

Star Gate 581

Chapter 581: Bluffing Too Much (I)

A thousand thoughts swirled in Li Hao's mind, but he continued bluffing. "How are you worthy of meeting my ancestor? Not to mention, the ancestor is asleep and will not stir for minor matters. This world may be changing soon... Forget it, you don't understand what I speak of. You can meet the ancestor—I will lead you to the imperial palace myself when you are a supreme powerhouse. Do you dare visit?"

Xu Xing trailed off sheepishly, but confirmed that the monster spirit came from the imperial palace. How frightening! No wonder a mere Solar monster spirit could become an envoy of the Kui Mountains. So it had quite the background!

He could neither accept nor refuse the monster spirit's request at this stage.

"This is a very important matter," was his only possible response. "Please wait for a moment, I must report this to my father..."

"How annoying!" Li Hao snapped. "Humans are so much trouble. Or have you actually lost both boots, not just one? Don't try to lie to us monster spirits! Tell us if you've lost both of them, don't try to trick us. You can't afford the consequences! You will show me the boot even if you don't lend it to us. I must confirm you have it! If you don't, your family has no right to discuss anything with this king. It's a complete waste of this king's time!

"Also, it's not certain if the Windchaser Boots are a treasure of the eight guardian clans. We'll discuss further after seeing the real thing. If you do not show it to us, you Xus will have lied to the Kui Mountains. You can just sit tight and wait for our vengeance then!"

"....." Xu Xing had absolutely no idea what to say. Vengeance? Who the hell lied to you guys?? You're the ones who came to us and start spouting vengeance before we've come to any sort of agreement! Monster spirits are monster spirits alright, they have absolutely no patience or rationality.

Xu Xing's heart pounded with fear at the thought of almost irking a group of monster spirits for no reason at all. He quickly offered a few placating words before having the second steward take Li Hao to the Hall of Visitors to rest. He himself quickly sped to the rear yard. He knew that his father was keeping an eye on things and that asking for his father's opinion now was imperative.

Li Hao was also quaking in his boots. His youth showed! Next time he did something like this, he needed to consider all of the details beforehand. He would've been in huge trouble if the big snake had said there was no envoy.

I need to remember this lesson well... and should I ask around for a dragon transformation method since the big snake helped me?

He didn't have one, in any case. Would Battle Heaven have any? He could also ask the little tree.

I need to take a look at the Windchaser Boot at the very least. When that happens, I'll have a chance of stealing it!

There was something off about the Steadfast Duke's manor. He'd sensed the feeling of being placed under constant surveillance ever since entering. Xu Xing also frequently referred to a transmission pendant. He probably thought the monster spirit wouldn't recognize the item, but Li Hao did.

In that case, was Xu Qing keeping an eye on him from the shadows and monitoring him? It would be frightening if that was the case. He hadn't seen any sign of the man. Granted, there were a few big balls of light in the rear yard. Perhaps Xu Qing was there. Could he observe the rest of the complex from the rear yard and even eavesdrop on conversations?

There must be a surveillance system in the complex, one that's incredibly strong. But I have no idea what it is. I can sense some surveillance even here...

Li Hao inwardly rejoiced that he hadn't been so bold as to directly slip into the manor. He'd wanted to tunnel his way in. Thank heavens I didn't do that!

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Panther was led to a small building for visitors while those in the rear yard began their discussion. In actuality, Panther didn't rest either. Would a monster spirit, especially a descendant of an ancient personage, be willing to nap docilely? That didn't fit the image of an ancient monster spirit—since when were these entities so biddable?

Thus, the dog padded out as soon as the second steward left. It didn't make an effort to disguise itself and walked straight out. Picking a servant at random, it growled, "That weakling over there, come here! Show this king around!"

He carried himself like he would eat the servant if they didn't comply! The young servant trembled with fear, unable to agree and not daring to disagree. He was on the verge of peeing himself when Panther showed its teeth—this was when the second steward abruptly came back!

This further confirmed for Li Hao that he was under watch. The man had returned too quickly while Panther hadn't exuded any presence or attacked anyone. The steward had known a split second after Li Hao took action. The young man would behead himself for the enemy if there was no surveillance system around.

"Will the envoy not rest for a while? The Kui Mountains are far from East Heart City and you've been traveling hard along the way..."

"Do you think this king is one of you weak humans?" Li Hao retorted. "Not to mention, what kind of rundown place is this? It's so small, how is it fit for rest? There is also a very low concentration of energy. Cut the bullshit and show this king around. You humans know how to live well! A mere duke can enjoy such a large residence..."

The second steward's face twitched. This minor monster spirit was so rude! The steward was a Nova, but the monster spirit was throwing its weight around as a Solar!

Of course, he knew that the monster spirit came with quite a background and didn't dare provoke their visitor. "What would the envoy like to see?"

“Your treasury!” Li Hao transmitted after thinking for a bit.

“What?”

“Your treasury!” Li Hao repeated brusquely. “I want to see how well off your duke is! Are you worthy of working with the Kui Mountains? Are you qualified to be our partner? Your treasury is your foundation—if you don’t have sufficient mysterious power stones, origin weapons, and Life of Water, then what kind of major faction are you?”

“.....” The second steward was dazed senseless. It was his first time meeting such an arrogant person—monster spirit! No, he’d known some monster spirits before too, but were they all like this at heart? So direct, so brazen? If it wasn’t for this guy’s background, the steward would slap the monster spirit to death with one hand! It was too cocky!

“What, are you afraid of this king robbing you?” Li Hao snorted. “Is the duke afraid of the Solar that this king is? Not to mention, would this king want your treasures?”

Li Hao’s mental ripples carried hints of derision and contempt. He summoned a jug with a wave of Panther’s paw. It was sealed shut and opaque, but the dog casually tilted out ten drops of Water of Life.

“Serve this king well and I may give you a few drops. This king has plenty of this!”

The second steward went slack-jawed with shock. He’d been greatly moved when Li Hao took out one drop. Damn, monster spirits are rich!

But now, it was shock and madness. He even had the desire to kill this monster spirit for its treasure!

Oh my heavens, what did I just see?! I saw ten drops of Water of Life being casually poured out of a large jug. Being a steward of the Steadfast Duke's household, he was one of decent experience in the world. He knew how precious the Water of Life was. One drop represented one life!

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At the same time, the rear yard.

The supernaturals flared their presences at the same time. The Steadfast Duke crushed his second chair, startling a Xu Xing who'd just arrived.

"Your Grace!" gasped the powerhouses. There was killing intent, greed, and madness swirling around the gathering. That was a massive jug! A very, very big jug! If tilting it produced ten drops of Water of Life, how many drops were there in this jug?

Heavens above! How many lives did that represent?

Xu Qing was also thinking that if he had this jug and so much Water of Life, he would be able to enhance his organs to an extreme and just unseal his battle strength without concern for anything else.

"Sit down!" he abruptly commanded in the next moment. The greed in his eyes morphed to solemnity. "Everyone, sit down! Have you all lost your minds? Do you know what so much Water of Life represents? It represents that there's truly a monster spirit that's survived the ancient times, that the imperial palace really exists, that this little monster spirit really has an incredible legend behind it. It really is noble beyond belief to treat Water of Life as actual water..."

The more he said, the more fear set in. "Look at all of you going crazy at the sight of treasure. Aren't you afraid of not being alive to use it? Or do you think you can run off after seizing the treasure, leaving the manor behind to suffer monster spirit wrath? It would only be my people who dies!"

Expressions on the powerhouses' faces shifted drastically when they heard this and they quickly suppressed their greed. "We know our shortcomings, Your Grace!" They rose and bowed.

"Hmph!" snorted the duke. He'd been briefly seized by an urge to kill the monster spirit as well. He wanted to cast everything aside and rush out to slaughter the weak monster spirit. But reason won out in the end.

There were no more doubts in his mind. This was indeed a blue-blooded descendant of an ancient monster spirit with a magnificent identity. There might be more than one since monster spirits couldn't coalesce Water of Life.

How much was in that jug? There had to be a premier monster spirit alive somewhere.

The more the duke thought about this, the more he was horrified by the implications. He frowned ferociously before relaxing with a sigh. "This is good! The Kui Mountains are close to us, so they came to us first. It looks like they want to work together as well. Modern society is different from the past. As this golden monster spirit says, ancient entities may not be able to easily walk about or be used to our world. This makes sense.

"But, it's all speculation. If they truly wished to venture forth, then they would be existences that we cannot withstand." With that, he looked at his son. "Go show it around. Take it wherever it wishes to go."

"Father, it wants to go to the treasury..." protested a shocked Xu Xing.

"Take it!" Xu Qing answered resolutely. "Is our treasury really a treasury to it? It might just be curious or want to be entertained. I would be willing to trade the entire manor for its jug—it just wouldn't be willing! Or you can try asking it if it wants to make the trade."

Seizure by force was the most idiotic decision to make. He wasn't a wandering cultivator who acted without thought of anyone else.

Chapter 582: Bluffing Too Much (II)

The Steadfast Duke was the overlord of the east. He wouldn't be able to run if he robbed this little minor monster spirit—he could only do so if he gave up his family property. That was not up for debate. He would never relinquish two centuries of Xu accumulation for simply Water of Life.

Not only could he not seize anything from the monster spirit, but he had to protect it well. He scanned those on the scene when his thoughts traveled here.

“All of you are the pillars of my household, so I do not wish to witness any disappointing developments. Water of Life is precious, but there will be plenty of other opportunities to obtain it in the future. If we strike a full alliance with the Kui Mountains, I believe that we will not lack for this resource.

“Do not relinquish longer term benefits for the sake of profits at hand. If we can reach an agreement, I trust that something carried by a minor monster spirit will not be too costly to trade for.”

The group found the wisdom in his words after thinking it over. Someone immediately began a string of flattery.

“This is evidence of Your Grace's prosperous fortunes! Your name has moved the Kui Mountains to the point where they send the descendant of an ancient monster spirit to discuss an alliance.”

Xu Qing smiled without a word, but was naturally very proud of himself. However, there was a troublesome detail in the way—the Windchaser Boots!

Indeed, the Windchaser Boots.

That was what the monster spirit wanted and his greatest point of contention. If it was anything else, truly anything else, he would hand it over without a second thought in order to partner with the Kui Mountains and their ancient monster spirits.

But the treasure of the eight families...

The Steadfast Duke was highly conflicted. One had already been seized, leaving just one behind. He wasn't sure what to do. That these ancient existences all wanted the Windchaser Boots meant that they were indeed an incredible treasure. One he was unable to use. As incredible as they might be, he was unable to transform it into battle strength or any other benefits.

As various thoughts floated to the forefront, he decided to wait a bit longer. "You go first." He looked at his son. "Try to satisfy whatever demands it has. If it mentions the Windchaser Boots again, tell it that the treasure will be available when I emerge from seclusion. It cannot be shown now."

"Understood, father, I will be off then." Xu Xing quickly departed.

"We need to placate this ancient monster spirit first." The duke looked at the rest when his son returned to the front hall. "Stay on your toes, the grand ceremony begins at daybreak. We need to be on guard against the rest of the region delegates. We'll intimidate them if we can, but if not..."

He looked at the golden monster spirit in the image and pondered, could he make use of this monster spirit? Although their partnership was not set in stone, it wasn't out of the question to borrow the Kui Mountains name to subdue the four corners.

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In the Hall of Visitors.

The second steward was quite resigned by Li Hao raising a fuss in wanting to see the treasury. The man was enormously relieved to see Xu Xing appear.

The second master was completely distracted from the task of setting up for the ceremony. The jug of Water of Life was the only issue on his mind. "Where would the envoy like to go?" He beamed brightly at Panther.

“Your treasury. Your servant dare refuses...”

“A misunderstanding, that was all a misunderstanding! The envoy is a lofty descendant of an ancient monster spirit, what is a mere treasury worth? Steward Ming doesn’t understand any of this, which is the cause for this misunderstanding.” Xu Xing smiled fawningly. “I will take the envoy there. It’s just a collection of trinkets that are not worthy of attention. It would be our honor if the envoy is interested.”

Hidden in Panther’s stomach, Li Hao cackled silently to himself. As he thought! Although it’d been a risk he’d taken, it wasn’t that much of a risk when he faced the smart and ambitious. If he was up against someone like He Yong, Li Hao would never proceed in such a brazen manner. That would absolutely spell his doom as He Yong would smack Panth to death and seize the jug of Water of Life.

As for the trouble that would create, what did that have to do with him? If the Kui Mountains waged an expedition against the royal family, he might even stay to watch the show.

Therefore, different strokes applied for different folks. Li Hao had made the right moves with the Steadfast Duke. When it came to people like He Yong, they needed to be served with a punch!

Li Hao snickered to himself and continued to play the role of a brash monster spirit. “That’s true, how can you have anything good? Any that exists was dug up from the ground. But sometimes, you don’t recognize the value of what you’ve found and don’t know how to use what you’ve discovered.

“This king loves hunting for treasure. What you don’t understand, this king might. That will be this king’s fortune then! How about giving me some of what I set my eyes on?”

“That’s but a small matter.” Xu Xing nodded with a smile. His father had said to satisfy this descendant of an ancient monster spirit as best he could, so of course he would have no other opinion. Not to mention, only subpar items were stored in the treasury. Would the actual treasures be placed there?

Storage rings weren't vases for show. The real treasures were all in his father's storage ring. Not even Xu Xing had the right to touch them.

The second young master led Panther to the depths of the rear yard without further word. Panther looked around as they walked; Li Hao unleashed his mental strength without reservation and probed everywhere he could. He was so presumptuous that it was like this was his territory instead.

Xu Xing pretended he didn't register the monster spirit's actions. It could do whatever it wished—it didn't look like it was gathering information, in any case. Rather, it demonstrated the curiosity of entering the human world for the first time.

In reality, Li Hao and Panther were truly curious. As the young man investigated, he sent out another mental ripple. "Ah right, what is your name?"

"Xu Xing." As affronted as the man was, he had to answer.

"Oh I see, Little Xing... That's a good name!" Li Hao complimented. "Little Xing, this place isn't good..."

What now? Xu Xing heaved an inward sigh.

"This king has been uncomfortable since arriving," Li Hao commented casually. "Like there's something staring at me. Have powerhouses decided to target your family?"

Xu Xing's heart shook. The monster spirit could sense even that? It was the descendant of an ancient monster spirit, alright! Its senses were so keen that it perceived something overlooked by the many powerful Novas that visited the complex.

Shifting awkwardly, Xu Xing didn't say anything. This was a difficult matter to explain. This little monster spirit might erupt in a rage if he said anything, thinking that the duke had purposefully offended him.

Li Hao was only asking a test question, but swiftly gathered some conclusions when no response was forthcoming. After probing the surroundings, he realized it might not be an ordinary system surveilling him, but a treasure.

It wouldn't be so inconspicuous otherwise. The Steadfast Duke possessed many treasures, given that he hailed from a family with two hundred years of history. In this day and age, two hundred years of heritage made the Xus a large clan, even an old and well-known clan. No wonder Xu Feng had been so cocky that day and so sure that Li Hao would not dare kill him.

A few humans and a dog appeared beneath the massive attic of a building after taking a few turns.

"This is the treasury of my family..." Xu Xing introduced.

Li Hao sent his mental strength outward again, assessing decent defenses for the treasury. There were two Solars secretly holding down the fort. It was a strong level of defense for this part of the treasury, since anyone who could find their way here meant that the complex had been breached. Whether it was Solars or Novas on duty here... it didn't make a difference.

"This treasury is one whole, made from the strongest refined steel. Ordinary superhumans will not easily break it." Xu Xing walked up to the door and took out a key from his storage ring. There was a golden lock on the door. "The treasury is not usually open to others. Only my father and I can unlock it..."

"These scraps of metal can be broken with a tap of a claw," Li Hao commented indifferently.

"It can be readily broken by force," Xu Xing chuckled. "But this is the manor of the Steadfast Duke. While it may not compare to the imperial palace in the Kui Mountains, this is a heavily fortified and guarded place in the human world. You'll have to bear with us, envoy."

The lock opened with a click; Xu Xing pushed the door open.

Panther's nose twitched as it caught a whiff of some delicious scent. Li Hao hurriedly erupted with mind intent when the dog was about to drool. Don't be so embarrassing, alright!

Xu Xing didn't mind and walked forward with Panther. "There are three levels to the treasury, but they may not be filled with anything particularly precious to the envoy. The first level is storage for our reserves of mysterious power stones and mysterious power cubes. There are one hundred storage rings here, all filled with stones and cubes..."

There were only a few shelves on the first floor with storage rings neatly arrayed on them. Li Hao's eyes nearly bugged out of his head! Storage rings could not be stored inside each other, so each ring occupied a certain space. Regular people wouldn't carry so many storage rings on them.

One hundred storage rings... and were they all full? How many stones would that be?! It boggled the mind!

"Do you Xus have an energy mine?" Li Hao asked offhandedly.

Xu Xing blinked. Energy mine?

"Does the envoy speak of the energy mines recorded in the ancient books?" he laughed ruefully after a while. "That we do not. We have this as a result of our findings in the ruins."

"Oh, I see! I've seen some humans use those before, but all that is trash. Is that what you have here?"

"The trash that the envoy speaks of... I do not know. You are free to inspect them for yourself."

Li Hao directed the dog in grabbing a storage ring and probed it with his mind. The dog then casually threw it back on the rack, like it didn't care at all. It was as if the rings were less than trash.

In reality, the young man sucked in a sharp breath!

The storage ring was crammed full of mysterious power stones. There were at least ten thousand stones inside!

My word, what does this mean? Are there millions of mysterious power stones stored here? No way??

Li Hao had thought he was asking for the moon when he demanded thirty thousand from Silver Moon. The province had almost gone bankrupt, yet here the duke had more than one hundred storage rings in his treasury. If they all contained ten thousand at a minimum, didn't that make for one million stones at least?

"This is all trash!" Li Hao denounced, despite his shock. "Is that all there is in the other rings as well?"

Xu Xing smiled awkwardly. Anyone who entered the family treasury would be overawed, but now they were being held in contempt. And by a monster spirit, nonetheless!

Chapter 583: Bluffing Too Much (III)

However, there was nothing Xu Xing could say in response. He could only reply, "All of our mysterious power stones are like these ones. We do have some higher quality ones, but they're all with my father. We don't have many of the higher quality ones either, just enough to satisfy our own cultivation needs."

"Hmph." Li Hao didn't seem to care and looked around. The first floor was spacious enough to hold other items apart from racks of storage rings. He directed Panther in another direction and swept a glance at the contents before saying with derision, "Are you guys scrap collectors to save even these things?"

There were boxes upon boxes against the wall apart from the racks. Each of them held a suit of armor. There were a lot of them!

“They’re not scraps,” Xu Xing had to protest given that his family was being looked down upon again. “You may not be aware, envoy, but this is the equipment of an army called the Voidbreakers. We found the armor in a ruin, but haven’t been able to find a way to reactivate it. The armor from Battle Heaven and the Black Armaturas are all equipment from powerful armies of the ancient civilization...”

Li Hao raised an eyebrow, but continued in a similar vein. “This king is naturally aware! But those were scraps of metal back in the day as well. There are a ton of higher level ones in the imperial palace. Only lowly minions wear these ones. What are they, if not trash?”

“Is there such an army in the imperial palace, honored envoy?” Xu Xing asked with surprise.

“Of course!” Li Hao sneered. “The imperial palace houses a most eminent one, so of course he has his personal guards! Each of them were selected from thousands of strong contenders. I’ve heard the ancestor talk about the Battle Heaven Army that you mentioned. That city’s strong enough, but it’s just an ancient city that received their name thanks to the whim of an emperor. It cannot compare to the imperial palace and its army does not compare to the imperial guards...”

Xu Xing learned something new today! So this was the truth of the world! Not only him, but so did the eavesdropping Xu Qing felt that he’d gained new knowledge.

As it turned out, Battle Heaven was an ancient city personally named by an emperor in the ancient civilization! Even though it wasn’t the strongest, it was terrifying enough already. Its Golden Armors were said to retain domineering strength.

Xu Xing picked up his transmission pendant for a look when it vibrated. “Does the envoy know much about Battle Heaven city?”

“The city itself?” Li Hao thought for a bit. “Not much, just that there were a lot of people living in it back in the day. There were tens of millions, while its army numbered millions strong...”

“Then does the envoy know of warriors wearing golden armor?”

“Oh, you mean the officers who are the equivalent of first rank commanders?”

Xu Xing beamed. This monster spirit knew everything! Such was the advantage of an ancient heritage—those of that bloodline were all-knowing. So many people had failed to grasp the city’s full background, but the monster spirit easily spoke of it.

“One commander oversees ten thousand people, right?” Li Hao seemed to be recalling something. “I don’t remember, I heard this a long time ago. Battle Heaven seems to have only one or two hundred commanders. There’s more ranking officers above that, and their leaders above that too. The commanders... are just small fry!”

Xu Xing sucked in a sharp breath. How was that possible?

“Envoy, it’s said that the city lord is just a Golden Armor as well...”

“Bullshit!” Li Hao cursed loudly. “How is that possible? Whoever said that was blind! Not to mention, since when does the city lord wear armor? I remember the ancestor saying that the city lord... is... related to an emperor or something like that? His surname... was Wang? He was a raggedy old man who was very strong...”

The more Xu Xing heard, the more shocked he was. It meant that all of the information they held was fake! There was so much more to Battle Heaven! He wanted to ask more, but Li Hao cut him off with irritation.

“What’s the point of talking about all this? Who remembers any of that? Is there no real treasure here apart from this garbage?”

Xu Xing was quite resigned, was this really all garbage? There was a large sum of mysterious power stones, countless cubes of mysterious power, and a thousand sets of ancient armor on the first floor. If it wasn't for the fact that they weren't activated, the armor would be priceless anywhere in the outside world.

Well, this reaction made sense given the monster spirit's background.

"There are some more treasures on the second floor that the envoy might be interested in. They're a bunch of origin weapons—but granted, their level isn't too high."

A bunch! Li Hao clucked his tongue. What did a bunch mean? He headed to the second floor without another word.

The second floor was arrayed differently. Individual cabinets filled the floor. There were many cabinets, but most of them were empty. Only some of them held items—roughly twenty or thirty of them. Some exuded faint energy that was a sign of their uncommon qualities.

There was a long blade the color of fire, a broadsword the color of dirt, and a bow rimmed with frost...

Xu Xing looked cautiously at Panther, worried that the monster spirit would label it all as trash again. "These are all origin weapons..."

"I know!" Li Hao cut him off brusquely. "They're all trash too, and very unfriendly to monster spirits! What you call origin weapons were forged out of the corpses of monster spirits. The practice was abolished many years ago. It was in use only in the initial New Martial era, we used new designs in the late era. These origin weapons... are the discarded ones that were made available to wandering cultivators or rear personnel."

Xu Xing felt that he'd learned something new again! So this was the background of origin weapons!

“Then the Windchaser Boots mentioned before with the core origin of a monster spirit...” he couldn’t help but ask. Based on what you’re saying, the Windchaser Boots are trash too?

Li Hao blinked, then quickly cursed, “What do you know?! If the boots really are from the eight clans, then that’s different! If they are an origin weapon, they would be forged from an incredibly domineering monster spirit! It’s nothing that this pile of trash can measure up to!”

Fine then.

Xu Xing deflated as he looked at the treasury that was the pride of the family. Our treasures are precious items that other powerhouses drool over, but now they’re all trash! There were possibly one million mysterious power stones and several dozen origin weapons here!

While the most important batch of treasures was with Xu Qing, the treasury was also the core of the entire Xu family. This was the basis of the family’s rise and the foundation with which they dominated the east, and how they would conquer the dynasty! It was all trash to their visitor!

Li Hao didn’t care about what the man was thinking. He was almost drooling in Panther’s stomach. These guys are so rich!

Although he obtained plenty of origin weapons and even given the little tree almost a dozen a while back, he was still highly envious when he saw so many at once. The only thing he wanted to do now was to take them all!

But that was just an impulse that he curbed. He couldn’t do that! A little impatience spoils great plans, he’d yet to catch a glimpse of the Windchaser Boots!

“If the second floor is all trash like this, will the third floor be the same?” Li Hao groused with irritation. “The Steadfast Duke is known throughout the east and hailed as the overlord of the region, but this is all the trash that you have? If this is the case, I need to reassess the duke’s

strength! Strength is one aspect, riches are another. All the powerhouses in the world are useless if you don't have enough riches, you'll lack the strength to keep going!"

Xu Xing was quite embarrassed as well, but there was nothing he could say. What, was he supposed to protest that these were treasures that those outside would attack each other to claim?

There was no point in discussing this with the descendant of an ancient monster spirit. Their visitor had seen so much more than him, and sights that were much stronger. Xu Xing had been very confident about the items on the third floor before, but was now feeling uncertain.

"The items on the third floor are even better," he said ambiguously. "You can take a look, envoy..."

He didn't dare go into specifics. What if the other didn't find that to be the case again? He wasn't used to suffering blow after blow of mortification. It was always him slapping faces. But today, he was being repeatedly humiliated by something that somewhat resembled a dog, and he couldn't flare his temper for it! He had to admit to all of the assessments given since their visitor had a very privileged view of the world. What else could he say?

One man and one dog ascended the stairs to the third floor. There were even fewer items here and the layout was once more different. There were several crystal covers encasing certain items; energy wafted out of them, protecting the contents inside.

"There are six treasures on the third floor, they're all rare curiosities!" Xu Xing doggedly continued his introduction of the treasury contents. "Three of them are earth rank origin weapons, far superior to the gold and arcane levels below. The other three are very precious items indeed. One of them—"

"Oh, a Goldensky Lotus?" Li Hao identified before the man could. "And an entire flower at that, where did you get it from? This is a treasure from the Forbidden Sea in the New Martial era. It's ineffective for powerhouses, but good for those weaker. You guys have a whole flower, not bad!"

Xu Xing started. Damn, you know even this! You really know a lot!

“We also obtained this in a ruin, but... this item... has some drawbacks. We discovered more than one flower at first and realized that it’s very useful when it comes to strengthening martial master mind intent. But after the mind intent is fortified, the body cannot withstand it and collapses more easily instead.

“Given the trove we found, numerous Xu family members ingested it and many died as a result. Their bodies fell apart, leaving only this flower left. We’d planned to let my nephew use it after he ascended... but my poor nephew died in the hands of a villain.”

Li Hao cursed to himself. Fucking hell! My Goldensky Lotus! There hadn’t been just one flower, but many! These Xu bastards had wasted it all! Judging from Xu Xing’s words, they’d randomly used the treasure after finding it and strengthened mind intent beyond the capacity of the body. Their minds had crushed their bodies to death!

They deserved that death!

That was a foregone conclusion. This was a treasure with fabulous effects and immensely useful to the current Li Hao, not to mention other martial masters. But if too much was ingested by someone with weak organs, it would undoubtedly blow them up!

Chapter 584: Bluffing Too Much (IV)

Apart from the three origin weapons, there were also three other treasures. Li Hao only recognized the Goldensky Lotus. He didn’t know what the other two were. One of them seemed to be the fragments of a weapon, but it looked quite esoteric. It might be the remnants of a powerful weapon that’d broken.

There was something else that appeared to be a medallion, but the characters on it were too blurred and hard to make out. Li Hao didn’t know what kind of token it was, or if it was just an ordinary cube.

As for the three origin weapons, they were indeed of a higher caliber than the ones on the floor below. They felt stronger than the wind chime that he’d obtained before. The Xus were indeed a powerful family with vast operations. They were worthy of being the eastern overlord for the past two hundred years! And the key was that this was only part of their family wealth, it couldn’t be everything. The real treasures were likely with Xu Qing.

Even so, this place should hold most of the Xu fortune. Li Hao wants nothing more than to loot it all!

“Forget it, there’s nothing good here,” he dismissed scornfully, hiding his desire. “The Goldensky Lotus is not bad, but it’s not that useful for monster spirits. You guys keep it for yourself! What a waste of a trip!”

Xu Xing was quite resigned. The issue is that you’ve seen too many nice things! He’d wanted to trade some treasures for a few drops of Water of Life, but didn’t have the room to make that request now. Who would’ve thought that the Xu family treasury would one day be held in contempt?

“None of this trash is worth looking at.” Li Hao maneuvered Panther down the stairs. “When can I take a look at the Windchaser Boots?”

“Ah, please wait for a little while longer. The boots are with my father and we will report to you at once when my father is out of seclusion...”

“Hurry up! Humans really do drag their feet when they conduct business!”

“Of course, certainly!” Xu Xing was so humble that it was like the monster spirit was his ancestor, but he found nothing untoward with their arrangement. He glanced at the transmission pendant as they walked and asked carefully, “Envoy, if the Windchaser Boots are not what the Kui Mountains need, then our partnership...”

“Will be on hold!” Li Hao answered curtly, instilling the man with a sense of urgency. He hoped the boots were what the monster spirits needed!

“Envoy, if I may be so bold to ask, the dragon god of the mountains and the imperial palace...”

“The venerated dragon god is the guardian of the palace’s outskirts. The existence within the palace cannot easily emerge. The venerated dragon god received a few pointers from the ancestor and

could cultivate his way to this stage due to excellent potential. These days, he is quite close with the imperial palace.”

Xu Xing understood. So that one was a guard dog. No wonder it only dared say that the golden monster spirit possessed a lofty identity, and nothing else.

“Envoy, if the Windchaser Boots are indeed what the dragon god requires, then will you really provide five Novas for us to use?”

Li Hao smirked. They were tempted! It looked like this question came from old fart Xu Qing hiding behind his son. He started bluffing once more, cockiness filling his mental ripples. “It’s just five Novas! If the dragon god successfully ascends and the safety of the palace’s outer perimeter is guaranteed, what are five Novas worth? We can send you as many monster spirits as you need! There are countless races in the Kui Mountains!

“We need powerhouses, true heavyweights beyond Nova. Nova is just scrabbling in the dirt. But if the dragon still does not ascend and those in the palace are... Ahem, I won’t tell you this. Anyway, we won’t be needing the dragon god much longer if he still doesn’t advance!”

A shocked Xu Xing understood the connotations. Were the ancient monster spirits about to emerge from the palace? Urgency gripped the man, the mountains weren’t too far from the eastern provinces! Trouble might be upon them!

“Are the lords in the imperial palace about to emerge in the world?” he asked carefully.

“It has nothing to do with you!” Li Hao declared presumptuously. “We won’t care about you if we do emerge. I know what’s on your mind! If we come out, we head to Silver Moon! Our goal is not here or even this world! It lies in the depths of the firmament—you wouldn’t understand it if I spoke of it.

“We follow the ancient Human King’s footsteps and seek the emperor’s path in leaving this land. Your vision is so limited that you focus only on this continent. Back in the day, the core of the

Skystar Dynasty—the central continent that you revere—was just a piddling Skystar Island! This royal family of yours simply occupied the ruins of Skystar Town, that is how they have some capital to their name...”

Xu Xing felt his worldview imploding! What did all this mean?!

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At the same time.

“Skystar Island... Skystar Town... I see!” Xu Qing’s face flickered through a variety of expressions. “Silver Moon... So these ancient existences have never set their sights on this land... So the heart of the dynasty is just an island... How incredible!”

He believed the monster spirit as what he heard corroborated with some reports he’d received. There was only shock and desire in his eyes!

Li Hao’s spiel solidified one belief for him—that the Kui Mountains really weren’t interested in his family’s territory. They wouldn’t care if the Steadfast Duke became king of the east!

But he cared.

In that case, there was a possibility for their partnership. The monster spirits’ request for cooperation might only be temporarily valid. The fact that those existences couldn’t easily emerge at the moment was an opportunity for him. It might not come back around if he missed it.

“The Windchaser Boots...” He clenched his jaw. He’d already lost one of them, he’ll just lose the second as well! Perhaps the monster spirits really would return it to him.

Based on what the minor monster spirit had said, the snake king would be discarded soon if it still didn't break through. Once it was discarded... there was no need for the Windchaser Boots. Therefore, he should help the snake king break through. When it found solid footing, it would be grateful that the Xus had rendered it a favor. The snake king would be the family's connection to reaching an agreement with the Kui Mountains imperial palace.

Xu Qing knew what to do when his thoughts trailed here. He fully believed Panther's identity by now—there was no helping it, the monster spirit knew too much. Some of what it spoke of went beyond the family's understanding, despite two hundred years of endless excavations.

The duke firmly believed Li Hao precisely because he only knew half of the truth. If he hadn't known any of it, then Li Hao would've been preaching to deaf ears no matter how much he said. The crucial detail here was that the duke knew a bit of what the monster spirit spoke of, but not all of it. That made these revelations particularly deadly; each word was immensely shocking.

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Xu Xing seemed to receive some sort of instruction at this time and asked, "Envoy, our family's grand ceremony will be commencing at daybreak. Those from the other eastern provinces will be present. Are you interested in attending the ceremony?"

"No!" Li Hao played hard to get.

"Father might emerge from seclusion then," Xu Xing hastily added. "If he does, the Windchaser Boots will be there!"

"Very good, this king will be there!" Li Hao immediately changed his mind.

Xu Xing was overjoyed, but also cursed inwardly to himself because his father had said not to offer up the Windchaser Boots at daybreak! More precisely, Xu Xing wasn't to take out the one in his possession. He was to wait for Xu Qing to personally oversee the ceremony!

Damn it!

This made it more than apparent that the one Xu Xing looked after was fake! His old man had given him a fake treasure to fool others with! But now that a monster spirit envoy was here, he couldn't be allowed to bring forth a fake. If the envoy discovered it wasn't what they needed, it would be the height of disaster if it stomped off after that.

Plainly, his father was prepared to make an appearance himself and bring out the real treasure. He was the trash! He spoke so righteously about the Xus being unafraid of enemies, but still gave Xu Xing a fake!

The more Xu Xing brooded over this, the more incensed he grew! A tiny conspiracy formed in his heart when he looked at the golden monster spirit. He'd once thought his father to be so lofty that he was out of reach, but now it looked like this was all there was to the man. If he could form a relationship with this monster spirit himself and receive the support of the palace, would his father still not dare step aside?

No... perhaps... he could dream a bit bigger. Was it enough to just be a duke? The key to everything was the golden dog in front of him.

With that running through his mind, Xu Xing abruptly became much more humble and enthusiastic. His smile turned so fawning that it made Li Hao's scalp crawl. What was he smiling like this for? Had the young man bluffed so much that he'd been exposed?

Li Hao turned apprehensive; there was nothing for it but to continue the act at this stage. He sauntered out of the treasury without a care in the world, his own ideas shifting as well. It wasn't just enough to take the Windchaser Boots anymore, he wouldn't be satisfied without taking the treasury too! But how would he swing that?

It'd be best if he could create a ton of trouble for the duke! Otherwise, the first thing that the old man would do after having the time to react would be to chase him to the ends of the world.

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The day slowly brightened after a night of activity. Today was the memorial for the young master and his eldest son of the Steadfast Duke's household. Xu Feng was also being honored at the same time.

The latter two had died in Li Hao's hands. One could say that the blood feud between Li Hao and the Steadfast Duke eclipsed the one between him and Red Moon for the moment. Of course, this was when viewed through the lens of the duke against Li Hao. Just as Li Hao hated Red Moon, so did the Steadfast Duke itch to feast on Li Hao's flesh.

Such was the way of the world. You kill me, I kill you. There was no shortage of grudges to go around. So even though the Xus hated Li Hao with a fiery passion, the young man didn't care—just as Ying Hongyue likely didn't care whether or not the young man hated him. History was ever written by the victors. This grudge would naturally dissipate once the Xus killed Li Hao or Li Hao killed Ying Hongyue.

A bustle of activity started in the manor as the sky brightened. Voices could be heard from the plaza outside the front doors. The Steadfast Duke was close to the people and had built a plaza for leisure in front of his estate. Although his son and grandson were dead, it was open for business all the same. Such a hypocritical person was a rare find. Of course, if he won in the end and conquered the world, then he would be a paragon of all that was good and beautiful, not a hypocrite.

Someone like him was the most terrifying at times.

Chapter 585: Ceremonial Rites (I)

Li Hao laid in Panther's stomach—the dog's stomach was quite spacious and not that dirty. The dog had almost refined its organs to the point of being top-grade refined metal, so there wasn't much blood and other messiness to be found inside.

The young man was still thinking of the Xus' treasury. Did he go in for one job and leave with the Windchaser Boot, or did he walk off with the whole bag? This was the greatest question on Li Hao's mind.

If he swindled the duke just out of the Windchaser Boot, he'd be exposed before a few days were up. On the other hand, that might be much safer and help him smoothly leave the duke's manor.

At the same time, the duke was lending the boot with certain conditions. The snake king of the Kui Mountains wouldn't really send five Novas and it wouldn't possibly deliver large quantities of Water of Life as interest. Li Hao's lies would be unmasked in a few days all the same.

That would give him sufficient time to escape, though.

Do I take a risk, or do I take off after getting the Windchaser Boot? Li Hao asked himself. There was no one else he could ask and Panther rolled around on the ground, possibly uncomfortable because there was someone in its stomach.

If the Steadfast Duke's manor doesn't fall into disarray and I expose too many trump cards in the process of getting the Windchaser Boot... Xu Qing himself will probably come for me. Various eastern provinces are gathered here today, the duke wants me there probably to borrow my presence to intimidate them...

The duke wanted to utilize the Kui Mountains to intimidate certain people. The mountains were strong with one metamorphosis expert in the open and several more Novas. They also possessed a lot of Solars, making the mountains a force that regular provinces could not afford to provoke.

Intimidation... so this means that the Steadfast Duke doesn't have as strong a grip over the east as we think. Some of the attendees may even want to go against him.

The greatest overlord of the east is the Xu family, but there also seems to be some families that rival them on equal terms. If the Xus could suppress everyone within the provinces, they would've long dominated the region and proclaimed themselves king.

Various thoughts filtered through his mind as voices traveled in from outside.

"Announcing the director general of the Calm Borders provincial government!" There were personnel outside announcing the identity of each visitor. It was major powerhouses that came to

the ceremonial rites. They naturally needed to be individually announced to demonstrate the duke's prestige and connections.

Calm Borders was right beneath the duke's nose and naturally part of his camp. The director general was just decoration, but this decoration possessed a very high status. Out of the entire dynasty and millions of kilometers of territory, there were only ninety-nine director generals. That this one had come so early was to show the duke face.

Li Hao listened quietly and didn't react. Xu Xing had him resting here for a while, saying that someone would lead him to the proceedings in a while. According to the young man's speculations, the Xus might be waiting for everyone to arrive before bringing the monster spirit in, so as to catch some people off guard.

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Outside the Steadfast Duke's manor.

Cars continued to roll to a stop outside the front gates. Granted, there were those who didn't walk like everyone else did. Clad in certain, those heavyweights came on horseback or rode in on monster spirits. Regardless, their stature was imposing.

Some powerhouses came in directly on origin weapons. There were flying ships and carriages. Those assembled for the ceremony were strong and quite capable.

Apart from Calm Borders, there were twenty provinces in the east. Each province held roughly one hundred million citizens and the eastern expanses were a rich land with dense mysterious power. There were more powerhouses in the eastern continent—the north could not compare. Apart from a few crafty old foxes in Silver Moon, the northern continent was indeed the weakest out of the four continents.

Today, movers and shakers of the various eastern provinces were all gathered here. They hadn't necessarily sent their highest ranking officials or their strongest, but almost all of them were led by

Novas, senior officials, or equally representative characters. It was a very strong turnout. Some provinces did send their highest ranking official.

Changes abounded in the Steadfast Duke's manor. Many powerhouses had died—nine Novas were already dead. It made some provinces previously smothered underfoot stir with agitation. Some people wanted to take a look for themselves to see how much strength was left with the duke.

Nine Novas was no small sum! Their weakest of Xu Feng was mid Nova. As solid as the Xu foundations were, losing so many heavyweights in such a short period of time made their losses greater than what Silver Moon had suffered in Silver Moon these days.

Outside the Steadfast Duke's manor.

A small black car slowly rolled to a stop. There were two occupants aside from the driver—one old, one middle-aged. The old man's hair was pure white and he showed his age. Beside him, the middle-aged man was healthy and moved with rippling muscles. They weren't too apparent beneath his military uniform.

"We're here, father," the middle-aged man said lowly.

The old man opened his eyes and looked outside at the large characters over the magnificent door. "I wonder what Xu Qing's got up his sleeve today. Keep your ears sharp and don't speak too much when we enter in a moment."

"I know, father." The middle-aged man nodded.

The two were from the province of Firebright, an exceedingly strong eastern province. Due to the prevalence of volcanoes within its borders, there was an abundance of strong fire supernaturals in Firebright. For that reason, Firebright had been a thorn in the Xu family's side for a very long time.

The one in control of Firebright was different from the highest ranking official of any other province—the inspector general of the Inspectorate. He was the old man in the car and had fully grasped the province’s military power a few decades ago.

The old man had clashed with Xu Qing many years back—the Xus also wanted to be rid of him. But the old man was strong and had long set foot in the supernatural domain. He was now a metamorphosis expert and a very strong fire supernatural. His battle strength was fearsome. He also had the extremely loyal Fire Troops beneath his command. There were so many powerhouses that answered to his banner that the Xus didn’t dare move against him.

He was here in person for the ceremonial rites, but under heavy protest by the middle-aged man. The latter hadn’t been able to persuade the other, so he followed the old man to protect him.

“Father,” transmitted the middle-aged man when his father alighted. “I’m worried about the Xus suddenly moving against you. I should be here alone...”

“That’s enough, there’s no need to cower all the time if we don’t undertake anything major. As strong as the Xus are, it is an open ceremony today. They might wish to demonstrate their might, but they won’t be starting anything in front of everyone else. They don’t have the courage or the charisma to do so. Someone like Xu Qing will not be the first to step forward. Having only the eastern region be thrown in chaos and the rest of the world be fine is absolutely not what he wishes.”

Not to mention, the old man wasn’t Xu Qing’s only rival present today. His son was thinking too much! There was no possibility at present for Xu Qing’s desire to conquer the east.

Such thoughts ran through the old man’s mind, but he walked forward in silence. The servant at the front doors widened his eyes when he saw the latest visitor. “Announcing the inspector general of the Firebright Inspectorate!”

This was one proclamation that drew much attention. A few more powerhouses emerged behind the old man and looked toward the door when they heard the voice. Some were surprised by the old man’s presence, others were amused. With this one here, they could adjust their actions to the situation.

If they were to rise against the Xus, someone needed to be their leader. In the east, there were three factions who had sufficient qualification and strength to go directly against the Xus. The first was Firebright, the second was the province of East Pole.

East Pole was another province of extensive territory and numerous people, one that powerhouses flocked to. Its governance system was different from regular provinces in that it was also ruled over by one large family—much like Calm Borders. Although its family wasn't as well known as the Steadfast Duke, they were also once the founding nobles of the dynasty.

Apart from these two provinces, the third faction that could stand against the Xus was an organization known as Helios, not a province. Helios' tenure was second only to the three great organizations, but it hadn't grown as fast as the three. It was rooted in the east and was yet to expand to other areas. However, it was very strong in the east and had recruited large numbers of wandering cultivators. None of the three great organizations by themselves were rivals for Helios in the region.

Helios members could be found throughout the area; some of them possessed startling backgrounds. It was rumored that some of the highest ranking border officials were part of its ranks. It received backing from many who grasped actual power. Just as the Xus secretly supported three great organizations, Helios also had more than its share of backers. Some provinces didn't dare oppose the Xus on the surface, but were in favor of Helios from the shadows in order to maintain their position.

These years, the army of the Steadfast Duke focused on Helios members as their targets.

The old man attracted a lot of attention as soon as he reached the door. Powerhouses from other provinces quickly trotted up to him from behind, greeting him warmly, "Inspector General Yu is here as well! We would've traveled with you had we known you were coming. We'll be safer with the inspector general around."

"We can go back together." The smiling old man turned with a nod.

“Then we’ll have to impose ourselves on you!” The group of people chatted and laughed at the door, hardly seeming like they were here to offer condolences.

Xu Xing soon appeared and plastered on a fake smile when he saw the old man. “Inspector General Yu’s here, please come in...” His smile vanished and sorrow took its place. “My brother has most unfortunately met with disaster. Thank you all for making the trip.”

The speed with which he switched moods was startling. He smiled to express his friendliness and sorrow because his brother and nephew had lost their lives. It was a memorial ceremony today, so the proper tone had to be struck.

“My condolences!” sighed the old man as his smile disappeared as well. “To think that Light Sword and the others would be so bold! Li Hao is so vicious as to force a kind soul like the Steadfast Duke to send off his own blood. We hope that the duke looks out for his health and lives long. Do not let this be his downfall!”

Hypocrite! Xu Xing cursed inwardly. Living long wasn’t sarcasm as even martial masters and supernaturals didn’t necessarily live long. If one didn’t resolve the issues of weak organs, sometimes one hundred years was the limit of one’s lifespan. Thus, there was nothing wrong with these words, it was just displeasing when it came from this one’s mouth.

“This way please, inspector general!” Xu Xing didn’t want to say anything else. You’ll know in a bit! Even though the family’s suffered a grave loss, we’re still out of reach for you!

The Xus had been apprehensive before the arrival of the Kui Mountain monster spirits. But now if they reached an agreement with the mountains, there were plenty of major monster spirits that they could call on. Although the snake king was only a metamorphosis expert, its bloodline and body were formidable. That placed it beyond regular metamorphosis heavyweights.

Just you wait, we’ll see if you can smile after you realize we’ve struck a deal with the Kui Mountains!

Chapter 586: Ceremonial Rites (II)

The old man said nothing and strode forward with his son and powerhouses from other provinces. Servants from the Steadfast Duke's manor led them to the Hall of Ancestors. At the doors, the speaker announcing the visitors hesitated and looked at Xu Xing. Did he announce the person who was in line in front of the old man's set?

Xu Xing met the man's eyes and shook his head minutely. That visitor did not need to be proclaimed. His identity shouldn't be made public. Although everyone knew about him, no one would purposefully speak of him.

A ferocious air wrapped around the person in question. Quite a few followed behind him in a haphazard fashion, but they looked to Big Beard as their leader. He was wearing a short combat outfit and hadn't cleaned himself up for the occasion. There were traces of blood on him as he said from far away, "Is old man Steadfast Duke alright? That little brat Li Hao is entirely too bold! We'll find a chance to chop off his head and offer it to the young master!"

His voice was so loud that it raised a lot of attention. Xu Xing barely managed to squeeze out a smile and stepped forward. "Island Master Hu is here! Please come in!"

The big beard being identified as Island Master Hu continued to boom in a loud voice, "With the young master dead, that makes the second young master the little duke in the future! Congratulations!"

Xu Xing frowned deeply. Even if everyone was thinking this, this was not the occasion to say so. This guy was doing it on purpose, wasn't he?

Granted, he didn't want to offend the guy. On the surface, Big Beard was the master of an island in the East Sea. In reality, all eastern provincial powerhouses knew that was the leader of the strongest pirate crew in the East Sea, the equivalent of the Starlight Pirates in the North Sea. However, while the Starlight backers were mysterious, it was well-known that the Steadfast Duke backed the one in the East Sea.

Despite that being open knowledge, the two sides hadn't been much in contact with each other before. Here the pirate was, showing up today!

Some of the attendees were grave, some contemptuous, and others irate! The provinces along the coastline were often harassed by Big Beard and his men. That was plainly under the duke's authorization as well then, meant to weaken them. Now as they saw Big Beard today, some folks itched to rush up and execute him!

"The Steadfast Duke really is... confused in his old age!" transmitted a few scornful powerhouses. "These kinds of people can not be acknowledged in the open. He's summoned the Red Beard Pirates in order to exert his influence!"

"And what can you do about it? Red Beard is very strong. While he's an island master of the East Sea on the surface, everyone knows that he's a pirate. But since the official authorities haven't identified him as such, he's still a decent citizen on the outside."

"Red Beard is seriously bold to come on shore..."

"What, are you going to kill him?"

The other speaker fell silent. Red Beard was incredibly strong and rumored to be at the metamorphosis level. He wasn't here alone—several experts followed by his side. Who would dare ambush him under these circumstances? Not only would they possibly fail, but their actions might rouse the ire of the Steadfast Duke.

"Let's find a news agency to expose him later..."

"You first need to find one that's willing to publish the report. Besides, what will it matter if ordinary people know about his identity? What will that change?"

All discussion came to a halt. Across the way, Red Beard laughed heartily until one of his cultivators transmitted a few words.

“Men and gods alike shake with fury at the young master’s death.” He replaced his smile with a tragic expression. “Heaven and earth weep at your loss. Please contain your sorrow, second young master. You can come to me to take your mind off things when you have time. Although the open water does not measure up to the land, everything can be found there. You can vent a thing or two...”

He flashed a meaningful smile that he quickly tucked away.

A sorrowful Xu Xing pretended like he hadn’t seen it and exchanged a few more pleasantries before Red Beard led his contingent inside. Various local officials followed after him, as well as some powerhouses with their identity concealed. They weren’t announced either, but were carefully greeted by the second young master and shown inside.

At the end of the line, some people dressed in black robes with a large sun insignia on their chests walked in. Xu Xing’s eyes widened—Helios members! His family hadn’t invited the organization, but here they were.

That rounded out almost all of the factions in the entire eastern continent, aside from a very small handful. Even the three great organizations that the Xus were at odds with had sent representatives. It looked like they wanted to probe the depths of the Steadfast Duke’s remaining strength.

Xu Xing greeted the last of the visitors all the same and surreptitiously set watchers on them, before showing them in himself.

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Li Hao was watching from a distance, counting the visitors one by one. So many powerhouses! he registered with shock. Almost all twenty-one provinces, including Calm Borders, had sent Novas. Various organizations headquartered in those provinces had also sent representatives, which meant some provinces had sent more than one Nova!

Counting all of the attendees made Li Hao's head ache. There were thirty-two Novas here! That was incredibly frightening! The Steadfast Duke himself already possessed many Novas—his three generals, two stewards, and some resident experts sported balls of light around them. That was almost a dozen to the young man's eyes. Added to that martial masters that did not possess balls of light... There were almost fifty Novas gathered here!

This was mind-numbingly terrifying!

Of course, this wasn't the result of one faction, but a gathering of all of the elites in the entire eastern expanse. There were more provinces in the east than in the north. If one Silver Moon could produce so many experts beyond Nova, this sum of Novas was only normal given the dense concentration of mysterious power in the east.

As they say, we have to travel through the world to understand how tall the skies are and how vast the earth is...

He'd wanted to outright seize the Windchaser Boots before! With all these heavyweights present, it might be easier to ascend to the heavens instead. While they weren't part of the Xu banner, they would leap to defend the duke in order to curry favor. Having been local overlords for so long, the Xus wouldn't be enemies with all of the factions in their domain. At least a third of the provinces supported them, if not half. The duke wouldn't nurse the goal of conquering the east, otherwise.

But with so many present, it made Li Hao hesitate. Perhaps deception was more suited for the occasion. Ah, whatever, he'd adjust his actions based on what he saw. He wasn't sure what these people had in mind. If they attacked the Xus instead... that was perfect, he could fish in troubled waters.

"Envoy, the ceremony is about to begin." The feminine second steward knocked on the door at this time. "The second young master invites the envoy to attend the proceedings in the Hall of Ancestors. What might the envoy..."

"Coming!" Panther rose when the door opened automatically.

Led by the second steward, one man and one dog proceeded toward the Hall of Ancestors. It wasn't too far as it was also in the complex. Li Hao sensed various strong presences churning in the distance before he arrived. There really were a lot of powerhouses present.

Outsiders could not enter the Hall of Ancestors during the family's ceremonies. They all waited outside, but were seated in chairs. The times were not as they once were and some customs had fallen out of practice. If the royal family still ruled the world, these people would have to stand as they came to offer their condolences.

These days, instead, there were seats for the most important personages. Those deemed unimportant still stood.

The doors to the Hall of Ancestors were open and quite a few Xus inside. There were many concubine-born descendants apart from Xu Qing and Xu Xing, and the duke had his siblings as well. They were less well-known, so no one cared about them.

The hall teemed with Xu family members. Only on an occasion like this did one discover that a family with two hundred years of history was quite enormous. Since they didn't practice monogamy, many of the Xu men took concubines and multiple wives. Some had two dozen children, so it was standing room only for the men inside the hall. There were likely many who didn't even have the right to enter the hall.

Panther's appearance immediately became the center of attention. Expressions shifted minutely. Monster spirit!

Whether it was those from the Firebright or East Pole provinces, everyone was surprised. First it was pirates, now it was monster spirits... The Steadfast Duke was brazen in his doings! Where had this monster spirit come from? It was only a mediocre Solar. Of those present, no one was below Solar, apart from Xu family members.

Panther sauntered cockily down the path, arrogance dripping from every pore. It was actually almost weak at the knees—as was Li Hao. There were so many powerhouses here!

Of course it would go weak at the knees when stared at by so many people. But as a descendant of an ancient monster spirit and one who'd seen great occasions like these, a domineering act was called for. As Panther trembled, Li Hao blasted out with a mental ripple, "What are you all looking at, imbeciles?! I'll scratch you blind if you keep looking!"

Some expressions shifted drastically at that! Many people turned to the second steward, waiting for the Xus to react. On the Xu side, Xu Xing quickly walked out of the hall, inwardly berating himself for forgetting how cocky the monster spirit was. Although it was only a Solar, its arrogance knew no bounds!

The family knew the inside story and why it was so conceited, but not everyone would. If someone not in the know grew enraged enough to kill the monster spirit, then the family would be in grave trouble.

"Please excuse us, everyone." He swiftly walked forward with apologetic smiles. "The monster spirit envoy has different customs from us humans. He doesn't mean to give offense... Allow me to introduce the dragon god envoy from the Kui Mountains! Not only is the envoy representing the Kui Mountain monster spirits, but it is the descendant of an invincible existence with a noble status of its own!"

Kui Mountain monster spirits! Although some in the crowd had guessed at the truth, since there were only so many sources of monster spirits in the east, the last sentence was rather confusing. What descendant of an invincible existence? What kind of existence warranted such an introduction?

Within the crowd, Red Beard's eyes shifted rapidly and he blustered, "Second young master, who dares call himself invincible in this day and age?"

"Hmph!" Li Hao snorted. "Shut up, red hair trash!"

Red Beard glowered ominously!

“Please be at peace, envoy and Island Master Hu!” Xu Xing hastily cautioned with great pain. “This one is the descendant of an ancient monster spirit, does everyone understand? An ancient bloodline runs in its veins and its ancestor is still alive!”

Do you all understand now?

Chapter 587: Ceremonial Rites (III)

Expressions shifted after Xu Xing’s explanation, including Red Beard. Was this true? Everyone present was a notable figure, they naturally grasped the meaning of the second young master’s words. People rocked back on their heels with incredulity. How was it possible that a monster spirit from the ancient times was still alive?? That was an untold number of years!

Dynasties rose and fell, seas changed into mulberry fields and mulberry fields into seas, and it’d been less than twenty years since the rise of the supernatural. When compared to the ancient monster spirits... Everyone was well aware that those who were still alive now would be terrifying beyond belief.

However, they still found it hard to believe! Were the Xus just scaring them? Had they scrounged up a minor monster spirit from somewhere to fool them, so that the family could subdue all sides?

As strong as the Kui Mountains were, it wasn’t that those assembled couldn’t afford to offend one metamorphosis expert and a couple of Novas. Sure, that was frightening, but the presence of an ancient monster spirit made the Kui Mountains too horrifying to provoke!

Even Red Beard fell silent, but he was skeptical. He glanced at Xu Xing, not knowing if the man was just bluffing or speaking the truth. And were descendants of ancient monster spirits supposed to be this weak? This one was only mid Solar!

He wasn’t afraid of the Kui Mountains since he was also a metamorphosis level expert. He could just flee to the seas if he killed this monster spirit. The mountains were of land—if the monster spirits dared enter the sea, he would let them know that the East Sea was an entirely different proposition to land.

But if there was a surviving ancient monster spirit... then he would not court death either.

Li Hao was equally apprehensive in this gathering, but he composed himself when Xu Xing started paving the way for him.

“Listen up,” he announced in a newly arrogant voice. “Those of the Kui Mountains are about to enter the world again. You humans will listen to us or taste the wrath of the monster spirits!”

Fury dawned on some faces while Xu Xing inwardly cried with agony.

“Envoy,” he transmitted. “The customs of humans are different from monster spirits. There is no need for the Kui Mountains to provoke so many people and there’s no need for you to go toe-to-toe with them for anything...”

“Most of these people respect the mountains, but there are a few who regularly speaks ill of your home. The fiery old man is a powerhouse from Firebright province. His name is Yu Qiao and he’s so bad that he can’t be spoken of!

“The one wearing a small crown is the eldest son of the East Pole Duke in the East Pole province. That duke once said that he will exterminate the Kui Mountain monster spirits sooner or later...”

“The one in black robes with the emblem of a large sun is from the Helios organization. They’ve secretly killed many monster spirits as well...”

Xu Xing suddenly had the inspiration of setting the monster spirit on their enemies. This monster spirit loved to run its mouth, so it’d be best if it offended all of these factions to a point beyond salvage. At that point, the monster spirits would have no choice but to partner with the Xus.

It’d be even better if they started fighting on the scene. That would give the monster spirit a taste of hardship. The Xus could then step forward to alleviate the situation and save the monster spirit. That would make the circumstances more meaningful.

Quite a few thoughts swiftly ran through Xu Xing's mind, while Li Hao grasped an equal degree of understanding. These three must be feuding with the Steadfast Duke. This was good!

"You there!" Panther turned toward the old man with white hair. "Little Xingxing says that you said you'll exterminate monster spirits! You've got some balls! This king would like to see how strong you are to be so cocky!"

Xu Xing blinked, then cursed to himself. Fuck! I didn't tell you to say it out loud! Did it do so on purpose or is it really such a blabbermouth? I wouldn't have said anything if I'd known beforehand.

Although he knew the truth that not everyone was friendly with each other, that was all under the table. No one was openly hostile to another party. But thanks to the dog, everyone knew that it was the Xus stirring up trouble from the shadows—well, more like openly stirring up trouble.

The second young master felt overwhelming regret. He wasn't afraid of the consequences, but the circumstances were too awkward and too embarrassing. There was nothing he wanted to do more than to crawl into a hole after his blatant machinations were revealed.

"And that monkey!" Li Hao didn't let up. "When there is no dragon god in the mountain, the monkey proclaims himself king!" [1]

The eldest son of the East Pole Duke glanced wordlessly at Xu Xing. Yu Qiao also frowned, but didn't say anything.

"And the fellow with the red dot around your chest." Li Hao then turned to the Helios member. "How dare you secretly kill monster spirits! This king will tell the dragon god when I return to the mountains. We'll take care of you!"

"....." Xu Xing was completely dead on the inside and he hastily said, "The envoy is quick of word and mouth, he speaks what his heart thinks! Don't misunderstand, everyone, it's just a joke..."

Everyone in the crowd looked at him, with some cursing to themselves. Misunderstand? A joke? Any fool can tell that this is a result of you transmitting something to the monster spirit. It's not the sharpest, so it talked about everything you told it.

The three factions that were mentioned were quietly contemplating the situation. Some were thinking of the implications of the Xus working with the Kui Mountains. Others were secretly plotting murder. The monster spirit came with quite a background. It'd be interesting if it died in the Xu manor.

Xu Xing didn't look like he was putting on an act. He really did seem fearful and resigned toward the golden monster spirit. That was proof of its uncommon background. If it died here, would that sour relations between the duke and the Kui Mountains?

Killing intent briefly flashed through certain people, but Li Hao could sense it. He blinked, then thought of the reason why. Someone wants to kill me...

The Xus certainly wouldn't want him to die here. They were certain of his identity and would sooner let Xu Xing die than himself. Otherwise, unimaginable vengeance would be upon them. They would protect him if he clashed with the visitors, wouldn't they?

Despite the thoughts, Li Hao's heart quailed. What an... exciting feeling! He would be done for if the Xus didn't care about him, but if they did and truly protected him, then things would be interesting then. Perhaps he could create a massive disturbance by himself. Those three parties probably all wanted to kill him and pin it on the Xus, but didn't dare do so openly. Therefore, those impulses could only remain mental thoughts.

But what if he taunted them and created some confusion?

Numerous ideas floated into his mind to be dismissed equally quickly. It wasn't a good idea to be so obvious. At the very least, he hadn't seen the Windchaser Boots yet. He had to see them first and confirm they were real before taking such action. Otherwise, it wouldn't be appropriate for him to do so.

Xu Xing led him to a special seat—not a chair, but a golden cushion on the ground. It looked like something the family had produced overnight. Panther sprawled lazily on it, finding it quite comfortable.

The rest of the gathering looked at the dog, to which Xu Xing heaved a sigh of relief. All was well so long as the monster spirit didn't say a word. He could just be a backdrop to intimidate everyone with.

“Envoy, then I shall head into the hall first to host the ceremony...” he transmitted to Li Hao.

Panther waved an impatient claw; the man swiftly disappeared inside the Hall of Ancestors. Li Hao brazenly extended his consciousness into the hall, prompting startled glances from many. How bold! But the Xus turned a blind eye or tacitly permitted the monster spirit to do as it would. This was further confirmation that the monster spirit was of a noble identity, that it dared and was allowed to probe the Xu Hall of Ancestors at this time.

Li Hao didn't see the Windchaser Boots after making a circle of the hall. There was something like an offering table in the back of the hall. Judging from its shape, this was where the Windchaser Boots were normally offered. At the moment, there was nothing on it.

Didn't they say that the Xus would offer up the boots for three days at their ceremony? Were they not doing so this time?

Xu Xing put everything out of his mind and proclaimed in tragically modulated tones, reciting words of mourning with fury and anguish. “Oh venerated ancestors above, the Xu family has a heritage of hundreds of years and bend ourselves to the utmost for country, for nation, for people, for the world. We do not rest until we are met with death, but my eldest brother Xu Zhen died woefully in the hands of Silver Moon malefactors. We are even met with those who betrayed us and killed our generals...”

Each and every single word brought tears to the eyes of those listening. Li Hao and Light Sword were naturally the villains and murderers he spoke of. Those outside listened with immense sorrow. Some lowered their heads with a sigh, others clenched their teeth with fury. Only they themselves were privy to how genuine their emotions were.

“Your descendants were unfilial and had our heritage treasure be seized by the villains. We are ashamed of this and will return with it...” Xu Xing continued as a disturbance sounded outside the hall.

Li Hao blinked when he looked back. An old man was striding toward the hall—logically speaking, he should not appear at the memorial rites of his son and grandson, yet here Xu Qing was. Several formidable generals followed by his side.

He held up a boot in his hands and walked forward with it raised high. His expression was coldly stern as he approached the Hall of Ancestors.

“Descendant Xu Qing is incompetent and has lost face for the ancestors!” His voice carried out. “We have lost one of the Windchaser Boots and have only one left! We were too ashamed to offer it and bring further humiliation down on our ancestors, but the Xus stand erect in the east and will rise after our shame! As the ancestors be our witness, we will take back the other boot, hunt down our enemies, and clear our name!”

He respectfully placed the boot on the offering table, drawing bright-eyed looks from many present. Li Hao was even more direct and sent his consciousness toward it! No one followed suit, but he wasn’t afraid. Xu Qing seemed to have expected it and didn’t stop the monster spirit. He knew that it wouldn’t be able to help itself when the boot appeared. This was why it was here.

Li Hao hastily inspected it—he really was afraid of carrying off a replica. How nice was this, he could take his time inspecting it in the open. Regular people wouldn’t be able to determine if it was real or not, but he had the other one. All he had to do was to compare their internal energy—that was a characteristic very hard to fake.

All the same, it was difficult to come to a conclusion. He brusquely transmitted to Xu Qing, “You are the Steadfast Duke? The item is too far away from me. Can this king personally inspect it to see if it is what the Kui Mountains needs?”

“Naturally,” Xu Qing responded via transmission without a flicker of change in his expression. “But please wait a moment, envoy. You can inspect it when the ceremony is over.”

As eager as Li Hao was, he held himself in check at this moment. Then he would wait!

Chapter 588: Demon Sword Erupts in All Directions (I)

Countless notions floated to the fore of Li Hao’s mind. The Steadfast Duke and his people knew full well that the Kui Mountains wished to work with them, so they probably wouldn’t falsify anything with the boots. Should he take it as soon as he confirmed it was real? Or should he wait?

Endless ideas flowed through him as Li Hao kept a firm grip on his impatience. He focused on observing everyone else’s supernatural ripples instead. Some people’s energy was undulating fiercely—they looked to be very worked up. If it wasn’t for the Xus being so domineering, someone would’ve portably already made a move for the treasure.

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Not only was Li Hao staring at the Windchaser Boot, but so were the powerhouses outside the Hall of Ancestors. While they didn’t dare send their consciousness to scan it, a light glittered in their eyes as they stared fixedly at the item. This item was rumored to be one of the treasures of the eight families!

Some of the effects of Li Hao’s divine sword had become known to the world. Countless people were tempted by it. If the Windchaser Boots were part of that group, would they contain the same abilities?

Yu Qiao suddenly furrowed his brows as he looked at the boot. He sensed an extremely provocative mental ripple around him. The old man tilted his head to see the enormous golden dog looking at him with a vicious look. It even addressed Yu Qiao, “What do you think you’re looking at?? The Xus have decided to give the boot to the Kui Mountains, so stop drooling over it!”

Yu Qiao raised an eyebrow. Not only did he hear these words, but so did other people around them. They were surprised, but didn’t say anything.

So this was the case! The Xus had traded the Windchaser Boot for a partnership with the monster spirits. No wonder the family hadn't reacted earlier, this was the truth behind the scenes.

A variety of thoughts filtered through Yu Qiao's mind. If the Kui Mountains needed the item, what if it was lost? And what if this monster spirit died? Wouldn't that destroy the basis of cooperation between the Xus and the Kui Mountains, and also cause the Xus to suffer monster spirit rage?

Various trains of thought flooded his mind. They could never let this partnership solidify! There were too many monster spirits in the Kui Mountains as well as ancient monster spirits. If this came to pass, then the rest of them would only be able to bow their heads to their overlords. Resistance would be impossible!

He looked at the eldest son of the East Pole Duke and the vice head from Helios. The three locked gazes, reading each other's intentions from their eyes. This cooperation could not be permitted to succeed, or there would no longer be a place for them in the east!

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In the Hall of Ancestors, the Xus continued their declarations of revenge through gritted teeth. That they had brought shame to their ancestors was repeated ad nauseam before they recounted the illustrious family history and future aspirations. The Steadfast Duke had lost a son and grandson, but the memorial ceremony was being held like a rally to pledge resolution before a war.

Such were the methods of a politician. If they didn't make use of the dead to publicize the Xu family philosophy, then that death would be an utter waste!

Those outside listened quietly; no one raised a word of protest. After one long hour, wails and sobs finally sounded in the hall as the Xus began mourning Xu Zhen and his son. What might the father and son duo think if they were still alive?

The crying signaled that the memorial was pretty much at an end. Li Hao had been long shifting with impatience. He transmitted to Xu Qing when he saw the man relax, "Steadfast Duke, this king

can take a look at it now, can't I? This king has waited for so long and must have an answer to whether it is real or not. Stop wasting my time if it's useless!"

Xu Qing inwardly cursed to himself. This golden dog possessed absolutely no manners! It'd been a very long time since anyone had dared be so impudent to the overlord of the east. Not even Yu Qiao and the others standing below dared talk to him in this manner.

"You can," he transmitted in response after some thought. "But... does the envoy have a way to determine if it is useful or not?"

"Of course!" Li Hao dismissed arrogantly. "It's a small matter, I just need to influence the core origin power inside. Of course, none of you guys understand this. This king will know if it's useful or not with one glance. Why do you think I am the envoy and none of the other monster spirits?"

That may be true, but the key point was that none of the other monster spirits were as arrogant as you! It looked like the Kui Mountains snake king was also borrowing this monster spirit's identity to intimidate the Steadfast Duke. Otherwise, the duke would more likely than not refuse to lend out the Windchaser Boot to any other monster spirit that came.

Xu Qing wasn't a benevolent sort, he transmitted again, "If this boot is confirmed to be real and useful for the dragon god's ascension, can we trouble the envoy to say a few words?"

"What words?"

"An announcement declaring the alliance between the Kui Mountains and the Steadfast Duke, that the Kui Mountains are willing to send out their monster spirits to help the duchy pacify eastern unrest." Xu Qing needed a public declaration of intent. Not only that, but he added, "We also need a batch of Water of Life. We will lend the Windchaser Boot to the dragon god for free and trade mysterious power stones or other treasures for the Water of Life. It would be even better if the envoy is willing to trade what you have on hand. We have urgent need of vast quantities of Water of Life!"

“You want to trade that trash?” Li Hao asked with distaste.

“We have better offerings than what the envoy saw in the treasury. The mysterious power stones are of higher quality and are not the ones that you saw.”

“Then that will do, this is a small matter. General Oak just needs to absorb some energy to produce Water of Life. That’s very simple... I thought it was something complicated.”

General Oak! That was probably the ancient plant spirit’s name. So it’d been a general back in the day? The golden monster spirit spoke so easily of creating Water of Life. So it seemed that the ancient records were true—the stronger the plant spirit, the easier it was to produce Water of Life.

Xu Qing envied the arrangement. What a pity there was no plant spirit at his complex!

All factions should possess some Water of Life, but most of it came from reserves found in ruins or dregs located within withered plant spirits. No one had an unending source from a living origin.

The duke was quite excited by the notion as a large quantity of Water of Life was very useful to enhance the five organs. He wouldn’t have to just save it for critical moments! If he could fully unseal his battle strength in a few quick days, who in the eastern provinces would still be his match?

“Today, we hold a memorial for my son...” After Xu Qing concluded his discussions with Li Hao, he looked outside the Hall of Ancestors. “I should not be saying anything at this point, but the dragon god envoy from the Kui Mountains has arrived and has matters to announce to everyone. Please come forward, dragon envoy...”

Panther strutted his way into the hall with a graceful swagger. The powerhouses remaining outside watched with glittering looks. Had the partnership been agreed upon? But they were in the Steadfast Duke’s manor, this was not a place to start things.

Yu Qiao and the others contemplated ambushing the golden monster spirit outside the city. There was no need to take action here. It would be a chaotic melee if they did anything in the complex. All sorts of powerhouses were present—supporters of both sides, undeclared third parties, and other affiliated organizations. It would be a massive affair if a fight broke out and the truth hard to conceal otherwise.

They had to exit the city if they wished to kill the golden monster spirit. The group would find a desolate location and kill the Xu escorts as well!

It was a given that the duke would send an escort with the golden monster spirit when it left. Xu Qing was no fool and wouldn't give them a chance to do anything. It was down to a matter of who was stronger and made the better preparations. This was a game of strategy between the two sides, and the golden monster spirit's survival the key condition of winning.

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Li Hao touched the Windchaser Boot through Panther, sending a tendril of mind intent into it. A faint wisp of sword energy flowed into the item through the dog, eliciting a minute tremble from the boot. It was real! It looked like the duke hadn't dared bring out a fake.

Xu Qing's eyelid twitched when he saw the boot tremble; he was secretly shocked. Even he was unable to fully manipulate the Windchaser Boot! He could somewhat direct its power, but this ancient monster spirit could arouse a reaction from it with the slightest move. A heritage that went back far was mighty indeed.

"Not bad, it does have core origin power," Li Hao's voice rang in his ears. "But it's not that dense... probably because it's not a complete pair. This is good enough, though! So this king will be taking it!"

"Envoy!" Xu Qing's eyes widened, startled. It was taking the boot, just like that?

“What?” Li Hao’s tone turned unfriendly. “You said you would lend it to us. Are you going back on your word?”

“No... It’s just... Envoy... According to custom... We need to present this in the hall for three days...”

“So what? This king will look after it. Who knows if you’ll swap it out for a fake when this king isn’t looking? They all say that humans are crafty—not I, but my ancestor!” Li Hao thought a bit more. “Don’t worry, this king will announce the alliance between you and the Kui Mountains right now. Even if I leave now with the Windchaser Boot, you will not be worse off since you have the promise of alliance as made by this king!”

Xu Qing was conflicted by the exchange, but it did make sense. However... it was still uncomfortable to watch his family heritage treasure being taken away in front of his eyes.

“Are you willing?” Li Hao’s tone turned even more unfriendly. “Then forget it! I’ll leave this here and the Kui Mountains can search for another divine weapon. We’ll come back for another look if we can’t find one, but it might not be this king that comes next time!”

Panther threw down the boot. Xu Qing shifted it back to an upright position. Though he was torn, he quickly said, “No, you misunderstand, envoy. That is not my meaning. I am just regretful that I cannot lend the full set to the dragon god.”

“This king understands, the other is in that Light Sword’s hands. All of it will be the dragon god’s sooner or later. So long as the dragon god successfully ascends, that Light Sword is as good as dead!”

Xu Qing could only comfort himself with these words. Light Sword had taken one boot and not paid anything in return. Instead, she’d killed a lot of his people. Now the other was being traded for immense support from a massive faction... That was good, this was no loss.

Don't blame me, ancestors above. This is for the family's future. When the Xus fully come into our own and conquer the world, we'll have our share of whatever treasures we wish. I'm sure you won't censure us then.

Chapter 589: Demon Sword Erupts in All Directions (II)

Li Hao directed Panther to open its mouth and swallow the Windchaser Boot. Xu Qing watched it disappear with a pang to his heart. It was gone!

Xu Xing also watched with reluctance. Their family's heritage treasure... was completely gone! While the monster spirits spoke of returning it, reality might be entirely different. Since the family had lent it out, they should expect to not see it again. That made this an easier pill to swallow. Constantly being concerned about it made for continual discomfort.

Those outside also saw the scene—Yu Qiao and the others looked on with solemnity.

“Then this king will go outside to announce the news,” Li Hao transmitted. “You want to intimidate those fellows, don't you? That's easy enough. How dare they insult monster spirits! I will be sure to tell the ancestor when I return to the Kui Mountains and let these humans know right now that monster spirits are not to be insulted!”

Now that sounded much more pleasing to the ear.

Panther sauntered outside. In its stomach, Li Hao held both boots and thought for a bit before shoving them on his feet. Not only that, but he hesitated before transmitting to Panther, “Panth, I... want to do something pretty far out in a second. I want to rip through your stomach, so you'll suffer some heavy injuries. I'll give you more energy after that's done, what do you say?”

Panther's eyes widened! You... want to kill this dog?

“Pretend like you've been ambushed by someone, do you understand? When your stomach is opened, activate your bloodline power and spontaneously erupt with strength. Attack Yu Qiao or the young master of the East Pole Duke. After that, you can feign an inability to match them and be

beaten back...” Li Hao rapidly sketched the instructions for putting on a show. He wanted to create a massive disturbance.

The young man guessed that these people wouldn’t necessarily do anything here, but also that he himself wouldn’t be able to retreat if he didn’t do anything. They might waylay him outside the duke’s territory. Meanwhile, the duke would send him back with an escort. The situation would be tricky to maneuver around then. The Steadfast Duke wouldn’t let him go back alone.

Once they reached the mountains, despite the big snake being willing to help, Li Hao didn’t want to create greater trouble for the snake. His previous thoughts had been that having the help of a major monster spirit was for the best. What did the life or death of a monster spirit have to do with him?

But the great snake had helped maintain the integrity of his cover—there was a tie of connection between them. Therefore, Li Hao had to reveal his identity before he left. He needed to ensure that his actions would not affect the Kui Mountains, that he was just borrowing their name. Once he exposed himself, everyone would know that all of this had nothing to do with the mountain.

That would also prevent trouble from descending upon the Kui Mountains.

Be it humans or monster spirits, Li Hao’s principles were the same. I help you, you help me. Since the big snake was willing to help him, then he could not bring annihilation down on its head.

Panther wasn’t very willing.

“There’s enough sword energy!” Li Hao transmitted.

Panther was still conflicted.

“I won’t ride you next time, you can ride me instead...”

The dog's eyes brightened. Now that was more like it! As scary as ripping apart the stomach sounded, monster spirits possessed durable bodies. Hence, it wasn't outside the realm of consideration.

"I'll use Water of Life to heal your wounds."

Panther had no more objections after the latest suggestion. With that, Li Hao understood that the dog had agreed.

"Walk closer to them!"

Panther strutted its way to those assembled outside, toes high and nose in the air—the very picture of unbridled arrogance.

"The Kui Mountains monster spirits are willing to officially ally with the Steadfast Duke!" Li Hao expressed through mental ripples. "When this king returns to the mountains, the dragon god will immediately send out five Novas, one hundred Solars, and a thousand monster spirits beneath Solar to assist the duke in Calm Borders!"

A variety of expressions flickered across faces at his words. Some beamed from ear to ear! Those people were certainly from the duke's faction. They were all in good spirits upon hearing the golden dog's words. Five Novas, one hundred Solars, and a thousand other monster spirits... that was enough.

"Not only that," Li Hao continued bluffing. "But the Kui Mountains will supply the Steadfast Duke with five hundred drops of Water of Life every year..."

BOOM!

Everyone jerked with surprise; the duke's heart skipped a beat. He almost burst out with curses in his surprise. You don't need to talk about that! We'll be targeted for our riches now that you have! This will result in unexpected trouble on our heads!

But he quickly thought of another possibility—this might actually be a good development. He wouldn't need to be wary of too much with the Kui Mountains supporting him. This might even be a good opportunity to recruit some people—those premier heavyweights! After all, five hundred drops of Water of Life was an astronomical figure!

Yu Qiao and the others looked very unpleasantly. Was the monster spirit joking with the number of five hundred drops? Was it bluffing? If this was true, what was the point of fighting anymore?

Yu Qiao despaired—why had the Kui Mountains suddenly appeared on the scene? Judging from the looks of things, they really did have support from ancient monster spirits, and more than one at that. Damn it, why??

The Xus were hotly ambitious and the rest of them just wanted to protect themselves. Was there anything wrong with that? Why must they be treated in this manner?

Yu Qiao wasn't willing to accede to fate, but there was nothing he could do. The only decision he could make was that the monster spirit had to die here. Even if he himself died in Calm Borders during the attempt, he needed to preserve an avenue of retreat and spark of hope for Firebright province.

As Yu Qiao made ruthless plans for the immediate future, the eldest son of the East Pole Duke was likewise immensely grave. The golden monster spirit pranced beside them and looked at them sideways with quite some arrogance.

“You humans better not think of overturning this partnership. It's impossible! This king is no fool. There may be humans who wish to kill me, but there will be powerhouses from the Kui Mountains soon to welcome me back...”

The Steadfast Duke was starting to find this behavior untoward. There was also a thing called too much arrogance! This kind of talk would easily infuriate Yu Qiao and the others. They might put their lives on the line and fight to the death if pushed too far. It was enough to just intimidate them—even rabbits scratched and bit when they were backed against a wall.

The duke's expression changed midway through his thoughts. It was fast—so fast that he didn't see anything before the golden monster spirit cried out with anguish and clutched its stomach. A bloody mark had appeared and large quantities of blood gushed out!

“ROAR!!” An anguished cry rang through the air. An enormous monster spirit manifested, its presence ferocious like it was a giant primordial beast.

“Ancient monster spirit...” gasped someone in the crowd.

“Damn you all!” Li Hao rasped. “How dare you ambush one of a noble ancient bloodline!”

ROAR!

The roar shook heaven and earth as Panther slammed a paw down on Yu Qiao. The man was actually in an incredulous daze himself. Who'd done it? They were very bold! But there was no time to consider that much. Something had happened to the monster spirit, it was attacking him, and the Steadfast Duke would never let him go for this even if he wasn't behind it!

“Kill!” he shouted and punched Panther. “Xu Qing wishes to capture all of us in one fell swoop. He is colluding with monster spirits and pirates. Kill him!”

The crowd milled about restlessly. The eldest son of the East Pole Duke clenched his jaw and strode through the air, a spear materializing in his hands to stab toward Panther! The Helios representatives also made up their minds in a series of flickering expressions. This partnership could not be allowed to succeed!

“This king will remember you guys!” Li Hao snarled. “Firebright, East Pole, Helios... Await your destruction! The Kui Mountains will avenge this slight unto the death!”

The Steadfast Duke was watching the proceedings with horror. He still couldn't determine who it was that had attacked the golden monster spirit. Were there powerhouses acting from the shadows?! And yet, now wasn't the time for an investigation.

“You bastard!” The duke punched at Yu Qiao's group, his presence soaring to the sky. “How dare you! Everyone, help me capture these cretins!”

Although he was concerned about experts hidden in the dark, he couldn't very well watch the monster spirit die in front of him. He wouldn't be able to shoulder the responsibilities if that happened! How had a simple show of strength turned into this... It was shocking that Yu Qiao and the others were so bold as to attack at this time!

Perhaps they weren't the ones behind the initial attack, but they made their moves as soon as it was injured. It was plain to see that they'd already decided to kill the golden dog.

BOOM!

Powerful presences erupted in all directions. There were so many that the earth started shaking. Countless buildings around the hall were leveled and various powerhouses of other provinces were also buffeted by the winds. Some were frightened, others were grave.

Who should they help? Do they help the Steadfast Duke or Yu Qiao and the others?

“Stand with us!” Yu Qiao shouted. “Do you think Xu Qing will show you mercy if we die? The Xus are ruthlessly ambitious and have long wanted to conquer the east. All of us will die unless we become their dogs! Use this opportunity to kill this monster spirit! The Kui Mountains won't know the truth! It will be the death of the Xus when the ancient monster spirits come for them!”

Some among the crowd were tempted by the words; a dark shadow flashed toward Panther. It was obstructed by other powerhouses in the next second.

“You bastard Yu Qiao!” Xu Qing roared. “You will die today!”

Damn it! Everything had been going so well, but this imbecile dared mess everything up for him!

“Retreat with the envoy!” Xu Qing blasted Yu Qiao back with a fist and sent the eldest son of the East Pole Duke flying with another punch. He was incredibly domineering, but there were a lot of people standing against him.

He had numerous supporters on his side, but not that many premier powerhouses. The more elite one was, the less willing one was to bow their head to another’s banner. Even Red Beard looked on indifferently and swiftly retreated with his men, not raising a hand to help.

No one could guess at his thoughts given the cold expression on his face. However, he knew that so long as the Steadfast Duke Manor stood, so long as Xu Qing was present, then the Red Beard Pirates would not be his. He would have to take commands from this man for the rest of his life.

But if he was dead...

Then the Red Beard Pirates would be his.

Several people swiftly appeared next to Li Hao. The second steward, Xu Xing, and another premier powerhouse. Judging from his ball of light, he looked to be of the metamorphosis level.

One of the three generals!

Light Sword had killed five generals, leaving the Sky, Earth, and Yellow Generals. This one seemed to be the lowest ranked Yellow General. It was uncertain whether he'd reached metamorphosis, but he looked weaker than Qian Feng and Fan Chang from before.

Chapter 590: Demon Sword Erupts in All Directions (III)

The Yellow General was young and solemnly protected the injured Panther from the madness in the vicinity. He sent a hidden Nova flying with a flash of his sword. The Steadfast Duke remained a dominant force in front of them and repelled strong foes with another punch. "Yellow General, take them to the rear..."

The front of the complex was in shambles. A dozen Novas were locked in battle and the rest were retreating the best they could. They dodged what attacks came their way, or returned blows for self-defense when they were dragged into combat. It was a complete mess on the scene.

"To the treasury!" Xu Xing hastily said.

This was utter pandemonium and some people seemed to have slipped off to the treasury! One had to know that there were only two Solars there. If anyone wanted to fish in troubled waters while these people erupted with open hostilities, it would be an incredible loss to lose the contents of their vaults!

Judging from the situation, the Steadfast Duke was ever more vigorous with older age. The Heaven and Earth Generals were both present, as well as various residence experts. Yu Qiao and the others weren't enough of a challenge. They would be defeated, sooner or later!

Panther struggled fiercely as Li Hao snarled, "This king will not leave! How dare they ambush this king! They deserve death! If it wasn't for this king being able to spontaneously erupt due to possessing an ancient bloodline, I would be dead! Damn it, they all deserve death!"

The rest of the assembly also had their hearts in their mouths. The monster spirit had been a mid Solar previously, but its momentary flare of power had aroused its bloodline, raising it to the level of a Nova in the blink of an eye. No wonder it was so arrogant!

And yet, this further proved that there were differences of strength and nobility among monster spirit bloodlines.

Seeing that it wasn't willing to go and wanted to leap into the fighting, Xu Xing groaned to himself. He quickly pulled Panther back. "Please avoid the keen edge of attention, envoy! When my father takes care of these miscreants, we'll give them to you for sentencing. You are gravely injured, be careful of strong foes in the darkness!"

Indeed, Xu Qing had sent word to his second son that there might be further enemies lying in wait. He hadn't sensed how Panther had been injured just now, but a scarlet line marked the monster spirit's stomach all the same. It was still bleeding. No wonder the monster spirit was so irate!

Panther was in enormous pain and quietly cursed Li Hao for being too brutal. But now was the time to demonstrate the fearsome might of monster spirits! It snarled and roared, breaking free of Xu Xing's grasp. It took the second young master and the second steward's efforts to jointly suppress the dog.

"Retreat! Head to the treasury!" barked out the Yellow General. "We'll leave this place to the duke!"

Boom!

The fighting ahead was intense, but those in the know could determine that Yu Qiao and the others would not prevail. Yu Qiao himself hadn't planned on taking action here, there was just no helping it when opportunity pulled him in. He grappled with a faint sense of unease—who had harmed the monster spirit? Could it possibly be the Steadfast Duke himself putting on a show, so he would have reason to exterminate his rivals?

But with how the circumstances had developed, there was no room for him to retreat. Yellow mud had fallen onto his pants. Even if it wasn't shit, it was shit now!

With the monster spirit injured, Xu Qing would take advantage of this opportunity to kill him if he didn't resist. Yu Qiao had no choice but to bawl to the crowd. "We will stop Xu Qing! The duke's

treasury holds endless wealth and the monster spirit is on the verge of death. We'll kill the monster spirit, seize the treasury contents, and get away free and clear. Who will know who did it then?"

BAM!

Xu Qing sent him flying with a punch, drawing looks from the fleeing powerhouses. That was right, the duke's treasury! And the Xus might be done for if the monster spirit died. Yu Qiao and the others might not withstand Xu Qing's offensive. Wouldn't there be a chance for the rest of them if they all died?

At this stage, who didn't have a bit of ambition? Not to mention that some of them bore evil intentions in the first place. There were representatives from the three great organizations and nine ministries present. In their eyes, this fight was that of dog eat dog. It'd be best if they all died. Countless shadows flew toward the rear yard in the blink of an eye. A livid Xu Qing watched them go!

"Stop them!" Multiple figures materialized throughout the manor with his shout. They were all domineering beyond belief and rushed at the heavyweights from all sides.

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Dragged by the Yellow General and the others, Li Hao fled in the direction of the treasury.

"Everything will be fine after we enter the treasury," Xu Xing said rapidly as they ran. "Although its defenses look mediocre, there's actually another set of defenses available. Once Yu Qiao and the others die, the eastern expanse will be the domain of the Xus... and the Kui Mountains!"

"This king is going to kill them!" Li Hao roared furiously, as if completely uninterested. One drop of Water of Life hit Panther's stomach, causing Xu Xing and the others to suck in sharp breaths. The wound looked severe, but wasn't much to monster spirits.

The golden dog was using Water of Life just for that? Descendants of the rich and noble were different, alright! Xu Xing had fancied himself as a premier second generation in the past—but he was nothing compared to this monster spirit! He would never be willing to spend Water of Life like this!

“Please quell your anger, envoy. The Xus will not show them mercy either after this matter is concluded. They will be exterminated and put to an end!”

Li Hao did not respond—that could not be allowed to happen! These forces opposing the Xus could not really die. If they did and the Xus conquered the east, then he would’ve helped the family take a step forward in their ambitions.

A million thoughts ran through his mind as they swiftly arrived at the treasury. There was no one else here yet. Xu Xing swiftly opened the doors and hid inside with the two Solars on duty. He ignored all of the treasures and quickly brought everyone up to the third floor.

When the group reached the floor, Xu Xing took out a key from his storage ring. Under Li Hao’s surprised look, he carved the air a few times over his head with the key. Something resembling a set of stairs floated out of the air—the fourth floor!

Xu Xing immediately ran upstairs; Li Hao urged Panther into following suit. Xu Xing wanted to refuse entrance, but didn’t say anything after seeing the monster spirit run up.

The fourth floor was very small, as if it’d been isolated by an illusion formation. There was only one item on the fourth floor—something that looked like the fragment of a mirror. Xu Xing sent tendrils of internal force into the mirror and shoved in vast quantities of mysterious power stones.

Li Hao was surprised by a faint energy that wafted out. Moments later, the entire treasury seemed to vanish from the world and the sounds outside completely disappeared.

“This is an ultimate treasure that we excavated from the ruins,” Xu Xing had to explain upon seeing Panther stare at the mirror. “There’s no big use to it other than isolation and concealment.”

He left unsaid that it could also conduct surveillance.

“So long as we hide in here, not even Novas will be able to enter the treasury...”

The current situation of the entire manor floated onto the surface of the mirror. Everywhere could be glimpsed through the reflection. Xu Qing was dominating Yu Qiao. As strong as the latter was as a metamorphosis expert, he was far less of a match for Xu Qing even though the duke was yet to unseal himself. In Li Hao’s judgment, Xu Qing might rival Hong Yitang!

The realization startled and alarmed the young man, and he was even more taken aback by the marvelous effects of this fragment. All was quiet inside the treasury. The occupants were the Yellow General, second steward, Xu Xing, two Solars, Panther, and Li Hao.

The fragment panned around different scenes. Many figures darted through the complex and gathered by the treasury. Plainly, they all wanted to loot the place.

“Bastard!” Xu Xing suddenly cursed. The rest on the third floor charged upstairs, confused.

“Red Beard!” Xu Xing pointed outside. “We invested so much to help that piece of shit rise! How dare he not help my father and bring people here instead! That son of a bitch!!”

He was irate beyond belief at Red Beard’s audacity! If there was another metamorphosis expert and several Novas by the Hall of Ancestors, there would be a lot less pressure on Xu Qing.

“Young master, I will go out and kill him!” the Yellow General announced coldly.

Xu Xing waved him off. That was a metamorphosis level powerhouse. Although the general was also one, he’d barely made it to that level. He wasn’t much stronger than a peak Nova, so who knew who would be killing who?

As the group stared at the mirror, Li Hao quickly turned over possible plans in his mind. Three Novas—Xu Xing barely cleared the threshold for one and the second steward wasn't much at mid Nova. It was the Yellow General who was the thorny issue. Even if he was weaker than usual metamorphosis experts, Li Hao wasn't confident that he could kill the man with one strike.

But he didn't want to think so much at this point. The only thought on his mind was to kill these people and take the treasure with him.

As for the heavyweights outside, especially Red Beard... Li Hao's thoughts turned to the tree root. Could it handle metamorphosis heavyweights? None of these pirates were anything good, so it might be for the best if he could kill that one too.

The Yellow General was standing right next to him, an ambush might work. However, Li Hao couldn't be certain of success. He somersaulted in Panther's stomach when he thought of something.

The dog whined with pain, drawing looks from the Yellow General and others.

"Damn it..." Li Hao hastily said. "There seems to be a unique force in this king's body... You... You seem the strongest. Hurry... help me expel this thing... It seems to be a martial master's aura..."

His claws indicated the general; the general had no reason to refuse. "Don't worry, envoy, I will help you expel that aura. So was it not Yu Qiao and the others just now, but a martial master?"

"It might be a martial master in the pay of those guys!" Xu Xing's voice rang out as he glared at the general. Is there a need for you to explain at this time? This was a frame-up! Whether it was or not, those guys were responsible! The monster spirit envoy had to remember them and ensure that the Kui Mountains wouldn't let them off the hook even if they managed to escape.

The Yellow General understood and said nothing further.

