

Star Gate 601

Chapter 601: Savages from the North (II)

Skystar Academy.

This was a new academy established twenty years ago. Countless descendants of senior officials, children of local officials, and those with extremely strong potential matriculated as students. Today, however, its august halls were so silent that a pin drop could be heard.

Hou Xiaochen coughed and held a list of names in his hand. He stood on a stage and called out, “Xu Ming, Xu Yue, and Xu Rong... Are these students here?”

He swept a gaze over several thousand furious students and coughed again. “Additionally, those that I call next will step forward as well. I am taking a roll call of those whose parents serve in the four institutions of Calm Borders. There seems to have been an insurrection there, so I must bring you back to the Night Watchers for your safety.”

“Hou Xiaochen, the Silver Moon martial world refrains from dragging family members into your feuds! You go too far!” someone shouted.

“My apologies, I am not of the martial world!” Hou Xiaochen smiled with a cough. “I am an official, the Skystar commander, and a deputy director of the Night Watchers. Those who serve in the government do not follow the rules of bandits and thugs. Not to mention, I am doing this for your own good!

“Not to mention, I was once one of the commanders of the Skystar Guards. My mission was to exterminate superhuman elements that did not follow orders. According to prior custom, I should’ve razed this academy already. You can ask the Steppe Prince if you don’t believe me. Was that not the original mission statement of the Skystar Guards?

“What a pity that we are no longer who we were,” Hou Xiaochen coughed again. “The honorable Steppe Prince wanted to eradicate pests, but he was unable to act upon his aspirations! He wanted to

restore the royal family... But ai, I misspeak. Do not misunderstand me! Now we are in a situation of the Skystar Guards being abolished and I shall not speak of it as the Skystar commander.”

An old man with white hair walked out in the distance. His expression was calm as he approached Hou Xiaochen.

“Brother Hou,” he said softly. “You can speak of any matter in private with me. There is no need for such actions. Not to mention, are you sure you can affect the duke in arresting these people?”

Would a man who didn’t care about the death of a son mind the capture of these people? Whether it was his younger brother, grandson, or grand-niece and nephews... Did he care?

The martial world spoke of not embroiling the families of those involved in its grudges, but Hou Xiaochen pointed out that he was not of the martial world. He also said that it was Xu Qing who broke the rules first, to which there was nothing that anyone else could say.

The old man walked out at this time to placate the intruder. If this farce continued at the Skystar Academy, its reputation would hit rock bottom. Who would continue believe that this was the greatest institute of higher learning within the dynasty?

“Do not misunderstand me, I really am cleaning out members of the three great organizations.” Hou Xiaochen struggled with a coughing fit. “I’m not using my position to get even for a private grudge, nor am I that type of person. It’s been so many years, Brother Zhao, but you’ve truly misunderstood me...”

“How about this, I won’t make things difficult for you or the boys and girls. I’ll withdraw from the academy if Brother Zhao helps me with something.”

“Please speak of it.” The old man looked at him with mixed emotions. They’d once been familiar with each other and Hou Xiaochen had been under the Steppe Prince’s banner.

Everything was different now.

“The Night Watchers lack personnel in recent times, while highly educated students with great potential are in abundance at the Skystar Academy,” chuckled Hou Xiaochen. “Have them conduct a few missions with me as their graduation exam. I happen to be in the middle of exterminating the three great organizations. These students can do their part for the country!”

He turned to the students that’d brimmed with anger moments ago and smiled at them. “No matter how much you learn in the classrooms, none of it measures up to some actual fights in the battlefield. That is where your talents, knowledge, and strength will shine!

“That Li Hao didn’t learn anything in the Veteris Institute of Skystar City either. It’s only been a short while since he left school, but he’s a premier powerhouse now. He also served beneath my hand for a while... You people need to experience a thing or two. No matter how strong your families are, they cannot protect you for a lifetime!

“The three great organizations are evil beyond compare and burn, kill, loot as they will. No villainy is off limits! I’ll introduce you to blood, seize their treasure, kill evil supernaturals, and dominate the world. Your name will be known throughout the lands—now that’s a life worth living!”

The looks in some eyes changed with his words. No matter how excited the students were, they held themselves in with effort and didn’t make a sound.

The man with white hair frowned slightly.

“We can forget it if you don’t dare,” Hou Xiaochen chuckled. “You are all descendants of large clans and some might be in cahoots with the three great organizations. I wouldn’t want people like that either. They say that Skystar Academy is filled with geniuses, but there are also people that say that you’re just a bunch who got in through connections. Apparently, all of you are just for show. You may graduate as Novas, but Solars in the outside world will beat you black and blue...

“Also, the three great organizations are powerful. It’s normal to be afraid of death, blood, fighting, and their revenge...”

“Are you trying to spur us into action, commander?!” someone yelled. “We’ll go if the headmaster agrees! Who’s afraid of killing members of the three evil organizations?!”

Resignation appeared on the old man’s face. You idiot! you know he’s trying to goad you, but you respond all the same. It’s so obvious that he’s prodding you into action. Hou Xiaochen is completely blackhearted!

These were a group of children descended from highly placed officials. What should happen if they were to die in the field?

First of all, would the three great organizations dare kill these children? If they didn’t, it was their deaths on the line. But if they did, that would be an end to their peaceful agreement with the nine ministries. And the key was, was Hou Xiaochen truly undertaking this to eliminate the three great organizations? Or would he take the students on some other missions as well?

There were many who understood the connotations and an academy powerhouse snapped, “You won’t be taking anyone with you no matter how much you say, Hou Xiaochen! Don’t think that no one sees through your tricks...”

“My tricks? Should we all be exterminating the three great organizations? Or are you colluding with them?” Hou Xiaochen coughed. “Men! Arrest this fellow and take him back for interrogation!”

“Understood!”

Bam!

Golden Spear jabbed his weapon through the firmament and sent the speaker flying. His next stroke pierced through the speaker’s shoulder and nailed him to the spear.

“So you’re an academy powerhouse?” laughed Hou Xiaochen. “Both of you are initial Nova... but you were captured in two blows. And it’s because Golden Spear doesn’t want to kill people, otherwise you would be dead with one blow! Ai, so this is the famed academy education... How ludicrous!”

The old man’s look turned chilly; Hou Xiaochen stared calmly back at him, but with a hint of killing intent in his eyes. If you dare move, I will dare kill you!

Despite the old man being a metamorphosis expert, he gradually calmed his anger. He knew that if they really met in a fight and Hou Xiaochen unsealed himself, the old man would die. As for whether or not Hou Xiaochen would actually unseal himself... it was hard to gauge these Silver Moon maniacs. Xu Qing would not, but those of Silver Moon unsealed themselves at the drop of a hat!

Golden Spear’s moves electrified quite a few students. Was the gap between powerhouses from the battlefield and the academy this big? That had only been two moves!

“Commander Hou, do you have strength requirements for your interns?”

“None. I have uses for any strength level!” Hou Xiaochen chuckled. “Come with me now if you’re willing. I’ve just received word that an insurrection is occurring in East Shore. We will be going now to arrest those at the East Shore Office in Skystar City. They may be preparing to betray the dynasty, so we’ll take them out!”

Color drained from some faces with his words—those students were from East Shore.

“I’ll go!” someone called out eagerly. It was rare to see pitched battle in Skystar City. A province’s representative office in the dynasty’s capital would certainly be staffed with powerhouses.

“Come with me!” Hou Xiaochen soared into the sky with a laugh. The Silver Moon Guards around him swiftly retreated with a wave of his hand. Golden Spear flung the powerhouse on his spear

down to the ground, where colleagues swiftly converged upon the wounded Nova to take him into custody.

“Brother Hou, are you still taking him with you?” The old man frowned.

“Brother Zhao, Headmaster Zhao, I’ll take you if I can’t take him.” Hou Xiaochen turned around and narrowed his eyes. “Take your pick!”

The old man clenched his fists and chose to remain silent. Hou Xiaochen grinned, then gave a bark of laughter that traveled in all directions! It was very cocky and over-the-top laughter!

“Let’s go!”

Hundreds of Guards followed his command. Some of the students looked at their mute headmaster, inwardly despising the man. You’re a metamorphosis expert, a premier powerhouse, one lofty above all... Bah! You don’t even dare resist!

A dozen students rushed out to follow Hou Xiaochen. The man’s unbridled arrogance was right up their alley. They were second generation of the rich and powerful—all of them were audacious in the extreme. They felt that the academy was good enough before, but it was sheer trash to them today!

Witnessing true slaughter at close quarters was what they wanted. More students rushed out to follow Hou Xiaochen. The old man watched them leave.

“Headmaster, he’s too full of himself!” Some furious people appeared next to the old man and transmitted their thoughts to him.

The old man watched Hou Xiaochen’s back and said slowly after a long moment, “No one from the nine ministries, royal family, and aristocracy have stepped forward to stop him. Will you guys stop him?”

The group quieted down, but someone was still frustrated and didn't understand. "Why?? He's just come from Silver Moon, how does he dare behave so impudently? Didn't they say that they were letting him come here just to humble him?"

And now? He'd become the Skystar commander who wielded great authority! What of those who said they were going to take care of him before? Was everyone like Silver Moon of this ilk?

Demon Sword Li Hao had kicked in the Steadfast Duke's doors and killed his son in front of the duke's eyes. Hou Xiaochen now did the same. Savages lived in Silver Moon territory and the desolate wild lands produced barbarians!

"Why?" The old man was silent for a very long time before he shook his head. "There's no real reason why other than they are willing to unseal themselves. Everyone else doesn't dare to!"

It was just that simple!

Chapter 602: Savages from the North (III)

The problems that arose from unsealing oneself yet plagued superhumans around the world. There was also the hazardous issue of breaking the sixth supernatural lock. No one wanted to incite a battle of even higher levels.

However, Silver Moon did.

Skystar would be able to neutralize Hou Xiaochen if he unsealed himself in the capital, but if then came along Sky Sword, Northern Fist, then Tyrant Blade, Kong Jie, and Huang Yu...

Who wanted to stick their neck out to be the first to handle all of these characters? There was also Earthturner Sword and Light Sword to consider!

Not to mention, Hou Xiaochen was operating within the confines of his duties. He hadn't violated a single regulation, so what right did anyone have to move against him?

The nine ministries were not of one heart. Under such circumstances, Hou Xiaochen had the ability to be this overweening. Silver Moon was beginning to show its brilliance.

"Hmph! I bet that Demon Sword dies in Calm Borders this time! Let's see if this bunch can still strut around afterward! Once the Xus kill that Demon Sword and find their footing again, they'll kill as many of these Silver Moon brats as they wish!"

The old man still didn't say a word. His eyes widened as he abruptly grunted and punched out with a flash of golden light. The light scattered with a loud rumble when a fiery spear sailed through the firmament and pierced through the speaker!

"Shut up if you have no strength!" came Hou Xiaochen's voice. "Those with strength do not speak, but those without bounce up and down for all their might. Brother Zhao, this person openly says to kill a deputy director of the Night Watcher Silver Moon branch. You have no opinion about me killing him, do you?"

"You should stay away from mutinous sorts like these!"

The old man was at a loss for words. Blood trickled down his hand and dripped on the ground as the voice vanished. He looked into the distance with a complicated expression of shock. Hou Xiaochen must have broken through! Not in terms of cultivation level, but number of supernatural locks saturated. There must be more than when he killed Elder Red Hair!

The old man was a metamorphosis expert, not an initial Nova, but his hand had been run through all the same! Had Hou Xiaochen concealed his strength before, or had he improved recently? When the old man looked at the dead initial Nova and the trembling academy experts around him, he sighed and left.

There was no prestige left to the Skystar Academy after this occurrence. As he thought, it was unfeasible to imitate the martial universities of old. The student body was a motley crew, the

teachers were a motley crew, there were too few powerhouses, and everyone was afraid of death. It was a far cry from what could be found in the ancient times.

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At the same time.

The coastline of East Shore province.

Yuan Shuo smiled at the towering waves in the distance and flew toward the center of the bridge with the stone blade in hand. Such a massive disturbance should be felt throughout the entire sea. Do you feel it, little Li Hao? Even if you don't, Xu Qing should be aware. Will you come, Xu Qing? Or will the experts you command come?

Yuan Shuo smashed his hand forward like it was a missile! The blade cut through the void and executed the few survivors of the towering waves. Their blood sprayed over the East Sea.

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"Bastard!" Xu Qing snarled. He'd received a lot of news in a split second.

The East Sea Bridge had been bombed out of existence, the East Sea pirates had suffered heavy losses, his manor was being searched and property confiscated, Hou Xiaochen killed his younger brother at the front doors, and the Inspectorate had sent notice to the dynasty to demote him from duke to marquis!

Right and wrong, as well as legitimacy, were still needed in this world. Due to his unilateral action in haphazardly firing city annihilation missiles, it created a similar threat to all provinces in the land. People would soon follow in his footsteps if he wasn't made an example of, which would throw the world into chaos!

Demoting him by one rank didn't affect his influence, but it was a greater loss than anything to the Steadfast Duke. He gnashed his teeth and howled at the sky. How dare they!! Was the Inspectorate crazy?! How dare they publicly reduce his rank?!

The key thing was, the royal family had agreed and the other eight ministries tacitly approved of what they'd done! Plainly, they all felt that he'd set an undesirable precedent and couldn't be allowed to continue in this vein.

"Damn it!" he cursed, incensed. He hadn't given much thought to utilizing the city annihilation missiles—it turned out that the consequences were much more than he wanted to bear.

Xu Qing tamped down the violent rage in his heart and looked at a little black dot in the distance. Li Hao was getting ever further away. While the du—marquis was being harassed by these infuriating matters, the young man was making his getaway. These Silver Moon bastards were all crazy!

Indeed, Xu Qing felt that they were all nuts. It was Li Hao who'd called upon him with nefarious intentions, it was Li Hao who acted first! But these Silver Moon crazies declared war on him for another crazy!

The marquis set his jaw. He had to swiftly kill Li Hao to quell this matter. The young man would be worthless when he was dead. Didn't Silver Moon want to protect him at all costs? Then Xu Qing would kill him! That would make all of his losses and effort worth it.

His blood qi rose with a muffled grunt and fortified his presence. The man reluctantly swallowed one drop of Water of Life. Even he didn't have much of it; each usage was a waste of life itself. But now, he needed to conclude the battle as soon as possible!

Xu Qing slightly undid the locks of his five organs. Newly enhanced, he broke through the air and shot straight at Li Hao. The young man couldn't be allowed to run so brazenly any further. He would lose his quarry if this chase kept up!

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Up ahead, the look in Li Hao's eyes sharpened. He turned back for a look and saw that the Steadfast Duke that he'd almost entirely thrown off had accelerated again. The panting young man cursed to himself. That old codger had really partially unsealed himself, hadn't he?? He was crazy! If the strain on his body went beyond the capabilities of Water of Life, he would waste all of his previous efforts!

Li Hao had judged Xu Qing to be someone who didn't easily unseal himself. Reality had proven to be a surprise again...

He must be backed into a corner and want to kill me as fast as possible, the young man mused to himself. Perhaps someone was forcing the old fart's hand. Who? Silver Moon?

It could only be Silver Moon. Those old geezers truly had some skill to their name to force Xu Qing to these straits from so far away. However... you guys are bringing too much pressure down on him! He's gone crazy! I could've lost him if you waited just a bit longer! He might've felt that he had plenty of time before and thus didn't lose his mind so quickly.

You guys are gonna be the death of me, this wasn't the right time!

Silver Moon must have taken action from the shadows, but their timing was off. They were too early as Li Hao had yet to draw close to the sea. If they'd waited until then, he stood a very large chance of outright escape.

And yet, there was no helping it. They didn't have firsthand information, so they could only make the best judgment call possible.

Li Hao grit his teeth and swallowed Stellaris with a surge of blood qi. He operated the Breathing Method of the Five Styles to its utmost and directed endless sword energy into his body. He zipped across the sky with a new burst of speed.

Xu Qing cursed behind him. The boy had more power to draw on?? What the hell was Li Hao made of?!

The young man was as white as a sheet, but he leered. Surprised? There's more where that came from!

The supernatural lock of his sword was saturated, so he tried partially breaking it. It proved too hard to manage, so he had to use the sword aura against the formidable lock. I'll just snap half of it for now and see if I can bring even more strength to bear. If I can, I'll pick up speed again! Choke on your own spit, old fart!

Li Hao was flying in the direction of the East Bridge. He hadn't heard the massive explosion, but sensed a surge of energy erupting and churning over from that direction!

Given the amount of commotion, he guessed that perhaps reinforcements had arrived. As for who they were, he didn't know. He would have to take a look first. It would either be Hong Yitang or Light Sword. Light Sword would help him because she wanted him to suppress the energy within her body, and Hong Yitang would help him because he... was a good guy, right?

Those two were the only possible candidates—Li Hao didn't even consider the possibility of his own teacher. There'd been news of his teacher at first when he entered the central region, but there'd been none recently. Perhaps watchers had lost sight of him, perhaps he'd run off with Jadelight Sword, or perhaps he was digging up graves. Who knew?

His teacher was so weak that it was useless if he came!

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Hunter and quarry panted heavily. Li Hao fled in the direction of the East Sea Bridge for all his worth. He was chased by a brooding Xu Qing.

Despite having somewhat unsealed himself, the marquis still couldn't immediately catch up to Li Hao. His face darkened as he looked in the direction where Li Hao was running. The East Sea Bridge had collapsed from the missiles. Whether it was unexpected developments in East Shore or something else... Xu Qing did not yet know. Perhaps there was someone on the East Shore side waiting to rescue Li Hao.

If Li Hao convened with his rescuers, that might create a lot more trouble for Xu Qing. Everything was on the table at this point of the chase. He grit his teeth and cracked his locks a bit more, then swallowed two more drops of Water of Life. A surge of vitality entered his organs and circulated swiftly through them.

However, the energy could not be directed to heal damage at this point in time. All his efforts would be for naught if that occurred. And yet, that growing sense of being cut apart deepened the longer he refused to repair his locks. It was a terrifying notion.

He ultimately stood strong against the fear and shot forward, his legs propelling him as if two rockets. Xu Qing covered one thousand meters in the blink of an eye. Sonic booms abounded as the marquis picked up speed.

Up ahead, Li Hao's jaw dropped. The guy had truly gone crazy! The rich and noble did not sit under the eaves, for fear of falling tiles. You're not a pure martial master, you're a duke! A hotshot! Why are you trying so hard?

Seeing that the gap was closing between them, a crystalline root suddenly appeared in Li Hao's hand. He roared and tossed it at his pursuer. "Eat this and die!"

Xu Qing's pupils contracted violently! He immediately ground to a halt and climbed higher in the sky, horror in his face. That thing had killed Red Beard with one move—he'd seen it with his own eyes! He'd been guarding against this possibility all this time, but almost forgotten about it when Li Hao continuously failed to use it.

Chapter 603: Return of Old Demon Five Styles (I)

Seeing as how Li Hao had his teeth gritted in fury and looked like he wanted nothing more than to kill Xu Qing, the marquis didn't dare meet the young man head-on. He was confident that he was

much stronger than Red Beard, but even so, that thing would heavily injure him or break more of his supernatural locks, even if it didn't kill him.

Xu Qing didn't dare take the risk, so he chose to evade the oncoming collision. The item's effects wouldn't last too long. One second, two seconds, three seconds...

Up ahead, Li Hao once more widened the gap between them.

The crystalline root floated upon the air... and floated... before it fell to the ground. Xu Qing froze with surprise, then looked at the running Li Hao with a vicious glint.

You lied to me, not once, but thrice!

"Li Hao!" Xu Qing roared as he broke through the air with a loud boom and shot straight at the young man. Does this little bastard take me for a fool to lie to me again and again?

Li Hao couldn't be bothered to respond. Anyone would've been scared to death by what he threw out, what a pity that it only had any force the first time. If he had a second tree root, he might use it to great effect right now. His opponent might not care about the second root after falling for it once and kept charging him.

What a shame that he only had one of them.

The young man almost regretted his actions. He'd used it on Red Beard when he didn't know how strong the item was. Red Beard was just a metamorphosis expert without the strength to unseal himself. Li Hao should've just ignored the pirate. He hadn't known that the tree root of core origin was so strong that it could outright kill Red Beard! Otherwise, he would've saved it to use on Xu Qing. He'd thought that it could only handle superhumans around peak Nova. Killing Red Beard had exceeded his expectations.

“You won’t be getting away, Li Hao!” Xu Qing flew at an ever faster speed as his presence grew stronger. The ominous look in his eyes grew more foreboding. This brat had caused more losses to him than could be imagined! These losses would be hard to make up for if he did not kill Li Hao today!

Having just fallen for a trick, the gap between them had grown bigger. Xu Qing once more shortened it as Li Hao looked at his burden of Panther with resignation. This dog was still bald even now. Should he just leave it behind?

The black dog seemed to sense something and looked at the young man with innocent eyes of suffering. Li Hao laughed ruefully. It was quite a show of composure that he could still laugh at a time like this. He wasn’t afraid as everything that’d happened today did not measure up to the fear that the scarlet shadows had brought to him when he was a weak mundane.

After he crushed his mental demons on that day, he was no longer afraid of any of this. He could see the sea in the distance now, and a bridge that continued to collapse. At the same time, he saw lots of soldiers. There also seemed to be weapons aimed at him, but their threat wasn’t as great. They might be city annihilation missiles, but the marquis didn’t seem inclined to have his people fire them.

Xu Qing saw his people as well. The army unit ahead plainly possessed more missiles, but he didn’t give the order to fire. He couldn’t use any more of them. If he did, that might truly create great trouble. The nine ministries, royal family, and Silver Moon were all warning him and other places were getting their kicks in when he was down. If he continued to fire missiles with abandon, the east might be divvied up by various sides before he killed Li Hao.

As Xu Qing scanned the collapsing bridge, he didn’t see anything in particular. “Steadfast Army, stop Li Hao!” he roared.

In the distance.

There weren’t that many soldiers on the bridge, less than one thousand. However, many of them were sweating profusely with fear. One Nova was in residence, as were several more Solars. Mostly mundanes made up the rest of the unit and they all carried guns. At the moment... they were shuddering with dread.

The Nova struggled with his liege's command. He'd served the Steadfast Manor for many years and became a Nova with the faction's support. Therefore, he didn't dare ignore orders. All the same, he was well aware of how strong Demon Sword was. He hadn't been afraid when the Heaven and Earth Generals were present, but the two generals were now gone and he was holding down the fort by himself. It was... a truly daunting prospect.

Yet when his thoughts turned to how Li Hao must be at the end of his tether and that he only needed to delay the young man for a bit, his fear abated slightly. It was comforting to consider that his liege would be here soon.

"KILL!" yelled the general, rising into the air with three equally terrified Solars. They blocked Li Hao's path while the soldiers beneath shot into the air with trepidation. They were so far away that they wouldn't hit anyone.

City annihilation missiles were out of the question, but regular bombs fired at the young man! Li Hao could also vaguely sense that someone else had come. It was a peculiar perception that had him raise an eyebrow to the distance. It wasn't Hong Yitang since there was no indicator in the armor. The red dot seemed very far from him.

It felt like... someone from the same source as him!

Li Hao's eyes widened as he groaned to himself. Was it his teacher? You've got to be joking! Now? I'm being chased by a powerhouse beyond Nova, what are you here for? You're a weakling who may not even be able to kill a Nova, what are you doing messing things up at a time like this? It's nice to have thoughts of rescue, but... you've gotta be aware of your capabilities!

I might have to go rescue you instead!

No matter how dismayed he was, he couldn't avoid his opponent any longer. The more he ran, the more his teacher would charge toward him and possibly fall right into Xu Qing's hands.

“KILL!” Li Hao shouted instead of saying away. He punched out with a fist of a howling tiger emerging from the cage!

Although Panther was now a bald dog, it was infuriated to see weaklings dare stand in its way. It howled and opened its mouth, devouring heaven and earth like a black hole. A powerful suction force held the Solars in place, no matter how they struggled to free themselves. The appalled Nova officer found that his mysterious power was shaking, as if it wanted to break free of his body.

Color draining from his face, he held his terror in check and brought his blade down on Li Hao! The young man is just a Nova... and I'm also a Nova... There shouldn't be that big of a difference between us, right? I just need to stop him for a while, even if it's just two or three moves.

BOOM!

Heaven and earth shattered when the punch connected. The blade fell apart with a loud crack.

BAM!

The Nova's arm split open. Mind intent erupted and sword aura shot into the sky. The momentary collision dazed the initial Nova. His mind seemed to be tearing apart while he saw a sword sever heaven and earth. He grunted, seeing a fist as soon as he opened his eyes.

Bam!

His head split open! The horrified Solars didn't have time to run before Panther's bald tail swept past them. Bam bam bam! They were pierced through and fell into the water beneath like dumplings being tossed into a pot!

One Nova and four Solars were dead in the blink of an eye. The soldiers still firing from the bridge didn't have time to react before a bomb exploded in its chamber. This was the cue for everyone to

scatter, their knees knocking together as they scrambled to throw away their equipment as fast as possible.

Faces pale, they threw down their weapons and armor, fleeing helter-skelter. Li Hao ignored them after a second glance. One couldn't expect too much from modern troops other than the elites of the Silver Moon Guard, Black Armaturas, Skystar Army...

The other armies were mostly the same.

Granted, Li Hao had yet to see the Silver Moon Army and didn't know its particulars. But most armies of modern times could not fight a losing battle. They quickly collapsed when morale took a hit.

Although he'd taken out the army, they'd still caused a bit of trouble for him. Xu Qing's presence was palpable behind him. Li Hao swiftly spun around and no longer ran. He could sense Yuan Shuo's aura. If he left, his teacher wouldn't be making it out.

Li Hao breathed heavily. My master... still thinks the times are what they were. They are different now. This era no longer belongs to you. Xu Qing is powerful beyond imagine and you are unable to measure up to him with your current strength.

He wasn't complaining as his master was no fool either. Yuan Shuo knew full well the gap between these powerhouses and him, but had still made the trek to save his disciple. That was all that mattered. But since his master was here, Li Hao could not leave.

"Go back!" he grunted as he watched Xu Qing rush over. "Xu Qing has unsealed himself and is greater than Nova. You cannot match him..."

He was telling Yuan Shuo to leave! Perhaps he'd be able to hold off the duke for a bit, but the unsealed Xu Qing was so strong that Li Hao could sense his dominating blood qi before the man had arrived. It was truly the end of the line.

Strictly speaking, pressure from Silver Moon and Yuan Shuo's arrival was the real reason why Li Hao lost. He might've made it out otherwise. But could he blame them?

No, and he had to be thankful. They'd paid such a hefty price and risked their lives to save him. How could he blame them for it?

Unfortunately, their kind intentions would be his downfall. Li Hao didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He was still composed, just finding that these Silver Moon geezers weren't that reliable at times. If they still put on a mysterious act in front of me next time, I'll bop them all where it hurts!

But... would there be a next time?

He spat out Stellaris and waved his hand, sending Panther flying. "Take my teacher with you!" The young man's voice echoed in the dog's ears.

Panther whined and a violent light danced in its eyes. It ultimately turned around and headed for Yuan Shuo. It would find a chance to kill Xu Qing for revenge later on!

Xu Qing registered the development, but didn't care. He didn't care about the dog, just Li Hao. He smiled! Li Hao had finally stopped running. He couldn't run, in any case. Xu Qing kicked forward with unfathomable speed, almost breaking the void apart.

The thought of a tornado came to Li Hao's mind. This was his opponent's aura—Xu Qing was a martial master and the strongest martial master among the enemies that he'd met. It was also his first time truly fighting with a premier heavyweight. It was just a split second, but it felt like his own mind intent was about to be torn to pieces.

Chapter 604: The Return of Old Demon Five Styles (II)

This was likely how Light Sword and the others killed one Nova per every move they deployed. Their mind intent was so strong that they ripped the other's mind to pieces and caused them to sink into momentary immobility. That was illustrated when Li Hao killed the Nova moments earlier.

However, the young man was a martial master as well, a premier martial master! Even if he wasn't as strong as the person in front of him, his mind intent wasn't weak and he'd just eaten an entire Goldensky Lotus. This was when his mind intent was at its strongest. He put everything out of his mind and erupted with the auras of his organs!

His mind intent manifested as a sword and the overview of the sword aura appeared. The five auras were forcefully melded into it and a current of sword intent erupted around the young man.

"Kill!" Li Hao screamed as Stellaris flashed forward. He tore into his opponent's tornado with his mind intent. The sword stroke of his ancestor reappeared in his mind's eyes. Clad in silver armor, he rushed forward with his sword!

Boom!

It was a collision of the mental level. Li Hao's indestructible auras of the five swords was immediately scattered upon the wind. His organs trembled and the scene went dark in front of his eyes.

Although the tornado was hacked into two, it still contained an incomparable aura. The aura churned toward the young man and broke through his sword aura!

Pfft!

He spat out a mouthful of blood that was intermixed with pieces of his organs. Across from him, Xu Qing hesitated slightly mid-kick. Surprise crept into the look in his eyes. The boy had an incredible sword aura! However, it was a slightly miscellaneous arrangement and was weaker than his.

The marquis had unsealed some of his battle strength and was stronger than a Nova. This level of strength wasn't anything that Li Hao could measure up to. Xu Qing wasn't like the others in shattering multiple locks at once, he'd broken half of one of his. It didn't give him sufficient strength to kill Li Hao in a split second, but he could easily trounce the young man in his state.

He brought his leg down with domineering momentum! Xu Qing shunted Stellaris off to the side and slammed his other foot into the center of the breastplate. A loud collision rang out, leaving some cracks and a slight caving in of the silver armor.

Li Hao flew backward, everything dark before his eyes before the scene quickly restored itself. He focused his eyes to see Xu Qing regarding him aloofly.

“Not bad! What a pity that you’ve encountered me. Your aura is your biggest trump card, but it is ineffective against me! so this is all there is to a convergence of five auras!”

The marquis mentioned convergence, not fusion. For a premier martial master like Xu Qing, he could see to the truth of the matter as soon as they exchanged blows. Li Hao was very strong in the eyes of regular people, but his flaws were glaringly obvious to powerhouses. In his current state, the young man could have his fun with supernaturals, but would be encountering close shave after close shave if he fought premier martial masters.

Li Hao didn’t have time to think about anything before Xu Qing vanished with a loud thump, reappearing to kick the young man’s head. The silver armor caved in some more as the marquis lectured, “Speed is the only martial method that does not have a counter! But your armor is not bad, it’s high quality. It’s from Battle Heaven, isn’t it?”

“It really is something to still be intact after a few of my blows. Can you bring its full capabilities online though? If not, I can kill you through the reverberations alone!” Xu Qing said all this to disintegrate Li Hao’s will to fight and undermine his confidence. His attacks continued without pause.

Rumble!

Li Hao bounced back and forth like a rubber ball. Completely suppressed, he was at the mercy of Xu Qing’s kicks. He coughed up mouthfuls of blood inside the armor, fully experiencing the gap between him and his opponent. His speed, reactions, mind intent, and auras were less than his opponent...

It was a complete thrashing.

If it wasn't for his armor and the strength of his organs, he would've died to the kicks a long time ago. No wonder Hong Yitang and the others could easily kill peak Novas. When Light Sword and the others unsealed themselves, they positively mowed down Novas.

Xu Qing hadn't unsealed himself as much as they had, but his battle strength was equally overwhelming. A heavyweight like Li Hao who could kill late Novas was utterly defenseless when facing him.

Bam!

The young man slammed heavily into the ground again. He wanted to use his momentum to fall into the ocean, but Xu Qing immediately appeared beneath him and punched him back up, the reverberations traveling through the silver armor.

"Your organs are incredible!" Xu Qing sighed with appreciation. "They're still intact after all of this! Li Hao, you have the strongest organs out of any martial master I've ever seen. Even Earthturner Sword and the others might not measure up to you..."

It was normal for a martial master to have strong internals, but Xu Qing had adjusted accordingly and utilized the most optimal attack pattern of reverberation. If Li Hao really was a Nova-level martial master, his organs should have shattered a long time ago.

And yet, the young man could still defend himself! This was the most frightening of all! Greed dawned in Xu Qing's eyes as he looked at the sword tightly gripped in Li Hao's hands. All of this had to do with that sword, didn't it?

The greed vanished as soon as it appeared. The man's expression shifted slightly as he disappeared on the spot. But when he reappeared, Li Hao was still next to him. The Windchaser Boots glowed with a hue and the young man stabbed out with his weapon, as if he'd been waiting for the marquis!

Li Hao had neither given up on the counterattack nor made use of the opportunity to run, because he discovered that his idiot teacher had come again. Fucking... forget it, I won't bother cussing at him.

Otherwise, his plan had been to feign injury and weakness, then utilize the boots to get away. My dear teacher is so afraid I won't die that he's come to collect my corpse! We'll probably both go to the underworld together now!

Clang! rang out as Stellaris bit into its target. It met with a metallic collision as a set of armor manifested around Xu Qing. The man was startled and slightly incredulous. Li Hao had struck back at him! The young man still had the ability to fight!

If it wasn't for his armor, Stellaris was so sharp that it could've broken his defenses. While his death was out of the question, delivering a wound was already astonishing enough. It was rare for young martial masters to have such battle consciousness and tenacity.

As a duke—since Xu Qing refused to acknowledge the demotion—did he lack for origin weapons? Of course not! There wouldn't be such an array found in his treasury if he did. Not only did he not lack origin weapons, but all of his were premier quality. The armor he wore was the Divine Lock Armor. Based on current classification, it was a sky level origin weapon, on the same grade as the Flaming Phoenix Spear!

Not even Stellaris could break it; its weapon soul would have to manifest first.

Li Hao was thrown backward by massive recoil and resignation appeared in his eyes. He'd anticipated this outcome! A founding duke like Xu Qing was not one of the penniless senior officials or the impoverished Hong Yitang. Nor did he have to work for a living like Light Sword. He was the overlord of an entire region, how would he be short on treasures!

If it wasn't for the lack of boot-shaped origin weapons, he might have another set to use. It was Li Hao's guess that the man might have more than one origin weapon on him.

“Not bad, they were calling you the pride and glory of this generation of Silver Moon martial masters.” Xu Qing Smiled. “Word on the street was that you might be able to raise the limit for Silver Moon’s martial world. I hadn’t believed it before, but today I do. You’d be able to rank among the previous generation of martial masters, not just this generation!”

He kicked out when he finished speaking! His defenses were greatly improved after the armor manifested. Xu Qing no longer had to worry about Li Hao’s counterattack. The young man waved his sword in response to the kick—without shadow or form, the Ghost Shadow Sword!

Willow leaves drifted through the air—the Weeping Willow Sword!

He was demonstrating everything he knew and utilizing the Five Styles offensively. Tiger Roar Through Mountain and Woods, the deer style, and the Nine Forged Force!

BOOM!

Explosions ripped through the air as Li Hao calmly delivered stroke after stroke. Stellaris broke through the air, no return planned in its trajectory!

Sword light illuminated heaven and earth! His momentum was domineering, but it was once more caught up in a tornado.

“Roar!!”

Tiger Roar Through Mountain and Woods as the caged tiger broke out of its confinement. The ferocious tiger that usually found smooth sailing was lacerated by the tornado that Xu Qing had produced from his punch and found its stomach ripped out!

The tiger turned into one of bone, but snarled with reluctance and struck back for all its worth! I have a strong tiger in my heart, one that desires to break out of its cage... but the enemy is too strong!

It was Li Hao's first time being so firmly outclassed. He was utilizing all five styles, but they were shattered. His mind intent was ripped to pieces, his sword bounced off its target, the Nine Forged Force broken...

His organs began to collapse. The mountain caved in, the tiger was on the brink of death, the willow tree withered, the waves quieted, the golden dot exploded...

No matter how stubborn Li Hao was, he couldn't withstand the difference in strength. He slammed into the ground with a tremendous thud and broke it wide open! He didn't say anything, but looked back at the bridge...

My idiot teacher! What are you doing with all the time that I bought you? Why aren't you running and coming back to avenge me after you fuse all five auras? Why the hell must you run this way?? Have you lost your brains??

Xu Qing was about to crush the life out of the young man when he suddenly looked at the collapsed bridge. An irate Yuan Shuo was walking out of the wreckage, one hand gripping Panther's neck. He looked at Xu Qing, then at Li Hao lying in a hole in the ground.

"My idiot disciple... you sent this dog to slow me down and waste my time! I had to take it out first, it's just as dumb as you! I'll turn it into dog stew later on!"

Panther looked piteously at the old man. I was saving you! It was afraid of the old man before and thought that it could easily claw the man to death with its newfound strength. But the situation spoke for itself. Panther had been completely suppressed and dragged back by its head!

The dog cast an innocent look at Li Hao. It's not that I didn't want to take him away from this place, but that the old man is stronger than me and kept me under foot!

"Yuan Shuo!" Xu Qing narrowed his eyes. "I thought it was Hong Yitang here... but I also thought that he couldn't get here so quickly. So it's you!"

“Are you mocking me or what?” Yuan Shuo grinned. “It’s my disciple, so why would Hong Yitang come? It’s been thirty years, Xu Qing, you’re just as dumb as ever. I should’ve shoved you into your mom’s stomach thirty years ago to help you reincarnate into a smarter version of yourself!”

“The times have changed!” Xu Qing sneered back. “Yuan Shuo, this is no longer your era.”

He kicked Li Hao deep into the ground.

Chapter 605: The Return of Old Demon Five Styles (III)

Xu Qing’s eyebrows shot up after he kicked the young man—Li Hao’s arms were wide open as he clung to his opponent. Holding on for all he was worth, he forced out through grit teeth, “What are you blathering on about?! Kill him!”

Why did his teacher have time to chat?? He needed to either run or fight! If he wanted to talk, he should wait until they killed Xu Qing or were killed by him. Otherwise, there would be all the time to catch up in the underworld!

Boom!

Xu Qing rapidly kicked his right foot several times, creating several cracks in the silver armor with sickening crunches. Yuan Shuo, however, did not make a move. He simply watched the action below as various auras swirled in his body. Not only that, but he suddenly opened his mouth and bit down on Panther.

“I’m going to borrow some blood, Li Hao will return it to you later. The blood of major monster spirits has the effect of strengthening the organs. You’re also a martial master dog with an ancient bloodline. The power in your blood is very strong and a perfect match to my needs...” His voice sounded in the dog’s ears before Panther howled with pain. The old man was biting its butt!

I knew it! I knew that the old man wanted to eat me since a long time ago! I thought I wouldn’t need to be afraid of the old man once I got stronger, but he’s totally taking advantage of the situation!

Panther could feel Yuan Shuo sucking its blood as he sank his teeth into dog flesh.

“Awoo!” Panther whined. This was so painful! It’d lost so much blood today, what an awful day!

The sigh stunned both Xu Qing and Li Hao. What... in the heavens? They saw Yuan Shuo bite Panther’s butt, then... lick it??

What the hell?

Even Xu Qing paused in a momentary daze. He immediately realized in the next moment—was this... partaking of blood from a major monster spirit?

Yuan Shuo’s five organs were shaking violently. Four of them were very strong to begin with; his comparatively weaker spleen resulted in a slightly weaker earth aura. It corresponded to the bear aura, which caused some discrepancies between the fusion of his five auras. His wasn’t a convergence, but a true fusion.

The blood of major monster spirits was indeed beneficial for the five organs—that was a characteristic recorded in the ancient records. But modern monster spirits did not possess pure bloodlines. As strong as they were, they didn’t amount to much.

Since Panther’s bloodline had been activated, it was pure enough. It was also a dog that’d feasted on the best energies—Stellaris, Water of Life, core origin... It was fed by Li Hao in the outside world and the old turtle in Battle Heaven. Modern monster spirits fed on a random assortment of energy and a faint miasma of mysterious power. Therefore, Panther’s bloodline was quite good and stronger than even some ancient monster spirits.

Yuan Shuo had sensed this quality as well. He’d been hesitant that the idea was feasible, but discovered that it was a stroke of brilliance! The dog’s blood wasn’t pungent and in fact, was slightly sweet. What a cute little dog! I’ll be better to it and keep it around for its blood...

Panther seemed to sense the old man's thoughts and looked on with humiliation and fury. Damned old man, I'll bite you to death sooner or later!

Yuan Shuo's organs hummed as he ignored Li Hao. Since his disciple could still strike back, that meant he wouldn't die so quickly. He could afford to wait. It was necessary to have effective tools to do good work.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing's expression shifted slightly. He grunted and kicked Li Hao up again. A large crack was apparent on the silver armor as the young man continuously vomited blood. Though sword energy surged furiously into his body, it was still very difficult to withstand these kinds of attacks...

Yuan Shuo threw Panther away. The dog staggered limply to the ground in an extremely weak state. It weaved around like it was drunk—a result of losing too much blood. Panther wanted to cry!

"You've infuriated me, Xu Qing!" a low chuckle rang out before something like a small deer flashed in front of Xu Qing, but resolved as an ape swinging through the air. It darted in close to land a punch!

Tiger, bear, deer, ape, and bird appeared before melding into one—a person! Yuan Shuo!

Xu Qing seemed to return to the days of old. This was what had happened before—Yuan Shuo had used the Five Styles to beat him, the future duke, into a mental collapse. If it hadn't been for the previous generation duke being alive and the Xus having too much status, he would've died that day!

"Do you still think it's that time?!" Xu Qing roared and kicked with his foot! Do you think I'm the Xu Qing you once knew, and do you think you're still the Old Demon Yuan that once dominated the land?!

“You’ll always be that piece of trash!” Yuan Shuo yelled and punched, something jutting out of his fist—the stone blade. One loud collision later revealed a hole in the sky-rank armor that Li Hao had not been able to break!

BAM!

Yuan Shuo was as if a ferocious tiger. When he turned and waved his fists, it was like a tiger whipping its tail around. He hit Xu Qing with another punch and shattered the armor on the man’s right leg!

Li Hao’s jaw dropped and Xu Qing’s eyes were wide with dismay.

“Roar!!” A ferocious tiger roar traveled through heaven and earth!

“Aoou!” A golden eagle spread its wings to soar through the sky.

Five animals manifested like five major monster spirits. One enormous bear threatened to strain the limits of heaven and earth. The earth fractured when Yuan Shuo stomped his foot. Xu Qing had just landed when the ground split open!

Now in bear form, Yuan Shuo deployed yet another punch. The startled Xu Qing froze on the spot, then pushed off with both feet. Terror filled his eyes as he quickly flew an evasion pattern.

BOOM!

Heaven and earth were torn apart!

Yuan Shuo was domineering beyond imagine and looked coolly at the fleeing Xu Qing. “Trash! Aren’t you going to unseal yourself? If not, I’ll outright beat you to death!”

“Impossible!” Xu Qing gasped instead. “How is this possible?!”

Even now, he was the most premier among metamorphosis experts or even a little stronger. But when facing Yuan Shuo... he was the one suppressed!

“Your internal force... your auras...”

“If the only thing we look at is cultivation level, auras, and internal force, then we can forget about experience and potential! What’s the point of fighting then? You’re still that old piece of trash!”

He dove like a bird!

“Idiot disciple, look clearly and see what is meant by a true fusion of the five auras! When the auras are melded as one, I am aura. I am the bear, the tiger, the eagle... I do as I wish!

“I can roar like a tiger, fight like a bear, dance like a deer... It’s very straightforward when the auras are one, there’s no need to switch between them and ultimately lose the key essence of the five auras...”

“Metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. The five auras correspond to the five elements. When I punch, all five elements are deployed. Why would there only be fire and water?”

BAM!

An explosion rang out as heaven and earth shattered. Concurrent deployment of fire and water created a resplendent detonation. Yuan Shuo punched out while clutching the stone blade, sending Xu Qing flying with blood streaming out of a wound!

The man's armor had been punched clean through and furiously worked to repair itself. As he flew back, Xu Qing incredulously vomited blood. Fear crept into the bottom of his eyes. That Yuan Shuo was back! But it was impossible—Yuan Shuo's internal force seemed on par with Li Hao's, yet his aura was much too strong!

Just a single aura by itself wouldn't be much stronger than Li Hao, but a combined five auras was more than simple layering on top of each other. The complete whole erupted with the power of ten or twenty layered auras!

An unpleasant expression appeared on Xu Qing's face as fear settled in his heart. This was a repeat of the suppression of yesteryear, the fear of almost being beaten to death. He thought he'd forgotten, but he plainly hadn't. He thought he didn't care anymore! But it all came rushing back when he faced Yuan Shuo again.

"Trash is always trash," Yuan Shuo sneered like the demon he was. "You became a premier martial master only because of your family, so how are you premier? You're just trash pushed up to your position through an accumulation of resources. C'mon, unseal yourself! Let me see how strong you are when you're not sealed! Martial masters that rely on unsealing themselves for battle strength are all trash!"

"....." Li Hao's jaw dropped. He chose to stay silent and focus on furiously absorbing sword energy to heal his injuries. This offended all martial masters beneath the heavens, especially the premier ones, including Hong Yitang and the rest!

The young man was also stunned—was this the true fusion of five auras? Why? That combination completely overpowered the metamorphosis level Xu Qing. Of course, it also had to do with the man's innate fear of Li Hao's teacher.

Indeed, even Li Hao could tell that Xu Qing was afraid of Yuan Shuo and wasn't confident against his new opponent. He moved timidly against Yuan Shuo, as if another person entirely.

Even so, Yuan Shuo's offensive skill had reached a stunning level when he was able to easily break through a premier martial master's defenses with just one punch and kick. His auras, internal force, and blood qi seemed to have all melded together.

It wasn't just the combination of the five styles, but also some characteristics of the Incantation of the Blade of Blood. And yet, his teacher hadn't utilized the Incantation yet.

Li Hao was lost and found that his confidence over these days had been crushed by his teacher. This was truly cutting deep into a person. He would probably be driven up a wall if he was the enemy too!

Boom!

Yuan Shuo seemed to transform into a golden eagle and curved both hands into claws. He grabbed Xu Qing's arms and summoned a tiger over his arms that bit down on the armor.

The origin weapon was noticeably dented.

Yuan Shuo then twisted his body into an incredible angle and kicked backward with his legs, connecting with Xu Qing's head. The latter snarled irately and flared his blood qi, churning through the land with a tornado. However, Yuan Shuo's five auras shook it to nothing!

"ROAR!" Yuan Shuo suddenly manifested a third hand and, as Li Hao watched raptly, struck upward from below as a mallet!

"AHHH!!" Xu Qing screamed and forcefully wrestled out of Yuan Shuo's grip. He shot into the air, doubled over and clutching his lower body. His face was pale as he looked at Yuan Shuo below. Madness appeared in his expression. "Yuan Shuo, you forced me to do this!"

BOOM!

Something exploded—another supernatural lock! He'd blown two now and his presence soared for it. It eclipsed a He Yong at full strength, despite having only snapped two locks!

Chapter 606: Killing Xu Qing (I)

Anguish and reluctance appeared in Xu Qing's eyes after he swiftly swallowed a large sum of Water of Life. He'd already taken three drops before, now he gulped down seven drops at once. This was all the Water of Life that he had—that he'd bought with him on this chase. He had more, but it was stored with the powerhouses in the ruins. He couldn't take it all with him, even though he was the Steadfast Duke.

Ten drops...

He'd taken it all to protect his organs. His organs couldn't be allowed to collapse and his locks could not fully snap. A powerful presence swept through the vicinity as he was now overwhelmingly strong. He was so strong that Li Hao's heart pounded with shock. Xu Qing was definitely much stronger than He Yong and had more saturated locks than Light Sword!

Light Sword had filled six locks to capacity, He Yong only five. This guy must have managed at least seven, which meant three of the locks around his organs were full. This was the lowest possible number, he might have accomplished more.

Yuan Shuo narrowed his eyes as he considered Xu Qing. Though he continued to call the man trash, he was inwardly very solemn. So this was how much one's strength increased when they unsealed themselves! He himself experienced such a rise with the five areas combined, but at seeing Xu Qing unseal himself, he realized at once that he couldn't measure up to the enemy!

But there was no harm in trying.

"I like challenging the strong!" Yuan Shuo licked his lips with a smile. "Xu Qing, you're not trash anymore. You're... strong trash! Hahaha!"

Boom!

An attack fired into the sky like a flash of lightning. Matchless eruption of force was fully demonstrated from Yuan Shuo's side. He was so well-rounded that even his speed was unrivaled. Xu Qing focused on leg methods, but he wasn't necessarily stronger than the Five Styles King.

Yuan Shuo leapt like a deer, climbed like an ape, and swept through the sky like a bird! Although he was suppressed and on the back foot, the destructiveness of the stone blade still painted a ferocious picture in Li Hao's eyes!

In terms of momentum, Xu Qing still seemed apprehensive. The effects of yesteryear still persisted!

Yuan Shuo backed away after a loud explosion. The look in his eyes remained sharp and a dangerous curve played at his lips. His domineering arrogance knew no bounds despite the fact that he was bleeding. However, an irate voice sounded by Li Hao's ears.

"Are you a freaking idiot?? Run! We can't beat him and I'm going to be trampled after he's unsealed himself!"

Yuan Shuo thought very little of his idiot disciple at the moment. The hell you staring for?? Are you going to run only after you see me pounded into the ground?

The unsealed Xu Qing exceeded the Nova level—Yuan Shuo could not defeat him.

Li Hao didn't make a sound. I want to run, but my injuries are still there. Hold on a bit longer, teacher. I'll be able to run in a bit.

.....

Yuan Shuo remained as dominating as ever, whereas Xu Qing slowly regained his composure. He just needed to conquer his internal fear as he knew full well that he was much stronger than Yuan Shuo at the moment. There was no question about it!

But Yuan Shuo was still able to occupy the upper hand! Why? Because Xu Qing was afraid! They seemed to have traveled back thirty years, to that time when he had absolute fear beaten into him. Today might be his chance to beat those internal demons.

“Yuan Shuo!” He slowly landed on the ground and looked at the old man striking a proud pose. Xu Qing ground his teeth and forced out, “I’m not afraid of you! You’ve given me a chance today to ascend to a higher level as soon as I defeat and kill you!”

“And are you sure you can manage it?” Yuan Shuo grinned. “Are you sure you’re not afraid? Don’t forget how badly off you were that day. If it wasn’t for your father putting in an appearance, I would’ve smashed your head in! Have you forgotten how close you were to death?”

He advanced instead of retreating! When Yuan Shuo took a step forward, Xu Qing trembled like he wanted to back away. The latter forced himself to a standstill and didn’t move. Instead, he raised his head to look at Yuan Shuo.

“You said so yourself, that was back in the day!” A cold look appeared in his eyes. “I’ve swept through the eastern region over the past thirty years and defeated everyone. Today, I am the Steadfast Duke of the east and you are nothing!

“You can only struggle for survival beneath Hou Xiaochen and Silver Moon’s protection! If it wasn’t for those metamorphosis guys hoping to use you to complete the method of the five elements and five organs, you would’ve died a long time ago!

“Do you really think that Ying Hongyue can’t kill you? Do you think that Hou Xiaochen and them can actually protect you? It’s all in your head! The truth is, you’re just a tool to them! Your only use is to perfect the technique involving the five organs. Even if you don’t teach anyone, killing you and analyzing your body afterward is all the same!”

He seemed to be encouraging himself and cheering himself on. Xu Qing shifted his foot and... took one step forward. It was a giant leap, a personal breakthrough in the face of spiritual intimidation!

Just as Golden Spear had been unable to shake off Yuan Shuo's intimidation, he was now stuck beneath Hou Xiaochen's hand and unable to make any progress. That Xu Qing had cultivated his way to this stage didn't necessarily mean that he'd broken Yuan Shuo's shackles. It was that he'd chosen to gradually forget the man over the years, to avoid the pain points of his heart. That was how he evaded the crux of the issue as he did not choose to face it head-on.

But today, he needed to clear this obstacle or he would be caught beneath the heel of a boot each time he saw Yuan Shuo.

"Not bad!" Yuan Shuo raised an eyebrow. "Xu Qing, being a duke for thirty years has helped you grow a spine. You're able to voluntarily take a step forward in front of me. Congratulations!"

Xu Qing gritted his teeth and took another step forward.

"I am one of the most premier martial masters of this land! My blood qi is unrivaled, my body is invincible, my mind intent is full and complete. Someone like Light Sword is but a servant in my eyes! Yuan Shuo, I will shatter my internal demons by killing you and then ascend to the peak of this world's martial dao!"

Xu Qing roared and finally went on the offensive! One could not remain in an unsealed state for long. He also ardently wished to use his own immense strength to suppress this guy, this demon of the martial world!

Yuan Shuo, you've missed out on twenty years of brilliance. You won't be invincible forever!

"Kill!!" A foot shook heaven and earth; it whirled through the air and opened fissures when it landed on the ground. There seemed to be only that pair of legs beneath the heavens! It was too powerful to consider!

Only now did the Steadfast Duke demonstrate his true might. Yuan Shuo was the nightmare of his generation's martial masters. Whoever could break Yuan Shuo's curse was truly worthy of being hailed as the most premier martial master of martial dao.

“Roar!” Tiger Roar Through Mountain and Woods!

Yuan Shuo was a ferocious tiger that breathed out a cloud. It brought with it wind and rain—the five elements and five auras!

It was now that Li Hao seemed to understand what was mind intent and the aura. It was dao! Martial dao! This was the martial dao of the modern world. His teacher once said that those above Dominator were hailed as walking gods. They could do anything with the key of this level—their mind intent and auras. The physical body, blood qi, and others were naturally strengthened when the aura was strong.

Li Hao hadn't understood it at first, then found it potentially wrong. If the rest of the body was strengthened with the auras, why were the organs weak? It wasn't until now that he began to understand some of it. He stared raptly at his teacher, beginning to comprehend some of what he saw.

Yuan Shuo summoned the wind and rain. The power of the five elements drifted through the air, part of it entering his body to strengthen his organs. This was to summon the spirits and nurture the auras, which then nurtured the body!

In other words, Yuan Shuo only lacked time, he hadn't reached a bottleneck. If time was sufficient, he could absolutely strengthen his organs himself. After all, he could absorb the five elements and incorporate them into his body. For anyone else, the five organs were almost impossible to strengthen.

Yuan Shuo fortify out and manifested a small stone blade. It transformed from part of his brass knuckle into a short blade. He was obviously much weaker than his opponent, but in this moment, he manipulated the five elements and struck with his sword. It was like great dao had descended from overhead to subdue the world!

A massive bear floated out of the clouds and stepped down ponderously, looming like a descending mountain. It transformed into a storm, the waves, and into thousands of sword incantations...

“Break!” Xu Qing howled. Wind, rise! A gale wind swept through the scene—not the same level compared to Yuan Shuo’s of phenomenon, but one that was incredibly intense. Winds howled and churned through the land, breaking the bear into pieces and dispersing the clouds and fog.

“Nothing compares to strength!” Xu Qing shouted. “Yuan Shuo, didn’t you say that no matter the amount of tricks, trash is still trash in the end?”

In that case, so what if you have a lot of tricks up your sleeves? You’re trash too!

Yuan Shuo backed away and combined fire and water with a wave of his hand. Heaven and earth exploded and the gale wind stopped. He took another step back without a word! Tricks? He wasn’t employing tricks. Trash like Yu Qing wouldn’t understand. He was using the least possible resources against his opponent. He might be smashed to death in their current straits. Was he supposed to be a fool and present himself for close combat to be tortured?

All he wanted to do was stall for time. Either he tired out Yu Qing or Li Hao could regain movement. The kid looked like he was still healing his injuries. Otherwise, with his smarts, he would’ve run without needing Yuan Shuo to say anything.

Battle erupted once more. Yuan Shuo had shifted from suppressing his opponent to being entirely suppressed. Passively defending, he brought all manner of methods to bear. Nothing was left alive after they passed through it, the fissures in the ground began spreading and seawater flowed into the land.

The coastline was collapsing and towering waves in the distance rearing towards the shore. They were a result of Yuan Shuo’s city annihilation missiles. The waves were coming. As they approached, Yuan Shuo’s tiger seemed to grow stronger.

A surge of water aura burst forth and Li Hao suddenly leapt into the air. He punched with a fist instead of using his sword, nine layers of force drawing the waves forward and aiming for Xu Qing.

Chapter 607: Killing Xu Qing (II)

Xu Qing snorted and kicked out with his foot. The waves broke!

Yuan Shuo cursed to himself. Why aren't you leaving when your wounds are healed?? Dumb kid!

Li Hao, however, did not make a sound. Leave? Why leave? Old Hong was here!

Indeed, Hong Yitang and Light Sword were here and had contacted him. Li Hao's armor told him that Hong Yitang would be here soon, so why should they leave? I'm gonna kill this old fart!! He and his teacher just needed to hang on for a little while longer. Even if they were gravely wounded at the end of it, once the two Silver Moon powerhouses arrived, Xu Qing would have to die with extreme regret no matter what he did. It wouldn't matter if he threw caution to the wind and fully unsealed himself!

Yuan Shuo seemed to guess at something as well and fell silent. Master and disciple called upon all five auras—one as the ferocious tiger, the other as a massive ape. The ape retreated with a loud boom and the tiger dispersed.

Xu Qing was indeed strong beyond belief, but he found that he couldn't kill both of them!

Li Hao swiftly placed his back against Yuan Shuo's and flung out a drop of Water of Life, healing the injuries on both of them. The young man then transformed into a willow tree and took root in the cloud, sending a surge of sword energy into where he was rooted.

Xu Qing struggled to follow their movements as master and disciple operated the Five Styles to the utmost. Sword energy and Water of Life continuously flowed forth. Not only that, but Li Hao reached out to grab the stone blade, tossing Stellaris into Yuan Shuo's hand.

Yuan Shuo slashed down with the sword!

BOOM!

“You can use the divine sword too?!” Xu Qing backed away with incredulity. Why?! Yuan Shuo wasn’t of the eight families, so why could he use the weapons too?

Despite having the Windchaser Boots for so many years, Xu Qing could only study it bit by bit. He could only somewhat manipulate them and not use them. Why was Yuan Shuo an exception and able to use the heritage weapons??

The latter ignored him and was suddenly wearing two boots on his feet. Li Hao’s feet were bare now. No one knew that the Breathing Method of the Five Styles was the reason why the young man had been able to use these weapons. They all thought it was because of Li Hao’s bloodline.

Right now, the young man focused on fortifying Yuan Shuo to the best of his capabilities. He handed over his sword and shoes, crouching on his teacher’s back like a monkey. Blood qi and internal force entered Yuan Shuo’s body via the breathing method—the method of the same origin erupted!

Dual cultivation!

Yuan Shuo roared as master and disciple commenced combat in an extremely odd position. Li Hao rode on Yuan Shuo’s back, Yuan Shuo was as if a mother bearing a child. Or perhaps this was what was meant by the saying of “wolf and bei working together”.^[1] The bei was on top, the wolf on the bottom. Bei was in charge of conducting their movement while the wolf was in charge of attacking.

Yuan Shuo’s presence greatly expanded! He flew upward with a roar and struck with both hands and feet. Li Hao held one hand behind his back and shoved the other forward!

The fist was as if fire, the palm as if wind. Stellaris circled through the air and the stone blade pierced through its movement!

The incomparable Xu Qing was once more suppressed by another degree. He looked on with shocked disbelief and roared with fury, almost rupturing the void when he kicked to the side!

Bam! sounded out.

There was a fist imprinted on his foot. His boot had disintegrated and revealed a bleeding right leg. Yuan Shuo's arm seemed to be broken, but that was promptly healed when Li Hao reached forward with his hand.

Master and disciple engaged in a whirling dance of death with blade and sword! Xu Qing howled with fury again, refusing to accept the turn of matters! This wasn't possible! Their methods stemmed from the same origin, but it was their level of coordination that was too high. Li Hao had practiced the Five Styles for several years, but his strength was too far beneath Yuan Shuo's. They shouldn't have had too many opportunities to fight together. Why could they work together so well?

Bam!

A crack appeared on Xu Qing's armor and he kicked out in response. Yuan Shuo shoved Li Hao forward from his back to take the blow—the silver armor shattered with each kick it suffered. Li Hao bared his teeth ruefully. His teacher was awful!

Plainly, Yuan Shuo felt that Li Hao was stronger than him in terms of physical body, organs, and armor. It was safer for the young man to suffer the kick, but man it hurt!

Li Hao climbed upward like a monkey, as did Yuan Shuo. The two reversed directions as Yuan Shuo once more appeared in front of his opponent. He struck with his sword and connected with a leg that Xu Qing hadn't had time to retract. Another bloody mark appeared as the man's foot was nearly cut off.

Xu Qing took a few steps back and landed on the ground. Fresh blood scattered over the broken ground. He considered the two with a foreboding look.

"The New Book of Five Styles!" A greedy look entered Xu Qing's eyes. "It seems to be able to combine martial dao, core origin, and point straight to the grand dao. Yuan Shuo, you really are a genius!"

He understood why master and disciple could act and fight as one! It was due to the Five Styles! Their breathing was one, their internal force and mental ripples seemed to undulate in the same pattern. This was incredible as methods from the same origin didn't show themselves in such a manner. This was a unique characteristic of the Five Styles!

Everyone had underestimated Yuan Shuo and the Five Styles. This method that'd he'd created as a Sunderer had been perfected again and again into something wholly different.

“Heh, do you want it, Xu Qing? Keep unsealing yourself if you want it! Just two locks aren't enough! C'mon, break three, four, five, or all of them! Break them all if you want a chance of killing me and taking everything!

“The sword of the Lis, blade of the Zhangs, and boots of the Lius will all be yours!”

Three divine weapons! Even Xu Qing was moved by the notion. He was seized by an impulse to erupt with everything he had to kill the two in front of him. They were so rich, and not just in the ordinary sense! The three heritage weapons and Five Styles were the true, ultimate treasures! Any one of them would draw attention from all sides, not to mention that the duo had so many.

Xu Qing snorted as light sparkled from his feet. They landed as if feet of heaven and earth; the look in Yuan Shuo's eyes shifted at the sight.

He backed away with urgency before a massive footprint was left in the ground with a boom. Yuan Shuo's expression shifted with rage!

“Deficient Leg! Did you kill him and seize his secret art?!” Yuan Shuo snarled.

Xu Qing stomped down again. “Cut the crap!” he snorted. “You've killed so many martial masters that those who died of the thirty-six were almost all by your hand. Look at you being so angry just because I killed one Deficient Leg!”

“You should die!” Yuan Shuo raged. “You utter bastard, how dare you ambush a Silver Moon martial master! There would be news shared if he died in a sparring match—you ambushed him!

“ROAR!” A tiger howled its fury to the heavens. Yuan Shuo was incensed, and it was a different kind of anger than would be usually present.

He’d killed more Silver Moon martial masters than he knew, but he was beyond infuriated to hear that Xu Qing had killed Deficient Leg of the thirty-six. He was more enraged than when Li Hao had almost died!

The tiger howled as Yuan Shuo advanced. His sword broke through the air like sharp tiger claws as he brought it down on the foot!

Bam!

The skies and earth collapsed when the foot landed!

“I’ve always wondered why Silver Moon martial masters were so strong.” Xu Qing was wholly unconcerned. “You guys always enjoy great fortune and possess secret arts that are either the essence of ancient martial dao or contain its greatest mysteries. Yuan Shuo, you do indeed have the right to be arrogant. How do you feel now that I use a Silver Moon secret art against you?”

Another foot slammed into the ground! One foot after another drove Yuan Shuo back. Li Hao voluntarily took a few blows—his organs felt like they were going to rupture. It was then that he knew they really couldn’t defeat their opponent!

Deficient Leg was extremely mighty. Xu Qing might have refrained from using his techniques before out of reservation or wariness that Silver Moon might seek revenge on him if he did. But now, he let loose with abandon.

He'd clearly secretly killed Deficient Leg of the Thirty-Six Heroes and claimed his secret art. Who knew if Deficient Leg had been overly confident, or if Xu Qing had used some other way to trick the method out of the martial master?

Blood trickled out of the corner of Yuan Shuo's mouth; he was on the verge of furious madness, but there was nothing he could do! How he cursed his impotence!

He was very strong with the five auras fused together, but his first opponent after his breakthrough was the indomitable overlord of the east. How unlucky! Why couldn't things go smoothly for him for once?

"Almost... there... hang on... a bit longer..." Li Hao's extremely weak voice traveled into his ear.

Yuan Shuo tumbled out of the way of the next foot stomp, rolling both of them in mud. It was quite a pitiful sight.

"Hahaha!!" Xu Qing threw his back with laughter. He was delighted beyond words! His nightmare was trampled underfoot today and he used a secret art of Silver Moon to kick Yuan Shuo around like a beggar in the mud.

Xu Qing wasn't one to make his accomplishments widely known like this, but joy truly bubbled from the bottom of his heart at the moment. However, he soon frowned.

The two martial masters rushing in from the distance seemed to realize that they couldn't conceal their presences any longer. Typically coolly composed, Hong Yitang's eyes glittered with a frosty look. He strode in on the backs of huge waves with cold fury!

"Deficient Leg!" he enunciated carefully.

“You killed Deficient Leg?” Light Sword also forced out through grit teeth. “No wonder that guy completely disappeared. We have news of even Tyrant Blade, but he’s the only one that we don’t hear from. We thought he was hiding somewhere to cultivate, but it was you who killed him!”

Deficient Leg might not have been among the best of the thirty-six, but he’d been an invaluable part of Silver Moon’s martial world. Everyone had their own strengths in the martial world; his was a unique method for the feet and a rare specialized martial master for Silver Moon.

Yuan Shuo had killed quite a few of the Seven Swords, but decided not to kill Deficient Leg after defeating him because Yuan Shuo knew that this secret art was too hard to pass on. Silver Moon’s martial world prided itself on never ending a heritage. As for the swordsmen he’d killed... It was Yuan Shuo’s opinion that the martial world absolutely did not lack sword methods. It didn’t matter if he killed them!

“To sever the rivers!” yelled Hong Yitang as he deployed a move that did not overturn the heavens and earth. It was one that severed the rivers and was an ultimate killing move, not his usual that carried defensive properties in it!

The rivers were broken with his stroke and a sword fell from the heavens. Instead of being magnificent in presence, it blazed with killing intent!

Chapter 608: Killing Xu Qing (III)

“Light!” A blazing sun seemed to fall into the world with Light Sword’s grunt. She unsheathed her sword and snapped her supernatural locks alongside Hong Yitang. Their battle strength was fully unleashed in domineering glory. Their moves traveled thousands of meters in the air and slashed down on their target!

Mind intent soared to the heavens and sword aura threatened to split the consciousness. Immensely startled, Xu Qing shot into the air and ran for his life. He no longer dared swagger around with self-satisfaction. The twin swords were here!

They’d snapped their supernatural locks as soon as they saw him, unlike the duke. He had to hem and haw and determine if there was enough Water of Life to repair the damage. These people weren’t similarly restricted. Although Xu Qing was stronger than Light Sword and possibly even Earthturner Sword, he couldn’t behave as freely as they did.

However cocky he'd been seconds ago was how thoroughly routed he was now. He took to the air to escape, but a bird cry rang through the vicinity. Yuan Shuo shot upward and immediately caught up to him. "There will be no place for Silver Moon's martial world if you do not die!"

It wasn't as if Silver Moon martial masters hadn't died before or fallen to outsiders. But to kill one of the thirty-six through ambush and seize his secret art... All of Silver Moon's martial world would empty out to hunt down the offender! No one would pay attention to the code of etiquette in punishing the offender.

"Out of my way!" The void trembled when Xu Qing kicked out. Yuan Shuo ignored the move and stabbed with his sword. A piercing screech rang out, as if metal grinding on each other. Fiery sparks appeared beneath the duke's foot and Li Hao took advantage of the opening to slash with his blade!

Boom!

Master and disciple fell from the sky, but two bloody marks had been inflicted on their target's foot. Although wracked with pain, Xu Qing couldn't stop to pay attention to his wounds. He was just about to break free of his pursuers when another sword landed!

BAM!

His avenue of retreat was cut off. Light Sword bore down on him; Xu Qing shouted and scattered her light with a punch. His hand returned with blood flowing down it.

The two sword wielders convened in the blink of an eye. Four people on three different sides surrounded Xu Qing in their middle. The duke regarded them unpleasantly. Battle had been so heated earlier that he hadn't had time to check his transmission pendant. If he had, he would've known that the two were close. Master and disciple had kept him here for too long.

"Kill!"

“Kill!”

“Kill!” Four voices shouted in unison and struck at the same time. Three swords and one blade cut down on Xu Qing!

The man gritted his teeth, madness dancing in his eyes. Bunch of assholes! So you guys can kill Silver Moon martial masters and other people, but you go crazy when I kill Deficient Leg?

He knew he could no longer hesitate. A surge of presence erupted from his body and light from the five elements sparkled over him. All of the locks of his organs partially snapped; a livid Xu Qing blazed with blood qi.

“You... bastards!” he shouted as he kicked!

Bam!!

Sword auras burst apart. Yuan Shuo and Li Hao were the first to be sent flying. Xu Qing had completely unsealed himself! Yuan Shuo didn't know how many bones were broken as he plummeted from the sky, vomiting blood and pieces of his organs. He was rather resigned when he looked at his half-dead disciple.

I'm so damned strong, so how am I only a little better off than Li Hao in the blink of an eye? Unsealed battle strength is disgusting!

He sighed again when he looked at the twin swords. Forget it, I won't quibble with you unsealed guys. Keep unsealing yourselves. You can have fun together, you shameless brats!

The twin swords were not afraid of Xu Qing. The duke was quite domineering in his unsealed state, but so were they quite strong. Two swords crisscrossed heaven and earth; a large foot sailed through the air, chased by rays of sword light. Radiance sparkled through the area!

Xu Qing considered the situation gravely—both sides didn't dare delay after unsealing themselves! He had no other options in mind, but so would Hong Yitang and Light Sword be stuck if they couldn't defeat him. They wouldn't have enough time for Li Hao to reseal them. The three were in equally perilous states.

Hong Yitang snorted coldly, a violent light dancing in his eye. The sound of a heart thumping echoed in the void, followed by a sudden snap of something breaking. His presence increased exponentially amid Xu Qing's astonished and shocked eyes. It reached Xu Qing's level before Hong Yitang rushed out with his sword!

BOOM!

Xu Qing's foot was sliced to the bone; blood flowed freely from it.

"Hong Yitang!" Xu Qing denounced. "You're very strong, but none of us will be able to maintain our condition if this continues! One of our locks will break completely, is this what you want?!"

He wouldn't be willing to accept that outcome, and he trusted that neither would the two in front of him be willing to. Who would, with cultivation at their heights? Even now, none of the three were bringing their full strength to bear because their supernatural locks hadn't fully broken. They retained one last wisp of hope. As long as the slightest tendril remained of a lock, it could be repaired. If it fully snapped all the way through, then all hope was lost.

"It would be one thing if you just wanted to kill Li Hao and Yuan Shuo... It would also be one thing if you killed Deficient Leg in direct combat! You assassinated him, didn't you?!" Hong Yitang bit off. "Silver Moon martial masters can accept defeat! You would be someone notable if you killed him face-to-face. How dare you slink from the shadows!!"

Xu Qing cursed hotly to himself! What was the difference?! Deficient Leg may not have been able to overcome him in frontal assault. He'd struck from behind just to save some time and avoid some trouble. All of these people blew his actions out of proportion like they weren't engaged in the business of killing others themselves.

Bam!

Sword qi raced through the void as the three became embroiled in battle. The fully unsealed Xu Qing was formidable, but he was still suppressed by the other two. His armor clung to his body in broken pieces. It was so damaged that its weapon soul emerged. Unseen to this point, it looked like an earth dragon.

Li Hao brightened and abruptly yanked Stellaris out of his teacher's grasp. The stroke of severing the self flashed through his eyes as he stabbed upward!

“Break!”

The weapon soul hadn't been willing to reveal itself earlier due to fear of Stellaris. But as its outer shell was almost completely broken, it had to appear. It thought that those below the combatants couldn't fight anymore; who would've thought that Li Hao would throw himself forward like a madman??

Xu Qing ballooned with rage and stomped down with a foot. The kid courted death!

Li Hao was willing to take the risk because of trust—or perhaps it could be more accurately said, a gamble! He was gambling that the twin swords could protect him. As expected, Hong Yitang swept his sword through the void and overturned sky and earth. The big foot stomped toward the sky, but Light Sword was waiting to stab with her sword!

Xu Qing howled with indignity and wanted to break the auras facing him. Li Hao ignored all that—there was only one goal in his mind, the weapon soul!

BOOM!

A stroke of five auras! To sever the self with no return!

BAM!

Explosions rang through the air as the earth dragon skittered with fear. Stellaris seemed to see a dessert—this might be the strongest weapon soul it'd eaten thus yet. It seemed to turn into a black hole when it stabbed into the weapon soul, erupting with incredible suction force.

The weapon soul wailed with impending doom. “The Eternal Sword...”

Pop!

The weapon soul exploded!

Hong Yitang struck at the same time. The previously durable armor had suffered damage only from the stone blade and Stellaris. The twin blades had barely managed to chip it. But this time, Hong Yitang cut through it like tofu. It clattered to the ground, ruined!

This sky level armor had been the greatest reason why Xu Qing had barely suffered any damage in the battle. It broke the second the weapon soul was forced into materialization. Rage bloomed in the duke's eyes, as well as defiance.

Pfft!

Hong Yitang struck again, as did Light Sword. Xu Qing was caught off guard in his concern over his origin weapon; the twin blades left bloody marks on their target and even sliced off some flesh. The duke had been able to resist before, but he was clearly outclassed now!

A cold hint glinted in his eyes. “Do you guys... insist on dying with me?”

BOOM!

A supernatural lock fully broke in this moment and a blaze of flames appeared to immolate him. Flames covered Xu Qing as he'd chosen to completely snap one of his locks. There was no return from this! He was a fire supernatural after the lock of his heart had broken; his heart was burning as well.

This domineering duke completely cast aside his unrealistic hopes and left no leeway for himself. He jeered after breaking one of his locks, "Since you're forcing me to die, then come with me!"

Hong Yitang and Light Sword had unsealed themselves, but did they dare fully break their locks? Their hope would be gone too!

Yuan Shuo couldn't stop rolling his eyes. These kinds of enemies were annoying. They erupted with renewed strength again and again through first snapping a bit of their locks, then half of it, then all of it... Damn it, you're all martial masters. What kind of cultivation levels have you reached??

"Four supernatural locks..." Hong Yitang looked at Xu Qing. "No, you've saturated eight locks, haven't you? It's not for no reason that you rule over the east!"

"It's not much!" Xu Qing was a foreboding giant of fire. "You seem quite confident in yourself to be so calm. I'd like to see on what basis you are so confident. You forced me to do this, Earthturner Sword, so none of you will be getting away today!"

"It's just one lock," Hong Yitang sniffed. "Break a second and see if your organs can take it! If not, you can just sit tight and wait for death!"

"Death?" Xu Qing snorted and filled the sky with flames when he stomped his foot. We'll see who's going to do the dying! I won't let you off easily even if I die. What right do you have to say all this! We'll just all go down together if it comes down to it!

Hong Yitang seemed ready to erupt with an ultimate move. Li Hao watched nervously from the ground and cast a tense glance at his master. So many people fighting together couldn't kill Xu Qing... so he'd been able to run so far only because Xu Qing was afraid of death and didn't dare unseal himself!

Chapter 609: Killing Xu Qing (IV)

Hong Yitang took a deep breath, he appeared to be accumulating strength for major action. Perhaps he wanted to fully snap a lock, or just unseal himself further.

"Why don't you keep watching, you shitheads! Get out here and kill him!" he howled at the sky instead.

"Hahaha, coming!" A massive fist overshadowed heaven and earth!

"Northern Fist!" Xu Qing gasped.

"Hahaha little Xu Qing, you should feel honored today!"

"This seat is also here!" A long blade cut through the void, dimming heaven and earth.

"Tyrant Blade!" Xu Qing could no longer maintain his composure. All of the color drained from his face, leaving him ashen with dread. Earthturner Sword, Light Sword, Northern Fist, Tyrant Blade, Old Demon Five Styles, Demon Sword Li Hao...

He smiled a ghastly grin. Perhaps Northern Fist was right, it was his honor to die today. Silver Moon martial masters had moved out en masse!

Tyrant Blade was coolly aloof and struck from the sea. His blow towered beneath the skies with a hint of arctic frost. "We wanted to see what a fully snapped lock looked like for a martial master. Now it seems that this is all there is to it!"

“We have to follow custom,” chuckled Northern Fist. “Deficient Leg and I didn’t get along, but you can’t assassinate him like that. I would applaud you if you beat him in direct combat. You need to respect the rules, Xu Qing!”

BAM!

A fist landed to crush the big foot. Tyrant Blade chopped off one of Xu Qing’s arms with a swing of his weapon. There was no room for the duke to maneuver despite having broken one of his supernatural locks. He could not counterattack as he was surrounded by four major powerhouses. Whether in the skies or on the ground, there was nothing he could do.

Down below, Yuan Shuo rolled his eyes. What a pity that he couldn’t unseal himself, he quite envied them! Bah, I mean I disdain them! They’re four on one, they’re so shameless!

Xu Qing was caught in the depths of utter despair. However, a ripple traveled through the void at this time and coughing could be heard in the air. “Qing’er well deserves the loss of an arm for killing Deficient Leg through dishonorable means. Will you show him mercy after that, martial masters of Silver Moon?”

A streak of flame hovered between heaven and earth, one with some waves intermixed in it. Northern Fist raised a brow and Tyrant Blade smiled at the horizon.

“So the third generation duke is still alive,” chuckled Hong Yitang. “It looks like you’ve ascended beyond Nova and completely unsealed your battle strength. Fire and water exist concurrently, but aren’t you afraid of dying in this manner?”

“Father...” Xu Qing sighed, looking morosely at the person walking through the air.

The third generation duke was a supernatural, one with six broken locks! However, those with six broken locks almost always died once they brought their full strength to bear. Not even Water of Life could help them recover.

“I didn’t want to put in an appearance either...” Off in the distance, the doddering old man sighed. “But if I still do not show myself after all of you have come, Xu Qing is most likely completely dead. He has lost an arm and broken one of his supernatural locks. He can no longer be a martial master. Is this price sufficient to pay for his crime of killing Deficient Leg?”

Li Hao blinked. Hot damn! There really were other powerhouses when it came to the Xus. This was one of the powerhouses hiding in the ruins that Xu Qing had spoken of, right? His old man! It was said that the previous duke had died thirty years ago. He’d passed on his position to Xu Qing not long after Yuan Shuo challenged the latter.

Beyond Nova!

This was Li Hao’s first supernatural truly above Nova—not one as a result of a martial master unsealing themselves, but an existence who’d truly broken six supernatural locks. The young man hadn’t caught sight of the enormous ball of light prior to the old man approaching. Now that he was here, Li Hao could see how piercingly bright it was!

The old man seemed to sense Li Hao’s gaze and inclined his head at the young man. Li Hao’s heart skipped a beat! So strong! It was the first time that someone had sensed him assessing their ball of light.

Too many Silver Moon powerhouses had arrived today; it’d forced a personage like this out of hiding. Powerhouses hidden in various corners of the world registered the development with astonishment. The Xu’s foundations were being forced into utilization!

All of the various factions knew that there were certain people who’d broken through the current limits of the power hierarchy, but didn’t dare show themselves. The Xus were the first to display their powerhouse beyond Nova—the third generation Steadfast Duke.

“Killing a Silver Moon martial master... and from the shadows nonetheless.” Hong Yitang grinned. “Do you think just you are enough to end this matter? You’re thinking too simply, old duke. If the Xus are insistent on sticking their necks out, then we will kill!”

The twin swords struck, as did a fist and blade shoot for the same target—Xu Qing!

Despair was writ large over his face. The old duke seemed aware of the Silver Moon martial master style and erupted with fire and ice. An overwhelming aura swept through heaven and earth.

“I knew this would be the case... What a pity that I did not stop Qing'er back in the day!”

One could kill Silver Moon martial masters directly, no one would care about the results of that battle. But to assassinate one and seize their secret art, that was a grave taboo.

There were no pills for regret in the world; the old duke didn't care about any of this. There was no need to hide his strength as he was more than sufficient to handle these martial masters with partially snapped locks.

The group felt fire and ice bearing down on them, but none of the four powerhouses paused to stop the attack. All of them were focused on Xu Qing, as if they didn't see or sense any other threats. Incomprehension and denial appeared in the man's eyes. Why... didn't they stop his father?

Did they all want to die with him? Some of them had to split their attention for his father, why were they all focused on him?

He understood in the next moment.

A massive sword flew out of the void and erupted with extreme metal mysterious power when it landed straight down. Magnificent, boundless, tyrannical, ruthless, killing intent... Too much was part of it.

The sword landed with a massive boom and knocked back the erupting old duke. He spat out a mouthful of blood and exclaimed, “You... you've broken six supernatural locks as well!”

A person hovered in the air and looked coldly at him, mysterious power sweeping through the land.

The old duke looked at his son and smiled ghastly. “The Xus... should not have stepped forward like this!” He vanished with a sigh.

The person in the air remained aloof and didn’t stop the old duke.

“I am... honored!” Despite the finality of his doom, Xu Qing smiled. “Hahaha! What a worthy death I die today!”

Pfft! His head flew out! This powerhouse, overlord of the east, an incredibly dominant existence, was decapitated by a single stroke from Hong Yitang!

Xu Qing exploded!

Off in the distance, grief appeared in the eyes of the swiftly fleeing old duke. My most exemplary son, the one with the most hope in the family of breaking the barrier and exceeding Nova as a martial master, is dead!

Xu Qing had died after the old duke appeared, right beneath his nose. And yet, there was nothing he could do about his son being killed right in front of him. He could not afford to keep fighting. If he did, the entire family’s foundations would be sacrificed.

There were more and more Silver Moon powerhouses charging this way. His son had roused their general ire after killing Deficient Leg. The situation would not be thus otherwise, they wouldn’t demand Xu Qing’s death just for Li Hao’s sake.

The old duke looked back at the man in the void—Sky Sword! A supernatural who’d broken six supernatural locks had emerged from seclusion and looked to be in a much more stable condition. Why?

The middle-aged man looked down below him and ultimately settled his gaze on Yuan Shuo. “I am waiting for you in the next cultivation level, don’t let me wait too long!” He slashed through the void and vanished on the spot.

“Supernatural brute!” Yuan Shuo snorted, slightly dejected despite his gruffness. Damn it! I’m invincible with five melded auras, but these guys come here in the blink of an eye and they’re all stronger than me!

But so what? Whether it’s unsealing themselves or the supernatural, none of them are the proper path!

Right, that’s the case! I’m the strongest when they don’t unseal themselves or aren’t supernaturals. None of them can measure up to me.

Hong Yitang laughed and looked in the direction of the vanished Sky Sword. “Time to run! If we don’t go... there’s a ton of powerhouses around us. Even those above Nova will be coming!”

“Time to skedaddle!” laughed the rest and scattered in different directions.

Yuan Shuo grabbed Li Hao, dragged the dog in their wake, and swiftly ran off. Given the scale of their battle, there would be heavyweights above Nova here soon. With the caliber of strength that’d appeared, even the dynasty would be shaking in the aftermath. Of course, Xu Qing’s death would give rise to great waves of change and shock through Skystar.

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Experts hidden in the shadows reeled from shock.

“Sky Sword... is greater than Nova!”

“And the old duke, but his condition seems unstable. Sky Sword is stable, however. Why is that?”

“The old duke was noticeably outclassed and had to run. Staying would’ve resulted in his death. What a pity about Xu Qing... If he’d had a little more time... What a pity...”

“Silver Moon is a bunch of crazies, they’ve completely emptied out and are showing up with everything they have!”

“The Xu foundations certainly run deep, as expected of one of the three great aristocracies. The old duke is still alive and quietly ascended above Nova! I wonder if there will be open war between the Xus and Silver Moon next...”

Strands of conversation petered out as the observers left. This was no place to linger. Although the Steadfast Duke was dead, the Xus still stood. They might be the first ones to display their hidden battle strength on the open stage. Otherwise, the eastern region would fall into chaos that would slowly engulf the rest of the continents! The death of the Steadfast Duke encompassed many things. It was generally understood that an even greater storm was brewing in the world.

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BAM!

Immense waves crashed upon the shore and obliterated the previous battle site. The East Sea Bridge fully collapsed.

Tremendously powerful presences appeared on the scene not long after all the combatants left. They observed the surroundings, sensed the vicinity, and left just as quickly. Those above Nova had officially emerged in this world. It looked like the rest of them needed to focus on stabilizing their condition and prepare for the next breakthrough.

Chapter 610: Arcanus (I)

“Hahaha!” Laughter reverberated around the sea. A group of people scattered in various directions, their limits as high as they wished to soar. They were as free as fish darting through the vast seas.

Damn it felt good!

Silver Moon martial masters had been quiet for far too long. A bunch of premier martial masters had jointly killed the eastern overlord Xu Qing today; they were all jubilant about it!

It’s your fault for killing Deficient Leg!

When viewed in a complimentary light, Silver Moon martial masters were a group of heavyweights who pursued freedom. When spoken of bluntly, they were a bunch of bandits with some bottom lines—but these bottom lines weren’t all that righteous. Killing one of their own from the shadows, however, was a step over that line.

If Xu Qing had defeated Deficient Leg in open combat, the group might’ve jeered at Deficient Leg for being trash and bringing shame down on Silver Moon. Losing to an outsider in a match was well deserving of death.

This was a perfect example of how complicated Silver Moon martial masters were, and how they practiced double standards. But today, they’d all come in person to save Li Hao!

Silver Moon martial masters could be killed, but not in this manner. Also, Xu Qing could not bully those weaker or younger than him. Even though it was Li Hao who’d created trouble for him, he should’ve sent a disciple of the same generation against the young man!

Mhmm, these martial masters were shameless and proud of it! Their laughter counted to echo over the waters.

“I’ll be off then,” Northern Fist chortled. “Li Hao, as a Silver Moon martial master, you must respect custom! We’re labeled as savages because of you guys who don’t follow the rules. Be a

good lad, I hope we meet under different circumstances next time. Couldn't you have gotten some sort of decree from Zhao before you charged at the Xus? Something like the Xus are rebelling, that they shelter bandits or collude with pirates. There were a ton of possibilities, all of which concluded with you eliminating them on behalf of the dynasty! Now it's you who's more like the bandit. Tsk tsk!"

He vanished after delivering the rebuke. Northern Fist and Tyrant Blade hadn't unsealed themselves much and didn't fight for too long after appearing. They didn't need Li Hao's help and no one within the group looked at their peers with any sort of friendliness. Hence, none of them would stay to chat after the fighting and killing were over.

The thought didn't cross their mind!

Not to mention, Yuan Shuo was still here. They couldn't be bothered with a second look at the old thing. They didn't even greet him! Northern Fist didn't address Yuan Shuo and Tyrant Blade was even more aloof—he left without a word. They did not walk the same paths!

Although Silver Moon martial masters appeared firmly united in the outside world, once back home, there might be news of them killing each other the next day. If strength levels were similar, it was equally likely to hear of Tyrant Blade fighting Northern Fist to the death, Northern Fist punching Light Sword's life force out, or Light Sword slashing Southern Fist to pieces...

This group was just that ludicrous.

While Northern Fist and Tyrant Blade could leave, Hong Yitang and Light Sword could not. They'd unsealed quite a bit of themselves and needed Li Hao's help to suppress their power again. Thus, four humans and one dog traveled together at this time.

Yuan Shuo looked at the other two contemptuously! Even though he was weaker than Hong Yitang and Light Sword, he was disdainful all the same. Neither did the two want to look at him. Hong Yitang was comfortable enough, but Light Sword assiduously evaded Yuan Shuo's direction. Everytime she caught a glimpse of the old man, she also saw him sneer at her like he wanted to hit her.

As expected, the old fart loved his grudges. He must be recalling the news that'd disseminated before about Light Sword bullying Li Hao.

The young man could also sense the strange atmosphere in the group. These guys had just worked together beautifully moments ago to kill an enemy. Now that the enemy was dead, why did it seem like they'd turn on each other just as quickly? Hong Yitang was normal enough, but his master... Why did he look at Hong Yitang with enmity?

Hong Yitang was quite coolly composed, shooting over the East Sea with relaxed ease. Meanwhile, Yuan Shuo sneered coldly. Hong Yitang knew why the old man did so and treated him to a bland expression. Inwardly, however, he jeered right back. That's right, be jealous. Are you afraid that your disciple is about to disappear?

Heh!

You're the one who ran off to the central region. If you hadn't appeared for this fight, your disciple might be my disciple after a while longer. Heh!!

Granted, Hong Yitang wasn't really interested in stealing disciples. The kid also stirred up too much trouble! Hong Yitang couldn't handle it all—he'd already fought a few fights on the young man's behalf over the past couple of days. The kid was more combative than Yuan Shuo, so it was just as well that the two roamed throughout the world together!

Apart from the continuously whimpering Panther, the group traveled in silence. Li Hao and Yuan Shuo were both quite injured and the other two were laboring to keep their organs intact after unsealing themselves. They might give voice to their pain if they were alone, but at the moment, they forcefully kept their lips shut. They were in irritating company! Now was not the time to display weakness. They would die first before admitting to their suffering.

"Where are we going to rest?" Li Hao had to ask upon seeing that no one would be the first to speak. We have to find a place, don't we? We can't just drift over the sea forever. The three of you are in some sort of playing it cool contest—someone needs to come up with a location. We can't just keep running with no destination in mind.

“Ask him!” Light Sword and Hong Yitang looked at Yuan Shuo. A smirk spread over his face.

“Someone who’s been digging holes and tunnels for decades will have bases in a lot of places. Maybe you’ve raided the graves in the sea. He must have gone to the eastern continent at some point and the East Sea as well. How else would he be able to fight Xu Qing otherwise?”

“Don’t put on airs just because you’ve lit up a few more locks!” The look in Yuan Shuo’s eyes turned cold. “Are the likes of you allowed to discuss my affairs?”

“That’s true, I won’t do so next time,” Hong Yitang responded placidly. “You’re older, after all, so we need to show you respect. Wouldn’t you say so, big brother Yuan?”

“.....”

Li Hao didn’t make a peep. They aren’t going to start fighting right here, are they? They were fine with each other before! Hong Yitang’s temper is usually pretty good, so why does he seem to be in a bad mood today? He looks... to be picking a fight.

As for his master, the old demon had always been this cocky, so this was only to be expected. Meanwhile, it was like Light Sword was invisible. There even seemed to be schadenfreude lurking in the depths of her eyes. Fight fight fight! her eyes twinkled.

Silver Moon martial masters are definitely a weird bunch, the young man concluded.

Apart from exchanging a word with Yuan Shuo, no one even had the chance of seeing the supercilious Sky Sword. He’d suppressed the old duke with one move, then left. Then there was Northern Fist and his slightly hypocritical talk of the rules, and the flinty Tyrant Blade.

None of them were normal in Li Hao's eyes, but of course their reinforcement was quite a thrilling feeling. They were all from Silver Moon at the end of the day. It was always particularly touching to see a fellow countryman. Those from the same origin were more reliable.

Yuan Shuo snorted and couldn't be bothered to reply. He was still restrained to a certain degree in front of his own disciple. It was difficult to maintain the appearance of a noble, principled scholar. His disciple had always viewed him as a magnanimous and benevolent sort—he didn't wish to destroy that mental image.

Li Hao had thought of his teacher in such a manner before, but he didn't think that way now. His teacher was too deeply vested in his own act. If the young man still believed that his teacher was a cultured, refined, and kindly old man after hearing so many stories of his past exploits, then Li Hao would be an idiot.

"Let's go to East Shore, I have a house there that I haven't visited in a long time. I don't know if it's still there or if there's people squatting in it."

A knowing expression appeared on Hong Yitang's face. He knew this was the case!

The group quickly altered their heading and flew toward East Shore.

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Explosive news spread throughout the dynasty. All of its senior officials had enjoyed a good show today.

The Inspectorate.

The inspector general had returned and chuckled merrily at an intelligence report. "Like I said, one side must die when two tigers fight! Rest in peace! Alas, Xu Qing was too trash and the Xus too

cowardly—they didn't kill a single Silver Moon martial master! That was only half of a show, it wasn't good enough!"

More should've died, which would then herald a war between Silver Moon and the Xus. They would then engage in an epic war and continuously bring out trump cards until the province was forced to summon their oldest, most secret powerhouses. They would be answered in kind, and their battles would drag in the rest of the east and north. Now that would be a show worth watching!

No one knew the inspector general's thoughts. The people around him didn't dare make a sound. The Night Watcher director and deputy director Yellow Dragon were both here. As the highest and second-in-command of their agencies, they were here to participate in a meeting of the senior ranks and analyze the fallout from this affair.

An important person had died—a first level provincial official, the overlord of the east. Certain attention still needed to be devoted to this matter. Otherwise, the dignity of the dynasty would lie in complete tatters. The Xus were one of the three founding dukes, after all.

"We should discuss the aftermath, inspector general," Yellow Dragon raised. "Li Hao and the other Silver Moon bandits killed the Steadfast Duke. What do we do now?"

"The Steadfast Marquis!" corrected the inspector general with a frown. "Don't ignore the earlier proclamation or simply treat it as a piece of paper! Xu Qing was wrong to fire the city annihilation missiles. It was a grave mistake to begin with, I don't care if he did so for self defense or to kill enemies. That should not have happened! This is the punishment that the dynasty meted out to the Xus. If you use the wrong term of address again in an official setting, punishment will fall on your head as well!"

Yellow Dragon didn't say a word. He dared talk back to the Night Watcher director, but he didn't dare retort against the inspector general.

The nine ministries had been established eighty years ago and this one was the second inspector general. The first one was his father—his tenure had run for fifty years. This one possessed thirty years under his belt. None of the ministry leaders were easy characters to handle.

The inspector general didn't continue after rebuking Yellow Dragon. He looked at the group, not interested in asking for their opinions. "How about this," the inspector general smiled after some thought. "Send a document to Silver Moon. Don't they want to promote Li Hao? It's approved! Li Hao went to the east to eliminate bandits and earned a great merit of distinction for killing the East Sea pirate Red Beard!"

Yellow Dragon's eyes widened.

"Additionally, put Earthturner Sword, Light Sword, Northern Fist, Tyrant Blade, and Old Demon Five Styles on the wanted list," continued the inspector general. "They committed a grave crime in jointly killing the Steadfast Marquis. Have the Ministry of Armed Forces send out the Skystar Troops and call upon the Steppe Prince to assist. The royal family has an obligation to eliminate these bandits!"

"Since the old duke is still alive, but his son is dead... Have him select another son to inherit the Steadfast Marquis title. He has many sons and the title remains his family's!"

"Ah, yes. The East Shore provincial government must bear responsibility for its province haphazardly firing missiles. Start with its director general and replace everyone including the commander-in-chief of the provincial armies, director of the Inspectorate, and director of the Night Watcher branch.

"Additionally, Sky Sword Mountain Villa... Forget it, Sky Sword only exchanged one move with the old duke. Sparring between supernaturals is a common occurrence, we don't need to address it."

And so it was quickly decided. The Silver Moon martial masters were wanted criminals, the Steadfast Marquis would be helmed by a new face, Li Hao was to be promoted, and the East Shore leadership to be shuffled...