

## Star Gate 641

### Chapter 641: Running Away In the Night (II)

“It’s good to be confident in your abilities!” He Yong nodded; some of his resentment receded and he managed a smile. “You won’t get far without confidence, but you can’t be overly confident. Skystar City is not a typical metropolis.”

“Understood.”

The two walked together at a moderate pace. It wasn’t until they left the avenues behind that a din built in their ears again. This was a city that didn’t sleep, it just grew quiet at the nine ministries at an early hour. It was dim in those avenues, just like the dynasty. Resplendent on the outside, dim and dark on the inside.

“There’s an old pub up ahead with good alcohol. I go there often,” He Yong chuckled. “What a pity that you weren’t willing to come with me last time. You missed out on a precious opportunity. If not...”

“A precious opportunity?” Li Hao looked at He Yong. “Is martial uncle stronger than before?”

“That’s tough!” He Yong sighed with a shake of his head. “It’s tough to replenish blood qi, but I’ve improved ever so slightly.

“What was the opportunity, you ask?” He Yong thought for a moment before transmitting, “One involving the royal family. I suspect that they’ve come into full control of the ruins of Skystar Town, but that they haven’t had time to fully explore it. The royal family sends expedition teams into it every year. As a martial master, I am sometimes permitted entry since I can protect the royal children...”

“They allow martial masters to participate in such highly classified matters?” Li Hao was baffled. The royal family seemed to value He Yong a great deal. Why was that?

Silver Moon martial masters typically weren't welcome elsewhere. That He Yong could cultivate to such heights with the royal family was a rare sight. Under normal circumstances, they wouldn't let an outsider like him participate in the ruins.

"Why else, if not for profit? Such is the way of the world!" He Yong answered dismissively. "I offered my services to the weakest prince who had the least authority twenty years ago. I supported him immensely when he was in difficult straits and even saved him from a few assassinations. Now that he's grown stronger and his faction's authority increased, he responds in kind towards me—whether out of real gratitude for an early investor or just spending significant resources on true talent."

Fascinating!

"Martial uncle has a great eye for the future," Li Hao sighed with appreciation.

"What eye? I simply bet on the cheapest investment. I would make it big if I won and run for the hills if I lost. The impact of timely assistance is far greater than congratulations at the height of success. It is a testament to his own abilities that he was able to rise up."

"How is the royal family able to fight among themselves when they are already in less than ideal circumstances?" Li Hao asked curiously. Plainly, the assassination did not come from the nine ministries. Why target the weakest prince? That was obviously a result of internal discord.

"How would the nine ministries find any sort of footing if the royal family wasn't rocked with conflict?" He Yong laughed. "But it's not like they have their opportunities only because the royal family is preoccupied. Otherwise, how would there be the nine ministries at all given how strong the Black Armaturas were in those times?"

"The royal family is filled with ruthless characters and fight each other more viciously than outsiders do with them for the position of king! Even the positions of nine ministers and thirty-six dukes are hotly contested by blood, to say nothing of the royal throne."

“It’s been a bit better these years because the royal family themselves know they are in trouble. The conflict has dwindled somewhat. If this was twenty years ago, just the royal family would turn the world upside down, to say nothing of the nine ministries.”

Disputes were ever present. Li Hao nodded, finding that his worldview had expanded yet again. He’d thought the royal family would be of one heart at this point in time, wanting to break free of the nine ministries. To think that the truth would not be thus, that they would still be fiercely fighting against each other!

“Is the prince that you support still very strong?”

“He’s alright, about the same as you,” He Yong chuckled. “The royal family has a lot of resources and opportunities. Don’t think that they’re stuck to their palace. They can move about freely since only their political authority is restricted, not their personal freedom. Not to mention, the nine ministries aren’t able to stop them if they really want to leave. Not unless they wish to declare open war. The key thing is, the royal family can enter the ruins without leaving the palace.”

“.....” The two chatted as they walked, stopping in a small alleyway before long. It really was a small pub. Despite the hustle and bustle around it, there weren’t that many people inside.

He Yong sauntered in, waking up the dozing owner. When he cracked his eyes open to see He Yong, the man shot to his feet. “Boss He is here...” He glanced at Li Hao. “The usual?”

“Yep, make that double!”

“Alright, I’ll get on it.” The boss disappeared into the kitchen. There wasn’t even a server around. It looked like this was a one man show.

The two sat down; He Yong grabbed a jug of liquor with a casual probe of his hand and two bowls with another snatch. “Don’t be put off by the lack of people here, this is where the good stuff is. Places are bigger in the city, but their food and drink doesn’t taste much. C’mon, have a sip!” He poured a cup out for Li Hao.

Li Hao clucked his tongue after a mouthful. What kind of good taste was this? The alcohol was just strong. It burned on its way down and seemed to set his stomach on fire. Perhaps the only good alcohol was strong alcohol to He Yong. It was quite a novel sensation to have strong alcohol explode in the young man's stomach.

He Yong was quite at home as he quaffed cup after cup. "Out with it, what do you want me for? Do you want to take down the Ministry of Finance? Or the Colosseum? But that's Hou Xiaochen's goals, not yours. What goals do you have?"

What goals do I have?

Li Hao thought for a while before saying, "Not many and my goals aren't that ambitious. Before I came here, I just wanted to make some trouble for Red Moon. I changed my mind on the way and now I want to see whether the heart of the dynasty is black or white. Is there light to be found in this world?"

"Why are you taking after Hong Yitang for?!" He Yong was speechless. "I'll tell you, this world is as black as night! Skystar City is the blackest of black! Countless people die in places you can't see, all sorts of vermin are gathered here."

"I'm not imitating Martial Uncle Hong," Li Hao chuckled and took another sip. "I just feel that as martial masters, superhumans, and officials... There are things that we should and should not do! Take this Skystar Colosseum, for example. I don't actually care about sparring matches or fights to the death..."

He Yong listened quietly.

"I just want to take a look."

“A look at what?” He Yong stared at the young man. “What can you see? What can you do? I’m not trying to take the wind out of your sails, but just telling you that you’re creating trouble for yourself in getting involved with this.”

“I don’t care.” Li Hao continued to drink, a happy smile on his face. “Do you still remember the Battle Heaven Army, martial uncle?”

He Yong blinked.

“Do you think that that army would be willing to protect those in Skystar City?”

“.....”

Silence.

He Yong started drinking as well, frowning with thought. He said after a long moment, “Those principles and logic are too far removed for me. I’m not interested! Of course, taking a stand when we encounter injustice and journeying through the world is the dream of all martial masters. Just tell me what you want to do, how you want to do it, and where you want to go with it. That’s enough for me!”

Li Hao burst out laughing. “How much help can you give me, martial uncle?”

“How much help do you need?” He Yong looked at Li Hao with a brewing headache.

“Send me a few Arcanus!”

“.....” Go to hell! All this kid knew was how to bullshit. “I’ve spent twenty years in Skystar City, but I only have a small network. I can get you two Novas and me for a third. We’re reliable people and can do anything for the right amount of money. Anything is possible!”

“What level of Nova?”

“A late Nova and a peak Nova.”

Li Hao frowned.

“What, do you think that’s too weak?” He Yong rolled his eyes. The kid had seriously let everything get to his head!

“They really are too weak!” Li Hao nodded.

“Do you think metamorphosis experts grow on trees?” He Yong couldn’t help but jeer. “You’ve met a lot because you keep antagonizing the wrong people. You offend either the nine ministries or the royal family, a duke or a director general. Go see for yourself how many metamorphosis experts exist in the world!”

It was Li Hao’s fault for the background of all his enemies. The three great organizations, Steppe Prince, Near River Director General Office, Steadfast Duke, Ministry of Finance...

Each of these organizations were renowned throughout the lands. In actuality, Nova was a premier powerhouse in the world, but it was a minor detail of the past in Li Hao’s eyes. Even so, a martial master like He Yong remained at this level.

“It’s better than nothing,” Li Hao sighed.

He Yong scowled darkly. Nothing your ass! That's a peak and a late Nova we're talking about—this is your assessment of them??

“Are they on good terms with you, martial uncle?”

“Quite good.” He Yong put the matter out of his mind. “I don't have the easiest personality, so I either make no friends at all or I make really good friends. My friends are similar to me—not the shyest, but unwilling to live in the status quo. We're willing to give things a try if there's anything to be gained...”

“Will you guys move against me instead? There's greater benefits to be had if you take me out and it'll be less dangerous than the Ministry of Finance.”

He Yong blinked, then stroked his chin. “This... might actually be a possibility! How about this, I'll go ask them and if they're willing to. Forget them if they're not, but they wouldn't turn on you if they decide to work with you.”

#### Chapter 642: Running Away In the Night (III)

Li Hao was at a complete loss for words. “How strong is martial uncle now when you unseal yourself?”

“Less than Arcanus,” He Yong had to say. “Let's put it this way. People like me are primarily judged by how many supernatural locks we unseal. It depends what degree we unseal them to and how saturated they were. It's difficult to define martial masters at this stage, everyone's situation is different.

“The metamorphosis of a Nova is a very protracted process. Do you know what that stage entails?”

Li Hao shook his head.

“The metamorphosis stage refers to those who have broken one lock of their organs and all four of their limbs. As we know, breaking five locks makes one a Nova. Arcanus is when another of the five organs have been shattered, so why is there a separate mention of metamorphosis?”

“This stage is one of adjustment, in which the second elemental attribute is slowly released into the body. The sixth lock cannot be abruptly shattered all at once, that will cause an internal explosion! It’s a similar situation to our unsealing—supernaturals gradually wear away at the second lock of the organs and release the energy within. They are Arcanus when it fully breaks. Before that, they are in the metamorphosis of change.”

Li Hao finally understood! So this was the meaning behind that stage.

“Those undergoing this deliberate fracturing are naturally also divided into strong and weak. One supernatural might have cracked one tenth of their lock, another might have worked on one fifth. It really is rather similar to our unsealing.

“Whether it is Xu Qing, Hong Yitang, or me, we are all in this stage. It’s just that I... can’t reach Arcanus even after I unseal myself. Hong Yitang, though, will rival an Arcanus when he fully unseals himself.”

“What if martial uncle saturates a few more locks?” Li Hao thought rapidly.

The look in He Yong’s eyes changed and he stroked his chin. He suddenly flashed a brilliant smile at Li Hao. “Then that’s another story entirely. If that’s the case, I’ll beat whoever you want me to beat up and kill whoever you want me to kill. But... is there enough time for that?”

“Why wouldn’t there be?”

“Aren’t you going to take some action tomorrow...”

Li Hao laughed before he had the chance to finish. “Why tomorrow? Everything thinks I’m going to listen to Director Hou and start kicking down doors tomorrow, but why must I go tomorrow? I’m going to go into closed door cultivation for a few days, can I not?”



He Yong blinked. Could he do that?

Actually, he could!

“If your two friends are willing to help, I’ll pay them in advance. What does a peak Nova on the cusp of metamorphosis want? Energy? Sword energy? Elemental energy? Or others? I’ll pay for them to be my bodyguards!”

He Yong stared at the young man for a very long time before grinning widely. “You’ll do!”

Everyone thought that Li Hao would put in an appearance tomorrow since Hou Xiaochen had declared war tonight. Damn, the kid was going into seclusion instead! That was... unexpected! The Ministry of Finance must be ready, but Li Hao would run off instead!

“Alright... where are you going for seclusion?”

“Skystar Sea. Three days should be enough.” Li Hao beamed radiantly. “As opposed to benefiting outsiders, I should let the good stuff go to martial uncle instead, shouldn’t I? We’ll make full preparations and soar to fame with one move. We’ll be rich beyond belief as the Colosseum is definitely swimming in wealth...”

“Also, there’s no need to just stick to the Colosseum,” the young man said upon further thought. “Can martial uncle find evidence of the Four Seas Company colluding with pirates? If there is, we’ll take them down first!”

He Yong took a deep breath, then another deep breath. He looked at Li Hao. “You’re a vicious one!”

“Just listen to yourself, martial uncle!” Li Hao chuckled merrily. “The Four Seas Company may not be poorer than Colosseum—it might even be richer! The key thing is, they probably definitely work with the pirates!

“How can they navigate the troubled waters so smoothly if they don’t?” the young man ended with a sneer. Any fool would know that there must be an agreement or even partnership between the two. It was also possible that the Four Seas Company secretly conducted pirate business, that they were one faction. Otherwise, regular merchants didn’t command profit margins as high as the pirates did. Deals without any costs involved were the most lucrative.

He Yong looked at Li Hao for a while without saying anything.

“The Four Seas Company is headquartered near the Skystar Sea because they sail the four seas. Skystar Sea connects directly to the four bodies of water as well. It’s just sealed so that no passage is possible,” Li Hao continued.

“Their boss is Wu Yong—I’ve met him once, a metamorphosis expert. He’s most likely staying in Skystar City now though. However, I can’t do anything to someone of the Ministry of Finance without any evidence. If there is and it involves supernaturals, then I have the authority to attack them directly!

“The Four Seas Company have operated for so many years that, even if most of their gains are handed in to the ministry, part of them must have stayed with Wu Yong. They don’t belong to him alone, however, so we’ll be rich if we raid the company!”

He Yong smiled and nodded. Their food was served at this time and the pub owner returned to his nap when he was finished with his duties.

Li Hao and He Yong ate and drank their fill.

“Then I’ll contact those two fellows,” He Yong said after a while. “If possible, let’s go together. If not, then just us two.”

“That works!” Li Hao didn’t say anything else.

He Yong asked the young man to wait for a bit and ran outside. The young man didn’t know if he was utilizing a communicator or some special method. The man returned with a smile after almost half an hour.

“Done!” He nodded. “Those two were very worked up, but they also have a request. They want to join the Inspectorate or Night Watchers after the job.”

“Eh?”

“For safety,” He Yong said bluntly. “You’re not razing the Ministry of Finance to the ground, so you’re not afraid. But they are and retaliation is easy after the fact. I’m different since I’m associated with the royal family. They’re on their own, so they must be allowed to join one of the institutions at the end of this. They can be the sort without any duties, kind of like guest elders. Is that doable?”

“That’s fine, we can do that now. A Skystar commander office is being established and I’m the vice commander. It’s just a title and I can make the call for any rank below first rank inspector. They can even be commissioner inspectors—it’s just the matter of another two medallions.”

“Your confidence is completely different in your new role!” He Yong laughed, then switched to transmission. “I had them go to the Skystar Sea first. When we part ways in a bit, you should go before I do. Just contact me through the armor.”

“Alright.” Li Hao quickly departed after a few more words with He Yong.

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The young man didn't take the car. Instead, he melted into the darkness and headed straight outside the city. He Yong disappeared before long as well.

The sky gradually began to brighten. All of Skystar's senior executives hadn't been able to sleep on this night. They were waiting, waiting for the arrival of the next day.

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The Night Watcher headquarters.

Hou Xiaochen hadn't slept either. Golden Spear, Mu Lin, and Manager Yu were waiting in his office. He gave a long exhale and couldn't help but laugh, "Li Hao... you're really something!"

Damn it!

Manager Yu was likewise at a loss and had a headache. "The director has just erupted in open hostilities against the Ministry of Finance and is ready to go on the offensive... Has the kid gotten lost?"

Li Hao had said that he had some business to take care of and would be back soon. But... where was he?

Gone!

Was this the vanguard that he'd promised Hou Xiaochen?

Fucking... hell! Has he run off?

“Has Li Hao... possibly... run away?” Mu Lin asked carefully. “Maybe he fled in the middle of the night with the dog...?”

It wasn't that they wanted to think this way, but that everything had been agreed upon yesterday. Li Hao was missing before the scheduled action today! It... was a logical conclusion.

“I can lead people to the Colosseum if he's gone...” Golden Spear sighed. “Otherwise...”

Otherwise, there was no way out for Hou Xiaochen. He'd completely offended the Ministry of Finance, to say nothing of reaping any rewards.

“Forget it,” Hou Xiaochen chuckled with some resignation. “If he's really run off, it'll take my personal attention to accomplish anything. Not even little Yu will do. Ai! Forget it!”

Didn't you agree last night? I wouldn't have been in such a hurry to declare war if you hadn't come.

So he'd thrown down the gauntlet, but his general had run off. Once news spread of his disappearance, Hou Xiaochen would become the laughingstock of the city. There was no helping it!

“Is he repeating an old tactic and already slipped into the Colosseum under a disguise?” Manager Yu mused.

“That's not outside the realm of possibility.” Hou Xiaochen nodded with a smile. “Let's leave it at this! Everyone, go rest.”

There was nothing else to say.

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At this moment, in the Night Watcher headquarters.

“Li Hao’s gone missing?” Yellow Dragon sneered. “He didn’t come back?”

“No.”

“Has he concealed himself in the Colosseum?” Yellow Dragon thought for a bit before sniffing, “Does he think this to be the east? He wants to use the same trick twice!”

“Can he have run away?” one of his subordinates asked softly. Li Hao would be very familiar with this voice. “I know a bit about Li Hao,” Hu Qingfeng said carefully. “I’ve also seen him before. I’m very surprised by the enormous disturbance he caused in the east. Based on what I know about him, he shouldn’t be this bold. Perhaps he’s already gone as he’s up against a ministry this time.”

“Run off? Isn’t he afraid of Hou Xiaochen...” Yellow Dragon asked with surprise.

“His master Yuan Shuo and others such as Earthturner Sword and Light Sword are his backers. He won’t be afraid of Hou Xiaochen.”

“It’d be for the best if he has run off!” Yellow Dragon grinned brilliantly. “Things will be really interesting then. Hou Xiaochen issued his challenge with such flair, but his general ran off in the middle of the night. He’ll certainly be the butt of every joke and lose every shred of dignity, and he’ll also have completely offended Minister Liu. There will be vengeance sooner or later, so I’d like to see how Hou Xiaochen will take care of himself next.”

Hu Qingfeng laughed dryly and didn’t offer his opinions.

Chapter 643: In the Dark of the Night (I)

Li Hao continued to be absent as the sky brightened. The entire royal city was surprised.

The Skystar Colosseum.

The beguiling woman Liu Sha and deeply tanned Wu Yong were both waiting. Waiting... waiting... for someone who didn't come.

The Colosseum operated as normal today, but there were many more noble or highly placed guests compared to usual. Of course, they weren't here to watch Sunflares fight in the ring, they wanted to see Skystar vice commander Li Hao take down the Colosseum.

And yet... it didn't happen.

All was well.

Sighs of disappointment echoed from the private booths over the arena.

"He's run off!"

"Who would've thought? It was Hou Xiaochen who laid down the gauntlet right after Demon Sword entered the capital. We all thought he was going to do something major to find his footing, but look at this. He's gone!"

"Has he been assassinated by someone?"

"Then you think too little of Hou Xiaochen and the speed in which news spreads in Skystar City. There would be word out if he'd been assassinated. He's plainly run off in the middle of the night!"

"Is that all there is to Demon Sword?"

“What a joke!”

“Hou Xiaochen probably won’t dare set foot outside anymore. He’ll be laughed to death if he does! We all thought that Demon Sword was going to soar in a blaze of glory today. Who would’ve thought that we wouldn’t even see him?”

“This is boring!”

“.....” Various customers discussed the happenings. Some jeered, some were deeply amused, and yet others understood Li Hao. This was one of the nine ministries that he’d offended, not an ordinary person. Slipping away in the dead of the night was a wise move.

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Ministry of Finance.

Minister Liu tilted his head back at the sky and sank into deep thought with a frown. Have I been had? Did Li Hao really run off, scared? But when I met him last night, even though it was our first meeting, he didn’t give me a cowardly feeling.

A headache brewed at the minister’s temples. Everything was ready and the Colosseum would be turned into hellish killing fields today—Li Hao’s final resting place. But the boy was gone! They would be boring no one!

His communicator rang; Minister Liu picked it up to listen to the report. “Be careful and stay on guard,” he said slowly. “He posed as a monster spirit when he visited Calm Borders and openly entered the Xu Manor. He might do the same with the Colosseum and make his move when all of you have relaxed your guard...”



That course of action would lack some assertiveness and domination. In the minister's eyes, Hou Xiaochen shouldn't proceed in this fashion if he wished to establish his authority, as well as take down the Colosseum.

Various thoughts floated into his mind as the pensive man took out another jade pendant and entered a few words, asking about Li Hao's whereabouts. There was no news of the young man. He'd disappeared last night after leaving the Nine Dragons Pavilion.

Where had Li Hao gone?

As for He Yong—he kept a very low profile in Skystar City. Not many knew of the occasions in which he made a move and no one shared news of him. Thus, he didn't appear to have a relationship with Li Hao on the surface. Not to mention, He Yong was a weaker consideration and part of the royal family.

Anyone who wished to investigate him would have to delve deep into the palace to do so. That would easily give rise to unexpected developments, so no one wanted to proceed to the palace and ask if Southern Fist was present.

As the situation stood, Li Hao had just arrived in Skystar and lacked familiar faces by his side before disappearing. It made one wonder if he'd run off because he was scared.

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The Inspectorate.

The inspector general stroked his chin with an odd expression on his face. "Does the Inspectorate know of Li Hao's whereabouts?"

“No,” answered a subordinate. “But the north gate reports that a powerhouse left through the air last night. Whoever it was didn’t speak to the city defenders, so they don’t know if it was Li Hao or not.”

“.....” The inspector general was also at a loss. “This has grown out of hand! Hou Xiaochen was so overbearing last night, look at how he will be now! Forget it, he’s the one who’s lost face. This has nothing to do with me.”

Li Hao had run off in the middle of the night, leaving no time for outsiders to react. They didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. It’d certainly been a grand show of thunderous lightning, but minor raindrops hit the ground in the end.

No, there hadn’t been a single drop of rain.

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On this day, Li Hao and Hou Xiaochen once more became names on everyone’s lips in the important circles of Skystar society. This time, they were mentioned with a touch of derision and jeering. People all over continued to search for Li Hao’s whereabouts—the young man still held two heritage weapons in his hand!

However, no one could find him. At present, he was busy sitting on the ocean bed and consuming resources at an eye-popping rate to help He Yong saturate his supernatural locks. As for what others said or thought... Li Hao never worried about the opinions of others. His life was his own. Ole Hou was taking a risk, whereas Li Hao was unwilling to do the same and pin all of his hopes on someone else.

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In the depths of the Skystar Sea.

Three men, one woman, and a dog sat down cross-legged. Indeed, there was a woman present. The helpers that He Yong had summoned were a married couple in their forties. The group's internal force swirled as a massive protective barrier. The man was bearded like He Yong, the woman was a petite individual.

"Oooh.... oooh!!" the man moaned with comfort. "Oh heavens, is this cultivation? It feels so good! Ahh! Sooooo good!"

"....." Li Hao couldn't contain his eye rolls and the man's wife was also mortified. He Yong itched to punch his friend in the face. You're such an embarrassment!

"Damn this feels good!" The man was called Yang Shan and had been a martial master back in the day. He chose to cross over when the supernatural rose and was now a peak Nova. Those with the strength of a peak Nova were no ordinary wandering cultivators—and indeed, he wasn't one.

He'd worked for the Tranquil Duke in the west a few years back and accumulated quite a bit of personal wealth. However, he hadn't been satisfied and set his eye on the pirates of the West Sea.

Unfortunately, he attacked the wrong bunch and destroyed the duke's personal pirate faction. The Tranquil Duke didn't rebuke him for it—he just wanted Yang Shan to hand over the pirate treasure. Yang Shan was a ferocious fighter and as such, a valuable asset in battle. The duke also very much needed the treasure that the pirates had excavated from the sea, so these conditions were lenient.

For some reason, Yang Shan decided to abscond with his gains. Perhaps other motives crept into his mind when he saw the treasure, or maybe he found it inappropriate that the duke had colluded with pirates. Whatever it was, his wife left with him. In actuality, his wife had been a manager of the duke's harem.

Yang Shan had somehow wooed her away—which proved critical for his escape out of the west.

The man moaned and groaned, laughing wildly as he absorbed energy. He seemed more crude than He Yong and more like a pirate. Anyone's first impression of him would not be that of a good person.

As expected, birds of a feather flock together. He Yong's friends were just like him.

"Oh my heavens, how can cultivation feel so damn good? It's even better than my wife at night..."

"Yang Shan!" shrieked the petite woman. She glared hotly at him—what are you talking about?!

"Oh, eh, I don't mean it that way," Yang Shan said sheepishly, then continued with excitement. "Com... commander Li! We'll follow you in the future! We don't ask for much, just to enjoy this every once in a while. We'll attack wherever you point us to!"

"Heh, I don't need that level of dedication," Li Hao laughed softly. "So long as you and your wife don't get other ideas in mind and want to seize my sword. Our partnership should be fine otherwise."

"How would we ever!" Yang Shan blustered. That was never happening! Are we that kind of people??

Li Hao smiled without a word. He'd seen the greedy looks in their eyes at their first meeting. But one was a peak Nova and the other a late Nova... it was a pipe dream if they wanted to take his goods.

If it hadn't been for the fact that they were introduced by He Yong and ultimately suppressed their desires, he wouldn't mind adding two more to his list of victims. He'd long lost his discomfort over bloodshed after killing so many people.

Superhumans were not undying!

Indeed, that was the case. Li Hao himself was not immortal either. There was nothing else to be said since they'd all set foot on this path. You kill me, I kill you. Who knows who would kill who in the end, but everyone on this path had their hands stained with blood.

"Is there a chance for you to set foot into metamorphosis?" Li Hao glanced at Yang Shan.

"That requires disturbing the sixth lock and releasing a second element." The man considered the possibility. "My element is fire and I've touched upon the lock of my kidneys. I can release water energy to form abilities of water and fire through the intersection of these elements.

"But the interplay of water and fire means my lock will break more easily, which makes it more dangerous..."

"What if I use my sword to help you maintain your organs?" Li Hao looked at him.

"Then... there... shouldn't be much of an issue?" A light danced in Yang Shan's eyes. "But I'll need a lot of sword energy and we don't have that much money. What you pay us can't be traded for that much. I can see that you're consuming a lot of mysterious power stones."

Chapter 644: In the Dark of the Night (II)

"There's room for discussion if Brother Yang is willing to exert yourself to some action!" Li Hao said after a pause. "A metamorphosis expert can do much more than a peak Nova. If one focuses their line of sight at a higher point, one might understand that a variety of requirements is needed to ascend to Arcanus. The most critical factor is the stability of the five organs."

Yang Shan's expression shifted slightly. That's right, the Arcanus cultivation realm!

Other than those who were supernatural veterans of many years and masters of their own major factions, which meant that they partook of vast quantities of life essence to stabilize their organs, it was very difficult for anyone else to set foot into Arcanus.

The path of metamorphosis to Arcanus was hazardous and fraught with peril.

“Don’t worry, Commander Li.” The petite woman beamed as her husband turned over Li Hao’s words. “Brother He called us here naturally because he trusts us. Whether it’s the divine sword of the Lis or the Windchaser Boots, are those treasures for the likes of us?”

“To be hunted by the world... To be honest, we two are without support or patrons. We don’t have the commander’s confidence to be enemies with the entire dynasty! Powerhouses abound in Silver Moon’s martial world. One battle was sufficient to draw out Sky Sword, Tyrant Sword, Southern Fist, and the Five Styles King. How would we dare provoke such an existence?”

She was much more diplomatic than her husband and beamed merrily. “These people make their moves because they wish to seize the sword of the Lis. If they don’t dare, would we dare? Commander Li thinks too highly of my husband and I.”

“That’s right,” Yang Shan added sheepishly. “Don’t worry, Commander Li.”

“I’m very much at ease.” Li Hao smiled. “I just don’t wish for accidents or mistakes to happen. I also prefer making things clear, in case unexpected developments happen along the way. You two are Martial Uncle Southern Fist’s friends, so I don’t wish for us to end on a bad note.”

“I’ll be the first to beat them to death if they dare turn on you,” He Yong snorted. “Don’t worry!”

“.....” Yang Shan furiously rolled his eyes and couldn’t be bothered with anything. “I can try entering metamorphosis, but my wife likely can’t. The ascension of supernaturals comes with certain physical requirements and contact with the locks. My wife is a bit removed from that.

“But if she continues to absorb sword energy and elemental power, she has a hope of rising to peak Nova. If metamorphosis... She would need to acclimate to her increase in power first. Otherwise, it will be too difficult for her to control and she’ll explode instead.”

It was easier for supernaturals to advance, but the dangers within were greater than for martial masters. Their strength came from the absorption of outside forces rather than their own body. In that case, they would easily lose control if they progressed too quickly.

“That’s fine.” Li Hao nodded with understanding. “One metamorphosis and one peak Nova is better than what we’ve got now! So we’ll fuel our fights with our battles. After we take down the Four Seas Company, we’ll head to the Skystar Colosseum and drag out everything Minister Liu has. You won’t be far off from Arcanus then!”

With that, he shut his mouth and focused on supplying sword energy and elemental power. He also absorbed the energy in the process. The temporary bridges of the five organs operated at a high speed as power surged into his organs. He didn’t need to focus on each individual organ as they were all strengthened at the same time.

Next to him, Panther continuously absorbed power as well. Li Hao sighed. The dog... ate a lot! It ate more than anyone, but its strength didn’t seem to change. It’d been like this when it left Battle Heaven and was still this way now. He’d asked it a few times if it’d improved, but Panth always shook its head. Li Hao couldn’t tell if it had or not.

The young man mentally set the dog aside and concentrated on strengthening himself while sword energy gushed out. He was going to armor himself to the teeth! It was best if he could find his footing in Skystar City as the royal city was a critical piece to understanding the dynasty as a whole. It was most ideal if he could intimidate the entire capital with the upcoming operations and buy himself some breathing space.

As he absorbed energy, Li Hao turned over other thoughts in his mind. The fragment of a mirror appeared—the mirror from the Steadfast Duke. It fulfilled surveillance purposes, but couldn’t be refined. It seemed to be able to monitor only a small area.

The young man furrowed his brows and took out another fragment moments later. It was the shard of a weapon that looked like a blade or a sword. It was one of the six weapons that’d been stored on the third floor and was valued as equally as the three earth rank origin weapons. While its presence seemed formidable, there wasn’t much purpose in keeping it around.

Li Hao took out Stellaris. Could his sword devour it? It'd only devoured weapon souls up to this point, could it swallow physical pieces? If it did, would that unseal it a bit more?

These days, Stellaris was much more useful than before. Li Hao could control it as he would, but he still couldn't refine it into his body. That meant it hadn't been fully unsealed yet.

He operated the Breathing Method of the Five Styles while the fragment hovered in front of him. It seemed to spark some hunger in the little sword. He brought the fragment closer; a faint suction wafted out of the sword. The fragment trembled and then seemed to soften. It then transformed into something like golden water as it flowed into the little sword.

Hints of something else shimmered over Stellaris as the scene changed before Li Hao's eyes.

"KILL!" Thunderous sounds of fighting traveled into his ears. There was a person slashing through the firmament. Though his long blade broke, he cut the enemy into thousands of pieces before fragments of his weapon rained down.

Li Hao was then propelled back to reality. That must have taken place when the long blade broke. A powerhouse who used the blade had killed his enemy, but also shattered his weapon. What the young man had held was one of the fragments that scattered over the ground.

More sword energy surged from the little sword. Other than that, no other changes were immediately apparent. After some thought, Li Hao took out three earth rank origin weapons. He owned numerous origin weapons—a full thirty-five of them. They were all loot from the last raid. Apart from that, he'd taken six drops out of a stash of sixteen to give three drops each to Light Sword and Earthturner Sword. His teacher hadn't wanted any Water of Life as he had some himself. After using one drop in the Nine Dragons Pavilion, Li Hao had nine left.

Upon some consideration, he placed four drops in a flask and tossed it at He Yong. The man received it with a look of shock!



“I may not be able to suppress martial uncle’s locks in time during battle. But with Water of Life, martial uncle can unseal yourself as you wish. It will help martial uncle suppress your power in time so long as the locks aren’t fully broken!”

“You’re outright buying my life!” He Yong sucked in a sharp breath. Some things weren’t that easily accepted. In all his years of experience, He Yong had never obtained so many benefits in one go as four drops of Water of Life.

“You’re joking, martial uncle.” Li Hao looked at the five he had left and took out two flasks, placing one drop in each. Yang Shan and his wife jerked with astonishment, realizing the significance of his actions.

As they expected, Li Hao respectively tossed them a flask. “This is a life-saving measure!”

“So generous!” An excited Yang Shan nearly clawed his flask out of the air. “Commander Li is so magnificently generous! This is my first time witnessing the magnanimity of Silver Moon martial masters. Ole He is a huge miser and I’ve never seen him be generous...”

He Yong sneered. No shit, I’ve got to have wealth first before I can splash around. I’m poor as fuck! There aren’t many Silver Moon martial masters with money. Most of us spend as much as we have. Where am I supposed to get treasures to share with people?

“Our thanks to Commander Li!” hastily thanked Qin Lian, Yang Shan’s wife.

“As I should!” Li Hao chuckled. “A life-saving measure comes with the caveat that you need to put your life on the line. Please consider the situation well.” He looked at the three earth rank origin weapons in front of him. “I have many origin weapons, but not that many earth rank ones. Lower ranked ones aren’t useful to us.

“The three here are a set of armor, a blade, and a mallet. The three of you can allocate them as you see fit. They are available to you as a loan, not a gift. The Water of Life is a gift.”

“Naturally, naturally.” Yang Shan grinned widely. “Can I use the blade?” He quickly added, “And my wife can use the armor. Ole He’s defenses are powerful, he can take the mallet!”

He Yong rolled his eyes again. Just listen to yourself! But... the mallet was nice all the same. He gleefully picked up the weapon. “Now we’re armed to the teeth!”

He had his bronze armor and now the mallet. If only he had a pair of boxing gloves... With four drops of Water of Life protecting his life, he was completely outfitted.

Yang Shan and Qin Lian picked up their origin weapons and drops. Li Hao ran quick calculations—he’d just spent six drops and another thirty thousand mysterious power stones worth of sword energy. Based on the little tree’s prices, that was ninety thousand stones. But according to the Nine Dragons Pavilion, the figure would be ten times higher! One million stones!

Indeed, the thirty thousand stones that he’d expended could be traded for three drops from the little tree. Didn’t that make for a total expenditure of nine drops? Rounding that up to one million wasn’t too much either. Stellaris should charge some handling fees.

“I’ve paid such a high price of one million stones, if I don’t reap that much...” Li Hao said slowly as he looked at the group. “It would be a loss! I very rarely conduct transactions at a loss! Of course, your increases in strength will be real, but that is not key to me. Do you understand what I mean?”

“Don’t worry!” Yang Shan said excitedly. “Commander Li, we’ll throw down everything we have to make this a big one!”

The young man had already paid such an incredibly high fee. With such a generous boss, even the Tranquil Duke paled far in comparison. This was true generosity! They had to serve such a good boss well!

Another key was that if they wished to become Arcanus, Li Hao was indeed a key figure. Without Li Hao, it would be as hard as ascending to the heavens for them to enter that cultivation level. It

wouldn't happen unless they joined another major faction—but who would want them? Was it worth offending the Tranquil Duke to accept the married couple? Would regular factions dare let them immediately make the breakthrough?

It might have to take three to five years of service before they won sufficient trust. That was too onerous. Judging from Li Hao's attitude, that might not matter with him.

.....

The cultivation session was not yet over. Li Hao continued to absorb sword energy to saturate his supernatural locks. He'd filled the one of the heart before in a cultivation session of a full ten days. During that session, he improved his aura, completed the bridges of the five organs, and continuously absorbed energy. He'd saturated four locks by the time he left East Shore. This time, he started on the fifth lock.

He'd yet to touch the ones of his limbs, a course of action that was the opposite of the direction that most usually took. His teacher had said that it wasn't necessarily a good thing for his auras to be so strong. His sword overview wasn't strong enough, so he needed to proceed slowly. It was better to complete his sword overview first and then improve his abilities. Otherwise, his five auras would easily rage out of control.

#### Chapter 645: In the Dark of the Night (III)

Li Hao didn't mind the state of his auras for the moment, they should hold up for the time being. When all five locks of the organs were saturated, he would be able to use them to complete the true construction of the five bridges—as according to regular cultivation procedure. That would make it easier to nurture his auras.

Once he fully completed the five bridges and melded his auras into them, as well as was able to unseal himself like others could, that would place him in the Refiner of Spirit cultivation realm that Yuan Shuo spoke of.

However, he did not choose to fashion the five bridges as one. The auras would be immensely nourished, but to the point in which he probably wouldn't be able to suppress them with the sword overview. That was not what he sought.

Li Hao focused on only one supernatural lock over the next three days. Meanwhile, He Yong furiously absorbed energy without reservation. He'd taken in quite a lot before and secretly absorbed some more when Li Hao suppressed his looks on prior occasions. Not to mention, he'd received some benefits from the royal ruins.

He Yong saturated another one and a half locks this time, making for three locks of the organs in the blink of an eye. His blood qi was much stronger than before. Previously, he was the equivalent of a mid Nova when he didn't unseal himself. Now, He Yong estimated himself to be a peak Nova if he didn't unseal himself!

Three saturated locks put him on equal footing with Light Sword. Although, he was still less than a sealed Light Sword if they were making an equal comparison. Thus marked the differences between martial masters when they reached this stage. Everyone headed in a different direction and strengthened their locks to different degrees.

"Why do I feel like... my blood qi still isn't strong enough?" he commented with some confusion and regret when his third lock was saturated.

"The problem lies with your body." Li Hao flicked a glance at him. "You've saturated the locks of your four limbs and three of the five organs, but the ones of your zifu and spine are incomplete. If you wish to strengthen your blood qi, I think the key point lies in the lock of the zifu."

He Yong's eyes danced around as he looked at Li Hao.

"Have you not found them yet, martial uncle?" The young man looked at him.

"I have a vague sensation of where they are, but I don't think I can fully locate them yet..." He Yong rumbled. "Can you?"

"I can't either. This can only mean that martial uncle's physical body and skeletal structure have not caught up to the rest of you."

“I see...” He Yong nodded with an exhale. “I was wondering about that. I’ve already saturated my third lock of the organs, but I’m somehow still less than Earthturner Sword and the others. Is it because their bodies and bones are stronger than mine?”

“Martial Uncle Hong should be stronger than you, as for Light Sword...” Li Hao thought for a bit and laughed. “Probably stronger than you too. Her power of light can also nurture the body to great effect!”

He Yong was rather despondent with the response!

“What about Tyrant Blade and the rest? His body definitely isn’t as strong as mine, he focuses on blade intent...”

“I don’t know about him.” Li Hao shook his head. “But Tyrant Blade is so strong likely because he’s strengthened other supernatural locks, such as the one of his head!”

He Yong sucked in a sharp breath. “So this means... I’m at the back of the pack??”

“Not necessarily,” Li Hao laughed. “But if martial uncle can manage to saturate a lock of your zifu or spine, I’m sure that you’ll be at the metamorphosis level without even having to unseal yourself.”

“Then we’ll have to wait for that,” He Yong said with regret. “I need to digest all of this first. And I wondered why I was still less than them after all these years of improvement! These bastards have secretly obtained plenty of benefits!”

Energy abruptly surged next to them as fire and water collided. The fire energy was noticeably stronger than water. The impact was so fierce that it made Yang Shan spit out a mouthful of blood.

A current sword energy rushed into his body. Fully recovered, Yang Shan opened his eyes with some fear.

“Fuck!” he cursed, then capered with joy. “The metamorphosis level is really dangerous! If it wasn’t for sword energy protecting and strengthening the five organs, my lock would’ve been blown wide open after I loosened it slightly. These guys really have some ability to their name. It takes some guts to set foot into metamorphosis!”

The slightest collision between fire and water had nearly shattered his organs. It was easy enough to imagine how strong those who truly broke their locks and set foot into Arcanus were.

“Does this count as you successfully ascending?” He Yong asked curiously.

“Of course!” Yang Shan roared with laughter. “Both fire and water have been released, what do you think? It’s just... my water energy is too weak, so I don’t dare erupt with too much. I can only meld a little bit together, but I’m much stronger than before, that’s for sure...”

He was a full metamorphosis expert, just at a low degree of his lock breaking. He was most likely the equivalent of the Yellow General that Li Hao had killed through ambush. But when considered with the aspect of an earth rank origin weapon and the assurance of Water of Life, he wasn’t too weak.

His wife had already become a peak Nova yesterday—that was a much easier process than Yang Shan. This was their third day of cultivation.

“Try and acclimate yourself to your strength, big brother Yang.” Li Hao made some calculations. “We’ll make our move when it’s dark!” He took out two sets of black armor. “You should each use one. Its defensive capabilities are passable, but also levies certain restrictions on supernaturals. However, it prevents leakage of mysterious power to the greatest degree possible at the same time!”

“Wear it for now. You can take it off when we encounter serious fighting.”

He Yong cackled. Black armor? I’m a bronze armor troop leader!

The two didn't ask questions and swiftly put on the armor under He Yong's instructions. To their surprise, they found that they could communicate with each other within it. Communication was possible even when five hundred kilometers apart—that was incredible!

.....

The night was fully dark when four humans and one dog left the bottom of the sea, making for the headquarters of the Four Seas Company.

.....

Having disappeared for three days, Li Hao was a total and complete laughingstock by now, as was Hou Xiaochen.

The Night Watcher headquarters.

Hou Xiaochen had suffered his fair share of sarcasm and jeering over the past two days. Not only that, but there were official censures underway. Representatives from the other ministries continuously sent missives to the Inspectorate, asking if there was a need to make adjustments to Hou Xiaochen's position.

Who'd given him the audacity to antagonize the Ministry of Finance?

"Deputy Director Hou," Yellow Dragon started anew in a conference room. "The Ministry of Finance is refusing to pay out this month's salaries! Our brothers need to eat! Although the Inspectorate fronts part of our monthly bills, the ministry is our largest source of funds. We're alright if the ministry doesn't pay out the salaries, but our brothers will be out on the streets!"

The Ministry of Finance didn't claim sole ownership of their wealth. They needed to disburse funds to various institutions—this was part of the checks and balances between the nine ministries.

The Inspectorate had people and force, but did not have money. Of course, the inspector general had his personal wealth, but there was no reason for him to utilize his personal funds to support the entire ministry. He wouldn't be able to afford it either.

"What's the rush?" Hou Xiaochen responded calmly. "It's only the fifth. If my memory serves, salaries are paid on the tenth."

"The Ministry of Finance has already sent word that there will be a delay in this month's payment," Yellow Dragon said coldly. "They've encountered some difficulties with collecting taxes from the east and need some time. But the deputy director should know full well the real reason for the delay. You should head to the Ministry of Finance and have a conversation with Minister Liu. Apologize or offer to make amends. I think the minister won't make things difficult for you then."

"Director." Yellow Dragon looked at Yao Si. "I think giving Li Hao the position of Skystar vice commander is inappropriate! Not to mention, the guy's run off! I think it's better that we cancel it and also investigate Li Hao for misconduct."

Yao Si sipped tea out of a giant mug and lifted his head with a smile. "Well then, you should discuss this with Deputy Director Hou. Draw up the documents and send them to the Inspectorate. I wash my hands of this."

Yellow Dragon cursed inwardly and snorted softly. Wash your hands? If you do, why did you sign the order giving Li Hao the position? Hou Xiaochen does not have the authority to install a vice commander. The old thing had signed the order without discussing anything with him. It looked like he wasn't satisfied with the state of things either.

Yellow Dragon didn't wish to converse further with the old man and looked at Hou Xiaochen again. "What do you think, deputy director?"



“There’s no rush.” Hou Xiaochen smiled. “We won’t lack money once we take the Colosseum. If the Ministry of Finance won’t disburse our salaries, I will.”

“What, is the deputy director still going to continue?” Yellow Dragon frowned. “There are many nobles and wealthy characters at the Colosseum, aren’t you afraid of causing some disturbance if you clamp down on them? These people are full of vigor. It’d just be creating trouble for the Night Watchers if you don’t give them a place to vent their energies. Has the deputy director ever given thought that a lot of Night Watchers might die if there is too much unrest? I think the status quo is very good...”

Did he make sense?

Some.

But if one did not keep crime in check for the sake of preserving the most life possible, that would ultimately still lead to great bloodshed.

Hou Xiaochen laughed and looked at the man. “Deputy Director Yellow’s lofty words are certainly eye-opening! According to what you say, we should leave the three great organizations alone and indeed, leave everyone alone! They can do as they see fit when it comes to killing and fighting others. That will ensure that a lot fewer Night Watchers die, won’t it?”

“That’s not what I mean,” Yellow Dragon responded faintly. “But a comparison between the Colosseum and the three great organizations is not apples to apples. You don’t need to try to confuse the matter!”

“Enough, let’s end here for today.” Hou Xiaochen rose to his feet. “What’s the rush for? I’ll find a way to fill the gap on salary day if the Ministry of Finance does not give us our funds.”

“I’m only afraid that you won’t be able to afford it!” Yellow Dragon sneered.

Chapter 646: In the Dark of the Night (IV)

Just the Night Watchers of Skystar City alone numbered in the thousands. Combined with those of other parts of the central region meant that there were thirty thousand Night Watchers in the territory. This was a massive number of personnel that wasn't just paid in gold coins—mysterious power and mysterious power stones were necessary.

The other four continents could be ignored, but the central region had always fallen under Skystar City's jurisdiction. The Ministry of Finance digging their heels in didn't just affect the royal city. When all of the Night Watchers didn't receive their salary, they would blame Hou Xiaochen and Li Hao, not the Ministry of Finance. It would be the duo's fault for courting death!

.....

Hou Xiaochen walked off without further addressing his colleagues. Manager Yu swiftly caught up to him with an unpleasant expression on her face.

"Director, this Yellow Dragon is exceedingly annoying," she transmitted. "Why don't we..."

"He's a deputy director of the Night Watchers and a deputy inspector general." Hou Xiaochen shook his head with a smile. That would cross some boundaries. If he could kill Yellow Dragon, then the others could throw away all of the rules and come kill him as well.

This was something that the nine ministers and royal family would not permit. They would at least ensure that the rules of the central region were not broken. It was the foundation of the dynasty's rule.

Killing intent faded from Manager Yu's eyes. She really wanted to kill that guy... but sadly, she couldn't. "Then I'll visit the Colosseum tonight..." she transmitted.

"Let's wait!" Hou Xiaochen breathed out and frowned at the city outskirts. Had Li Hao really run off? I don't believe it! The guy wouldn't run away so easily since he'd dared come to the royal city. Perhaps something had come up, or perhaps he'd gone for reinforcements. Maybe he was in closed door cultivation or there was some other reason.

Whatever it was, Hou Xiaochen trusted that Li Hao wouldn't disappear without giving a reason.

.....

At the same time.

Li Hao's group traveled incredibly quickly. With Li Hao present, they easily avoided the patrols and even Night Watchers safeguarding the seas. Skystar Sea was an inland sea. There was a high number of patrols here, but they were as obvious as blinding lights to the young man.

The headquarters of the Four Seas Company was placed on an island in the Skystar Sea. The entire island belonged to the trading company. They'd modified it to a near paradise.

The group drew near the island before long. Resplendent with blazing lights, a loud din of voices rose from land. Being familiar with the Four Seas Company, Yang Shan introduced it in the armor's internal channel.

"Not only does the Four Seas Company have a colossal fleet of ships that sails the four seas, but their headquarters is also a renowned den of entertainment and pleasure. Here, you can find gambling houses, whore houses, underground fighting rings, and anything else you can wish for!

"This is a good place for consumption as it has local wares from the four continents for sale. There's even sea monster spirits present. The trading company can achieve anything you can think of. Your imagination is the only limit.

"Many people know that this is also where pirates transact..."

"Pirates dare draw near Skystar City to conduct their business?" Li Hao transmitted through the armor.

“There’s nothing daring about it!” Yang Shan responded unflappably. “They stay outside the city. Even if they enter the city, no one will care about them so long as they keep their noses clean! There’s a certain degree of security in transacting at the Four Seas Company, but that means they have to pay a high commission to the company. The pirates don’t care though, since they didn’t have to pay anything for their wares.

“The most famous out of everything on the island is the auction house! It goes without saying that various treasures are for sale, but there’s also women available. Heh, all kinds of women are there. You can have any type you want and those with a good appetite... can even buy monster spirits!”

Current monster spirits could not take human form. So if monster spirits were being auctioned off...

Li Hao shuddered and sneered, “So this is just a bigger nest of pirates! That’s good, that means there’s a lot of money and treasure here!”

He fished out a mirror fragment; a peculiar energy stretched toward the island in the distance. The young man drew closer—there was a limit to the range that this item covered, but he could see everything on the island through it.

Li Hao himself could see supernaturals, but he could not see martial masters. He wanted to investigate and see if there were many martial masters present, if there were powerfully domineering existences. He had to cover all his bases and prevent plots against him.

If the Ministry of Finance had foreseen that he was going to attack the Four Seas Company, they might be playing into his hands and arranged for an ambush here. That would be an incredible loss for him.

It wasn’t until he was almost at the island that the mirror showed the situation inside. Being a decently sized landmass, only part of it was shown. The young man saw many things from the reflection—the images were much clearer than what his eyes could show him.

Patrols dominated the perimeter of the island, some were even wearing Inspectorate and Night Watcher uniforms! There were also military uniforms and soldiers wearing the uniforms of the ministry's private guard...

Its defenses were extremely strong!

Numerous ships were parked at the port and there seemed to be a faint defensive shield shimmering around the entire island. It was very faint, but one might be discovered as soon as they barged in. Li Hao jerked his head up at this moment—a large bird soared through overhead.

“Sink to the bottom of the sea!” he swiftly transmitted. The group immediately dove. “Their defenses are very tight. It goes without saying that the guard on land is heavy, but there's even minor monster spirits patrolling the sky...”

He suddenly looked around as another thought struck him. As he expected, there were pinpoints of light in the sea.

“There might be sea monsters patrolling in the depths—where do so many minor spirits come from!” Li Hao frowned. The Four Seas Company were on high alert to have patrols in land, sea, and air. They would be quickly discovered in a moment of carelessness and attract powerhouses.

“Based on the information I obtained from the Nine Dragons Pavilion, Wu Yong is the boss of the company and a metamorphosis expert. He has four vice presidents beneath him that oversee operations in the four seas. They're all of the Nova realm and span from late to peak Nova. Additionally, he also has captains of the guard. They sometimes go out on missions, sometimes stay at the island. Counting Wu Yong among the mix means that there are nine Novas!”

This was the sum of the company's strongest battle force. Was that weak?

Not at all!

Five Novas and one metamorphosis expert backed by the Ministry of Finance was a formidable force.

“They may not all be here, but a couple should be standing guard. It’d be best if they were all present!” Li Hao watched the mirror as he introduced the enemy to his team. He’d identified a building structure with numerous supernaturals inside. Some were resting, some were playing cards. That should be the guard—they were of no threat.

He lifted his head to look at the island and located some balls of light that belonged to Novas. Fixing their location in his mind, he continued, “We’re going to capture them in one go!”

“.....” He Yong and the others blinked. Capture them in one go? He had to be joking! How could they do that with the size of this island?

All the enemy had to do was scatter in various directions to make it impossible for them to accomplish that. Even with the four of them guarding one cardinal direction each, they might not be able to capture all of their targets and would have to remain on guard against being mobbed by the enemy.

“It’s fine, don’t worry. My treasure can create something like a cage and envelop the entire island with it. It can withstand Novas if the range is small enough, but even Solars will be able to break it if it’s stretched too much. Therefore, we only need to kill all of the Novas and Solars to prevent anyone from getting away!”

The metamorphosis Red Beard and his Nova subordinates hadn’t been able to break the shield formed by the mirror. It was just a costly treasure that took mysterious power stones to power.

“You’re going to kill them all??” He Yong transmitted with disbelief. “There’s at least ten thousand people on the island...’

“How would I!” Li Hao laughed. “There must be Skystar nobles on the island. We’re a law enforcement agency, not robbers! We can’t kill everyone just because they’re here for some fun, some happy endings, or gambling. That’d be a grave offense to too many factions!”

So you know that too, huh!

“We’ll capture them all and have their families ransom them back! We’ll also get them to accuse the Four Seas Company and write confessionals. With these witnesses and capturing some pirates, that will solidify the company’s crimes! We must execute this flawlessly as we are not bandits. Remember, we are a law enforcement agency!”

He reminded once again that they could not randomly kill people. They needed to be backed up by evidence.

“Additionally, we need to prevent them from using transmission pendants. I don’t know if those will be out of commission after we seal off the island, but we should be prepared for powerhouses to rush here from Skystar City. If they’re quick about it, it will only take them about ten minutes. We have to kill all of the cretin that dares resist during this time!”

“Understood!” He Yong smiled. “Who would’ve thought that you’d be more vigilant than before...”

“There’s no harm done in being careful!” Li Hao gave his orders. “Senior Qin Lian, you are adept with dark energy. You and Panther are in charge of killing all fleeing powerhouses. Southern Fist and Senior Yang Shan are in charge of killing the powerhouses in the island. I’ll shout out their locations to everyone!”

As for himself, he would hold himself in reserve and see if any martial masters suddenly appeared within the island. Powerful martial masters would be the greatest trouble. After a quick round of assignment, Li Hao looked at the dog. Panth looked back at him with a look of innocence.

“I want you to fully release the power of your bloodline in a moment when I say so—suppress all of the monster spirits! Make all of the monster spirits inside and out of the island spontaneously rage out of control!”

He had to make use of Panther’s ability, it was a convenient skill. The dog nodded. It’d eaten so much that it was time to go to work, it understood that logic. Not to mention, raiding such a fat target meant that there would be more to eat later!

Li Hao began waiting for the night to grow deeper and the sky to become darker.

.....

On Four Seas Island.

A faint unease prickled at numerous powerhouses. It was very faint, but some of them made a brief patrol and returned without discovering anything. Not even the bird and sea monster spirits demonstrated any response. There was no disturbance in the special formation covering the island.

They were much reassured by these confirmations. The Four Seas Company dominated the lands, who dared run afoul of them? The Hou Xiaochen who wanted to take down Skystar Colosseum had fallen flat on his face. He was the laughingstock of the royal city!

Chapter 647: Ambush (I)

Darkness blanketed the sky. Sea winds howled over the water surface. The island was alive with song and dance. Lights blazed, women giggled, men shouted, gamblers catcalled, and rapt audiences cheered on the fighting rings.

The island guests displayed a certain degree of reservation while inside the city. Skystar City was the royal capital, after all. Although certain soundproofing measures were in place, people didn’t dare raise too much of a fuss even at Skystar Colosseum.

Here, however, yells and hoots rose to the heavens.



What did their noise matter? They were roughly thirty kilometers from shore and the sound of the waves drowned out anything they emitted. No one would keep them in check, which made the island the best place for these prissy, sanctimonious noble young masters and misses to fully vent all of their desires and energies with abandon.

One was a god here if they had enough money! Even the domineering pirates were thrown out if they didn't have enough money. With sufficiently deep pockets, one could do whatever they wanted.

Strength?

Strength was useless here. As strong as one was, would one be stronger than the Four Seas Company? Than the Ministry of Finance?

With regards to Li Hao and Hou Xiaochen, many guests here didn't even know about those happenings. They hadn't emerged from their comfortable zones in several days. Who had time for that nonsense?

Who dared provoke the nine ministries? No one! Such were the thoughts of many.

Unbeknownst to all, a faint layer of fog slowly crept in and enveloped the entire island.

.....

Li Hao was burning through money. One hundred mysterious power stones, five hundred, one thousand...

The bronze mirror fragment continuously emitted a faint fog and released a special defensive barrier, just like it had at the Xu treasury. This time, it was directed at confining the occupants instead of protecting them. It'd held off a metamorphosis expert last time. On this occasion, Li Hao simply wished for it to fend off everyone below Solar.

He continuously expanded his effective area, swallowing the island that wasn't the biggest. Up in the sky, the bird monster spirits sensed something, as did the monster spirits in the sea. The sixth sense of monster spirits was more sensitive than humans. They vaguely detected the arrival of danger.

Just as one of the bird spirits blinked and wanted to call out a warning, it mantled with alarm! A deep-rooted fear from its bloodline emanated from its bones and spread throughout its body. A king!

This was an innate fear etched in the depths of its being, present from birth. The difference in hierarchy and bloodline caused the little bird spirit to even forget to cry out or move.

Splat!

It fell down from the sky—and it wasn't the only one. Hundreds of minor bird spirits plummeted out of the sky.

On the island.

A massive bird abruptly mantled and flung its wings out straight... The human serving it was confused by the monster spirit's sudden change and asked carefully, "Bird King... are you alright?"

The bird froze after prostrating itself on the ground. Fear wafted from its bones. A major monster spirit was here! One that was exceedingly high level and of supremely noble bloodline! An ancient monster spirit!

It wasn't just an ancient monster spirit—the bird king wouldn't react thus if it was a descendant of a typical monster spirit. The bird king's bloodline was uncommon as well, but the more uncommon the monster spirit was, the more fearful it would be.

A phrase echoed in his mind—the Monster Spirit Envoy! One who held sway over all monster spirits beneath the heavens! It was a mark left in the bloodline that notified descendants that ancient monster spirits had their king as well.

The big bird shivered and trembled. The ancient past was no more!

It wasn't the only one cowering on the ground—many monster spirits crawled within the island and quite a few outright lost control.

Within the beast fighting rings.

Two monster spirits suddenly went berserk and charged at the crowds. The powerhouses in charge of security immediately beat them back, shouting. “Damn it, have you gone crazy?! They’re guests, what are you doing??”

The monster spirits had agreements with the Four Seas Company. They and the company both worked together to earn money. The agreement in place was that audience members could not be harmed. But at the moment, a Solar monster spirit was raging out of control!

“Roar!” Eyes bloodshot, a massive lion spirit snarled and bristled like it'd been triggered by something. There was an innate dread and fear, but it didn't know where these feelings came from. It could only go berserk and attack in all directions. It bit the powerhouse coming to quell it, not responding to the frantic questions. It ripped and tore at everything around it. This place was so dangerous, it wanted to flee!

.....

Li Hao hadn't thought that Panther activating its bloodline so brazenly would cause such consequences. There happened to be a lot of monster spirits on the island; it was engulfed in disturbances in a split second.

“We need to head to the beast fighting rings! The monster spirits are rioting!”

“Damn it, I said long ago that they’re too hard to keep under control and that we shouldn’t let them in...”

“Oh shut up!”

“Someone come here! The monster spirits on Monster Spirit Street are also out of control!”

“Damn it, why is there rioting there too? What’s going on?”

“.....” The entire island was thrown into chaos. Large sums of powerhouses swiftly flew out and enforcers in uniform rushed to their assigned spots. With the disarray caused by the monster spirits, the scent of blood began filling the air as well.

No one paid attention to the imperceptible white fog in the air. Fog sometimes rose in the sea as well. They would consider it more carefully in ordinary times, but the commotion caused by the monster spirits completely distracted everyone.

.....

In the center of the island stood a building six stories tall. This was a tall building on the island. Some Novas swiftly materialized.

“What’s going on?”

“Milord, the monster spirits are rioting!”

“Bastards!” A muscular blond man walked over with gravity. “Why are they rioting? We have an agreement with them and supply them what they need. It’s a win-win situation, what in the blazes is this? What does the Bird King say?”

“Milord.” Someone hastily ran over. “The Bird King has suffered a sudden shock and is not in the right frame of mind. It ignores us no matter how we address it...”

The blond man frowned and wanted to go take a look himself when a faint fog wreathed the air. He directed his frown up at the sky, finding it untoward. Why was there fog?

“Is there fog at sea today?”

“We don’t know, it wasn’t forecasted.”

“The monster spirits are rioting and there’s suddenly fog...” Blondie mused gravely. “The president told us to be careful when he left. Is someone behind this?”

After thinking about it, he took out a transmission pendant to send a message. Something was wrong! As for what exactly was wrong, he couldn’t say. However, the island was in a messy disarray and the monster spirits were rampaging. Perhaps he could request for the president to come back... Although the president was at the Colosseum defending against strong enemies, hadn’t that Li Hao run off?

“Be at ease, everyone! Some mishaps have developed on the island, but they will be under control soon!” he called out as he sent a message. “Please enjoy yourselves as you normally would, it will not affect you!”

His voice carried to the four corners of the island; some people weren’t taking the disturbances seriously in the first place. A man leaned on a window in an opulent hotel and hooted with laughter at the mess below.

“So fun! This is how it should be and what we’ll do next time. We’ll send some berserk monster spirits against mundanes... No, supernaturals! We can bet on who survives to the end and who dies first. Hahaha, that’s fun and makes it the game of real men!”

“That’s right! The fighting rings show us fake fights everyday, they think we’re fools! I don’t even go there anymore. They fight all day but can’t kill each other. It’s so damn boring!”

“Precisely!” Many agreed with the man’s words and roared with laughter as they looked down over the chaos. This was so much fun!

The island guards were swiftly responding to the unrest as disruption flooded the island. Many were running away from the berserk monster spirits, but many also believed that the Four Seas Company could suppress the confusion. Not only did they not run away, but they drew closer to watch the show and laugh and point fingers.

This was so much better than watching monster spirits put on a show and supernaturals attack each other! It was a better thrill than toying with women!

A group of people roared with laughter regardless of gender. They watched with rapt attention as monster spirits ripped through the guards.

“Well done!” they shrieked with approval. “I knew that the lion king is greatest at ripping and tearing! Damn it, they were just putting on an act everyday before. They couldn’t tear apart Sunflares, but now they rip through Sunflares in the blink of an eye!”

“Attaboy, that’s it, kill them all! Hahaha, go lion king! Kill them all!” A bunch of nobles hollered and catcalled with abandon.

“Get out of the way!” a guard roared.

The monster spirits were rioting and all these idiots knew was to yell their heads off. The more they did so, the more that excited the monster spirits!

“Who do you think you’re talking to?” one of the nobles raged. “Get Wu Yong out here! He wouldn’t dare talk to this young master in that tone! Do you know who I am?!”

The guard had to shut his mouth; this was someone he couldn’t afford to offend. However, the fires of anger blazed in his heart. What a bunch of assholes!

## Chapter 648: Ambush (II)

The guards grew furious to see their colleagues ripped to pieces, but neither could they truly attack the monster spirits in retaliation. They could only forcefully suppress the scene. It was barely brought under control after more powerhouses joined the efforts.

Off in the distance, Blondie suddenly frowned. He took out his transmission pendant and saw that his message... hadn’t made it out. He turned to those behind him.

“Try transmitting something to the outside world. I can’t seem to send anything out, what’s going on?”

The rest of his colleagues tried as well—someone quickly called out, “I can’t either!”

He can’t either? Blondie’s frown deepened. That wasn’t good!

“The Night Watchers are here to enforce the law!” an incomparably cold voice echoed across the scene at this time. “Everyone is to comply and stoop down. Those who resist will be killed without mercy!”

A guest blinked, then roared with laughter. “Hot damn, what kind of show is this? Even the Night Watchers are here. Hahaha! This is too funny, do the Night Watchers have jurisdiction over the island??”

“Hahaha!” Many people laughed with him. This was the Four Seas Company!

“You guys are lousy actors!” someone hooted with laughter. “You should say that guards from the Ministry of Finance are here to ensure order! This island doesn’t fall under the Night Watchers! Idiots...”

BAM!!

A massive fist descended from the sky!

Blondie and the others weren’t smiling—they were only shocked. They responded as Blondie roared, “We’re under attack!”

“Those who resist the law will die!”

BOOM!

A pair of iron fists fell. Dressed in bronze armor, He Yong outright unsealed himself. Indeed, he’d already cracked three supernatural locks. Li Hao was close at hand, the young man would fix him right up afterward and he’d be able to fish some additional gains out of it.

He Yong wasn’t in the habit of losing money when doing business.

An erupting Southern Fist was incredibly strong. His punch resulted in a massive collision. Some recognized Blondie—he was from Celestial and the president of the East Sea Company under the Four Seas Company. A peak Nova, he exploded in a mass of flesh and blood amid the joking amusement of onlookers!

Shock!



Disbelief!

There was no fear yet because there hadn't been enough time to be afraid. Countless people gaped over the island, watching the warrior with bronze armor covering his body. He'd detonated a peak Nova powerhouse with one punch!

"President!" someone wailed. Several more Novas took to the sky the next moment—not to kill He Yong, but to flee. They knew more fully than any of the guests what had happened. They needed to run!

"The Night Watchers... Demon Sword!"

"Silver Moon martial masters!" Panic seized the crowds as some became aware of who they faced.

A long blade cut through the dark void as Yang Shan executed a Nova on the spot. Off in the distance, Qin Lian materialized in the darkness and ran her sword through a Nova like she was an assassin.

Three Novas were abruptly dead in the blink of an eye.

"Run!!" someone shrieked with abject terror.

"Demon Sword has come!" Many were still staring blankly, but they started to recognize that something was amiss. This... didn't seem to be an act.

Two Novas charged out of the fog and rushed off the island. They wanted to dart into the sea! They didn't dare fly because they didn't know how many enemies had come or how many powerhouses waited on the periphery. All they knew was that flying might be the most dangerous and foolish course of action.

However, a claw stabbed through one of their hearts as soon as they entered the sea. Li Hao charged out with the bronze mirror from the other side and laid around with sword qi. He immediately killed the initial Nova that he encountered.

Dressed in silver armor, the young man chuckled. He slowly walked into the island with a smile on his face. Things were... proceeding much easier than he thought. These guys had thought it was an act, a joke! Most importantly was that Panther had been able to set all of the monster spirits into a frenzy. That had been the key to success.

Five Novas were dead in the blink of an eye. There were only nine total Novas possible on the island. Wu Yong wasn't here and the other three were absent as well! The peak Nova that He Yong had killed was likely the strongest. He was the president of the East Seas Company, the other three presidents weren't on site.

That meant to say, battle was over before it began. The five powerhouses holding down the fort were respectively taken out in the blink of an eye by the five attackers. Granted, Li Hao knew that there were more Novas than this on the island. He saw more balls of light—five more!

There were ten Novas total, but the other five might not work for the Four Seas Company.

He Yong floated in the air and boomed, "Freeze, everyone! Those who move will be killed on the spot!"

A fist descended!

Bam!

An old man shot into the air, fiery sparks spitting off him. A powerful force churned in all directions and he demanded with fear and anger, "Who are you? The Night Watchers? I am of the Ministry of Administration..."

“Comply or be killed!” He Yong shouted. A He Yong in battle was a far cry from the demeanor that he usually presented to the public. He split heaven and earth with a loud boom as he punched downward. The old man was very strong at peak Nova, but all of his bones broke under He Yong’s fist and he slammed to the ground!

Someone wanted to slip off the shore, but a large blade flashed through the air. Fire and water energy intermixed over the weapon and the target exclaimed, “A metamorphosis expert? I am...”

Thud!

His head hit the ground!

The peak Nova old man crashed to the ground while vomiting blood. He stared with fear and dread, “Southern... Southern Fist...”

“I didn’t kill you?” He Yong showed his face with a sigh. “You’re a tough one!”

“I am... of the Ministry of Administration...”

“We are enforcing the law. All those who resist with violence will be killed!”

BAM!

The old man was flattened by another punch. A hush stole through the surroundings. A noble young master was at first terrified, then delighted.

“Coach He, it’s me!” he roared. “It’s me! Is the royal family here? I am...”

A loud impact echoed as He Yong beat him apart through the air!

“Are you all deaf?” he asked coolly. “Don’t move! If you move, you die! The Night Watchers are enforcing the law here! No one move or you’ll end up like them!”

“My father...”

Bam!

Another explosion rang out. Someone wanted to speak of their family background, but He Yong viciously laid waste to the speaker. They outright exploded.

“I don’t care about your families, factions, or backgrounds. Right here, right now, you’re all prisoners!” He Yong’s voice echoed through the island. “Don’t try to escape or think of sending messages, that’s all useless!

“There are three more Novas hidden in the crowd. Do you want me to ferret you out or will you come out yourself? If you step forward now and kneel, you will be spared!”

The crowd rustled for a bit before a muscular man walked out. He looked at He Yong, at the metamorphosis expert wielding a blade and dancing in and out of sight in the sky, then at the peak dark Nova. There was also unfathomable danger outside the island, so he chose to step forward.

He didn’t say anything before walking up to He Yong and kneeling.

Dignity? What was that? It was nothing in this moment. In the face of an existence beyond metamorphosis, one metamorphosis expert, and a peak Nova, not to mention countless pairs of eyes in the darkness, dignity was worth absolutely nothing.

Once precedent was set, it would be followed by another instance. A second powerhouse walked out moments later—a woman with exquisite features. She squeezed out a smile as she seemed to recognize He Yong. He ignored her attempts at a greeting and stared coldly at her.

A cold grip sizing her heart, the woman also knelt down fearfully. Was it the royal family, or Demon Sword? Was He Yong in contact with Demon Sword? She knew a bit of the particulars and how Demon Sword had vanished. Where did Li Hao find so many helpers? He'd also ambushed the Four Seas Island!

Many trembled and shuddered, but the third Nova did not present themselves. Li Hao abruptly descended from the sky with the bronze mirror in hand. He scanned the crowd, his eyes as bright as torches. A figure appeared in the mirror—an old man hunched over in a corner. He jerked his head up, but—

WHOOSH!

Sword light raced to the heavens!

“You did not come out when we told you to,” Li Hao said calmly. “Do you think you’re powerful as a peak dark Nova? Or did you think you could escape my search?”

Sword light raced across the scene; sword intent unified the five auras and enveloped the old man. Li Hao appeared in front of the old man with exceedingly fast speed and slashed out stroke after stroke. Blood qi exploded with his next stroke!

BAM!

The massive collision rang loudly as the incredulous old man was hacked into two. Those stooping on the ground were absolutely horrified by the sight.

Li Hao didn't even look twice at his victim. He frowned and disappeared on the spot, then reappeared in front of a big bird. It'd seemed to greatly recover.

The bird looked at Li Hao with a hint of awe. "I am the envoy of Phoenix Mountain. You... you have killed them, so we can work with you too. Phoenix Mountain is one of the seven divine mountains and the mountain lord is the revered phoenix..."

Li Hao didn't respond; he simply scanned the bloody carcasses around them with an expressionless face. "Do you eat people?" He looked at the bird.

"No no, I do not eat people. This is food offered by the Four Seas Company..." The bird seemed to sense danger; its thought ripples agitated. "These are all servants, not supernaturals..."

Servants... were not people. Perhaps that was the monster spirit understanding. They hadn't eaten any supernaturals, just the food that the humans themselves had offered. These were just snacks.

There was no problem with that, right?

"Servants?" Li Hao looked around and suddenly stamped his foot. The ground split open to reveal a large cage with some people still inside. They were petrified with dread—mostly women and some young kids.

#### Chapter 649: Ambush (III)

"This is what you eat?"

"Yes, this is my food," the bird didn't deny it. "They are without supernatural powers and weak, the trash of your race. Unbelievably fragile, we cleanse trash for you when we eat them."

It didn't find anything wrong with its actions—all monster spirits wouldn't find anything wrong with these actions. In their races, the weak were cast away and even eaten. The bird hadn't intended on eating the offerings at first, it simply wanted the Four Seas Company to provide some food. The

company had offered this of their own accord. Upon finding their taste to be satisfactory after one tasting, it continued to partake.

“How long have you been here?”

“How long?” The bird thought for a bit. “Three years, according to your sayings...”

“How many people like these have you eaten?”

“Not people...” The bird still wanted to explain. “This envoy partakes of the offerings only once a month and chooses the ten most tender specimens each time...”

“Which means 120 people a year and 360 in three years...” Li Hao understood, then smiled. “You are the envoy of Phoenix Mountain?”

“Yes!”

“What is the nature of partnership between the mountain and the Four Seas Company?”

“We help them survey the surroundings and provide long distance flights to facilitate communication between the mountain and trading company. We exchange some monster spirit specialities for necessities that Phoenix Mountain requires...” The bird knew that the human in front of it was not someone to offend, so it didn’t dare hide anything. Its thought ripples undulated violently when it was done. “What are you doing?!”

Boom!

Li Hao brought down his sword with unfathomably dense killing intent. His sword pierced through the cardinal directions and chopped the bird’s head off. This was a late Nova monster spirit, but incredibly fragile all the same when facing Li Hao.

It was gravely wounded and on the verge of death after one blow. The young man didn't say a word and continued to swing stroke after stroke. In the end, there was only a bird skeleton present in front of him. All of the flesh and feathers had been hacked off.

"You're very tender too!" Li Hao smiled and turned to He Yong. "Kill all of the guards on the island, don't leave a single one alive!"

What!

The guards prone on the ground paled with horror. The strongest among them was just Solar, how could they withstand a powerhouse like He Yong? He Yong knew that Li Hao was enraged and didn't say anything else. He punched a massive crater into the ground and pulped several dozen guards!

"Senior Yang, kill all of the monster spirits on the island!"

"Understood!" A grunt came back on the wind before blade light flashed.

"Everyone on the island is to convene here. Those who are not present within five minutes will be executed!" Li Hao hovered in the air, light glistening from his silver armor. He looked silently at the bronze mirror in his hand. "You can try escaping if you think you can make it out! I am Skystar Vice Commander Li Hao, the Demon Sword that you know of! The Four Seas Company colluded with pirates and monster spirits to brutalize humans and eat our fellows! You have seen it with your own eyes! You can try running away if you think you'll make it!"

Low sobs and wails rose in the surroundings. No one dared move. The jeering nobles were crouched on the ground in bedraggled form. Some of them had peed themselves from fright—various pungent scents wafted through the air.

"Commander, I am a Night Watcher..." A terrified person volunteered carefully when he heard Li Hao identify himself.



Pfft!

A sword ran through his head. Li Hao looked at the body, then at the group. “I told you to convene on this spot, not talk! Anyone who opens their mouth will die!”

The crowd was even more horrified to see this demon kill his own colleagues. More people wet themselves.

“Night Watchers?” Li Hao asked coolly. “There might be some among you, but... don’t identify yourselves right now. If you do, I’ll only find it disgusting that we’re on the same side. How embarrassing that I am also a Night Watcher! I might be able to spare you when I calm down, understood?”

No one else dared make a sound; more streamed to where Li Hao was. Elsewhere, He Yong was furiously hunting down the fleeing guards. Some had run to the beaches, but were blocked from escape. The barrier could not fend off Novas, but these guards were at most Darkmoon. No one was getting away!

Wails and howls rose and fell.

“Demon Sword, we of the Ministry of Finance...”

“Ah!!”

“The Ministry of Finance will get you guys for this!”

“.....” Li Hao simply counted down the time. When it was up, he shot into the air and erupted with hundreds of rays of sword light. They exploded in all directions, razing multiple buildings! Agonized screams wailed out.

“Whether martial master or supernatural, do any of you think you’re getting away from me?” Li Hao couldn’t see balls of light around martial masters, but he had the bronze mirror to identify any signs of life within its effective range. They wouldn’t be escaping his reach!

A martial master rose into the air and immediately shot for the distance. He punched Li Hao’s answering ray of sword light to pieces!

A powerhouse among martial masters!

“I am a disciple of Buddha Mountain...” he roared.

BOOM!

A thick column of sword light raced down. Li Hao shot upward like he was a bird, kicking and punching. The Buddha Mountain disciple plummeted with grave injuries after a second. Li Hao reached out and snapped his throat.

“Your mountain lord’s younger brother seems to have been killed a few days ago. We did that too. Your mountain lord is on bad terms with my master, so is Buddha Mountain supposed to be scary?”

This was a decently strong martial master, at least on par with Golden Spear. But when he encountered Li Hao, he could only suffer the fate of being killed.

The premises grew even more hushed. The young man looked at where he’d stood before. Thousands of people crouched on the ground made for a magnificent sight. What a pity that the overpowering stench did not live up to it.

“Everyone is to write down their identity, cultivation level, and hand over their storage ring!” Li Hao’s voice once more rang out. “Make sure to clearly write out your name. Those who conceal their identities will be shown no mercy!”

“Don’t think that you’ll be able to evade disaster if you give a fake name! You can try it out if you’re that confident in yourself!”

Thousands of pieces of paper and writing brushes landed in front of everyone. Some of them trembled so much that their hand shook too much to write. They were beside themselves with fear. However much they were cocky before, they were truly terrified now. This was a real demon!

“Sp this is what the dynasty’s nobles are like?” He landed in front of everyone with a sigh. “How can the dynasty not decline with scum like you guys? How can it not collapse? Wake up, you’ve got five minutes. Those who can’t write should find someone else to write it for you. If not, you can be buried here!”

It was like school was in session as the sound of brushes scratching over paper was the only thing that could be heard. Many were explaining their identity, while a few shook so hard that they were unable to grip a brush. They begged for those next to them to help.

He Yong came back before long and nodded with a smile. “It’s done!” He’d killed six Novas and one Nova monster spirit in a short while. There were also numerous guards on the island—at least one thousand. But right now, they were completely obliterated by a few butchers!

In Li Hao’s view, these guys were worse than pirates. All of them were guilty! It wasn’t much to keep monster spirits around, but they fed humans to the monster spirits! Women... children... Though monster spirits gave these actions the pretty veneer of helping humanity eliminate waste, would these guards be unaware of the truth? Would those enjoying themselves on the island be oblivious?

Li Hao wanted to kill them all, but he held himself in check in the end. He forced down the burning flames of his heart because he knew he couldn’t do so. There were too many here and they were connected to too many others.

It was fine for him to kill a few or a handful, but he couldn't kill them all unless he wanted to go against the entire dynasty. He didn't have the strength to do so, despite these people all deserving death.

Li Hao felt that it wouldn't be an injustice to kill them all, but he suppressed his rage in the end.

"After you finish identifying yourself, detail the crimes of the Four Seas Company!" He smiled. "As for what crimes there are, you guys can decide yourselves! When you are done, sign and stamp the confession!"

He scattered a rainfall of papers over the terrified crowd. "You can live if you write, you can also try not writing anything!"

Yang Shan appeared at this time, holding many storage rings in his hand. "I've emptied out several warehouses and taken the storage rings from the Novas and Solars. There's probably still a lot of unclaimed treasure in the buildings of this island."

Li Hao didn't look at the rings after he received them from Yang Shan. He continued to stare at the bronze mirror and reached out before long, summoning the papers and store rings from the crowd. He grinned after perusing them.

"A lot of you guys are highly placed! If I summon your fathers or grandfathers to collect you, half of the nine ministries and royal family would be represented. No wonder the Four Seas Company is so arrogant and so wealthy. With all of you present, of course they're wealthy!"

He pointed at a young man who seemed relatively composed still. He lowered his head when he saw Li Hao point at him.

"You are the grandson of the North Sea King?" Li Hao smiled.

The North Sea King was the greatest pirate of the North Sea! The identity on this sheet of paper was his grandson... Li Hao had reeled in a big fish!

#### Chapter 650: Ambush (IV)

“Yes, but my grandfather has many grandsons,” the young man said in a low voice. “I’m just one of them and I’m not terribly important...”

“You have to know that being not important means there’s no point for your existence. Are you sure about that?”

The young man struggled for a bit before saying, “I’m one of the more favored grandsons. This one... is my guard!”

He pointed at the muscular Nova kneeling on the ground, the late Nova. His guard sighed with resignation. The grandson of the North Sea King... There was a grudge between Li Hao and the North Sea pirates. One of the dukes of the pirates had even attacked Li Hao before, but he was the one dead after the attempt.

The guard himself wasn’t one of the dukes, just a powerhouse deeply trusted by the North Sea King. Hence, he was given the task of protecting this young man.

Li Hao nodded with a smile and looked at the kneeling woman. She was a mid Nova. “And what’s your identity?”

“She’s quite a character,” He Yong responded before the woman had a chance to. “You’d see her name on the Divine Masters Ranking if you looked at it. She’s Mu Xiaorong, the youngest daughter of the minister of Internal Affairs. She’s connected to the royal family.”

“The minister’s daughter?” Li Hao was surprised.

“Yes!” He Yong affirmed. “And her potential is wonderful to be someone listed on the ranking.”

“The Ministry of Internal Affairs represents the royal family,” Li Hao laughed. “The Four Seas Company is of the Ministry of Finance. What are you doing here? Is a woman also here to gamble and while her days away in the whorehouses?”

He seemed to have caught an even bigger fish!

The kneeling woman with delicate features didn’t appear to be greater than thirty years old. She transmitted to Li Hao, “Commander Li, it’s not a good course of action to publicize my identity here. This has to do with matters between the nine ministries and royal family...”

Wham!

Li Hao punched outward, eliciting a drastic change in expression from Mu Xiaorong. She wanted to defend herself, but sank into the ground from the force of the blow. Blood sprayed from her wounds and she coughed up more blood with shock.

“Don’t threaten me and I don’t care what you guys have agreed upon!” Li Hao laughed. “There will be people along to investigate! I only know that you’re a prisoner right now, a criminal, do you understand?”

“I am your prisoner...” Mu Xiaorong still spat out blood. “But I am not a criminal!”

“No no no!” Li Hao shook his head. “Remember that everything having to do with superhumans falls under the purview of the Night Watchers. You are a superhuman and just transmitted a threat to the Skystar vice commander of the Night Watchers! That is a crime! Do you understand now?”

Mu Xiaorong fell silent.

“Hand over your storage ring!” Li Hao suddenly looked at her with a cold look. “What are you trying to take out?”

“Nothing...” She ducked her head with a spasm of fear.

“Are you thinking of bringing out something that will kill premier martial masters like me and Southern Fist?” Li Hao demanded frostily. “Why don’t you give it a try?”

Ashen-faced, Mu Xiaorong threw out a storage ring without a word. Li Hao’s expression shifted when he caught it—he took out a translucent, crystalline item that brimmed with energy. It seemed very unstable, as if it would explode at any time.

“An energy bomb!” He Yong sucked in a sharp breath, then released it. “It probably won’t kill me!”

Just one wasn’t sufficient for the task.

Li Hao stared sternly at it. He was familiar with this since Fan Cheng had used it last time and forced even Hong Yitang to back away with light wounds. She came from a spendthrift background, alright, for a mid Nova to have this kind of treasure!

“And you?” He looked merrily at the grandson of the North Sea King.

“I don’t have that...” the young man hastily said.

“Are you going to offer up your storage ring by yourself, or do you want me to cut into you to fetch it?”

The young man’s eyes widened.

“This applies to all of you!” Li Hao mentioned faintly. “Storage rings can be detected even if they’re embedded in the flesh. I’m well familiar with the habit of using one in the open and keeping another one in reserve! You can try me if you want to bet that I won’t cut into you one by one...”

People were already trembling in the crowd. Muffled grunts soon rang out as someone dug out a storage ring hidden in their body. This was a contingency in case of robbery or danger. The rings held treasures to kill enemies or to facilitate escape...

The young man sighed and spat out a storage ring. He didn’t need to dig into himself. Li Hao was quite a difficult character to handle! His storage ring hidden within his organs had been discovered!

Li Hao grinned at the development. Had he located the hidden storage ring? That he hadn’t. It wasn’t that easy to do so. He’d just recalled that when he concealed mysterious power stones with Liu Long and the others, they’d swallowed the stones into their stomachs. Surely this was an act feasible by others!

As he expected, there was more than one person with a hidden storage ring. Li Hao was collecting a tremendous amount of rings today! He’d captured another two Novas alive, one of which was a guard of the North Sea King and the other the daughter of the minister of Internal Affairs. Both of their identities were uncommon.

Meanwhile, many were those in the crowd were also related to the nine ministries and royal family. There were plenty of grandchildren of deputy ministers. When it came to the direct lineage of the nine ministers, this woman seemed to be the only one. There were also numerous descendants of royal dukes and princes. It was a pity that there were no children of the emperor. What a pity!

Li Hao swept a glance across the crowd—there were at least three thousand present. That was a lot!

Many of them were attendants working for the Four Seas Company. Li Hao had only sent his people against the island’s guards, not these people. These people were usually here for business or supplied a special service. The young man wasn’t interested in killing them either.



Adding the number of people dead to the total figure meant that the tiny island had held four thousand people. It was a decent amount of people and the key thing was that many of their identities were surprising.

Everyone looked carefully at Li Hao; a foul smell filled the air. The young man checked the time—it'd been twenty minutes since the start of his attack. Perhaps someone on the other end had already discovered something. Maybe some communications were proving impossible—that would raise suspicion.

The young man seemed to consider something as he looked at the crowd.

“What do we do?” He Yong transmitted. “Do we kill them all or what?”

Li Hao looked at him and transmitted back, “Martial uncle can kill them all!”

“.....” He Yong was speechless. I’m not doing that! Will there be a place for me in this world after I do that? It was one thing to offend the Ministry of Finance—Hou Xiaochen stood in front of him for that. But if he killed everyone here, he may as well flee to Great Li.

Li Hao didn’t say anything; he collected all of the confessionals. “You write one too.” He looked at Mu Xiaorong. “Write... that the Ministry of Internal Affairs...”

“Then you might as well kill me,” she responded lowly. “I can’t write anything like that. I’m different from them. Whatever I write represents the attitude of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.”

Wham!

Li Hao slammed his fist down, prompting horror out of the woman. Killing intent!

“I’ll write it!” she shrieked, no sign of her previous composure to be found.

Bam!

She was still sent flying, coughing and spewing up blood. “You asked for it!” Li Hao chuckled.

The surroundings were eerily quiet as everyone was beyond horrified. Was this Demon Sword? That was the daughter of the minister of Internal Affairs! He wanted to kill her at the drop of a hat all the same. Any thoughts of rising up were spontaneously snuffed out in their minds. All they hoped for now was for Li Hao to show mercy. As for resistance... that did not exist.

“And you, write all about the collusion between the North Sea pirates and Four Seas Company!” Li Hao turned to the North Sea King’s grandson. “Don’t tell me that you don’t know.”

“I... just want to ask,” sighed the young man. “Is there a chance for my survival?”

It was a difficult call for the others, but he was the grandson of the North Sea King. Li Hao may not show him mercy. This was a demon he faced!

“There is, I won’t kill you.” Li Hao laughed. “It’s good that you’re alive. However, you might be held in the Inspectorate or Night Watcher headquarters. Of course, if your grandfather has the ability to bribe the senior executives, you’ll make it back alive! But so long as I’m here, all you need to do is point out witnesses for me!”

Point out witnesses!

The young man understood. His heart chilled. In that case... there was nothing ahead for him but death even if he escaped. Li Hao’s intentions were clear—Demon Sword wanted to kill a group of people and he was the best evidence for their deaths.

“Be happy, everyone!” Li Hao chuckled. “I’m a good person who upholds justice! I’ll take everyone back to Skystar City in a bit and have even prepared your transportation! You will be fine so long as you are innocent. Liven up! The world might think that I eat people otherwise!”

The crowd sagged with relief at his words, but also cursed loudly to themselves. You don’t eat people? You’re scarier than demonic cannibals!

Li Hao threw out an origin weapon that swiftly enlarged into a flying ship. It was quite spacious as it used to belong to the Steadfast Duke. He breathed out and looked at He Yong. “We might encounter trouble on the way back, so please be careful, martial uncle.”

He Yong nodded.

Li Hao took out a transmission pendant and dismantled the bronze mirror’s shroud after some thought. He entered a message, “A sudden fog came over Four Seas Island and hampered communication. We suspect that major monster spirits are behind it...”

He set everything aside after keying in the message, then transmitted some more instructions to He Yong. The man was surprised, but nodded without a word.