao realized what the rest of its words were and looked at it. The atmosphere grew taut.

The little tree hadn't undergone too much tempering of life as it was just a product of inheritance. Hence, it'd actually let something important slip. So it would seem that killing humans or monster spirits who wielded core origin strength could also lead to its emergence.

The tree refused to speak further.

"Does the senior mean that if we kill existences equipped with core origin, that will lead to some dissipation as well?"

"That is right!" answered the tree despite a period of silence. So they would fight if the human wanted to kill it!

Next, Li Hao changed the topic. "Is there any other way? I just need to use a small amount of energy to trade for sufficient core origin strength that will help me grasp the aura. I have no other need for this strength..."

"You seemed to have grasped many different types already," the little tree pointed out. "You're very weird. There were a few like you in the New Martial era. If you wish to grasp more types of dao, you'll need to block out your comprehension of other dao. Some heavyweights in our time had unique ways to accomplish that.

"I don't have many good ideas to help you, but I can still exude some core origin strength. I might not need the mysterious power stones that you speak of..."

"What?" Li Hao asked excitedly, but worried that this other possibility would be even more of a hassle.

"You seem to have other divine weapons on you..."

“Divine weapons? Origin weapons?” A baffled Li Hao took out an origin weapon. He carried many on him—the Revolution King’s wind chime, Xu Feng’s boxing gloves and Heart Protector, and the Celestial Elder Crimson’s black sword. He also had a set of earth armor from a Yama leader.

The young man brought out the earth armor first. It had the lowest value. He also had the Divine Kun Ship as another origin weapon, but that one was different from the others.

“Not this...” transmitted the little tree. “If there are any suited to me, such as ones of the wood attribute, they will supply large sums of the energy that I need. The divine weapons were made from the corpses of plant and monster spirits back in the day...”

It abruptly realized that it’d said the wrong thing again!

Li Hao was looking at the collapsed tree off to the side. The tree was shattered, but it hadn’t been completely pulverized. Did the little tree mean that it could absorb energy from its own kind?

“Father’s body has become the palace’s defensive formation,” agitated the little tree. “It cannot be moved. It shouldn’t, even if it could. Don’t consider this possibility!”

“I understand, I’m just a bit curious.” Li Hao nodded rapidly. “Why... why is there a hole leading to the palace?”

Intruders wouldn’t be able to barge into this place if it was sealed off like Battle Heaven.

“You... don’t understand,” the little tree said with resignation. “I wouldn’t be able to absorb a single iota of energy if there wasn’t a crack. Father’s corpse sealed off the palace, making it impossible for me to absorb any power. I had to create a small crack so I could absorb a little bit of energy. Who would’ve thought that it would attract you guys after I did so?”

“Can it not be closed again?”

“It can... but I’ll sink into slumber once more if I do.” The little tree was quite resigned. “I could intimidate the one last time since he wasn’t that strong. I thought I could hold out for a while longer and store sufficient energy for a while of support. But here you are, and you’ve seen through the illusion.”

It was only because Li Hao could see the dwindling mysterious power stones that he’d stayed. Otherwise, the young man would’ve left or come back with more people like Golden Spear. Many thoughts popped into Li Hao’s mind.

“Senior Tree, does this mean that there are other powerhouses who are asleep till today like you? Some of the New Martial heavyweights, for example...”

“Why would they need to sleep?” intoned the little tree. “Father had to enter sleep because he was gravely injured and was entrusted with the safekeeping of the palace. The powerhouses of the New Martial era would not choose to slumber, you do not understand! If there are any left, they either cannot leave their location like me, or they are too heavily injured, or they are bound by duty.

“I understand your meaning. You wonder if there are New Martial heavyweights remaining that did not leave with the Human King. That is impossible! Anyone who could fight all left!”

Anyone who could fight all left.

Li Hao briefly experienced the emotions for himself. “Then... didn’t the Human King leave some people behind to safeguard his territory?”

If a tree could live for thirty thousand years, then what of the other heavyweights of the ancient civilization?

“I don’t know, probably not... In my memory, the Human King would take the field himself if he could eliminate the enemy. If not, he would go forth in full strength. He would not leave powerhouses behind to stand guard. There shouldn’t be much danger in the rear either. Enemies

were eliminated on the front lines. If confusion appeared in the rear, then it was internal conflict or trouble they'd created themselves.

"The Human King's philosophy was that he was busy killing enemies in foreign lands. If chaos gripped his home, then it was their fault and their fated outcome to die. He wouldn't care. The Human King couldn't bear for the people to be hurt when he was benevolent, but when he was in a vicious mood, everyone should be afraid."

Li Hao was quite interested in the turn of conversation. The ancient Human King!

If he mapped to the figure of Li Hao's memories, then that would be interesting indeed. That personage was heartless beyond compare, but also a kindly ruler according to what the little tree said.

He either put his full force behind his blows or set off on a campaign with all of his people. Even more interesting was that he wasn't concerned about trouble from the rear. If there was, he wouldn't address it. Any trouble was internal discord. Go and attack yourselves however you will. I won't care if you're all dead.

With the current situation...

Li Hao hadn't heard of any invasions by unknown races. It was just the dynasty constantly at war with itself.

"We shouldn't talk too much about the Human King," said the little tree. "It's best not to mention the names of these powerhouses. They might sense their real name if you use it too often, despite being separated by countless years and distance. This might not be a good thing, it could be bad as they cannot determine whether it's friend or foe using their name. They might use certain methods to curse whoever's using his name."

"No way?" Li Hao blinked. "It's been so many years..."

“Everything is possible!” reminded the little tree. “This world may be under some restrictions. We are unable to mention their real name. This is a kind of protection to separate friend from foe. We might be killed through a curse if we use their real name now!”

“But what if you have the same surname and given name...”

“You know not the profound mysteries of dao!” The little tree gave up communicating. Li Hao was too stupid... No, he’d seen too little of the world and didn’t understand it at all.

There was nothing the young man could say. He was used to the ancients scoffing at him, and now even an ancient tree looked down at him. Did it want his help or not?

“So you mean that if I give you sufficient wood energy or wood origin weapons, you’ll be able to release some core origin power to help me comprehend the aura?”

“Yes.”

“Will I be able to coalesce my mind intent? The stuff you saw earlier?”

“I don’t now.”

Very well then! Let’s give it a try.

Chapter 542: Partnership (II)

“Do any of these suit you?” Li Hao took out a few more origin weapons.

“No... but if you’re willing, I can absorb some of these as well. I’ll just need more of them to satisfy my need...”

Li Hao sighed. It took a lot of resources to nurture his little sword and now, this tree also required a ton. The dog could also eat a lot of energy. Compared to them, his own consumption was nothing!

But if he could grasp the wood aura, he wouldn't care about expending five origin weapons, much less mysterious power stones. A lack of these resources was hardly an issue if one was strong enough in this age!

If it came down to it, he could go for a spin around Red Moon, the three great organizations, the nine ministries, the royal family, Near River's General Director Office, or even the pirates if he had no other choice.

Other than the origin weapons he possessed, he'd also taken a long blade from Sea Shark when he killed the pirate. It seemed particularly unique and not a typical origin weapon. It was durable beyond belief, but it didn't shelter a weapon soul. Li Hao had sealed it and temporarily put it away.

"Do you think you can supply some core origin power for me to study if you absorb these weapons?" The young man took out five origin weapons. "At the very least, let me know the benefits of this special power. I won't have much motivation otherwise."

"I can try the earth armor, Heart Protector, and little black sword. The earth armor should be crafted out of earth dragon skin, the black sword from the corpse of a black hellhound, and the Heart Protector from a mountain pangolin..." the little tree rapidly identified. "The boxing gloves and wind chime are of a higher grade. I would easily waste them. The other three are made from lower level monster spirit corpses. I can give them a try."

Li Hao knew that the wind chime was a high grade, but so were the boxing gloves? He thought of He Yong—the man had looked at them for quite a while, but Li Hao hadn't paid it much attention then. Had He Yong been interested in them and too embarrassed to say anything?

The young man thought for a bit. He could offer some mysterious power stones, but origin weapons...? And three of them? The tree spirit might grow so much stronger after absorbing them and be beyond his abilities to handle. If open hostilities broke out between the two, he might've just signed his own death warrant.



“I’ll have my friend wait outside and call over a few more to stand guard over me. Is that alright?” he asked after mulling over the situation.

“.....” You might as well just say that you don’t trust me.

“My friends are stronger than me and know more of the world than me. They might have better ideas to help senior recover...”

“No need!” the little tree interrupted. “You’re just concerned about me taking in too much energy. I would not like too many outsiders to set foot in this place. How about this, you can leave behind this person next to you. He can meditate for a bit and you can make a decision after determining whether or not what I offer is effective.”

Li Hao looked at Liu Long. The man nodded with a smile. “We can try that, there might be big benefits! But I’m a water type...”

The tree might be a wood or life attribute. As such, its efforts wouldn’t be as useful for Liu Long. The origin weapons would be expended regardless.

“How about I send Li Heng inside?” Li Hao suddenly proposed. “We’ll explain the situation to him. He’s a half step Dominator now and studies the wood sword intent. If it helps him, he might be able to advance to Dominator. If that doesn’t do it for him, then this means whatever the tree offers is of limited use to me too.”

“Him?” Liu Long considered the idea. “He’ll do, but... are you alright with that?”

“What’s not to be alright about?” Li Hao grinned. “Chief, didn’t you say so yourself that we’re all on the same team after joining the Demon Hunters? Besides, didn’t we bring everyone here with the hope of helping some progress further on their paths?”

“That’s true, I took too narrow a view of things!” Liu Long laughed.

“I have some subordinates outside, one of them practices the Weeping Willow Sword.” Li Hao turned to the tree. “He’s weaker than us. I’d like to have him come down. Senior can then devour the origin weapons and release some of the core origin power for him to sense. Is that amenable to you?”

“Whatever you wish.” The little tree could sense that there were indeed more humans outside, but their strength was mediocre.

Li Hao quickly left with Liu Long, walking through the air. The little tree drooped as soon as the disappeared and turned to the collapsed tree not too far away. It was just a tree, but it seemed to fix its gaze on the big tree in this moment.

“Father...” The little tree looked at the big tree, then at the castle near at hand. Protecting the castle was father’s duty, not its duty. Its father was dead, but it continued to stand guard here.

It could’ve left twenty years ago, but it didn’t. It was a sapling from the old tree’s demise and had sprouted from its roots. It was both a descendant and a rebirth of the original body. Safeguarding the abandoned palace seemed to have also become its mission.

If possible, it didn’t want Li Hao in this place. But now it was fragile beyond belief and humans had discovered this area. If it didn’t swiftly grow stronger, more powerful beings might come. Even though the palace had been discarded, it was once an incomparable structure! No one should be able to set foot inside it!

Therefore... I can only partner with him... Since he is a troop leader of Battle Heaven, that means the city has not fully perished. There should be a verification process still running and General Pagoda was willing to gift a drop of life essence. That means there should still be a sliver of life left in him. Perhaps I can place my hopes in this person that he will find more hope for General Pagoda...

Li Hao was thinking far too little of the little tree if he thought that the tree spirit was willing to work with anyone it encountered. If it wasn’t for the drop of Water of Life, the silver armor, and

Stellaris, he would only be faced with the little tree's defiance to the death. The bloodline of the eight families was at times completely useless, but at times, the stepping-stone to success.

He wouldn't have been able to join the Battle Heaven Army without his bloodline or reach a partnership agreement with the little tree.

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Within the mountain cave.

The Demon Hunters waited anxiously. Two figures returned one after another.

Li Hao flew forward and looked at Li Heng. The latter fidgeted to be stared at so intensely. "Leader, what are you looking at me for?"

Seriously.

"Do you want to be a Dominator?"

Li Heng blinked, as did the others. A variety of expressions crossed the faces of Liu Yan and the old Demon Hunters. You call for Li Heng instead of us for an opportunity like this? Is there a need to look after him so much just because of a surname?

"Of course, leader!" Li Hang jerked to attention. "But... it's very hard to improve the aura. Do you have a way?"

All that a Sunderer needed to do for their breakthrough was to strengthen their aura to the point of transformation. It was a process that normally took many years. Yuan Shuo had persisted for many years, as did others. Liu Long had directly entered Dominator possibly because he had outside help.

“Yes, but it’s very dangerous!” Li Hao cut straight to the point. “There’s a tree spirit below that’s reached an agreement with me, it has a few ideas to strengthen our auras! Of course, the price to be paid is very high—origin weapons are to be used as fertilizer. I don’t mind that, I’m just worried that it has other plans in mind. Therefore, I need someone to go down there first and I’ll make a decision after seeing the effects...”

Whoosh! Li Heng flung himself at the hole. “Leader, I’ll test the waters for you!” With that, he jumped down!

Li Hao looked wordlessly in the appropriate direction, then looked at Liu Long and the rest. They were equally speechless. That guy... Li Hao was yet to finish his words, but the fellow seemed deathly afraid of losing the opportunity and jumped straight down!

“I... forget it!” Li Hao nursed a brewing headache. I wasn’t done yet! The hell you throw yourself down for? He’d wanted to remind the young man to be careful and keep an eye on the tree, but Li Heng had already jumped down. What else could he say now?

Li Hao tossed the earth armor into the hole. “Try absorbing this first, senior. We’ll see how to proceed if that’s not enough.”

It was just a Sunderer making the attempt. If one origin weapon wasn’t enough... Li Hao would have to consider if the partnership was worth it.

The little tree did not respond. Everything quieted below; some minute changes occurred after a long while. Li Hao felt a surge of presence that swiftly disappeared.

An hour passed, long enough that the young man started growing nervous. He considered the hole solemnly, wondering if he should rush down... A figure darted out at this time!

Li Heng wobbled to a landing. Li Hao looked at him with fresh eyes—Dominator! Li Heng was a Dominator!

Li Heng himself was a bit absent-minded and vacant. He recovered his wits only after seeing Li Hao.

“Leader...” he mumbled. “Am I... am I a Dominator?”

“Mmhmm, what do you feel?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t feel anything, it was like I entered a patch of darkness and then saw a road—a very narrow road. I think I saw some people fighting, and trees, and monster spirits. And then... I woke up, and here I am, a Dominator. I don’t feel anything about it myself.”

Li Hao raised an eyebrow. That was it? That easy?

He didn’t say anything else and had Liu Long remain on the ground while he jumped down again.

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The little tree was no longer crystalline. It seemed to have wilted some.

“The people of your era... are very strange. I’d thought that I could guide you to the path of core origin, but I cannot... Perhaps your path is different from us...”

This “us” that it spoke of did not refer to the little tree itself, but its inherited memories. It was almost a carbon copy of the old tree.

#### Chapter 543: Partnership (III)

“But the core nature of our martial dao is similar. We all reach the same goal by different means and all daos are one. It is all the same in the end... What do you think about the effects?”

“They’re very good!” Li Hao nodded. “If he’d had to cultivate by himself without the aid of external help, it would take him at least ten years to have a hope of becoming a Dominator.”

Ten years was the baseline. Yuan Shuo hadn’t taken that step for several decades. Of course, it also had something to do with the fact that he was merging five auras into one. This was one origin weapon for one comprehension opportunity that produced one Dominator. Li Hao felt that it was quite a worthy trade-off.

After some thought, the young man tossed out the remaining origin weapons without hesitation. “Can you absorb these two and emanate some core origin power for me to comprehend?”

“Yes... but you cannot spend too much time in my dao. It is my dao, not yours. You can sense some, but not follow it entirely. You will not walk far otherwise...”

Li Hao waited silently. Moments later, the two origin weapons disappeared as the little tree melded them into its body. A particular ripple slowly wafted out. Though Li Hao focused on it without hesitation, he didn’t lower the sword in his hand. He still didn’t trust the tree all that much.

The scene turned dark before his eyes and he quickly sank into darkness. Just like Li Heng had said, a road vaguely materialized in the gloom. He stood on the muddy path while figures appeared on it.

Being relatively clear-witted, Li Hao collected his domineering mind intent. This woke him up even more. Many things sharpened into focus when he took a closer look; he saw the gradual growth process of a towering tree. There weren’t too many grand surges or momentum, just an ordinary routine.

It was planted next to the palace. A wretched-looking old man came along one day and fished out a cat... a cat-shaped fruit to feed to the tree.

“You’re lucky to grow here, but I made this trip to announce that we are abandoning this palace. The war has entered a critical moment and His Imperial Majesty will probably not be visiting any longer. You would’ve had a great fortuitous opportunity growing here, what a pity...

“Here’s a Cat Fruit for you to try. I hope you find your own path. I’ll be off now. If anyone comes along to patrol and asks you anything, tell him that I fed you five... no, ten Cat Fruits!” The old man patted the tree. “It’s not easy being a martial senior. They try to get more out of me everyday and I’m almost running empty for it. I finally have an excuse to keep some for myself. Do you understand me?”

The big tree seemed to somewhat understand. It shook its body to indicate that it did.

The old man cackled, displaying yellow teeth, and patted the big tree again. “You’ve got strong potential. Then I’ll be off now. Oh, yes. Although this place has been discarded, don’t let anyone else inside. Keep an eye on it so it’s not disturbed...” With that, the old man vanished.

This was probably the tree’s deepest memory on its path of martial dao, the event that it was most proud of and the most auspicious.

An old man had given it a fruit; it grew furiously after that, becoming the only guard after the palace’s soldiers were withdrawn. It was the abandoned palace’s only protector because the old man had said that even though the structure was no longer in use, no one else could be allowed inside.

Li Hao seemed to transform into a tree at some point, keeping the tree company as it grew. Wind and rain beat down on it, the sun and rain bore down on the tree. So time passed day after day, year after year. As the young man immersed himself in the perceptions and comprehension, the scene changed again. Weakened even more so now, the little tree was suddenly in front of Li Hao and looking at the young man.

“Your eyes...”

“My eyes?” Li Hao asked blankly, countless scenes filling his mind. He cleared his thoughts with a shake of his head.

The little tree didn't know how to describe it. Li Hao's eyes weren't that different from their regular state at the moment, but it felt that there was something different.

"You... must be careful of your eyes," it finally said after a long while. "They might be the Eyes of Truth or the Sword Eyes. Your ancestor was incomparably mighty in the legends. His path was different from ours. He broke his own core origin dao, so strictly speaking, his descendants... might have been influenced by him. You might walk your own unique martial path instead of core origin."

Li Hao cocked his ear to listen more closely.

"You should study your eyes more," said the tree. "Additionally, the origin weapons you supplied are only sufficient for this amount of power. My core origin will be damaged if I continue!"

Li Hao nodded without a word and turned quiet. He was quietly perceiving everything he'd seen before. The images weren't the key—the key was that he seemed to have become a tree himself and grown continuously. He waved Stellaris around and deployed the Weeping Willow Sword. Stroke after stroke, a new understanding teased at the edges of his consciousness, but it wasn't that straightforward. He felt that certain things were still obscured in a haze that was difficult to clear up!

If he could, perhaps he might grasp the wood aura.

"Don't be in a rush, this is a very normal process," the little tree pointed out when Li Hao returned to his senses. "You've sensed a lot of paths and might fully comprehend it after a few more tries with me."

Li Hao smiled ruefully. This was an incredible rate of consumption—three origin weapons in one go! Not even royal princes spent as heavily as he did! How many origin weapons had he gone through over the course of his cultivation? The little sword had eaten quite a few origin weapons as well.



Li Hao took a deep breath and tamped down his emotions. “Can you depart from here, senior?”

“No, I need to protect this place.”

Li Hao didn’t deny the need. All he did was think of the scene he’d seen earlier—a casual word from a wretched old man that inspired the tree’s father to stand guard for thirty thousand years!

The little tree still carried out the mission of its father’s time. One had to say, these monster spirits were to be admired when they doggedly stuck to one ideal.

“Then I can only come here if I want to seek out the senior?”

“That’s right. I can also close the passageway if you give me sufficient energy. Father’s corpse sealed off the premises. If I close the tunnel, no one will be able to enter. You can send people to cultivate here and you yourself can come at any time, so long as you supply me sufficient energy.”

This meant to say that if Li Hao was willing, he’d be able to turn this place into his personal sanctuary. The only drawback was that this place was slightly far from White Moon City—approximately three hundred kilometers. If one was strong enough, the distance was easily passable.

“Senior, this place has been abandoned.” Li Hao flicked a glance at the castle. “I... also saw some things. When the old man visited, he seemed to retrieve something before leaving. This place is likely empty. So why...”

“I don’t know, but father said I can’t go, so I cannot go.”

Li Hao sighed! He wanted to bring the tree with him as the tree spirit didn’t feel too weak. It was very weak before, but that was due to a lack of energy. Even so, Golden Spear was unable to fully match it. Li Hao wouldn’t have dared set himself against the spirit if he hadn’t peered through the falsehood either.

The tree was really something!

In Li Hao's eyes, he was just too poor. Otherwise, he would collect Water of Life and endlessly try the scenes that he'd just seen. If he grew with the little sword, he might comprehend the wood aura.

There were some more origin weapons in his storage rings, but Li Hao was yet to fully digest what he'd just gained. He would waste whatever he supplied now.

“Ah, then the cat-shaped fruit...”

“That's an ultimate treasure that's possibly been lost by now. It was the senior's companion fruit—he was also a plant spirit...”

Li Hao blinked. A plant spirit? The old man?

“Do you mean, senior, that monster spirits can also take human form?”

“Yes. It's easier for monster spirits, harder for plant spirits. but all have hope.”

Li Hao's thoughts turned to the dog waiting outside. Could Panth become a human? That was a frightening prospect, for a dog to be a human!

“Senior, I have a few more mysterious power stones on me for you to use. Can I send my subordinates in to train?”

“Of course!!” the little tree didn't decline. Absorbing energy and supplying it to Li Hao's people meant that the tree could also siphon some for itself. That was the true exchange known to both

sides. Otherwise, the little tree would have to be an idiot to work with Li Hao. Plainly, Li Hao understood this theory too.

He wanted to see the effects of his cultivation as well. The little tree seemed to supply energy similar to that of what the sword energy neutralized. That meant that there was one less step for Li Hao to concern himself with.

He had to stand in and be that conversion factor every time the Demon Hunters cultivated. That was not necessarily a good thing. After a while, he called everyone down to meditate. The young man fished out large sums of mysterious power stones at the same time.

The little tree was indifferent to the rest of the team, but it was wary when Panther entered the area. Even though it was a tree, Li Hao could tell that it was nervous. It seemed to be afraid that the dog would slip into the palace in a momentary lapse of attention.

Truth be told, Panther did want to sneak inside. The little tree kept it out multiple times. There was nothing else for it to do but crouch on the ground and stared silently at the palace. There seemed to be something in its memories about the structure, or another palace that was similar about this palace shaped like a cat.

My forebears seemed to have been able to come and go at will from these places...

The dog looked at the palace, then at the tree. More memories were awakening from the depths of its bloodline. One of its forebears seemed to like pawing at a tree. Was that the case or not? Regardless, the brand within its bloodline reminded it of many things.

#### Chapter 544: Entering the North Sea (I)

Inside the ruins, Li Hao took out a large sum of mysterious power stones and offered them to the little tree. This would give it sufficient energy for it to exude power to help others train. Meanwhile, the young man thought back over everything he'd just experienced—becoming a tree and growing with the little tree.

His Weeping Willow Sword gradually took shape, but he still lacked inspiration when it came to the wood sword aura. His fifth aura was too hard to manifest. The young man was beginning to understand why his teacher sought out people to fight. Perhaps only through sparring his way through the land could he improve his own aura. Otherwise, pure cultivation alone might make it difficult to comprehend the fifth aura.

A ripple suddenly traveled from Li Hao's armor after an indeterminate period of time. Soldier Kong Jie requested to communicate.

Kong Jie!

Li Hao had given him a set of armor before and they were less than five hundred kilometers away from White Moon City. They could indeed communicate at this distance. Li Hao could reach Kong Jie directly, but the man needed Li Hao's permission to do the same.

A momentary pause later, Li Hao accepted the call.

"What is it, Inspector General Kong?" He'd only just left White Moon City. Had the White Shark Raiders already come? Surely not!

"There's been news from the east that Light Sword erupted at the Steadfast Duke's holdings five hours ago. She killed five of his generals and seized their heritage treasure. She seems to still be alive and is escaping to the north..."

Li Hao paused from shock. "Isn't she part of the duke's faction?"

"Would a Silver Moon martial master really be willing to call someone else their uncle? Only Silver Moon denizens can suppress another person from Silver Moon, such as someone like your master. The Steadfast Duke plainly doesn't count among their number."

"Okay!" Li Hao had nothing else to say. He was simply confused why the inspector general was telling him this. Escaping to the north? Could it be...

The young man thought of what Light Sword had once said to him and broke out in a grin. She's not coming for me, is she?

That was very possible.

The swordswoman had threatened him into helping her suppress her inner turmoil once. It looked like she'd unsealed herself to kill her enemies last night...

But that'd been five hours ago. She was dead now, right? Even if she wasn't, she would be a supernatural. That was just as good, Li Hao wouldn't be able to do anything for her then. She was beyond saving as a martial master after so long. Not to mention, the eastern expanses were very far away.

A premier powerhouse would have to travel approximately five thousand kilometers if they flew in a straight line from east to north. Although Light Sword might be erupting with full power, it would take her at least a day and a half at a speed of one hundred and fifty kilometers per hour.

"Light Sword killed five premier powerhouses last night," Kong Jie continued. "Four of them were late Novas and one close to metamorphosis. She killed them all with one stroke! She's a terrifying character who looks to have snapped five locks at once."

Damn! Li Hao clucked his tongue. That was intense! No wonder she could kill five generals with one move. Hong Yitang couldn't instantly kill an existence in metamorphosis even if he snapped two locks. If he could, the four monster spirits of Ash Mountain would've been in a great deal of trouble.

No wonder she could face such overwhelming odds and make it back out alive. He Yong had mentioned that Light Sword should be stronger than him after unsealing herself.

“We’re not sure what treasure Light Sword’s seized, but according to some records, the Xus were known for their speed when they helped the royal family conquer the world. Therefore, we speculate that they might have the ‘feet of the Lius’ as mentioned in the eight families...”

Li Hao’s eyes widened. Was that so? However, he still didn’t understand what Kong Jie wanted with him. “Does the inspector general mean to say that Silver Moon is interested in this treasure?”

“Naturally, of course, and there are many who are also interested. There’s probably numerous parties who wish to stop her along the way. Light Sword may still be alive since there’s no news of her death. If that is the case, she’ll be gravely wounded and possibly near death. Many people will head to her once they receive the news as well.”

“Then you should go take a look, inspector general.”

“We cannot leave rashly...” Kong Jie finally broached his main point. “Even if we do, we might not have a great effect. I recall the instance when He Yong and Hong Yitang unsealed themselves... but were fine for it. You also received a drop of the Water of Life in the ruins...”

“Soldier Kong Jie, your superior officer has ended communication!” A voice suddenly echoed in Kong Jie’s ears as he spoke on. The man blinked, freezing. He cursed, “The fuck!”

I wasn’t done yet! Li Hao hung up on me! This kid... these guts... Damned if he didn’t want to punch someone!

.....

The clearing in front of the castle.

Li Hao was speechless. The heck? He understood Kong Jie’s meaning—the man wanted him to rescue Light Sword and help suppress her five supernatural locks. If not, then use the Water of Life to save her.

You're joking!

One drop of that water was worth ten thousand mysterious power stones to Li Hao. Suppressing five locks? He Yong had snapped only four last time and not all the way. He'd received treatment on the spot, but still consumed three thousand stones. That instance had put He Yong into massive debt!

Li Hao would be an utter fool to save the woman, not to mention there was a grudge between them. He rather liked Silver Moon martial masters, but those did not include his enemies such as Ying Hongyue or the dead Green Moon. Light Sword hadn't taken action against him only because she hadn't had the chance to. Both He Yong and Hong Yitang had been present and they had been inside Battle Heaven. Reinforced by two more Gold Armors, Li Hao wasn't afraid of her at all.

Therefore, he wasn't the least bit interested in saving someone who'd once threatened him.

But if she came to him, he would honor his word. The precursor to that was that she paid for her own treatment. He'd agreed to help keep her energy in check, but not pay the price for it.

The key thing was, she couldn't reach him. The young man laughed. Even if she ran to him with everything she had, it would take her a day and a night to reach Silver Moon. She'd be long dead by then.

A weapon of the eight families? This was what Li Hao was interested in. Director General Wang of Battle Heaven security had told him to collect those, that they were important tokens and keys. So the weapon of the Lius was with the Xus?

The young man sank into deep thought and looked at Liu Long cultivating not too far away. Chief's surname was also Liu and his family was one of the more well known Lius of Silver City. They didn't seem to have much to do with the Lius of the eight families, however.

Another communicator alert traveled into Li Hao's ear. Kong Jie was still looking for him. Only the armor's communication system could reach Li Hao. The others couldn't find him even if they wished to.

The young man frowned. What was with Kong Jie? He knew that there was a feud between Light Sword and Li Hao. Despite the internal grumbling, the young man still picked up.

"Silver Moon needs Light Moon alive, and preferably in perfect condition. Bring her back to us. We're not at liberty to make a move ourselves and neither will we be of much use. We still have to ask you for help. We're willing to pay a price!"

"Not interested!" Li Hao flat-out rejected. "She threatened me once before. I don't have many friends, nor do I need them. I'm not interested in turning enemies into friends."

"One sword stele!"

"What?"

"I'll trade you a sword stele for you taking action! It's left behind from a premier swordsman and there's an inscription on it. There was sword qi remaining on it when we dug it out from the ancient ruins. It was so strong that it almost killed a Nova powerhouse. It will be a very useful treasure to you."

A sword stele.

"Is there a signature on it?" Li Hao thought over the idea. He wanted to know if it used to belong to one of the premier swordsmen that he knew. If not, he wasn't interested.

"Yes! Just one character... Li!" Kong Jie chuckled. "It might have belonged to one of your ancestors."



Really? Li Hao didn't believe him. Li was a popular surname, there were too many with it.

"Light Sword will certainly repay you if you rescue her. With her strength, she'll be able to do many things for you that you can't do. She's one of the more gentle martial masters among us. She trains in the light sword discipline and is a very decisive person."

"Inspector general, it's better that you guys do the deed," Li Hao declined politely. "If you really can bring her back and supply sufficient mysterious power stones, I'll help her get her energy under control again."

He was rather curious that if they wanted to save people, who could stand against their combined might? Just head out already! Why waste time with me? I'm just a martial master barely on par with mid Nova. If you send me, I'll die if there's any kind of powerhouse there. Light Sword is finding it tough to shake off her enemies even with her eruption of power. I'm sure she's very strong right now, so I'd just be going to my death.

If the person being chased was Yuan Shuo, then Li Hao would go without even needing to be urged. But it wasn't, and it was Light Sword who was the target. He wasn't interested in taking the risk.

"We can't, we pose too big of a target," Kong Jie sighed. "Let's put it this way. A lot of people have their eyes on us and we'll be easily exposed if we disappear for too long, particularly at a sensitive time like this. Silver Moon might appear to be peaceful after Ole Hou's departure, but there are a lot of people watching us.

"You, though, don't have any official duties and don't need to appear at official events. You can do whatever you like... So name your terms! We want to save Light Sword as there might be drastic changes in Silver Moon coming up. We need someone with her strength! You won't be in much trouble if you go. If you can save her, suppress her internal disorder and repair her organs, she'll have the strength to face some dangers too..."

Name my terms?

Didn't Li Hao risk his life, undertake excavations, and attack pirates because he wanted to increase his strength? Here was a perfect chance to, but he needed a tremendous amount of resources.

#### Chapter 545: Entering the North Sea (II)

"One hundred origin weapons..."

"Cut the crap, Li Hao!"

"One hundred thousand mysterious power stones!" Li Hao amended. It seemed to take a lot of stones for one instance of core origin power. The little tree said it was three times the amount needed to coalesce Water of Life, so didn't that make it require thirty thousand stones?

One hundred thousand stones would give him three attempts to comprehend core origin. He might be able to attain his fifth aura then.

"Stop joking." Kong Jie was on the verge of hysterics. What was this nonsense?!

"In that case, ten origin weapons and they all need to be of the wood attribute with no restriction in level!" a wordless Li Hao amended again. "Thirty thousand mysterious power stones, and they all need to be of the wood attribute as well!"

"How do we have so many resources, Li Hao! If we did, Silver Moon would not be what it is."

"Then forget it, inspector general." Li Hao didn't believe the response because these people had certainly excavated quite a few ruins in the province. They must have a lot of treasure stashed behind the scenes.

The other possibility was that Silver Moon might have a powerful martial master army in secret. That was a given!

Li Hao speculated this because if Hou Xiaochen had his Silver Moon Guards, then the others must have their preparations as well. Silver Moon was of a mind to declare independence. Would they do so with only a few powerhouses? As strong as their powerhouses were, they were not omnipotent. They couldn't be in two places at once—would the various cities not need defenders?

The Night Watchers only had a few Solars on the surface. Was that their basis to declare independence with?

Impossible!

These guys were one hundred percent hiding more personnel elsewhere. As for where, that was easy. Battle Heaven... the little castle... any of these were suitable for hiding people. If Li Hao was of a mind to, no one would know where he put the several dozen Demon Hunters.

Yuan Shuo had also led the Night Watchers on numerous excavations back in the day. Had they gained nothing for their efforts? That was the last thing that Li Hao would believe. Therefore, these personages in charge of Silver Moon must be frightfully rich. They were just pretending to be poor.

Leading the Demon Hunters with his strength had seen the entire crew stand at half step Dominator after a few simple battles. He even had his first Dominator!

And these old guys?

Director General Zhao and the others had been leaders of Silver Moon for several decades. This was their home ground! Who knew how many ruins they'd excavated.

"Li Hao, why do you want so many resources for?" Kong Jie asked wearily. "Your people can't possibly use them all..."

"Inspector general, it costs a lot to save someone. We expended almost ten thousand mysterious power stones to save Southern Fist last time. Ask the senior yourself if you don't believe me. Light

Sword is in a more critical condition and we may not be able to keep her energy under control. Do you think three times that amount is a lot?

“Also, why the wood attribute? Because the wood attribute can be used to heal people. I’m not using it for my own cultivation. The wood origin weapons are also for this purpose because her condition is too severe. The wood mysterious power stones may not have an effect if her injuries are too heavy. This is the only way we can save her.”

A migraine throbbed at Kong Jie’s temples. This was too much. It was so much that he was starting to debate whether or not it was worth it. This was such a hefty expenditure to pay for saving Light Sword!

Could they afford it?

Yes!

But these were tactical resources that they were expending; they’d accumulated those in preparation for war. It wasn’t meant to be used for one person.

“You can think about it, Inspector General. Let me know when you’re done thinking.”

There was no time to think about it!

“Head over there first,” Kong Jie answered. “I’ll discuss this with the others and give you an answer later, but you can head out first. You can come back anytime if we can’t afford it.”

“I’m busy!” Li Hao hung up again. I’m not an idiot, I’m not doing that. You guys are geniuses to think of having me save Light Sword. In that case, you can pay through the nose for it!

.....

Kong Jie looked at the others with a pained expression. “He’s named his terms of ten wood attribute origin weapons and thirty thousand pieces of mysterious power stones. They also need to be of the wood attribute. As for whether or not he’ll use them on saving others or for comprehending the wood aura... That’s hard to determine. Saving Light Sword will certainly consume some of these resources. It’s also a certainty that he’s asking for the moon...”

“Can we ask Hong Yitang to convince Li Hao?” Huang Yu asked.

“Hong Yitang?” Kong Jie’s headache intensified.

“Hong Yitang will only ask for more,” Director General Zhao said languidly. “Li Hao just wants some resources, Hong Yitang will want independence. Do you want to let him be an independent fiefdom within Silver Moon? You can go to him if you want.”

“.....” That would no longer be an issue of resources anymore!

“Then...”

“Stop,” Kong Jie interrupted. “Do you think anyone other than Yuan Shuo can convince him? Light Sword really will die if we delay any longer. What we need to consider now is if she’s worth the price. If she is, then we do it. If not, then we give up!”

Was one Light Sword worth such a large expenditure?

“She’s worth it if she stays in Silver Moon afterward,” the director general said softly. “There aren’t many martial masters like her anymore. If she’s not willing, then it’s not worth it. This is a test of character. If it was Southern Fist in her shoes, he wouldn’t be worth it. His character isn’t good enough as he reneges on his word often. But Light Sword... what do you guys think?”

“There’s another point to consider,” Kong Jie raised, “If large numbers of powerhouses are set on hunting her, will Li Hao even be able to see her if he goes? Will he have a chance to address her wounds? It will take more than a split second given the circumstances, he might need to take shelter in a quiet place!”

“Let’s not think about that for now,” Director General Zhao breathed out gently. “If Li Hao dares accept the mission, that means he has the confidence, or at least the spirit, to take this risk. We can give him the mysterious power stones, but origin weapons... and wood attribute ones... We don’t have that many.

“Three, that is what we can spare. Ask him if he’s willing to act for that number. Move out if he is, forget it if not. Light Sword is on her own then.”

Three origin weapons!

Kong Jie nodded and returned to the black armor to communicate with Li Hao.

.....

“Three origin weapons?” Li Hao clucked his tongue. Those guys were rich, alright! They gave three wood origin weapons at the drop of a hat. Most importantly, they hadn’t haggled in terms of mysterious power stones! That was thirty thousand stones!

Hao Lianchuan had been beside himself with joy when he obtained a few dozen in Battle Heaven. Oh director, how pitiful are you to be so overjoyed at a dozen mysterious power stones?

Just listen to that! Silver Moon was willing to pay thirty thousand stones to save Light Sword!

Li Hao looked at Hao Lianchuan furiously absorbing energy; he suddenly pitied the man and didn't want to disturb him. However, he still said, "Director Hao, Silver Moon is offering three origin weapons and thirty thousand mysterious power stones for me to save Light Sword. What do you think?"

"Eh?" Hao Lianchuan widened his eyes and stared at Li Hao. The young man repeated himself to the stunned man. Hao Lianchuan's jaw dropped and he stammered after a bit, "You're... you're joking. How do they have so many reserves? I'd believe three thousand stones, but thirty million in Silver Moon..."

"It doesn't matter if you believe it or not." Li Hao grinned.

Hao Lianchuan opened his mouth to say something, but abruptly shut his eyes. This was too awful to consider, so he wouldn't think about it. This might... actually be real. The quick comparison made him so pitiful in contrast. Were these old farts of Silver Moon really that wealthy??

Thirty thousand pieces! What kind of concept was that? He'd never seen so many mysterious power stones in his life!

Meanwhile, Li Hao was debating whether or not to accept the mission. He'd given these terms because he felt that Silver Moon wouldn't agree to them. Now that they had, a headache throbbed at his temples. It was very difficult to save someone, not to mention his target was being hunted by others. Her pursuers were also equally strong—this was the first part of the problem. The second was that who knew where Light Sword had run off to? Would he even be able to find the swordswoman? And yet, the wood origin weapons and mysterious power stones tempted him...

Wasn't this all so he could grow stronger? He would also fulfill his promise to Light Sword. It would have nothing to do with him if the person died beforehand.

"Very well, I agree," he sent a communication ripple through the armor system. "But you pay half of it first and the remaining half after the mission is complete. If I don't get there in time and she's dead I'm not returning the deposit!"

“Li Hao, you’re part of the Night Watchers after all...”

“The Night Watchers are in charge of Silver Moon’s protection and I didn’t demand payment from anyone when I killed pirates. This is an additional mission, so why should I not require payment?”

Don’t try to pull the ethics card on me. I don’t know myself where my bottom line is.

“Fine! Then how are you getting there...” Kong Jie nearly choked.

“Where is she, roughly? I’ll go there myself. You better give me the items first. I’ll head back to White Moon City right now—you guys can have someone meet me halfway. That will save some time.”

“Light Sword has fled north from the east. We’re not certain of her exact location at the moment either. We can only be roughly sure that she’ll follow the east coast and run toward the North Sea...”

“That’s enough!”

“Huh?”

“That’s good!” It was enough for Li Hao to know the approximate location. All he needed was to scan the route with his eyes. Any place with big balls of light could be where Light Sword was.

But his strength was giving him pause. It was a frightening prospect to leave Silver Moon. After some thought, he turned to the little tree.



“Senior Tree, I need to leave for a bit on a more dangerous mission. The rewards are plenty, however. I’ll be rewarded with thirty thousand of the mysterious power stones that you absorbed before and three wood origin weapons!”

“You want me to go with you?”

“That’s my thought!” Li Hao nodded. “If the senior is worried, you can seal off this area first and then head out with me. The senior will be able to revive a portion of your strength from them, no? I feel that you expended too much energy before and cannot maintain your operations. This is why you can only bring Nova level strength to bear. If you can obtain more treasures and recover your energy, you’ll be able to flex more strength.”

#### Chapter 546: Entering the North Sea (III)

Li Hao was including the little tree in his schemes, but the latter shook its body after some thought.

“No! I cannot leave at the moment! The palace needs to be guarded and the outside world... may not be friendly toward creatures like me...”

Li Hao didn’t insist upon receiving this kind of response.

“Are you willing to pay me a portion of the rewards?” the little tree suddenly asked.

“Of course!”

It grappled with internal conflict before saying with difficulty, “I cannot accompany you, but I can separate a portion of my core origin power for your use. You must pay me though, to make up for my loss!”

Li Hao blinked. Separate a portion of its core origin power?

“With that portion, you can comprehend the core origin once by yourself or use it as a consumable talisman. It will be the equivalent of a blow at my full strength—which has enough potential to kill you...”

So that meant to say he would gain a treasure that would either give him one comprehension opportunity or kill a mid Nova?

“Will any harm come to you for doing that?”

“Naturally! Core origin power is very precious to us, but I am indeed expending more energy than I am taking in. Otherwise, no matter how much of this kind of trash there is on offer, I would not be swayed into severing my core origin.” As resigned as the little tree was, there was no helping it.

“Alright, then I am willing to pay ten thousand mysterious power stones and one origin weapon for the portion. If I still have not grasped the wood sword aura by the time I come back, I’ll give the remainder to Senior Tree and try comprehending core origin power again.”

The little tree was surely inflating the numbers—not that much was needed for one attempt. However, Li Hao was willing to pay the price since the offer had just fallen into his lap.

The tree decisively cut off a portion of its crystalline roots. It fell into Li Hao’s hand without exposing a sliver of presence.

“If you want to use it yourself, meld your dao with it to activate it. If you want to use it against enemies, simply activate it with mental strength...”

Li Hao could see the little tree wilt noticeably. It looked to have consumed a great deal of resources to sever a portion of itself. “My thanks, senior!”

“This is just for our mutual benefit.” The little tree didn’t want his gratitude. It just hoped that the human would bring back sufficient compensation.

“Then I’ll leave my brothers here. I’ll come back as soon as possible if I’m alright. If I do not return... Senior can just let them out!” Li Hao gave Liu Long a few more reminders before darting out of the hole.

.....

Outside the mountain cave.

Li Hao took a deep breath. The sky was dark, but beginning to brighten. He immediately took to the sky to travel at top speed. He could go faster when not moving with the Demon Hunters. Martial masters could proceed through the air, albeit at a high cost to their internal force. Li Hao didn’t care, however. Sword energy could offset his depletion so he didn’t consume too many internal resources. He needed to obtain his deposit.

“Where are you?” sounded from the armor after a while of making fast time.

“Twenty-five kilometers from you!”

“.....” How do you know that?

Kong Jie understood upon looking at the black armor on him. This thing is equipped with location services, isn’t it? So the kid knew as soon as I left my office? As useful as the equipment was, he couldn’t use it too often. Otherwise, he’d always be under Li Hao’s surveillance.

Twenty-five kilometers wasn’t too far; both sides were traveling at top speed. Li Hao noted a pinpoint of light representing Kong Jie’s position before long—the black armor location service. Kong Jie himself was also blinding, but the young man needed to be much closer to see his personal light.

Quickly flashing through the air, the two met moments later.

“Kid,” Kong Jie sighed when he saw Li Hao. “If you’d just outright agreed and not named any terms, I might’ve been able to fight for an extremely good opportunity for you!”

What a pity! If Li Hao hadn’t countered with anything, the inspector general felt that he could’ve raised the proposal of four institutions governing Silver Moon again. Li Hao had missed out on an exceedingly vital opportunity.

But since the young man had named certain conditions, Huang Yu and Director General Zhao would both think that he lacked the spirit of sacrifice. They wouldn’t easily agree to letting Li Hao become part of them.

“What opportunity? Can it be more valuable than this?” Li Hao chuckled.

“You... just don’t get it!” Kong Jie shook his head. If Li Hao could take his position among them, what he would gain was far more than what these resources were worth. Not only would his status be greatly elevated, but certain classified secrets would be shared as well as offers of mutual help. The others would move to protect him if he was in trouble, that was a given.

Unfortunately, Li Hao had missed out on all of that.

The young man didn’t care. Nothing was as good as opportunities held in his own hand. Three thousand mysterious power stones and three wood origin weapons were sufficient for him to try comprehending core origin power three times. Surely he would be successful at grasping the wood sword aura then. If he could meld five auras together, he would be at least late Nova or peak Nova, if not metamorphosis?

Strength in his own hand was the truly valuable! Someone like Hong Yitang lived so free and unfettered because he grasped that power. Light Sword was worthy of Silver Moon paying such a hefty price to save her because of that power. One was pathetic without strength. I can not use it, but I cannot lack it.

“Where is it, inspector general?”

Kong Jie reluctantly tossed a storage ring to Li Hao. “Ten thousand mysterious power stones and two wood origin weapons. The rest will come once you finish your mission. Since you’ve received payment, there’s something you must do. You cannot say you saved Light Sword by yourself. You did so on behalf of the Silver Moon authorities, you must make that clear!”

“Of course, I would never do something that shady!” Li Hao nodded emphatically. “But I also need to say that she made me promise to suppress her energy once. If I save her, that absolves me of that debt since I didn’t say I was going to go out and help her!”

“That’s between the two of you!” Kong Jie didn’t say much. They just wanted to make sure that Light Sword acknowledged she owed them a favor. “I need to go back now, I can’t stay outside for too long. These are sensitive times...” He turned to leave.

“Inspector General,” Li Hao called out. “Do you guys not know to strike back if someone’s got their eye on you?”

“.....” Kong Jie sagged with resignation. “The timing has not yet arrived!”

“.....” Fine then. Li Hao smirked silently. The timing has not yet arrived? It was always down to timing. What was the proper timing? Whatever, it has nothing to do with me.

He took to the air and set course for the North Sea. He was taking someone else’s money to help another person stave off disaster. A black dog ran swiftly on the ground. Li Hao hadn’t wanted to bring Panther at first and didn’t even want to fight, really. He would save the woman if there was a chance to, but forgo it if not. He’d already said that if there wasn’t an optimal opening, he was keeping the deposit.

Panther, however, seemed uncomfortable where it was. It swiftly followed the young man when he left. Li Hao had no choice but to let the dog do as it would. Panther was strong and their safety was more assured with it present.

Li Hao sped through the skies; the two entered the vicinity of the North Sea before long. He summoned the Divine Kun Ship with a wave of his hand. When human and dog boarded the vessel, he took out the crystalline root.

What talisman for a single, fatal blow? That would be an idiotic use of the treasure! He would make use of this time to comprehend the core origin once more. He wouldn't need an offensive talisman with the strength of a mid or late Nova if he produced a wood sword aura!

The young man sent his mind intent into the object. As before, a faint might enveloped Li Hao and seemed to send him into another universe. He started growing with the tree again.

As Li Hao comprehended core origin power.

The depths of the North Sea.

A major monster spirit slumbered in an opulent structure at the bottom of the sea. It abruptly opened its eyes, sensing a special ripple with some confusion.

"Core origin power..." it murmured after a long time. "Are there still core origin monster spirits alive in this day and age, and traveling through the North Sea?"

It wanted to investigate and take a look... but quickly dismissed the notion with a soft sigh. It could not brashly investigate or leave its abode. The world was different now! Those guys in the ruins might think it was the same, but the sea monster had felt such a long time ago that things were different.

.....

Li Hao was oblivious and immersed in comprehension. He sprouted and put down roots like a tree, waving its branches around and swaying with the wind. One year, two years, three years...

Countless eons passed in his memory, but only a quick moment in reality. The core origin power around him dispersed; the young man opened his eyes. Crystalline dust piled in his hand and dissipated upon the wind.

A lost look tinged with regret appeared in his eyes. If he had just one more opportunity... he would succeed! He knew that he was only a little ways off! That stirring vitality, the call to action... He was almost there. He'd failed only because the experience hadn't lasted until the tree comprehended its core origin. Li Hao ground his teeth. What a pity! He should've hung on!

Or perhaps the little tree had done that on purpose because if Li Hao succeeded, he wouldn't come back.

"Almost..." Li Hao took a deep breath and quickly regained his calm. He might not need to continue visiting the small tree. Perhaps he could spar with a powerhouse. His teacher had comprehended his five auras in much worse conditions and strength, but he'd succeeded all the same. Yuan Shuo had fought again and again to manifest his.

The Divine Kun Ship sped through the waves. Panther lolled listlessly at the stern. It was bored and fishing with its tail. What was Panth thinking? Can you get any fish with the ship moving so fast?

Panther's tail shot upright when it sensed Li Hao's gaze. A large fish was strung on it. The dog looked at Li Hao with confusion. Do you want some?

"....." I thought you were casting your tail for fish, but you're more like spear fishing!

Panther wagged its tail and sent the fish back into the water when Li Hao showed no signs of wanting to eat it. The dog didn't want to eat the fish either. It just seemed to have a memory of someone liking to eat fish and using their tail to fish.

Chapter 547: Entering the North Sea (IV)

As Li Hao sped toward the North Sea, some chaos was occurring over the waters. The various pirate factions received word that Light Sword was about to cross the East Sea and enter the North Sea.

The White Shark Raiders.

There was another figure standing next to White Shark. He wore a mask and rasped, “General White Shark, upstairs has given word that it’s best if you can kill Light Sword and take her Windchaser Boot! Of course, it’s even better if you can capture her alive.”

“Five of the Steadfast Duke’s generals were killed in an instant, are you sure it can be done?” White Shark frowned.

“That was before, Light Sword is hanging onto life by a thread. More importantly is that many people will be fishing in troubled waters. However, the North Sea is our domain...”

White Shark remained noncommittal. Our domain? That was too much. The White Shark Raiders did not lead the eight great pirate factions. His number two and three had just died and internal confusion roiled his organization. This was not a good time.

And yet, the speaker had come from upstairs. Although White Shark wasn’t afraid since he was stronger than his fellow commanders, there was no need for open hostilities. He thought for a bit before saying, “Light Sword may be looking to flee to Silver Moon and hoping that its martial masters will save her. We don’t need to go to great effort. We may come across her if we wait here.”

“I’m afraid that she’ll be dead before she reaches us,” cautioned Mask Face. “Why don’t you draw closer to the East Sea...”

“I’ll think about it!” White Shark couldn’t be bothered with the suggestion. That was someone else’s territory. He’d just be creating trouble for himself if he went. He rather hoped that Light Sword would make it to Silver Moon. Those chasing her might follow and create trouble for the province. That would give him a chance to move against Li Hao.



.....

At the same time, at the intersection of the East and North Sea borders.

Blood dripped continuously from Light Sword's wounds and she occasionally threw up pieces of internal organs. She was alive because light power surged through her body, suppressing her wounds.

She wasn't entirely without hope, even though she'd extracted a promise from Li Hao. Light energy was extremely suited for healing and recovery. Anyone else would have long self-detonated, but she'd gone on a fugitive run and was still alive for it. Some hope shone in her eyes, but it was gradually extinguishing.

Those behind her gave chase relentlessly. The key thing was, news of her deeds and escape had spread like wildfire. Powerhouses were already beginning to encircle her. Plainly, it was tempting that the Steadfast Duke hadn't been able to capture her.

Light Sword looked at the North Sea ahead. She needed to cross it and enter the Moon Sea to count as having truly set foot into Silver Moon territory. But there were more than five hundred miles separating the two sides!

She probably wouldn't make it that far.

I did my best...

she murmured inwardly. There was no way out of this, but even so, she would not go down without a fight!

Light Sword continued to run, wanting to see who would be the first to jump out and take a stand. She would kill some of them even if her organs completely ruptured. She would have the world know that Light Sword was matchless and unrivaled!

Any of Silver Moon's Seven Swords was not trash if they'd lived to present day. Granted, she walked an ancient cultivation path that wasn't complete. That didn't concern her, Light Sword had always ignored her slow rate of improvement.

Time passed bit by bit; the solemn look in Light Sword's eyes intensified. Too many had come! It'd only been such a short period of time, but she could sense there were at least ten Novas jockeying for position behind her. They were all very powerful—not just initial Novas.

There might be even more waiting in front for her.

.....

Li Hao was now fully in North Sea territory. The limitless water coaxed him onto the ship's deck. This was his first time out of Silver Moon's jurisdiction. When he fought the pirates before, he'd done so within the Moon Sea.

The waves of the North Sea were even bigger! They slapped the water with deafening rumbles. Li Hao, however, felt like he was on top of the world. The North Sea was beautiful! What a pity it didn't belong to Silver Moon.

Panther also looked around curiously. What a big sea. What a beautiful sea!

Man and dog stooped at the ship's bow, unconcerned about danger and simply luxuriated in the comfort of witnessing an even greater world. Perhaps I should've left with Hou Xiaochen, Li Hao suddenly thought.

The sea and sky were boundless. As the Divine Kun Ship skimmed the waves, the young man was in fine fettle at seeing a bigger world. This was so different from the Moon Sea as both shores were visible from the water when it came to the latter. It was a bit too narrow to be called a sea. The North Sea, however, ran boundless from side to side.

Li Hao stood at the ship's bow and peered around him. So this was the North Sea. The core of the dynasty—the central region—was surrounded by seas on all sides. The North, South, East and West Seas bordered the central region, the latter split the dynasty into two major portions.

The young man looked to the south—there was the central continent. However, Battle Heaven intelligence indicated that it might be an island instead, not a core continent. Li Hao gently flicked his sword as he observed the surroundings. To sway along the wind like a willow leaf. The sword was nimble and agile.

As the Divine Kun Ship shot ahead, some balls of light came into hazy perception. Though they were very far away, they weren't too far if Li Hao could see them. He steered the ship toward them and came across a merchant ship. There were people on the decks; Li Hao couldn't be bothered with a closer look after quickly determining they weren't pirates.

The little ship cut through the waves, leaving a faint mirage for those on the merchant ship to look at. It wasn't tangible enough to be identified, so another urban legend was likely to be added to the North Sea repertoire after today. There might be a new story of big fish appearing in the sea in the dead of night, ones that were as fast as the shuttle of a loom.

.....

The little ship quickly came across another ship, one that looked like another merchant vessel, but was filled with supernaturals. There were two Solars and nearly one hundred supernaturals.

Ships like these were most likely pirates. There was the occasional surprise that they might be part of an army sent out to eradicate pirates, but that was very rare!

Li Hao pushed off from the deck and soared into the air. He darted through the void and hovered over the ship. Ears twitching, he momentarily eavesdropped to confirm that they were indeed a band of pirates. Sword light flashed!

BAM!

The ship hold exploded amid a series of outraged shouts. Solars roared with anger as sword light illuminated the void.

“Who are you and what enmity do you have with us?!” shouted one of the Solars. “We are the Brokensea Army...”

The Brokensea Army was just a cover—they were the Brokensea Raiders of the eight pirate factions.

Li Hao sent a head flying through the air with a flick of his sword.

“Li Hao of the Five Styles discipline!” he chuckled, slashing down with his sword and detonating the pirates beneath him!

The Solar who’d shouted was already headless on the ground. The entire ship of pirates followed their comrade’s footsteps in death. Li Hao waved a few storage rings into his hand. He couldn’t be bothered to scan them and only determined that there were no more people alive on the ship. He punctured the vessel with his sword and filled it with water, watching it sink.

With that, he jumped back onto the Divine Kun Ship. That hadn’t taken a lot of time. He would draw his sword if he saw anything unfair along the way. He didn’t like pirates. When martial masters liked something, they liked it. When they didn’t, they used their own methods to make the target disappear. Li Hao seemed to be acting more freely after leaving Silver Moon.

“Let’s go!” Li Hao called out when he saw Panther playing with the pirates that’d jumped into the water.

A smile seemed to appear on the dog’s face and it smacked one last pirate to death. Floundering a few times, it swam back to the ship. The little ship continued on its way while the large ship behind it was lost beneath the waves. A one-hundred-person team of the eight pirate factions led by Solars abruptly vanished amid the deep blue.

Li Hao made quick time, pausing to kill any pirate ships he came across. This was also a way to look for Light Sword as she might show herself if he killed enough people.

The sky was bright now as sunrise broke over the sea. The wheel of red rising over the waters was exceedingly beautiful as it illuminated the depths. Li Hao looked into the distance with a furrowed brow. It was three hours since he entered the sea and the Divine Kun Ship was making fast time. It'd covered at least five hundred kilometers, but there was still no sight of Light Sword to be found. He was worried about missing the other as well as the sea was too expansive. If she kept to one side, they might just miss each other.

He could see balls of light in this unbroken expanse and could probably identify a Nova from ten thousand meters away. That only made for ten kilometers, which was far too short in the sea.

"It's too hard to find her!" Li Hao sighed and looked at the dog. "Panth, do you smell anything?"

Panther shook its head after a twitch of its nose. There were limits to its sense of smell and it wasn't easy trying to find someone across such a stretch of water.

Perhaps... I should grab a powerhouse and ask them questions.

The eight pirate factions seemed to have a strong intelligence network. They should know where Light Sword was. However, none of them were ideal to offend.

Or perhaps a merchant convoy or trading company...

There were high numbers of merchants in the sea. They ferried central resources to the four corners and brought curiosities from the four corners to the central region. Their business spanned a large scale and ran across the four seas. All of them were backed by major factions. Their sources of information were very thorough as well.

As they sailed the four seas, they were typically cordial with the pirates. Some of them were merchants one second ago and pirates the next. This was what Golden Spear's information said; Li Hao wouldn't have known otherwise.

It was exceedingly difficult trying to find someone in the vast seas. But once he had an idea in mind, the young man worked quickly. He crossed another fifty kilometers in the blink of an eye, bearing down on three ships that were either a merchant convoy or pirates.

When he drew closer, he sensed that they should be merchants. One conspicuous factor of pirates was that they possessed no ordinary people on their ships. The pirates might nurture new recruits, but they would never do so on a ship. They had their bases, the islands, or even on shore on the mainland.

Merchants would have supernaturals protecting them, but not many. A flag fluttered from the lead ship—Li Hao recognized it. He was a deputy director of the Night Watchers now, he knew of the more famous designs. This one was a gold coin flag of the Ministry of Finance.

Chapter 548: Sword Unsheathed! (I)

A merchant convoy from the Ministry of Finance?

Li Hao thought back to the Liu youngster who'd died in Battle Heaven—he seemed to have been from the Ministry of Finance too. But that had nothing to do with Li Hao, it was Qi Gang and Hu Qingfeng who'd killed him.

The nine ministries all had their own flags. Skystar Dynasty also had its own flag as well. It just hadn't flown in many years. There were three Solars in residence on the ship. It looked like the Ministry of Finance was very strong!

Li Hao rose into the air and flew toward the ship. A man in his thirties kept a weather eye out. The sky was bright enough that he could easily pick out the powerhouse approaching from above. They exuded no presence, which meant they were either a premier martial master or a Nova!

“Who goes there?! We are the Four Seas company under the Ministry of Finance, a faction of the nine ministries...”

BAM!

Li Hao landed as the man was speaking. The latter’s expression shifted drastically and a dozen supernaturals converged on the decks. Everyone was on high alert and very worried. Who was so bold as to attack a ship of the Four Seas??

Li Hao displayed a medallion in his hand. “I am a high level chief commissioner from the Night Watchers...”

“How dare you!” roared a supernatural when they heard the newcomer was a Night Watcher. “How dare Night Watchers barge onto a vessel of the Four Seas! Which branch are you from?”

Li Hao blinked, then smirked. “You shrink and cower when you see pirates, but lay down the law when you see the Night Watchers!” He kicked out his leg!

BAM!

The speaker was sent flying and smashed onto the deck. Li Hao looked at the man in charge. The latter wanted to speak, but a flash of sword light cut him off. Cold sweat drenched him as his hair fluttered to the ground.

“They say that the nine ministries are the same as the three great organizations. I didn’t believe it before, but now... I do.” Li Hao said this because the man had seemed ready to attack. When the young man revealed his identity as a Night Watcher, it drew hostile action instead! These guys had been more apprehensive when he was an unknown factor.

Was this a trading company under the nine ministries’ jurisdiction? They were worse than the pirates!

“Chief Commissioner... I...” The man swallowed hard.

“Cut the bullshit. Have you received word? Light Sword has been surrounded and seems to have entered the North Sea. Do you know where she is?”

The man’s heart skipped a beat. Why was this person asking about Light Sword? He must be very strong. Was he a premier martial master? Or a premier Nova? But would a character like that only be a chief commissioner?

He didn’t dare say anything other than answer the question. “We received word two hours ago, telling us to avoid certain areas...”

“What do you use to communicate?”

The man paused, hesitated, and took out a jade pendant. “This is a transmission pendant excavated from the ancient ruins. We started using them several years ago. The major organizations and factions all have them.”

Puzzled, he snuck a glance at Li Hao. This one... wasn’t pretending to be a Night Watcher, was he? It didn’t make sense that he wouldn’t know this at his level of strength.

“This transmission pendant can reach fifteen hundred kilometers. Every organization or faction can respond quickly because there’s a transmission hub in certain locations. They can relay messages to specific people or dissemble them on a large scale. That requires time, however, and sometimes the transmission hub doesn’t receive the news in time...”

Li Hao was surprised by the jade pendant. Was this so? So they had methods like these to call upon? He really didn’t know about this. No wonder news traveled very fast sometimes—such as when battle exploded in the eastern region. Silver Moon knew of it in less than five hours. Not even the fastest messenger could travel so quickly.



The ancient civilization was incredible alright! That much was obvious from the armor.

Li Hao carefully looked it over and saw that there was small text on it already. The man explained nervously upon seeing plain interest, “This kind of pendant can only store ten messages as there isn’t enough memory inscribed inside. Any message it receives is displayed on the surface. If you wish to send one back, look for the red button on the pendant. You can press it, input your message, and send it to the closest transmission hub.”

It wasn’t the most convenient, but far more superior to modern day communication equipment. Li Hao did indeed find some messages stored in it upon closer inspection. The latest was two hours ago.

“Light Sword has entered the North Sea and is being pursued by various powerhouses. Battle will soon commence. All personnel in the North Sea are advised to retreat. Light Sword is strong and many are hunting her...”

She’d entered the North Sea two hours ago! Li Hao swiftly reviewed a mental map of the sea—it was very big. She could’ve covered five hundred kilometers at most after entering from the east. That was how much he’d traveled himself.

That meant they were still far from each other as the North Sea didn’t just run from Silver Moon to the East Sea. It spanned the entire province along shorelines that were not connected to Silver Moon. That indicated there was at least another fifteen hundred kilometers between them. Even if they traveled at full speed, they wouldn’t meet for another two or three hours. And full speed really meant full speed, they would have to cross more than two hundred kilometers an hour.

No wonder I haven’t found her yet... Li Hao realized with resignation. Added to that the time she’d spent before, it was incredible that Light Sword was still alive after almost ten hours of running. She likely wasn’t utilizing her full strength to escape either, and it’d take him another couple of hours to rush over.

As Li Hao read the messages, the man in front of him sweated profusely and secretly observed the Night Watcher. There were many Night Watcher organizations around them—Near River, North

Sea, and Sea Mountain were all possibilities. Which one was this powerhouse from? Or was he just borrowing their name?

“Can I borrow this?” Li Hao suddenly looked at the man.

“Of course!” He nodded rapidly. “You can take it anytime you wish, sir.”

“Is this also a tracking device?”

The man paused, then nodded. “Yes, but we can’t see the location data. Only some of the transmission hubs can.”

“If I wish to ask for information, will I need some sort of code, secret passkey, or special greeting?”

The man groaned inwardly, conflicted. This he didn’t dare answer. It was one thing for his transmission pendant to be seized, that was no big deal. There were indeed some secret passcodes to prevent information from being stolen and the secrets of the nine ministries from being lost. Revealing these secrets, however, was an enormous crime!

“What, are the Night Watchers unable to be supported with some intelligence reports?” A grinning Li Hao understood.

“It’s not that, sir, just that the Night Watchers are a different system from us. I...”

“Very well!” Li Hao didn’t force the issue. He laughed as he looked at the supernaturals around him. “You haven’t been pirates, have you?”

“What?”

“You haven’t done what pirates would do, have you?” Li Hao repeated calmly.

The bottom fell out of the man’s stomach and he hastily shook his head. “Of course not, we’re a group under the nine ministries at the end of the day. We’re different from the others. If discovered... Ahem, we cannot dishonor the nine ministries.”

“It wouldn’t matter,” Li Hao laughed. “Whether it’s the merchant ships, trading companies, or pirates, it’s all the same! But a group directly under the nine ministries wouldn’t stoop so low as to raid the ordinary citizens on the shorelines, would you?”

“Of course not!” the man protested. “We would never do something like that!”

Li Hao said nothing further and turned to leave. The man couldn’t hold himself in check, considering his pendant had been confiscated.

“If I may... ask your name... sir...?” he ventured carefully, regretting his words almost as soon as he said them. He shouldn’t have asked! People unaware of his intentions might think he wanted revenge. But he absolutely didn’t, not at all!

It was just a jade pendant, he could find an excuse for that. And upstairs wouldn’t fault him if he really couldn’t overcome the enemy. Asking so bluntly like this... was asking for trouble!

“Li Hao of Silver Moon!” the young man answered with a smile, departing through the air as the crowd grappled with what they’d heard.

Li Hao of Silver Moon!

“Li Hao of Silver Moon...” The man’s expression shifted drastically when Li Hao was gone. “Disciple of the Five Styles and of Yuan Shuo, heir to the eight families...”

What was this guy doing out here? Wasn't he in Silver Moon? And that wasn't the crux of the issue—there was a message regarding Li Hao in the pendant! Please please please don't see it.

In reality, Li Hao had seen it already. He just didn't care.

“After the Four Seas company enters Silver Moon and concludes their business, they are to stay in the province for a period of time and collect information regarding Li Hao of Silver Moon...”

Li Hao didn't find it strange that the nine ministries were interested in him. He wouldn't even be surprised if they had designs on him and wanted to seize the sword. Neither would he be taken aback if they wanted to just kill him. Thus, the man's worries were misplaced.

“Sir, that Li Hao is too arrogant!” Someone next to the man couldn't help but protest as he stared in the direction Li Hao had vanished in. “It looks like he's going to seek out Light Sword. He'll be dead before long if he's this cocky! There's a lot of people who want to kill him...”

The man flicked a glance at him and raised an eyebrow. “Would you still be speaking if that'd been the three great organizations or a heavyweight from the pirates?”

“Huh?” His subordinate blinked. What did that mean? Of course he wouldn't! Those people were so cruel!

The man sighed inwardly and said nothing else. Li Hao had been right. Everyone was afraid of the three great organizations, the eight pirate factions, but not the official authorities—for no reason other than they were subordinates of the nine ministries!

This was a frequently seen issue as they could do nothing to those factions. But when it came to the official authorities, there was plenty they could do to those they knew.

However, everyone would be well served to remember Li Hao's other identity.

## Chapter 549: Sword Unsheathed! (II)

"Li Hao is a Silver Moon martial master!" The man suddenly turned back to say as he prepared to leave.

The person who'd been speaking paused, as did the expressions of those around them shift. They'd almost forgotten this detail! That was a Silver Moon barbarian! Li Hao wasn't a Night Watcher of the central region, but a savage of the southern hinterlands.

There were some other Silver Moon martial masters in the central region who killed without blinking—Sky Sword, for example. Yuan Shuo had also claimed the spotlight for a previous duration of time. They were both exceedingly vicious martial masters. Light Sword had killed five Novas with one move—she was a Silver Moon martial master as well.

Plainly, the identity of a Silver Moon martial master was much more menacing. No one in the crowd said anything further. Night Watchers were easy to bully, but Silver Moon martial masters were not.

.....

The little ship continued to thread through the waves. Li Hao smiled when he thought back to what'd just happened and shook his head slightly. Certain thoughts that rose in his mind were quickly extinguished.

The nine ministries...

To be honest, life was passable these days. The proliferation of certain technologies made people's lives much easier. This had much to do with the nine ministries.

Prior to their governance, the royal family held charge of the world for one hundred and twenty years. They'd deviated from their original mandate and levied onerous taxes, ruled with a heavy

fist, and didn't concern themselves with the lives of the people. The royal family had committed all sorts of crimes. Life was truly difficult back then.

Therefore, although people were far removed from the nine ministries and didn't understand them too well, they more or less trusted and were grateful to the ministries. But the more that Li Hao came to know them on a deeper level, the more he realized that the nine ministries had become evil dragons themselves.

Their lack of worthwhile action was their biggest mistake. They permitted supernaturals to run rampant, allowed the three great organizations to rise and grow, permitted internal conflict to spread...

Many thoughts rose to the forefront of Li Hao's mind and quickly faded away again. This has nothing to do with me for the moment. The most pressing issues were to increase his strength, a rescue mission, and an obligation to save others after receiving pay to do so. Of this, he was well aware of.

Upon learning of Light Sword's approximate position, Li Hao picked up speed again. The Divine Kun Ship seemed to fly through the waves as it churned ever faster. This was to Li Hao's immense satisfaction as he quite liked this origin weapon.

.....

Roughly five hundred kilometers away from Li Hao.

Light Sword shouted authoritatively and slashed with her sword, detonating a powerhouse that was obstructing her. She vomited a mouthful of blood and quickly fled the scene, a vicious glint in her eyes. Moments later, her ears twitched and she swiftly darted down, vanishing beneath the waves.

Powerhouses appeared on all sides moments later. Someone looked at the scene and proclaimed calmly, "She's at the end of her tether! But it's best not to approach her at the moment, be careful of her striking back in her final breaths of life!"

“Her direction seems to indicate that she wants to go to Silver Moon for help. But who will save her after Hou Xiaochen’s departed?”

“Our intelligence reports indicate that their main leaders are still inside the province, particularly Huang Yu of the army—he hasn’t left White Moon City. There’s nothing to worry about.”

“.....” The various heavyweights communicated with each other. A middle-aged man in particular raised a cupped fist salute to the four corners.

“The Windchaser Boots are the family legacy of the Xus. Whether it is to kill Light Sword, seize the treasure, or anything else... All is fine. My father, the family patriarch has said that we are willing to pay ten thousand mysterious power stones and an origin weapon to anyone who obtains eh boots. We will not take any of the other treasures she carries!

“The Windchaser Boots are a pair, Light Sword only has one of them. You will not be able to use them if you obtain them, they will just be decor. We will remember well anyone who renders aid to our family!”

“You’re too polite, young master duke!” some chuckled in response while others ignored him. The Xus were offering a high, very high price! It was good for wandering cultivators and those who didn’t have the ability to fight the Xus. No one was unmoved by the thought of ten thousand mysterious power stones. They might grab the boots if they were lucky enough.

But for the bigger organizations and factions, the Windchaser Boots were the most important target of all. They did not need what the Xus were offering. Anyone who reached Nova or dared hunt a Nova was a heavyweight. All of them were!

The young master duke they spoke of at the rear of the crowd was the eldest son of the Steadfast Duke—Xu Zhen, Xu Feng’s father. He frowned slightly when not that many people answered him.

Damn it! He cursed inwardly with resignation. Who knew that Light Sword could hold on for so long after breaking her supernatural locks? It was incredible! She was at the end of her rope and

didn't dare utilize her strongest moves anymore. However, chasing her for so long had drawn a great deal of powerful attention. If this continued, he couldn't be certain of retrieving the Windchaser Boots.

His father had sent him with people under his banner to retrieve the treasure. If Xu Zhen didn't perform properly, then his younger brother would step up without giving him space to breathe and probably take his place as the heir.

Xu Zhen continued cursing inwardly and led his men in continued pursuit. Five of the eight generals were dead; the other three had important missions to attend to. That didn't leave the estate without powerhouses, however. Some were with him right now, a few resident experts that were known in the east.

The Steadfast Duke wasn't the only overlord of the east; as strong as he was, he still recruited many powerhouses. The eastern provinces were a cut above the northern provinces—the latter was quite poor and the supernatural domain a barren affair. There was almost no energy in the air in even the most fertile regions, whereas plenty could be found in the east. It was subpar to the central region only by a hair.

"Deputy commissioner, a lot of people have come," transmitted an elder with white hair as they followed their target. "It's been a while, giving enough time for the nine ministries, three great organizations, seven divine mountains, and some from the real family to arrive."

The royal family! Xu Zhen frowned, did the royal family want a share of the profits? He recognized some people as well as a few representatives from surrounding provinces. These people wouldn't necessarily dare offend the duke, but the factions that the old man had just mentioned wouldn't care about the Steadfast Duke.

"Hasn't Red Moon withdrawn on all sides? What are they doing here?"

"I seem to have sensed the Black Widow's presence. She was going to go to Silver Moon, but dithered in the North Sea. She probably received news as it developed and came here..."



Black Widow—Orange Moon. Xu Zhen understood. “I hear that her daughter’s been captured and they’re demanding that she turn herself in. Is she really going to go to Silver Moon?”

“That I’m not sure of. There’s word from Red Moon that Ying Hongyue has said they will trade treasures for Violet Moon. If Silver Moon doesn’t agree, Red Moon will take revenge on the province. I feel that if Silver Moon doesn’t wish to fully erupt in open hostilities, they will agree to the swap.”

Red Moon hadn’t taken much action lately, but they were building their reputation all the same. Violet Moon had been taken, Orange Moon set out to rescue her, and Red Moon put out word that they would trade treasures for person. If Silver Moon refused, then all bets were off the table.

With Hou Xiaochen’s departure, however, Silver Moon hadn’t had time to handle the matter. They didn’t have the ability to respond, so Violet Moon was still locked up in the Inspectorate at the moment.

The group traveled swiftly as they chatted. Xu Zhen was no bumpkin. The Steadfast Duke only had two legitimate sons. He had a few sons with his concubines, but none of them had the right to inherit the duchy. Only Xu Zhen and his younger brother were the legitimate heirs. They’d fought each other in public and under the table for many years, not daring to fall behind in martial dao or the supernatural.

Xu Chen was not a martial master. He was a supernatural who’d crossed over to late Nova a long time ago. He steadily proceeded to peak Nova. While he wasn’t as strong as some of those present, he was no weakling either. His son Xu Feng had been a standout amongst the younger generation as a young mid Nova. What a pity he’d died in Silver Moon!

The more he thought about this, the more irate Xu Zhen became. His son had been one of his greatest advantages and the old duke had always treated him well. Ever since Xu Feng’s death, the old duke had been much nicer to his second son.

There was no helping it, the latter’s daughter was also a genius. Although she was less than Xu Feng, she was also a Nova. Thank goodness she was a girl. Xu Zhen would find it hard to eat or sleep if she was a boy.

I will regain my standing only if I kill Light Sword, retrieve the Windchaser Boots, and wash this shame from my family.

“Hurry, keep after her! Don’t give her a chance to rest and recover,” he shouted. “Her light energy can heal, but there’s also a limit to it. She can’t keep it up forever!”

Everyone knew by now why Light Sword could endure to her present state; she had a very special power. Not only could it kill, it could also heal. She had been suppressing her injuries—ordinary people would’ve long dead. That Light Sword was still alive meant that her life force was also incredibly stubborn.

.....

Light Sword sank into the sea, swiftly clearing up the unfocused look in her eyes. She propelled herself forward, unable to shake off the people following her. She was unable to use her full strength—she would explode if she did. It was already the limits of her abilities that she could still use a peak Nova’s strength. Her pursuers wouldn’t follow her so closely otherwise.

She had almost fully consumed her inner strength. If she wasn’t a martial master, she would long be running empty. As it were, her body could still supply some internal force.

The woman took out a pill and swallowed it, revitalizing her fading spirits. She didn’t know how much longer she could hold on. Perhaps an hour, perhaps ten minutes... But she didn’t want to go down like this.

She was beginning to regret her actions. Perhaps she could’ve contacted Silver Moon before she made her move and have Li Hao come to the east first, if not receive more outright support. At least the young man could’ve helped her more quickly.

Of course, Li Hao probably wouldn’t agree to it, but Light Sword felt that it wasn’t impossible. It was too late to think of that now. The crux was that the Steadfast Duke had been stronger than she

anticipated. He'd withstood her attacks without unsealing himself and merged unscathed. That had been horrifying and forced her to snap all of her locks!

## Chapter 550: Sword Unsheathed! (III)

The North Sea.

More merchant ships appeared along the way as Li Hao continued on his route. There were also more pirates, but to Li Hao's amazement, there wasn't the expected atmosphere of animosity between the two! He even saw a few pirates board the merchant vessels, then merrily return to their ships while escorted by fawning managers.

"You can take down the White Shark flag now," a voice traveled into his ear. "That trash White Shark ate a huge loss in Silver Moon and there probably won't be a place for him in the North Sea in the future. You guys can cut down on your expenses a bit and forgo what you usually pay to him. Of course, more taxes will go to the other factions, but it won't add up to what you used to pay White Shark..."

"Thank you, milord soldier!" flattered a manager.

The wind carried these words to Li Hao's ear. Expenses... taxes... milord soldier... No, these were pirates. He was certain these were pirates. But these pirates were blatantly extracting taxes from merchants that operated in these waters. They no longer raided their targets!

Raiding and looting was to catch fish by draining the pond. Collecting taxes, no matter how heavy they were, was a much more lucrative and acceptable practice. Commerce was immensely profitable and certain trading companies were willing to pay the tolls. Even after taking this expense into account, they were still able to reap massive profits.

Li Hao didn't take action on this encounter, he was running short on time. He committed a few faces to memory and recalled some other ones. Each of the eight pirate factions had their own flag. The White Shark Raiders had been ranked fourth—an enormous shark featured on their flag.

The most famous and strongest pirate faction was the Starlight Pirates. They claimed everything that starlight touched to be their territory. If rumors were to be believed, they boasted of ten thousand supernaturals in their ranks. Regardless of whether or not that was true, they surely had many powerhouses among them.

The White Shark Raiders only had three commanders, whereas the leader of the Starlight Pirates claimed to be the North Sea King. His nine direct subordinates were the Nine Starlight Dukes—self-styled dukes, as they were. Their flag bore ten stars, a nod to twinkling cosmic radiance. The North Sea King and Nine Starlight Dukes jointly ruled the Starlight Pirates.

Information quickly flashed through Li Hao's mind. He didn't know if he'd run into any of them as he was now in the North Sea. They couldn't possibly ignore the happenings as they were the greatest faction of the area; they may want to get involved.

Something twitched in his pocket and the young man took out the jade pendant from earlier. There was a new line of text on it.

“Ship 307 of the Four Seas trading company, you are off course. You are not to proceed on your current route. Battle occurred four hundred kilometers ahead of you ten minutes ago. Light Sword killed a Nova and adjusted her bearing toward you!” Li Hao blinked, was the message for him?

Actually, it might be. The ship he'd boarded earlier might've been number 307. Then this meant the transmission hub was locked onto the pendant's location and noticed that it was off course. Although he was very far away at four hundred kilometers, he might soon come across Light Sword if he continued at his current speed.

That warning's a bit useless... or is it just to confuse me? His speed was so fast that it was beyond the capacity of a regular ship. Had the transmission hub not noticed anything amiss? Perhaps they had, but it was possible that his location was broadcasted only at certain intervals. They may not know where he was at the moment.

Li Hao put the question out of his mind. Four hundred kilometers? Ten minutes ago... that meant that he'd almost caught up to Light Sword.

The young man picked up speed. So she was still alive and had just killed a Nova. Damn, she was tenacious! He wasn't thinking about any grudges at this point. Firstly, he'd received payment to help her. Secondly, she was still alive after snapping a supernatural lock. This kind of stubborn nature was rather reminiscent of Silver Moon martial masters.

Well, she was one to begin with.

Li Hao urged the Divine Kun Ship forward—fifty kilometers, one hundred kilometers... He zoomed at top speed for nearly two hundred kilometers, consuming a great deal of resources before finally seeing some balls of light. They didn't belong to Light Sword—but some Solars and Novas. There seemed to be a blockade ahead and powerhouses in the air. Golden light emanated from someone's eyes as they scanned the premises.

One of them sensed Li Hao and a voice boomed in his direction, "The Starlight Troops have sealed off this area! No one is allowed in!"

"Friends from far away, Light Sword has killed one of our brothers. We must have vengeance and any who seek to stop us will be our enemy!"

"....." Powerhouses constantly broadcasted various announcements around the area. Heavyweights stood outside the blockade—some cursing to themselves, others with eyes darting around the area and waiting for the right timing.

Plainly, Light Sword was corralled in the area ahead. The Starlight Pirates had moved in.

People were standing over the water not too far from Li Hao. One of them snorted.

"So the Steadfast Duke has hired the Starlight Pirates?" another clucked their tongue. "That's a big expenditure—there's at least ten Solars here, isn't there? And two Novas in residence... and this is only from one direction. Are there more pirates in the other cardinal directions?"

The thought was mind-boggling! Pirates of the North Sea really had become a force unto themselves!

“It might not be the Steadfast Duke, it could be...” someone chuckled and finished their words via transmission.

Li Hao frowned. So the pirates really had reached an accord among themselves; no one dared get on their bad side. The North Sea was a strategic passageway that connected the nineteen northern provinces to the central region. The two sides would be cut off from each other if it was blocked off by pirates. No one would be able to exterminate them then.

Li Hao looked at the Starlight Novas—they were just initial Nova. He looked at Panther, the dog looked at Li Hao.

“I’ll take one and you take one.” The young man suddenly grinned. “Even pirates can show off these days. This world is seriously full of strange things!”

The others may be afraid, he wasn’t. He had nothing to lose in this situation, so what was he afraid of? Would these people dare take revenge on Silver Moon?

As discourse buzzed in the surroundings, the pirates in the air looked down loftily! The North Sea was their territory! No matter how strong these people were on land, they had to scrape and bow in the sea!

Light Sword was dead without a doubt, leaving the Starlight Pirates the greatest winner. Someone had offered thirty thousand mysterious power stones, three drops of Water of Life, and ten origin weapons to purchase her body and the Windchaser Boot.

The pirates didn’t know who the buyer was, but it certainly wasn’t an individual. It must be a major faction not at liberty to show themselves. Perhaps it was the other two founding dukes of the dynasty. The three had always been at odds with each other and wouldn’t mind paying a high price for the Windchaser Boot.

The other two dukes were in charge of the south and west. They were possibly too far away to make it in time, which was why they offered such a high price to outright purchase the body and treasure.

The two Novas were still considering who the mysterious buyer may be and busy exerting influence on all sides when startled cries sounded from below. One of them raised their heads, uncomprehending of what they saw. It was... a sword!

“How dare...” he began to shout. Internal shock roiled him. Who was this?

ROAR!

A ferocious tiger roar erupted by the ear like a volcano. A harsh whistle pierced through one’s eardrums as light from a longsword illuminated the world. A sword stroke pierced through the heavens—bam!

The sword descended amid sparkling sword light!

BOOM!

After that shout, the initial Nova was ripped apart like cloth by the light. The longsword descended to finish bisecting him! Li Hao swept the body onto the ship with a careless sweep.

Off to the side, the other horrified Nova quickly didn’t have time to consider anything else. A dog had soundlessly snuck upon him—he was about to flee when the dog struck with its paw. Nine layers of force overlaid on each other and raised great waves in the ocean!

BOOM!

The waves churned and reached for the skies. Panther reached out amid the frothy spray and ripped the Nova to pieces!

The premises immediately quieted. Although the Solar pirates immediately fled for their lives, sword light flashed and sent pirate heads rolling on the ground in the blink of an eye. That sent the other powerhouses stirring with motion and they all ran as well.

“Who was that??”

“A tiger roar... It reminded me of the Five Styles...”

“Sword light...”

“It’s Li Hao! Demon Sword Li Hao! He’s here and killed experts of the Starlight Pirates!”

“And that dog...”

“.....” Shocked powerhouses fled for their lives. Two Novas had died in an instant! Li Hao was horrifying!

The young man had no intention of covering his tracks. It’s not like people were blind. He was here already, so he killed all of the remaining pirates in another heartbeat. Li Hao threw his head back with laughter, in exceedingly good spirits. He then flew ahead, supposing that Light Sword was nearby.

Li Hao naturally had a few cards up his sleeve to be this cocky. He was the height of arrogance and killed without blinking. Whether it was pirates or anyone else, he would kill everyone he could if they dared stand in his way!