

Star Gate 691

Chapter 691: Supernaturals Are Trash (IV)

Li Hao roared with laughter and walked toward Ying Hongyue. The latter regarded him warily, then vanished with Orange and Green Moon. He next appeared behind Yama and Celestial Sword Immortal. The man looked at the two with a frown. "I leave him to you guys."

The two raised an eyebrow. Interesting! Ying Hongyue really did seem fearful of Li Hao.

"Your seven bloodlines are not one." Li Hao flashed a smile. "You should be one of the eight families, so only one of the seven is a match for you. The other six are resisting you! You haven't fully assimilated them. If you had, you wouldn't be afraid of me. But at the moment... the other six seem to be closer to me!"

"So what if they are?" Ying Hongyue responded calmly. "You can't kill me. You can't even get close to me, not even with those boots on."

"I may not be able to kill you either, but I can kill your master, your friends, and everyone around you. Li Hao, it's just a simple matter of having Yuan Shuo hand over the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. Why do you have to make things so complicated?"

Ying Hongyue's bloodlines were not one whole. They refused to be fused together and felt a closer affinity to the bloodline of the Lis. Thus, he could not fight Li Hao. That would easily cause the collapse of the six that he'd forced together.

But just as he said, he was very strong and could kill anyone apart from Li Hao. He could also negotiate with people like Yama and have them kill Li Hao. It was just a matter of determining willingness.

Li Hao opened his mouth to respond, but someone suddenly sighed with complicated resignation next to him.

“Ying Hongyue, you’re still as arrogant and cocky as ever after all these years!” he said softly.

It was Earthturner Sword; he had a hand on Yuan Shuo’s shoulder. The latter seemed to want to do something, but Hong Yitang was holding him back.

“Brother Sky Sword.” Hong Yitang looked at Li Hao, then at the others. “It’s nice being a supernatural, isn’t it?”

“You can give it a try!” Sky Sword said faintly after throwing a look at him.

“As you wish,” Hong Yitang chuckled and focused on Hou Xiaochen. “You can forget that thought though, your nine locks aren’t that stable. Or they might be ten, even eleven locks. Regardless, you have your calling, so I don’t mind.”

Eyes widened at the information within his words. Li Hao’s expression shifted, but Hong Yitang cut him off again.

“The power of strength is found in its usage. Your master has more of a future in martial dao, whereas it doesn’t matter for me,” Hong Yitang laughed. “Don’t let your master flounder around randomly, and neither should you do the same as well...”

Massive force erupted for his body as everyone heard crisp snaps of locks breaking. Crack crack crack sounded without pause! The smile remained on Hong Yitang’s face as he was completely unconcerned about his actions.

“I’ve wanted to try this a long time ago, but only dared try the ones of my limbs. I’ve never dared take another step forward, but I’m rather tempted after seeing Li Hao grow so much stronger after his ascension.”

A sword drifted gently through the air, but it seemed to flip heaven and earth all the same.

“Thank you for supporting me with sword energy all this time, Li Hao. It’s been of great benefit to me. I wouldn’t be able to stabilize my locks so easily otherwise!”

BOOM!

An enormous rumble rang out as the Steppe Prince stared dumbly at the sword in the middle of his chest. When had it run through him? And, it’s the three great organizations after you guys. What are you killing me for?

“I kill you because you are a martial master with a broken lock. I fear that you may throw all caution to the wind now and continue to break more. That would turn you into a strong rival hard to contend against. The rest of them haven’t broken their locks because they still have some reservations in mind!” Hong Yitang explained very seriously. “Steppe Prince, I kill you because I view you with great importance, not because of a personal grudge. I hope you understand!”

The prince opened his mouth, suddenly wanting to laugh. I... see! You kill me because I’m a person of note after breaking one lock. You’re afraid I’ll break more and turn into a threat. Should I feel honored?

Perhaps!

After all, Earthturner Sword fully broke his lock just to be able to kill me. What an honor! I trade my death for him to become supernatural. Isn’t that good?

Hong Yitang pulled back his sword with a sigh. “The Steppe Prince really is talented. Nine of his locks were fully saturated—there wouldn’t be many who could fully match him once he completely unsealed himself. Therefore, I’ll send him on his way first. I trust that Director Hou and Commander Yu have no other opinions? He was your old supervisor.”

Hou Xiaochen narrowed his eyes without a word. Commander Yu’s expression was cold as he didn’t respond either.

What kind of stupid opinions would we have??

It was rather Earthturner Sword who was a new consideration for them. He'd fully unsealed himself and was still breaking more locks. Who knew how many he'd broken, yet he was still standing? His body was on par with Li Hao's!

The Steppe Prince had died a very wronged death, but there was no room for thought of alternative outcomes.

Li Hao brooded, silently wielding a blood-red longsword. Hong Yitang was a full supernatural now!

"This is nice." Hong Yitang walked over to him with a smile. "It's nice to feel so invincible!" He turned to face everyone else on the other side. "Do you still want the Breathing Method of the Five Styles? I think Yao Si, Hou Xiaochen, and Huang Yu can still unseal themselves to release their battle strength. Are you really going to sink to those depths?"

He addressed only the martial masters and ignored the Heaven's Eye from the City of Supernaturals.

"Are you going to back away now, or are you going to exchange a few blows with me?" he repeated.

"Brother Hong, now this makes the situation awkward," Yama laughed. "This wasn't our intent, look at things now! Why don't you try sealing yourself again?"

"You sure love to joke, Yama," Hong Yitang laughed and swung his sword! "I remember Yuan Shuo beat you a few times for your joking back in the day. How has that not helped your memory at all?"

BAM!

A loud collision rang out as Yama stumbled a few steps back. His face was flushed red while Hong Yitang coughed a few times.

“Darn, that’s hard! You’ve cultivated your Iron Shirt method to a maximum peak, but you ran away when Yuan Shuo beat Iron Shirt to death. I wonder if your junior brother hates you.”

The void seemed to split between the two of them. Yama looked down at his chest, a bloody cut there quickly healed. He frowned slightly and looked at Hong Yitang. “How many locks have you broken?”

“Guess!” Hong Yitang smiled radiantly. “Well, are you going to retreat?”

Yama frowned without a word, but abruptly jerked in shock and vanished on the spot. A blood-red longsword quivered where he’d been. Li Hao said nothing and simply frowned at the man’s extreme speed.

Hong Yitang looked wordlessly at the young man. What are you being so impulsive for?

Li Hao vanished and reappeared in front of the lord of Buddha Mountain. The man’s eyes widened with dismay and golden light immediately materialized in front of him. It broke with a crack, but created enough space for him to swiftly back away.

“Don’t force my hand!” Hints of mysterious power wafted from him. “I’ll leave now. I’m no Steppe Prince. No one will get off easy if you force me to completely unseal myself!”

Li Hao simply rained down stroke after stroke in response. The mountain lord took a blow with his body, coughing up blood so that he could break through the void!

He didn’t want to die, nor did he want to fully unseal himself like the others. Instead, he chose to flee. However, a massive sword descended!

BOOM!

Golden sparks sprayed from the lord of Buddha Mountain, but this time, they were followed by the red light of mysterious power. Blood gushing from his mouth, he punched the broadsword back and shot to the rear. He snapped one of the locks of his arms with a crisp crack.

The mountain lord's face was pale as he roared and snapped more locks in quick succession. He punched at Li Hao, making the young man stumble. That bought him enough breathing space to leave, but he took a look at Sky Sword who stood close by.

“What are you looking at?” Sky Sword looked remotely at him. “Unseal yourself. You're already here, how do you think you'll be able to leave just like this?”

He was a supernatural and it seemed that those present had forgotten he was an Arcanus. None of them paid attention to him after Hong Yitang unsealed himself! In that case, they could try him!

He'd flung his sword out to force the lord of Buddha Mountain to break a supernatural lock. A smile floated onto his aloof face.

“Fully unseal yourselves, everyone. There are inherent problems with the path of martial masters sealing themselves. It's so boring to hide and cower in the shadows! Turn into supernaturals, everyone! There will be no retreat before one side is fully exterminated today!”

This seemed to be what Sky Sword wanted to see the most. Perhaps he wished for nothing more than to have everyone become supernatural like him.

The scene raised dread in some people. Those from Yama frowned and looked at the lord of Buddha Mountain. While the man brooded, he chose to leave.

“Sky Sword, Li Hao... we’ll wait and see! But it’d be for the best if you can turn all of these people into supernaturals! I await that kind of result!”

He’d unsealed himself and thus his battle strength had ballooned, yet the lord of Buddha Mountain still chose to withdraw. He could no longer pursue his original intentions. In that case, he chose to leave more room for these Silver Moon lunatics to showcase themselves. It was best if they could force Yama and the rest into becoming supernatural. If he was to be crippled, then everyone should be crippled!

The unsealed lord of Buddha Mountain was extremely fast, so fast that he vanished in the blink of an eye. It all happened so quickly that people didn’t have time to react.

Ying Hongyue sighed and shook his head. He wanted to fan himself, but remembered that his fan had shattered. He smiled and grabbed a person with one hand each, then vanished on the spot.

“Live well, Li Hao! We’ll meet again in Silver Moon! When my seven bloodlines are fully melded, I think that will be the time for the eighth!” He was already gone.

Yama and Celestial Sword Immortal also laughed to see him go. “What a pity... but he’s right, we’ll meet again in Silver Moon. We’ll be able to take that step even without the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. We’re almost there!”

One powerhouse after another disappeared, choosing to retreat.

Chapter 692: Not Leaving (I)

The Heaven’s Eye from the City of Supernaturals darted into the void and wanted to flee from the scene. But a loud shout rose as Li Hao, Earthturner Sword, Light Sword, Hou Xiaochen, Huang Yu, Tyrant Blade, Northern Fist, Southern Fist, Yao Si...

Almost all powerhouses that could still bring strength to bear acted at the same time! Their target was one person, and one person only. The Heaven’s Eye!

Off in the distance, Ying Hongyue turned back with confusion. “Where did that idiot supernatural come from? We’re all gone, but she’s still making up her mind. She’s too ugly or I might’ve given her a reminder...”

He felt the situation rather odd. The rest of the group was gone, but she lingered. Do you really think that the City of Supernaturals is invincible? They don’t force us to stay because they’re concerned that we’ll fully unseal ourselves, leading to a pyrrhic victory. What right do you have to be so cocky as a singular supernatural?

Yama also looked back with a strange expression and laughed. “She’s braindead!”

Were all supernaturals braindead? There were so many heavyweights left on the scene that boiled with rage. Silver Moon martial masters were beside themselves with fury that Earthturner Sword and Li Hao had become supernatural. Didn’t she see that the rest of them had run?

What was she staying for? What was she thinking? Or was she not thinking at all?

Ugly people are so weird!

Celestial Sword Immortal had long vanished in the distance and sneered when she sensed the disturbance. Supernaturals not from the martial master system were all trash in their eyes. They were all idiots and braindead. It didn’t matter if one of them died.

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Kaboom!

Fireworks exploded over the sea! The immensely powerful Heaven’s Eye only had time for one ghastly scream before being obliterated. There was no surprise about her death. Everyone here burned with rage; although she was a very stable Arcanus, what did that matter when faced with so many people??

Li Hao and the rest hadn't thought that this woman would choose to be the last to leave. Didn't she see the lord of Yonder Mountain not say a word from beginning to end before quickly running away?

"What an idiot!" cursed another handful of people. Where did such a half-witted cultivator come from? Even the old ministers couldn't help eye rolls. What was she thinking?? Were pure supernaturals all so useless?

Not even Sky Sword might prevail over such a strong woman in single combat, but she died in this manner to a joint collective of Silver Moon martial masters!

A Heaven's Eye Arcanus was all too rare, but what use was one? Gone in the blink of an eye!

This was the fourteenth Arcanus to perish today. Apart from the lord of Buddha Mountain, the rest of the fourteen who'd stood outside Skystar City were all dead. The group filled in Buddha Mountain's place with a Heaven's Eye instead, perfectly rounding out the numbers!

It was frightfully quiet over Skystar Sea. There were a dozen supernaturals gathered behind the group—all Arcanus as well. There were five old ministers and multiple current ministers gravely considering the scene.

Representatives from the three great organizations and divine mountains had all run off. The City of Supernaturals was just here for the show, but they'd lost a premier Arcanus as well. Even the raging waves of the sea quieted down as they were enveloped by a grave air of solemnity.

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Over the Skystar Sea.

There were more powerhouses than could be counted. This might be the most that Silver Moon had ever sent, and they looked silently at the five old men standing in front of them. No one backed away, even with Hong Yitang having unsealed himself and the three great organizations retreated.

A red light shone in Li Hao's eyes before he stepped on a bolt of thunder and dashed over. Since Ying Hongyue and the others had left, there was no need to be polite to these people.

The massive whetstone once more descended in the sky to suppress the four corners. The five old men were plainly prepared and deployed their abilities to the utmost. When Hong Yitang and the rest charged, an old man mumbled a string of words to manifest a large character in the sky.

“Battle!”

BOOM!

The character seemed to summon a god wielding a large blade. It illuminated the heavens and caused the skies to fall in when it swung its weapon.

“The battle techniques of core origin!” Yuan Shuo identified with shock. “This is a secret art of Tranquil Star!” He looked solemnly at the five men and rapidly transmitted to Li Hao, “This is a battle technique from the ancient sacred land of martial dao—Tranquil Star! Mental strength is condensed into a character, it's a technique of core origin. I can't believe that core origin can still be coalesced in this day and age, be careful!”

The character was unbounded in its power. Li Hao clashed with the divine being in the sky, his wind and thunder energy showing hints of dispersion after a loud impact.

Another old man spat out a mouthful of blood to form an enormous attack character.

Boom!

Another god appeared in a flash of aureate light. It wielded a mallet that it swung at Hong Yitang.

The current ministers watched behind the five old men. Having lost his father, the minister of the Judiciary watched with a mottled face of anger. His eyes narrowed purposefully as he suddenly spat out blood into the air and howled, "I request the ancient gods to possess me!"

A black shadow appeared over his body while a battle blade manifested in front of him. It swiftly melded into his body, skyrocketing his internal presence and raising it to an extreme. It was like he was the incarnation of a divine spirit in this world!

"A weapon soul's become part of him," Yuan Shuo grunted. "And one from a premier weapon at that. An ancient intent will mark his movements after this, be careful!"

He was very knowledgeable, but sometimes pure knowledge was useless. Yuan Shuo had heard of such matters and read about them, but someone else was using it in front of his eyes. He'd thought it long lost!

Monster spirits killed back in the day were so strong that even though it'd been countless years since their deaths, those that had been made into weapon souls were still incredibly powerful. Melding a weapon soul into one's body would instantly raise one's battle strength to unfathomable heights.

A domineering presence swept through the scene. The old inspector general frowned slightly and looked at those standing in front of them. His frown deepened as he watched Li Hao and the others charge unceasingly, as if they didn't care about the latest development.

"A weapon soul possession will lead to grave losses on both sides," he felt compelled to remind. "This is not a technique that we should easily use. Everyone, we can sit down to discuss things or deliberate about anything untoward. Is there a need for this..."

“Kill!” Li Hao burned with rage and ignored the old inspector general. He thrust his sword through the air. Although he no longer commanded sword auras, the longsword itself was ferocious and pierced through a god with one stroke.

The old men were alarmed by this and one of them rasped, “Li Hao, do you guys think that this is all there is to the nine ministries? Ole Hu was careless and allowed you to take the upper hand. Do you think that you’ll win??”

The old man snorted and roared, “I request the divine weapon to descend!”

He vomited blood as peculiar ripples undulated in all directions. A longsword broke through the air from the city—there seemed to be a peerless shadow floating over it! Sword intent shook the world!

This was a figure akin to a sword immortal, but a shadow instead of a real person. It had been the personal sword of an ultimate powerhouse in the ancient civilization. Its sword intent was unabated after all these years and it shot unerringly toward its target in the north!

Sky Sword’s eyes widened and he flung his broadsword at the weapon!

Clang!

The broadsword fell out of the sky and the sound of flowing streams sounded in everyone’s ears. Rivers babbled as creeks flowed. Li Hao’s eyes widened as well.

“The Streamflow Sword Method!” He’d vaguely guessed at who the sword belonged to—one of the writers of the Fundamentals of Sword Theory that he had a copy of. He’d once read about their description of sword dao—the sword as the river, starting off weak, then building strong. It was the sword method by that Headmaster Chen!

Granted, Li Hao wasn't certain if the writer was Headmaster Chen himself, a disciple, or someone else, but the sword method should be the same. This was one of the stronger sword methods in the ancient civilization, so whoever had used this sword back in the day was very strong!

Stellaris suddenly trembled in Li Hao's hand. It had only been partially unsealed due to stimulus from his bloodline, but now it broke free of Li Hao's grasp and shot forward! An indomitable sword intent flared from it—to sever the self!

Li Hao sensed that stroke's sword intent once more, an unimaginably strong presence heralding a flood of sword energy.

BOOM!

It shot unerringly toward its target in the south!

The Streamflow Sword traveling northward met the Sever Self Stroke shooting southward. Both swords crashed against each other in the air, with the old man's Streamflow Sword immediately showing signs of defeat.

“Sword intent from the Eternal Sword Sovereign?” murmured an old man who seemed to know a lot. The little sword that Li Hao's blood had activated seemed to be different from before. His expression shifted drastically as he spat out a mouthful of blood. “I request the weapon of suppression to manifest!”

BOOM!

A spear hurtled through the air from Skystar City, racing out of the Ministry of Armed Forces!

Hou Xiaochen frowned at the sight and raised the Flaming Phoenix Spear. A phoenix split through the air and dove the spear. A faint spear intent blossomed from the spear, like a peerless king of the spear was forming. The fiery phoenix keened.

Meanwhile, Yao Si shook the world with his punch!

“We request the manifestation of the divine weapon!” yelled the three remaining old men.

The old inspector general gasped with horror and grit his teeth. “Are you all crazy?! You know what the consequences are if all five weapons are summoned!”

“Which side are you on, Old Chen??” roared one of the old men. “It’s them who give no quarter! In that case, they can try this on for size! This is Skystar, not Silver Moon!”

Three weapons materialized within the city, all incredibly dominating and shaking the world with their presences. One blade, one ax, and one that seemed like a whip could be seen. At the same time, a massive dragon head seemed to probe out of the void. Someone shouted within the city and a godlike figure from the Ministry of Administration manifested in the air. He held a book and brought it down on the dragon head!

A powerhouse of the Ministry of Administration! That ministry had only produced one metamorphosis expert thus far. It now showed a greater trump card, one that aimed a blow at the place.

Chapter 693: Not Leaving (II)

“Withdraw!” shouted the powerhouse holding a book. The five old men promptly retreated and convened with the two weapons in the air. The other ministers gathered with them as well.

The two inspector generals rushed into the city.

“Stop fighting,” transmitted the old inspector general. “None of you will have good endings if you keep fighting. The nine ministries have been suppressing the strongest of the royal family all this time. There’s an entire batch of powerhouses that haven’t taken the field yet. If we keep fighting to the bitter end with each other, it’s only the royal family that benefits!”

A light flashed through Li Hao's eyes as he looked at the city. That enormous dragon had simply looked around before receiving a resounding blow from the Ministry of Administration. That powerhouse was formidably overpowering and far stronger than regular Arcanus.

The ministers that'd returned to the city landed ponderously, the divine weapons returning to where they'd stood before. They quelled the four corners while thunderous rumbles came from the palace, like an earth dragon was thrashing through the land!

As everyone stared at the disturbance, some figures manifested out of the palace. Enormously forceful existences regarded the scene with some regret, but a booming voice swept the city before long!

“Skystar Marquis, the nine ministries have long forgotten their original aspirations. The world is in chaos and the people suffer in misery. We hereby decree the Skystar Marquis as the Skystar Governor General with the power to supervise and preside over the nine ministries! Any who violate the law may be executed first and a report submitted later!

“Powerhouses of Silver Moon, anyone who kills a minister will be instated as the Silver Moon King and will rule over Silver Moon as their kingdom!”

Certain people could no longer sit still given the happenings; the royal family had made their will known. Crush the nine ministries!

Plainly, the ministries were still successfully keeping something under control. Whether it was premier powerhouses or apex weapons, their blockade caused a great deal of distress to the royal family.

Today was a royal opportunity. As for the Steppe Prince, dead was dead. The royal family wouldn't have stuck their necks out when Silver Moon was plainly on the losing side. But now that the three great organizations had withdrawn and many ministry heavyweights were dead or injured, a good chance had presented itself.

Although the Silver Moon martial masters were also injured, there was a chance of breaking the nine ministries' blockade if they worked with the royal forces inside the city. The group outside looked at Li Hao, light glinting from their eyes.

Everyone could tell that the nine ministries and royal family had likely always struggled with each other beneath the surface. The ministries' domineering weapons had remained out of sight all this time, likely because they were exerting pressure over the royal family.

Prior to this, the old ministers were forced to use their divine weapons as Li Hao was relentless. That gave the royal family some breathing space.

Should they continue?

Li Hao looked at the group leaking mysterious power and then at the city. He suddenly laughed in a low voice, breaking his silence. "Dog eat dog!"

The royal family was nothing good! Skystar Dynasty hadn't been a better place eighty years ago—it might have been even worse. This was the pot calling the kettle black, they were all scourges upon the land. It was just that the royal family was the side being suppressed.

Li Hao frowned when his thoughts traveled here and he looked at his teacher behind him. "Teacher, those divine weapons..."

"They're weapons used by ancient powerhouses," Yuan Shuo answered gravely. "They might have been used early on and were never sealed. The nine ministries then refined them, but their weapon souls are fully awake and possess formidable battle strength!"

He looked at Stellaris in Li Hao's hand and hefted the stone blade in his. "They shouldn't rival the weapons of the eight families, but those of the eight families are so powerful that they aren't unsealed even after devouring your heart's blood. Stellaris erupted with some sword intent only because it was triggered by those weapons..."

“The nine ministries control many ruins and have demonstrated only a hint of the core origin battle methods that they know. The path of core origin has been abandoned in our day and age, so its capabilities are far from before. It’s said that in the ancient civilization, core origin methods from Tranquil Star City were unparalleled, unmatched, and could suppress invincible heavyweights!”

The battle methods of core origin were tied to core origin martial dao. Li Hao had once meditated on core origin, but the little tree later said that since it was a different age, perhaps it was time to fully abandon the path. It was not a match to this era.

But even so, the little tree’s core origin talisman had easily killed a metamorphosis expert and two Novas.

Li Hao didn’t say anything; the little sword flew back to his hand. The energy within it was much depleted. Thankfully, he’d stored a lot before. He didn’t say a word as he directed a flood of sword energy over the gathering. Countless mysterious power stones shattered; the little sword even devoured numerous origin weapons.

A dense wave of sword energy washed over everyone. Some, like He Yong, furiously absorbed it with tremendous glee. Others weren’t that overjoyed—Hou Xiaochen for one. He took in only a bit before stopping. After stabilizing his condition, he continued to brood.

Sky Sword only absorbed a little as well before stopping. He looked at Skystar City in the distance and asked faintly, “Do we continue to attack? The royal family is preoccupying the nine ministries. We might be able to break this balance if we make our moves!”

Li Hao mused over next steps instead of immediately answering. He looked at Hou Xiaochen. “Director Hou, Silver Moon has always been wary of the nine ministries and royal family. Is it because of these powerhouses?”

“No.” Hou Xiaochen shook his head after a brief silence.

Li Hao blinked with surprise.

“Silver Moon is not afraid of anyone, we are just wary of luring out some old monsters at our present stage!” Hou Xiaochen explained calmly. “Whether it is the nine ministries or royal family, they all control vast quantities of ruins. There are many in the central region. It goes without saying that there are ones belonging to the ancient human race, but there also might be plant spirits and beasts in deep slumber.

“They might have control over some plant spirits—you’ve seen some before. No one wants these existences to emerge in the world at present, but there are those who might try anything if they’re backed into a corner!” The man paused. “There is a difference between present day and the ancient times. Whether it is plant spirits or beasts, they bowed to humans in the ancient times. That doesn’t mean they’ll do so now. We wouldn’t have Sky Roc Mountain or Phoenix Mountain otherwise.”

Li Hao furrowed his brows.

“There are also a few special existences apart from those,” Hou Xiaochen continued. “They’re very difficult to deal with. We once wanted to explore outward, but we suffered heavy damage! In our generation, some of the old guard martial masters obtained great power at the rise of the supernatural domain. They retreated back to Silver Moon after enduring heavy losses.”

The look in Li Hao’s eyes flickered; he didn’t ask further.

“We say that we have the four guardians, not the four champions,” Hou Xiaochen continued. “Therefore, Silver Moon has always focused on defense, protection, and safeguarding.”

Huang Yu flicked a glance at him, then sighed when he looked at Li Hao. “We’ve come too late!”

He said this because Li Hao had become a supernatural. Huang Yu was a more solemn individual, this was a rare occasion in which he displayed more emotion. “You were in too much of a rush to transform into a supernatural... You don’t understand what you will face and what you will miss out on...”

“Do you know why so many powerhouses insist on being a martial master, despite knowing that it is a difficult path to walk?” He murmured as he looked into the distance, “Martial masters almost have no future at our cultivation stage, whereas the supernatural path is clearly laid out. Why doesn’t everyone pursue the supernatural then? The Arcanus level can be stabilized, whereas there isn’t even a hint of how martial masters should proceed.

“And yet, everyone insists on this path because there might be a change soon. Silver Moon might offer a solution to our problems and some ancient heritages might soon see the light of day! The cities guarded by the eight families will be open. Li Hao, you’re the heir to the Lis, but some matters are passed on only to martial masters. Take Battle Heaven, for example, the Battle Heaven Army are all martial masters and not supernatural...”

Li Hao would miss out on all of this as a supernatural! He might even be rejected by the city of the Lis when it appeared. It wouldn’t matter if he was of their bloodline because all ancient powerhouses were martial masters. There were almost no supernaturals—their legacies might not exist in this land either.

Hou Xiaochen was silent without a word. It was a blow to him as well that Li Hao had become supernatural because the young man had done so in Skystar City, right by his side!

“That’s it?” Li Hao laughed without a care in the world. “I thought the consequences would be severe!”

“You still don’t understand.” Huang Yu frowned. “Whether it’s martial masters or supernaturals, in our day and age, no one can dream of surpassing the ancients. There’s no hope of doing so. If we do not obtain the legacies left behind by the various powerhouses, we will only cease to advance and be completely unable to exceed our present! As strong as your master’s Breathing Method of the Five Styles is, dare he say that he is greater than the ancients?”

“I dare!” Yuan Shuo said grumpily. “Why don’t I?” He snorted and took a long look at Li Hao. “It’s fine, so you’re a supernatural. I’ll think of a solution for you...”

The old man glowered at the city and gnashed his teeth. “Let’s forget it this time, Li Hao. We’ll just throw them around a bit. Nothing good will result from a pitched battle, but since the nine ministries dare send out so many powerhouses to kill you... then I’ll...”

He ground his teeth and bared them at the city, suddenly falling silent.

“Don’t do anything brash!” Hong Yitang transmitted after a sidelong glance.

Yuan Shuo ignored him with a huff. Just you guys wait! He’d been in a foul mood ever since Li Hao demonstrated his supernatural capabilities. Of course, he comforted the lad on the surface and even praised him, but his heart had long been consumed by endless flame.

He’d already sorted out the cultivation realms of Summoner and Refiner of Spirit. All Li Hao needed to do was follow his instructions. It wouldn’t be hard to reach Refiner of Spirit. His five auras would become one and ultimately break out of their locks. Li Hao would even be able to easily exceed Refiner of Spirit and set foot into a new level. He could do whatever he wanted then!

Rumbles still echoed inside the city as the royal family continued to fight back. Light streaked out of the nine ministries to converge upon the royal family.

Li Hao said nothing else after releasing a vast sum of sword energy. He broke through the air and returned to his previous position at the northern gate. Silver Moon Guards were still on duty overseeing the nobles, but a portion of the nobles had already fled.

“The executions continue!” Li Hao ignored the ones who’d fled. Since the nine ministries and royal family were still fighting each other, he would execute them first!

Chapter 694: Not Leaving (III)

The fighting earlier had purposefully avoided the captured nobles, so they thought all was fine. Now, all of them were as white as a sheet and someone roared angrily, “Li Hao, you’re just bullying the weak if you kill us! It’s the weak being food for the strong!”

“Mu Xiaorong’s run off and so have those major nobles. Why don’t you go after them?”

“All your talk of fairness is just a joke! You’re just someone who picks on the easy targets!”

These nobles could sense the threat of impending death. The nine ministries had withdrawn, but Li Hao had come back. They shouted with anger and outrage. It was obvious that they’d been abandoned!

Most of the premier nobles, the likes of Mu Xiaorong and the others, had run off. It was the ones remaining who were discarded pawns. There were too many of them and the ministry experts hadn’t planned on saving them in the first place.

Li Hao watched them silently. Moments later, his shout echoed in all directions. “Commence the execution!”

Flushed with excitement, Silver Moon Guards swung down their blades with a grunt!

Pfft!

Arrows of blood shot out! The bleary-eyed citizenry within the city paused with astonishment when bloody scenes appeared on the projection screens.

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The Nine Dragons Pavilion.

An opulently dressed woman vanished and reappeared underground. She let her displeasure be known with a frown. “Why is the broadcast still continuing? It should have ended when the nine ministries lost!”

Indeed, as the extension of the royal family in the outside world, this farce should have ended when the nine ministries retreated. Scenes of the nobles being executed did not need to be streamed. It enhanced Li Hao's reputation, but was a blow to the nine ministries and the royal family. That was not a good outcome.

They had an arrangement to cease the broadcast when the nine ministries were defeated or Li Hao killed. No matter what, there should be no scenes of execution. And yet, the Nine Dragons Pavilion producer did not shut the stream off!

The woman had been focusing on the unrest at the palace and didn't realize that the projection screens were still active. It was only when gasps rose and fell outside that she realized what was at hand.

Massive machines whirred with activity below ground. A dozen people were in charge of operations. The female manager was here as well and about to speak when an old man with white hair smiled, blood suddenly oozing out of his mouth.

"Your Highness the Seventh Princess," he addressed the opulent woman. "Allow me to reintroduce myself. I am Zhao Mingduan, head of the Skystar Ancient Academy research division. I gave the order... for continued broadcast. Doesn't Your Highness... think it's so beautiful... when the heads are chopped off?"

He laughed, oozing more and more blood until he gradually lost his vital signs. The seventh princess looked severely at the others in the room. Everyone was quiet. Operating the projection machines was a technical job, not one strictly related to martial ability.

The Nine Dragons Pavilion had recruited some people when the Skystar Ancient Academy closed. To think that they would spring this on her today! Most of these people were former students, as well as several teachers.

Of course, it wasn't like she'd given them free rein of the place. Some of her people were standing guard here. She looked around and saw some corpses in the corner. Her expression shifted rapidly and she glanced at the female manager. "How did they die, Hu Jiao? When did you get here?"

Color drained from the manager's face and she lowered her voice, "Pavilion master, I..."

"Cough cough cough!" Another old man covered his voice as he coughed. "Your Highness, Zhao Mingduan is dead. He killed them before he died. Are you going to keep pursuing the matter?" He smiled at this point. "If you do, then the Nine Dragons Pavilion might lose contact with various locales at any point. All intelligence networks require our support for the moment, including the hubs of the transmission pendants. Once problems arise... is the princess confident in not needing our aid to complete repairs?"

"Are you threatening me?" The seventh princess looked coldly at him. The old man coughed without end, but he didn't seem to be afraid.

"It's not a threat," he laughed softly. "Just elaborating on the truth. Perhaps... everyone thinks we're useless, but the seventh princess should understand that without us, all of the royal intelligence systems will collapse. Will that satisfy you?"

"Do you all think this way?" The woman coldly regarded everyone around her. "This seat doesn't need that many people. So long as someone possesses the knowledge, the legacy will not end. Zhao Mingduan is dead and I need a new person at the helm. Glory and splendor is yours if you say so!"

She snorted inwardly. What were a few more dead? There were a dozen present and none of this was a problem so long as a few of them still understood the technology. There would naturally be new recruits to continue learning the trade and fill in the gaps.

Wasn't it just status and wealth? She would give it to them!

Dead silence reigned in the basement. Everyone lowered their heads without a word.

"We are in grief at the esteemed Zhao Mingduan's passing," the old man said softly. "It's not an appropriate time to talk about money or glory and splendor. This was just a small mishap, but he

paid with his life for it. Does the seventh princess still find it not enough? Then this old man will go with him...”

The expression on the seventh princess’ face turned colder and she sneered. “Well well, as expected of those from the Ancient Academy. Yun Haoran did not submit even upon pain of death, and he raised another crop of tough nuts in his wake!”

She whirled around and left. The female manager quickly followed her without saying a word. She ducked her head for a look when she passed by Zhao Mingduan’s corpse and looked into the man’s eyes. Her eyes grew wet at the sight of the other’s smile. The dampness immediately evaporated as she left with the seventh princess.

Muffled sobs sounded in the basement after the two women left.

“What are you guys crying for?” calmly asked the surviving old man. “Old Zhao died a worthy death! This is good—several hundred of those bastards lost their heads this time. The entire city and entire dynasty watched the execution! Whether it is the nine ministries or royal family, none of them can control everything!

“A basis of rule grounded in obliterating the people’s minds will not succeed! One set of laws for the nobles and another set for the regular citizens will also not win the hearts of the people! It is inevitable that nobles enjoy more of life, obtain more from life, and start at a higher position. But they cannot sacrifice the futures of the many for that privilege. That will only make the nobles more decrepit generation after generation. Soon enough, the dynasty will collapse!

“The nine ministries did not learn this lesson from the royal family and permitted all of this to happen. Their chickens will come home to roost sooner or later!” The crying dwindled as the old man calmly laid out the situation.

Everyone looked at him; he stood up with a cane as he was missing a leg. He pointed at a person in the massive projection screen. “He may not be anyone good either, and perhaps it’s only a matter of time before he becomes noble himself. He might proclaim himself king over a certain territory or be a lone wolf on his dao. But for now, he has pulled back a corner of the darkness!

“Everyone, remember this—there will always be someone who steps forward! Another would’ve come along if he hadn’t, so do not lose hope! We... will not be the only ones awake in this age!”

Everyone’s heart had died when the Ancient Academy fell. It was too hard to want to do anything in this era. They chose to join the Nine Dragons Pavilion in order to guarantee their survival. They swiftly built the communications system and helped the Pavilion complete their monitoring of all information within the ninety-nine provinces.

That was how they found their footing and why the seventh princess gradually relaxed her guard against them. But today, they defied orders and completed streaming the last scene of the execution...

.....

Skystar City was in an uproar as the final projection image had frozen on the executions. While the images were gone, a fire burned in people’s hearts. Three hundred nobles had lost their heads—the last moments of their fear, fury, and incredulity were emblazoned in looks that the entire city had seen.

They didn’t know which side had won, but Li Hao was alive. The nine ministries had ignored the nobles and permitted their heads to be chopped off, so it seemed like Li Hao had won!

That was enough!

Within the city, some noble vassals trembled with unease. Minor nobles who spent their days bullying others also cowered and shook, hiding at home to avoid going outside.

They were dead!

Several hundred had died! The people didn't understand, nor did they want to understand. All they knew was that such matters were too far removed from them. They only knew that the villains that walked in their midst seemed to be afraid. That was enough!

“The Night Watchers will commence patrols of the four directions!” Li Hao's voice blared through the city. “Those who commit evil will be executed! Those who cause disturbance will be executed! The Skystar Commander Office is still in operation, now at the northern gate plaza! Those who wish to file a report can do so. So long as the evidence is clear, concrete, and having to do with supernaturals, then they will be executed!”

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The nine ministries.

The various ministers gaped at each other.

“He's staying?!” one of them roared. Indeed, what a shocking turn of events! They'd thought that Li Hao would leave after this operation and return to Silver Moon. But no!

Li Hao was staying and seemed to want to continue cleaning house!

The current minister of the Judiciary ground his teeth and looked to the north. “You court death, Li Hao!”

It was incredible that the young man was staying. Did he really think of himself as invincible? Who knew how many from Silver Moon would die today if it wasn't for the nine ministries being impeded by the royal family. Where did Li Hao get the courage to stay from??

Chapter 695: Chicken Soup for the Soul (I)

The northern city gate.

Hou Xiaochen and the rest were confused. They're already spoken to propose that Li Hao withdraw with them and return to Silver Moon. It was safer there as the province still possessed strong battle strength.

Yet, the young man didn't make a sound.

He'd just eliminated a portion of nobles—everything would return to what it was before if he left now. Therefore, he wouldn't leave right this very moment. That would nullify today's battle in which nobles and powerhouses died.

So long as he remained in Skystar City, he would be the barometer of the city—the greatest barometer of the world. This was also one way to intimidate the four corners of the land!

“Li Hao...”

The young man raised hand to interrupt Hou Xiaochen. “What are we afraid of?” He smiled and looked into the distance, at where the nine ministries were. “I want to be a thorn in their side! I'll stab right into their heart! They're very strong and might have only displayed part of their strength, but... so what?”

“There is no need to be concerned about me, but if there are any of you who should leave, please do! I have the Windchaser Boots in hand and at my current stage in power, they won't be able to keep me here if I don't go toe-to-toe with them!”

“We must be diligent in our efforts to exterminate evil! What is the point of just starting the job?” Li Hao assessed the unrest within the city and then at the restless Night Watchers around him. “Do you see that? Some of the Night Watchers seem to be following orders well too!”

“Those Night Watchers are my old subordinates,” Yao Si said faintly. “None of them were that bad to begin with. They've just been oppressed by Yellow Dragon these years...”

“Then why did Director Yao turn a blind eye and deaf ear all these years and allow them to be suppressed?” Li Hao looked at Yao Si.

The man started to say something, then fell silent after a harrumph. Why? Are you blind? Did you not see all the powerhouses today? As strong as I am, do you think I would still be here today if I didn't keep my head down then and bide my time?

Once Yun Haoran died, the leader of the Night Watchers became a thorn in the side of the various institutions. If he'd maintained his strong demeanor of old, he would've died a long time ago.

Li Hao knew all this, but he was still annoyed for no reason other than Yao Si's habit of drinking Water of Life. That attitude of watching a good show irked him even now.

Yao Si couldn't be bothered with adjusting the young man's attitude. He left. It was just as irritating for him to spend time with Li Hao. The key point was that Li Hao now directly issued commands to the Night Watchers without going through him. What was the point of his presence?

Li Hao was the Skystar vice commander—he was outranked by the commander, deputy director, and director. He himself knew full well how many ranks separated the two of them, but he issued orders like he was the director himself!

“It's good that he's left. We can continue training. I wouldn't have wanted to keep releasing sword energy if he stayed!” Li Hao didn't bother keeping his voice down, leading to internal curses from Yao Si in the distance.

Did you say that on purpose for me to hear? I care about matters of dignity like that! My organs are stable. I only lack the cultivation path for the next stage. I don't care about the energy you have.

His battle strength increased significantly when he unsealed himself, but he didn't suffer the corresponding significant damage like the others did. He could nurse himself back to health. After cursing at Li Hao in his mind, he ignored the young man.

Yao Si was in a better mood when he returned to headquarters and saw Little Ye look at him with a worshipful expression. However, his mood immediately plunged to extreme irritation.

“The director... was so heroic this time! You’re still the great hero of my heart!”

Yao Si was delighted at that.

“The director recovered your past glory under Commander Li’s guidance! I think the Night Watchers will recover before long!”

Yao Si was most unamused by that. I’m the director! He’s a vice commander and many levels below me! So many levels! It’s not him leading me, it’s me leading him! The Night Watchers is my territory, do you understand??

.....

The northern city.

Li Hao continued to look at the central quadrant of the city. The struggle between the nine ministries and royal family seemed to have died down. It appeared that upon seeing that the Silver Moon contingent wasn’t participating, the royal family decided to continue biding their time.

This balance was the result that Li Hao wished to see. This was good! It would make him uneasy if one side won. He’d killed so many Arcanus that the royal family clearly felt that it was time to act. They hadn’t risen before, but chose to violently revolt today, likely because Hu Xiao was dead.

The ripples of power coming from the Ministry of the Judiciary were plainly weaker than the rest of the ministries. Their old minister was dead and his son was weaker than his father. He produced weaker energy ripples when manipulating their divine weapon.

Various powerhouses stood by Li Hao’s side and looked in the relevant direction. Golden light shimmered in Li Hao’s eyes. His eyes had always been able to see energy ripples—possibly due to

his bloodline. The little sword had unsealed only by a little more today after absorbing a great deal of his blood—possibly due to the purity of his bloodline.

But at this moment, his eyes demonstrated slight changes. He could see the energy ripples around him—not just pure energy, but some of internal force as well. He looked sideways at Hou Xiaochen; the man likewise tilted his head back at Li Hao.

Light sparkled in the young man's eyes. He could vaguely make out the thick chains of supernatural locks. This confirmed the changes in his eyes.

Why? Li Hao tightened his grasp around the little sword, finding a possible reason there. Perhaps the little sword absorbing blood had led to some purification of his bloodline. Was that possible?

He wasn't sure and had always had questions as to why his eyes could see certain things. He seemed to be different from cultivators with the heavenly eye.

Heaven's Eyes made use of powerful mental strength to peer into certain things. That wasn't his modus operandi. Li Hao utilized his bloodline, not mind intent. Heaven's Eyes just seemed to have a stronger mind.

The young man didn't speak of his speculations; he surveyed the surroundings to find many martial masters still lingering on the scene. Meanwhile, some had run off right after absorbing some sword energy. They'd run so quickly that they were long out of sight.

“Senior Thunderleg is gone.” Li Hao looked at Hou Xiaochen. “Director, what crime did he commit?”

This was the only martial master to come in reinforcement that he was less familiar with. Li Hao only recalled the man's wretched appearance.

“There were some bystanders present when he sparred with Deficient Leg twenty years ago,” Hou Xiaochen responded faintly. “He vented his spleen on the crowd when he lost and killed two dozen people.”

Li Hao’s brows drew together in a frown.

“Those people wanted to watch despite knowing that powerhouses were fighting,” Yuan Shuo dismissed what he viewed as foolish actions. “They acted like they were watching monkeys turn tricks at the circus. It doesn’t matter that they’re dead! You overcorrect in certain matters! Martial masters normally do not fight near mundanes. The ones watching were also martial masters. There has been a rule in Silver Moon since the ancient times that if you watch powerhouses fight, then you are responsible for your own injuries!”

“He killed people on purpose!” Hou Xiaochen looked coldly at the old man. “Yuan Shuo, your disciple is dispensing justice! And what of you?”

“Such are the rules of the martial world!” Yuan Shuo refused to back down. “The law is the law, but so are the rules the rules. All martial masters tacitly accept it, which makes it a superhuman rule. It’s not appropriate to apply the same rules to both superhumans and mundanes! He didn’t drag mundanes into the violence, so don’t mix up Thunderleg with these nobles!

“And, if you want to talk about breaking laws in a way that affects mundanes, very few of us have committed such crimes. If there are any, there is only one. You should arrest Southern Fist!”

He Yong looked around blankly.

“Thunderleg is much better than Southern Fist in my opinion!” sneered Yuan Shuo. “Thunderleg killed some bystanders in a martial world matter, Southern Fist often leaves without paying when he eats out! He’s like a hooligan who terrorizes the market! If you want to apply the law, I say kill him first! No one will object to that!”

The law-abiding Northern Fist nodded at Yuan Shuo's words. "Little He does indeed show a fair disregard for the rules," he said softly after some thought. "He likes to commit embarrassing acts. His reputation was the worst among the people when we were all active in the martial world. Not even Ying Hongyue and the others were as infamous as him."

The main reason for that was that the latter group was active in the martial world, unlike He Yong who had a habit of not paying for his meals in the civilian world.

"I pay my debts when I have money!" He Yong squawked with outrage. "I put a few meals on my tab because I didn't have any money! I discussed it with the boss that I'll pay when I have money! I just owe them money, it's not like I won't pay them back!"

What was this, a 'ruin Southern Fist's reputation party'?

"Go ask around in Silver Moon if I paid them back as soon as I had money!"

"When have you ever had money?" someone snorted.

He Yong blinked and cursed under his breath. Of course he had! How were they looking down their noses at him?!

Li Hao didn't add to the conversation as he was contemplating if the law should differ according to the population. It would be a fundamental difference in the law, not the same system with two different applications as was present now. If the line of separation was superhuman vs mundane, with each side following their respective laws, then which system should apply if superhumans interfered with mundanes?

This was a great matter for deliberation that he'd never considered before. He certainly thought about it a lot today. Thunderleg, for instance, took out his anger on some bystanders after he lost a match. Since this was in accordance with martial world custom, Yuan Shuo didn't see a problem with his actions.

However, Hou Xiaochen found these actions untoward and that the perpetrator be taken into custody. Hence, Thunderleg foregone all of the potential benefits and ran off after absorbing a tiny bit of sword energy. He was plainly afraid of Hou Xiaochen.

Chapter 696: Chicken Soup for the Soul (II)

Li Hao contemplated for a while before looking at the Silver Moon Guards below him. He then regarded the nobles who'd neither been sentenced to death nor ran away.

“Those who were not sentenced to death may go. But those who ran... I will bring all of them in for justice! Releasing you is also within the authority of the Night Watchers. Running away is against the law!”

The nobles beneath him blinked. They'd thought they were dead without a doubt! But they were released instead? Really? Those who'd run away were the descendants of major noble families. Li Hao was going to arrest them instead?

No one believed their ears!

Some were too fearful to move while others gingerly observed the situation. Upon seeing that Li Hao really was ignoring them, they cautiously moved their feet, then quickly fled the scene with glee!

One person getting away was the start of an avalanche. The rest of the nobles swiftly vacated the premises.

“Why aren't you killing them?” Hou Xiaochen glanced at Li Hao.

“There's no real meaning to that.” Li Hao shook his head. “That first batch is enough! I'll find time to take care of the rest. That's enough for today. Letting them go back will also intimidate the others and create some trouble for them...”

He laughed and looked down the Avenue of the Nine Ministries before turning back to Hou Xiaochen. “You should leave Skystar City as well, director! Go back to Silver Moon! It’s enough that I’m here.”

“You alone won’t do!” Hou Xiaochen frowned.

The young man turned to the rest instead of arguing. “Li Hao is grateful beyond words for the support shown by various seniors today! The seniors had to leave in a rush last time, please stay another day or two this time. I will release more sword energy when I have finished with my tasks at hand and help the seniors consolidate your organs!”

He looked at Yuan Shuo when he was done. The old man glowered, knowing what his disciple wanted.

“You want me to teach the path of Refiner of Spirit? It’s all theory apart from the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. You can choose to do whatever so long as it doesn’t involve the specific legacy!” Yuan Shuo truly didn’t care so long as the Breathing Method of the Five Styles wasn’t passed on. The rest was just theoretical concept.

For the rest of the crowd, however, the breathing method wasn’t necessarily the most useful for them. It was Yuan Shuo’s hypotheses that they were most interested in. Even Sky Sword halted his steps when he heard this and chose to stay.

This was when Panther abruptly reappeared. The black dog had been absent all this time and soundlessly slipped over to Li Hao’s side. It bubbled with delight, but didn’t make a sound. Li Hao looked down at it and raised an eyebrow.

“Panth, hand over everything from the people that the director and others killed!”

“Arf arf arf!” Panther protested. You want me to hand it over?? It’d just returned from scavenging the battlefield.

Li Hao knew it'd gone. He himself hadn't collected any of the spoils, but he knew nothing would go missing, if for no reason other than there was a dog keeping an eye on everything. This was how they'd operated for each battle. Panther wouldn't let a single scrap of treasure slip through its claws.

Who was in the frame of mind to stop and collect loot in the middle of battle? Only this dog. No wonder it'd disappeared after taking down one metamorphosis expert. It'd probably been cleaning up the battlefield ever since.

The group looked at Panther. There were so many powerhouses dead after the clash—Arcanus alone numbered fourteen. There were nine metamorphoses, a number that included Yellow Dragon and his colleagues, as well as numerous Novas.

With local sovereigns as the Steppe Prince, the Heaven's Eye, and Hu Xiao, there was certain to be an abundance of treasure. There was also the North Sea pirate and his many years of plundering, as well as the old Steadfast Duke...

Any one of these figures were as rich as a nation!

The sheer potential of the wealth tempted some in the crowd. He Yong looked at Li Hao a few times—how about we divide up the spoils?

Sky Sword and a few others didn't care about this topic. The nine ministries seemed to have fully quieted down. Sky Sword assessed their condition for a bit before saying, "It might be safe enough to stay, but you might also face attack from both sides!"

There were two possibilities in that the nine ministries would not move against Li Hao and the rest from now on. That would free up the royal family for other endeavors. The alternative was that the two sides reach an agreement with each other.

That response interrupted Li Hao's further speech and Panther took advantage of the opening to slip away. Plainly, the dog was independent enough that it didn't desire to share the spoils. Li Hao wanted to yell at the dog, but Hou Xiaochen stopped him.

“It’s fine if the dog takes it all. Whether it’s mysterious power stones or Water of Life, none of that has much of an effect on us. We don’t need them, we need the way forward!”

It was a small matter. The true matter lay elsewhere. Hou Xiaochen looked at Hong Yitang, the man had kept his composure all along. “Brother Hong, how many supernatural locks have you broken?”

“Why do you ask?” Hong Yitang smiled.

“I’d just like to see if you stand a chance of converting back.”

“It doesn’t matter.” Hong Yitang really didn’t care. “I’ll just continue down the path of energy if I can’t. At least there’s a straight way forward. I can try the system of three or four elements after I strengthen my organs. There shouldn’t be much of an issue with that.”

He didn’t want to explain himself further; Hou Xiaochen fell silent after a sigh. With how things stood, Li Hao, Hong Yitang, and Sky Sword were in similar straits—full Arcanus. All three had been martial powerhouses and supreme geniuses, so it filled him with complex emotions to see them thus.

Li Hao neither spoke nor asked anything. He’d been ready to face the situation by himself, so the arrival of so many heavyweights was an immense surprise.

Of course, he’d known that people would come, but the arrival of Yao Si and Thunderleg was still quite a surprise. The two fairweather participants from the Inspectorate didn’t ruffle Li Hao’s feathers. He didn’t take them into account for his plans since their minds were often changing.

This time, the young man was prepared to spend a period of time in Skystar City. It was a complicated situation at the dynasty capital and it wasn’t normal for so many Arcanus to have appeared. It meant that they possessed a lot of Water of Life, and what he saw was only the tip of the iceberg.

There must be ruins here, and many. Perhaps Skystar City was the old Skystar Fortress. It was said that this place used to have massive mines and was safeguarded by an army. Battle Heaven records spoke of ten Skystar armies keeping the peace. All contact was eventually lost with them.

Li Hao was quite certain that this was where the Skystar ruins were. Did the nine ministries and royal family jointly excavate the ruins, or did they explore separate ones? Various thoughts ran through his mind.

“Let’s find a place to talk about our experiences as a supernatural,” Hong Yitang raised. “We can leave the floor to them. Things will be fine in the immediate future.”

Li Hao was surprised and quickly surmised that Hong Yitang had something to say. He rather owed Earthturner Sword after this venture. The others didn’t say anything, so the two took a step in the air and vanished on the spot.

Yuan Shuo snorted after they were gone, immensely put out. There that fellow went again! Granted, he was quite resigned that Hong Yitang had fully unsealed himself. He wanted to do the same, but Hong Yitang had stopped him from doing so.

Jadelight stood next to him. She hadn’t been of much help in the fight, but she didn’t mind. It was paramount that Li Hao remained alive, and he was. “Didn’t you say that you grow stronger when you meet strong foes?” she transmitted.

Yuan Shuo cursed to himself!

“What do you know! This would’ve been the greatest battle of our era if they’d forced my hand! The hell do you know!” he transmitted back.

“You have more trump cards?”

“No shit! Who doesn’t have a few aces up their sleeves?” Yuan Shuo blustered, but he was actually considering if he should make some more preparations. His disciple was growing ever more unreliable and he couldn’t always hope to rely on outside force.

.....

By the sea.

Instead of discussing supernatural affairs, Hong Yitang asked, “What is your goal in staying here?”

“I don’t know.” Li Hao shook his head.

“You don’t know?”

“Mmhmm.”

“How are you engaging in all this nonsense when you don’t know?” Hong Yitang laughed. “You’ve actually broken a lot of unsaid rules with everything you’ve done. Silver Moon, for example, has been preparing an invasion by these powerhouses. And yet, the nine ministries and royal family aren’t ready... You left so little time that no one’s ready.”

“Isn’t that good?” Li Hao laughed as well.

“Oh, you!” Hong Yitang sighed with emotion. “Your master isn’t ready either. He’s always been confident, likely because he’s reached an agreement with a plant spirit or monster beast. Or he might know where they are located and hasn’t dug them up yet. But judging from his recent performance, he seems to have uncovered one...”

Li Hao nodded in agreement after some thought. “He might have discovered a plant spirit and reached an agreement with it, resulting in my teacher’s organs being rapidly strengthened.”

He’d seen some signs as well. Yuan Shuo’s combination of his five organs was the result of absorbing significant Water of Life. That hadn’t come from Li Hao, Yuan Shuo had dug it up himself. Perhaps he’d found a plant spirit in the central region and remained in contact with it.

However, partnership with plant spirits wasn’t necessarily a good prospect. Revitalizing them might lead to unpredictable results.

“Skystar City is not a kind place,” Hong Yitang nodded. “Staying here means being surrounded by tigers and wolves. The foundations of the nine ministries have not yet been fully called upon.”

“Are the old ministers not it?”

“Not necessarily.” Hong Yitang looked at the city again. “The one from the Ministry of Administration never took the field. Only seven old ministers appeared. The one from the Ministry of Armed Forces was also missing. They’re the two strongest. The third strongest... is probably the fairweather guy.”

“Him?” The old man from the Inspectorate?

Li Hao nodded upon further thought. That old man was indeed powerful. He’d killed the Chu River King as soon as he showed up. The young man hadn’t been able to read anything about him afterward because the old minister hadn’t done anything after. He didn’t cough either and rather seemed like a martial master. Li Hao didn’t read a ball of light from him.

There were martial masters and supernaturals among the nine ministries. Hu Xiao had been a supernatural, but the old fart from the Inspectorate seemed rather like a martial master. It was hard for Li Hao to read anything from them at their level of strength, but he could still determine who was a pure supernatural since their ball of light burned too brightly.

Chapter 697: Chicken Soup for the Soul (III)

“So you want to reform the dynasty?” Hong Yitang asked after briefly analyzing the situation from Li Hao. “Apologies for being frank, but there’s no hope of doing so, not unless you completely overthrow it and build a new one!”

“I don’t intend to lead a revolution.” Li Hao shook his head. “To be honest, I don’t know what I want to do either. I just find the world to be a bit unfair, a bit too dark, and refuse to accept the situation as it is. I know the limits of my ability and don’t have the capability to do as you say, to become a savior. That is not realistic and not what I’m searching for either!”

“Let’s put it this way. Perhaps after seeing Battle Heaven and reading a few ancient books... I find that whether it’s this age’s supernaturals or martial masters, we are all simply searching for a path to become stronger. It has nothing to do with the mundanes. In that case, why do we interfere with their lives? Why must we fight wars? Why do we prey on them? Did the ancient civilization grow stronger through predatory practices on helpless civilians?”

He didn’t understand and felt that there wasn’t a need to be thus.

Hong Yitang smiled and shook his head. “They aren’t just simply exploiting the people, they even want to obliterate the people’s minds and raise a crop of idiots. None of the factions are dumb, they know that the people’s hearts can be useful. But why don’t they make use of it?”

“Because it’s too hard! Who can easily obtain the approval of ten billion people? It’s too difficult!”

“Therefore, there’s a simpler way of just making them dumber and brainwashing them. When the people lose their own thoughts and someone conquers the dynasty, that will create a direction for the people’s heart—a false people’s heart...”

Hong Yitang had to switch to a more direct tactic when he saw that Li Hao still didn’t understand. “Do you know why the number of schools has decreased and the people consistently suppressed?”

“I don’t know.”

“The human heart!” Hong Yitang explained. “The Human King... the human heart! The ancient tomes mention that whether one wants to be a Human Emperor or Human King, that person needs all of the people to accept them. That will bestow upon them insurmountable power and place them on a special path of great dao, one that will create a matchless powerhouse out of them!

“But whether it is the nine ministries or royal family, none of them are capable of creating this condition. Therefore, they wish for the people to be dumber and easier to control, ultimately creating a Human King for them!”

“.....” Li Hao blinked, looking at Hong Yitang.

“That is a much easier option,” chuckled the man. “There’s no helping it, the world is in chaos and no one can guarantee that they can benevolently rule over billions of people. It is beyond our reach to have everyone accept a sovereign from the bottom of their hearts. In that case, a shortcut must be taken!”

Li Hao understood this time and his expression flashed through a variety of changes. “So you mean... that this is all on purpose? That the nine ministries and royal family know full well the state of our world, but they’re still doing all this?”

“Of course!” Hong Yitang burst into laughter. “Their sages are much wiser than you! Of course they know everything and that the people suffer in misery. But once the people are stupid, they are easy to control. That has ever been the case since the ancient times.

“Yun Haoran of the Skystar Ancient Academy wanted to change the situation a few years ago, but he died a grisly death in his home shortly after he submitted his proposal. Do you think that the upper echelon doesn’t know the advantages of popularizing what he proposed? The ancient technologies and skills were very advanced! Once made standard, the world’s basic necessities of life would be vastly improved.

“But once the people’s intelligence level rises and they become more civilized, then more thoughts will flourish in their minds.

“Don’t limit yourself to thinking that the nobles are all idiots and oblivious to everything happening. They know. Why else would they themselves go to school, learn how to read, and cultivate?” Hong Yitang looked at Li Hao with a smile. “Thus, the status quo of the world is a state of affairs that all sides wish to see. Do you understand?”

Li Hao nodded and was silent for a while. “Isn’t there any faction who wants to be a Human King who truly has the people’s heart and not a king through ploys that rely on dumbing down the population?”

“It’s too hard!” Hong Yitang sighed. “That’s harder than ascending the heavens! Few are those since the ancient times who can truly accomplish that requirement. It’s not a matter of just being strong, but having to advance society’s progress and development from all aspects. Whether it is the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, housing, and transportation, or that of the mind and material world, such a person would be required to satisfy all of these needs.

“Li Hao, as stunning as your martial skills are, you will become the same as them sooner or later if you rule through force. Do you see what I mean?”

The nine ministries had wanted to win the people’s hearts through certain methods back in the day, but ultimately gave up. It wasn’t that they weren’t aware that they’d turned into the evil dragon themselves—they were fully aware!

But sometimes, they had no choice but to take that course of action because another road was too far away and untouchable. If there was a shortcut... then they would take the shortcut.

“It really is too hard!” Li Hao shook his head after some thought. “I can tell that I’m not cut out for this after your explanation, but martial uncle can give it a try...”

“You’re joking!” Hong Yitang laughed. “You must be. My hair is almost white from overseeing just one thousand people. If there are ten thousand, one hundred thousand, one million people in the future... I’d be out of my mind with nerves! Not to mention, we’re not just talking about one million people in this world, but billions or ten billion. It may seem like just a number to you, but it represents unbounded fear to me!”

He shook without being cold; he could understand the dread from the nine ministries and royal family. It was horrifying!

“Then why be the Human King?” Li Hao frowned. “Just do whatever you want! You might not satisfy everyone, but you can do as you wish and not do as you wish. Why suppress the people and seek to become the Human King?”

“The human heart is greedy. Once you know that you have a chance of becoming the undying Human King, wouldn’t you want to do so? In our times, how long can even the mighty Arcanus live for? Wouldn’t you want to live for three, four, five thousand years if you could? The previous generation has grown old. Those like the old ministers are around one hundred years old. In this age, an Arcanus at one hundred years old will still die if their physical body is too weak and decrepit!”

So this was for an extension of life? To be undying and indestructible?

“I’ve never thought about this,” Li Hao laughed upon some consideration.

“That’s right, so you don’t understand. This is why those old ministers desire this, because they are old. Someone advanced in age is prone to making mistakes. Even if one goes through life without being afraid of death, that fear still rears its head when they are old enough. The knowledge of knowing that one will die from old age is particularly hard to bear. Thus, even sages eventually find this temptation hard to deny.”

“I understand what Martial Uncle Hong is saying.” Li Hao finally nodded. “And understand your meaning. You’re saying that there’s no point in letting them remain, that I might as well eliminate them all?”

“That’s right!”

“Then we’ll eliminate them!” Li Hao bared his teeth in a grin. “I think martial uncle is more qualified than them to be the Skystar King!”

Hong Yitang rolled his eyes. Get outta here with that!

He didn’t want to be the Skystar King. He told Li Hao all this only because he wanted the young man to recognize on a fundamental level that there were some things that could not be changed by one person. No matter how strong one was, one could not change everything unless one was so strong that no one could resist.

“Martial uncle, we won’t become fat from one bite alone!” Li Hao continued. “I know what you mean, but we can start slow. If one year doesn’t work, then ten years. If not ten years, then one hundred years. I think the ancient civilization was great. Someone’s always going to do the work!”

“If you don’t do it and I don’t do it, and we spend our days talking about how hard it is... then of course it’s hard!”

He looked merrily at Hong Yitang. “I think that since I am a martial blockhead, I can clear out some obstacles for martial uncle. You can slowly expand the Sword Sect, starting from the most basic level, then the slightly less basic level, and gradually include all aspects of society.

“You don’t have to always think of ten billion people in one go. Why don’t we start with ten thousand people, then one hundred thousand, then one million? One million isn’t that many either, it’s the size of Silver City’s population. I don’t think it’s that hard for everyone in Silver City to be highly motivated after the city becomes rich.”

Hong Yitang had wanted to give Li Hao a lesson, but he suddenly blinked, lost in thought. If you don’t do it and I won’t do it, of course it’s hard. But if you do it, there will be more people that follow.

Li Hao had stepped up to resist this time, which led to Yao Si appearing as well. Some more stepped forward from the Night Watchers, but would any of them tossed their hats in the ring if Li Hao hadn't made the first move?

He'd wanted to persuade Li Hao to certain action, but now it was himself who was persuaded by the young man.

"You're much more mature than before." Hong Yitang nodded after a moment of silence. "And have some more thoughts of your own. You're right, there will naturally be others who follow after you take the first step. Even if they don't, they will admire you and not stand in your way..."

"Unrest will rock Silver Moon sooner or later and it will become the center of the world. It won't happen that quickly, however. It's Skystar City that still has more of a foundation at the moment and is the core of the dynasty. Anything you do here is magnified!

"The changes perpetuated from Skystar City might swiftly spread throughout the entire dynasty," he suddenly chuckled. "I'd rather like to stay, Li Hao, and accumulate some experience here. What do you think?"

"Eh?" Li Hao started. "Is martial uncle not returning to Silver Moon?"

That was sudden!

"I've been reflecting during this period of time and find that my thinking is still too simple." Hong Yitang nodded. "Some things are still too hard and I'm being a bit too idealistic. I need to ground my ideas in reality more!

"And sometimes, my proposals are quite a headache..." he admitted wryly. "The items that I brought back from Battle Heaven, for example, I find quite practical and advanced. But those of the Sword Sect find them hard to comprehend and thus do not appreciate them. They carry on as before, so my thoughts are that they know too little of the world and have too little education. I'd

like to rebuild the Skystar Ancient Academy and teach people how to prepare first, then print books and disseminate knowledge...

“But the first point is that everyone needs to have full bellies! Greater opportunities will come after their bellies are full. Once their material needs are satisfied, the people will seek satisfaction of mental and spiritual needs...”

Li Hao listened carefully, not sure he understood everything he heard.

Chapter 698: Changes (I)

Hong Yitang seemed to be persuading himself as he spoke. He smiled at the end. “Now is the perfect timing. The people’s heart is in flux, the royal family and nine ministries are curbing each other, the three great organizations and seven divine mountains are biding their time. If we choose to take the stage at this time and intimidate a bunch of people, combined with the effects of the earlier battle, we’ll be able to do certain things.”

“Will it impact martial uncle’s cultivation?” asked Li Hao.

“This is also cultivation,” Hong Yitang laughed. “It’s a cultivation of the heart. I thought you understood.”

“I have certain reflections about this topic!” Li Hao also laughed. “Everything is cultivation. Martial masters are not of the physical strength, but of the heart. Am I right, martial uncle?”

“You do have a bright future ahead of you! Therefore, when those martial blockheads focus on the path of martial dao versus the path of energy... It doesn’t actually matter, there’s no difference!” Hong Yitang chuckled. “To be honest, I’m rather surprised and delighted that you’ve improved so much in such a short period of time and comprehended so much. Only those with their sights limited solely to martial dao obsess over martial masters and supernaturals. You don’t need to pay them too much heed.”

“I don’t mind.” Li Hao nodded. “Not to mention, the locks of my five organs are still there. It’s not like I don’t stand a chance of converting back.”

“You don’t need to think about converting back,” Hong Yitang laughed. “That’d be too forced! Just go with whatever comes your way. Of course, seal yourself if you can. You look to have undone the locks of your limbs, zifu, and spine. The ones of your organs can be ignored for now. You must know, Li Hao, that there are so many more supernatural locks in the human body than these. Therefore, as you strengthen yourself on this new path, you can also consider if martial dao is the only possible path.”

Li Hao nodded again. He always learned something new when he conversed with Hong Yitang; the young man was feeling much more at ease. While Hong Yitang offered mostly chicken soup for the soul instead of tangible cultivation methods, it always brought some new reflections to Li Hao.

That he could make it to his current heights was in large part thanks to his teacher and Hong Yitang. One was his light on the path of cultivation, the other his pillar of faith when it came to the heart.

Li Hao didn’t offer a second opinion on Hong Yitang’s desire to stay. They’d just launch another massive battle if it came down to it! He wasn’t afraid of anything! He was no weakling anymore and while the other side understood his capabilities now, so did he know a bit about them. It wouldn’t be that easy or even feasible for them to kill him anymore.

He might as well take advantage of this opportunity to set his authority. If he left now, it would give one the feeling of a deserter. Of course, he had to be on guard against counterattack, so he needed to continue to strengthen himself.

The two started back after a bit more conversation; a question struck Li Hao after they walked for a while. “Martial uncle, Ying Hongyue and the others haven’t unsealed themselves, so why are they so much stronger?”

“Differences can be apparent when it comes to the saturation and total number of locks. They are also stronger in terms of physical body, blood qi, and mental strength. They’re more holistically complete than we are.”

Li Hao understood.

.....

The two didn't say anything further. What happened in Skystar City swiftly spread on this day. Large numbers of Arcanus were dead, the nine ministries had suffered a defeat, the North Sea King had fallen in battle, the Steppe Prince had perished, and three hundred noble heads had been chopped off...

Certain interested parties made sure the news kept spreading. Silver Moon widely disseminated everything they knew as soon as they learned of it.

.....

In White Moon City.

"Nice!" Kong Jie heaved a long sigh. "Even I want to be there just from reading the reports. To think that they'd all show up! You should've let Ole Huang take me!"

Director General Zhao ignored him. What could you have done if you'd gone? You wouldn't have contributed to anything.

"A pity about Li Hao..." Kong Jie continued.

"Not necessarily," the director general said faintly. "You guys are always pitying this and pitying that. What's wrong with supernaturals? Nothing! It's just that Silver Moon martial masters have stronger internal force than them, but they also have a different heart. Would you say that Qimei Staff and Sky Sword aren't martial masters?"

Kong Jie blinked.

“It’s rather Earthturner Sword who has an open mind!” Director General Zhao smiled. “He sees further than the rest of you. I think that while he doesn’t rank first when it comes to potential—that’s Yuan Shuo—but he’s likely first when it comes to the future!

“Li Hao was in close contact with him shortly after he came in contact with martial dao. The lad’s been greatly affected by Hong Yitang. We wouldn’t see the current Li Hao otherwise. He would’ve become the next Yuan Shuo if he followed his teacher, but being the overlord of the martial world is operating on too small of a scale!” The director general viewed the situation more expansively than most, so he didn’t think there was anything untoward about this development.

“But the eight cities...” Kong Jie frowned.

“Do you think that the ancient civilization was as short-sighted as you guys?” Director General Zhao couldn’t be bothered to further converse with Kong Jie. They didn’t understand that this was good! He rather had some more expectations for Li Hao now.

.....

Skystar City was the same flourishing scene of prosperity as usual. Yesterday’s great battle was already ancient history and everything had been returned to its previous condition. Apart from the northern city gate being slightly tattered, there was nothing else different in the city.

Well, there were several hundred corpses at the northern gate and several hundred heads hanging from it...

But the weather seemed to be nicer.

Skystar City was full in the onset of winter by the time November rolled around. Thunder and lightning had ravaged the skies yesterday, storm clouds pressed down on the city as gale winds howled. Today, the sun was out and a ray of sunlight barreled through the gloom to envelope the capital.

The thriving royal city basked in long-awaited sunlight this morning. Children ran through the streets as adults bustled about their business. Vendors and storefronts were open bright and early. A steady stream of customers browsed their wares. All was as usual. All was as normal.

A troop of supernaturals wearing Night Watcher uniforms walked on the streets. Merchants and passersby that usually avoided them like the plague—while still nervous—didn't shrink back from them as usual. Instead, they regarded the Night Watchers with either curiosity, confusion, or odd looks.

They seemed to be asking, are you from the Skystar Commander Office?

Countless pairs of eyes stared at the patrolling Night Watchers. It was a rather uncomfortable sensation, like they itched all over. They might have rebuked the crowds if this was in times before, swaggering around with their strength and finding joy in watching people run frantically away from them.

But today, they didn't dare do so.

They simply quietly walked along the streets, looking around the surroundings.

“The Skystar Commander Office is being built in the northern quadrant of the city!” someone rasped out, like they were reciting from a book. “If you have concerns, you can wait for a few days before taking action. All those who desire justice may proceed there!”

The two sides of the street were as quiet as could be. The Night Watchers felt equally awkward, but didn't dare say any. They simply reeled off their words, walked forward silently, then repeated themselves after a few moments.

A meat vendor suddenly called out from a distance. “Sirs! This guy owes me thirty thousand star coins and won't pay up! He threatens me and wants to kill me instead when I ask him to settle his debt! Can you do something about this?”

The roar startled the Night Watchers and the other vendors lining the streets. Everyone looked at the meat seller.

A fierce, brawny man wielded a butcher's knife as he faced a person outside his stall. The latter gripped a blade and wore luxurious clothing, but looked more like a monkey with a hat on. He was skinny, scrawny, and his eyes darted around shiftily.

His face twitched to see everyone put him as the center of attention and he quickly cursed when he saw the Night Watchers, "Bullshit! When did I ever say I wasn't paying you? I only said it'd be a few days late, can I possibly stiff you? It's just thirty thousand coins, I'll have it to you in two days! I'm buying meat for the marquis, would I possibly rip you off??"

His quick retort mentioned his status and willingness to pay as he knew many nobles had died just yesterday.

"Stop yelling," he said with a guilty conscience. "Why are you bothering those gentlemen with such a small matter? I'll give you three thousand right now and the rest tomorrow!"

He pulled out coins from his pockets and threw them onto the table. "Here, three thousand, do you see that?"

"Not enough!" The brawny meat seller set his jaw. "Give me all thirty thousand! It's not like you've owed me for just a day or two. You always leave as soon as you get your meat and never pay anything. I'm a small shop that's about to close because of debts like your thirty thousand. You're not the only one to owe me money! I'm actually prepared to close and take my family out of the city to find a way to live. I'll go toe-to-toe with you today if I can't get my money!"

He tightened his hand on his knife, but his knees were wobbling with fear. He'd said what he'd said though, the rest was up to fate. He wouldn't dare demand payment in normal times, even though he'd been driven to desperation. Many were those who had outstanding accounts with him, but he didn't dare request satisfaction.

Business was good as he earned eighty to one hundred thousand star coins a year. That would make him rich anywhere, but it was all paper profits! The ledger of those with open tabs was almost a meter thick!

It was the errand boy of a marquis who owed several thousand today, the cleaning staff of a director's household tomorrow. It might be the provisioner of a duke owing you tens of thousands today, and the provisioner of a minister owing you another tens of thousands tomorrow...

A year of this treatment meant that he was deep in the red and didn't even need to think about turning a profit. He was putting it all on the line today!

Chapter 699: Changes (II)

Since the Night Watchers were around, the meat vendor could take a gamble. If this was yesterday, he would have to bow and scrape, begging for the other to spit out a few coins. But today, he was bolder and more impulsive.

His hand gripping the butcher knife shook. A few thousand won't do, I must have it all. There won't be another chance to if I don't get it today! If I get all thirty thousand, I'll just run off in the night with my wife and kid...

The Night Watchers looked over, one of them muttered, "Let's not stick our noses where it doesn't belong. They're not superhumans, so they have nothing to do with us. This is a stupid, trifling matter. If anyone's to look into it, it should be the Inspectorate."

This handful of five people were a team.

"Don't stick our noses in this?" someone grunted back. "If we leave under these circumstances, that pig butcher... will probably die at home tonight."

"It still has nothing to do with us. If he dies, they can make a report at the Inspectorate..."

“Are you seriously this dumb? There’s so many people watching us. Have you forgotten who’s in charge now? Do you think he’ll talk logic with you if someone rats you out?”

The first speaker who wanted to stay out of things gaped, he’d almost forgotten. It wasn’t that he’d forgotten the great one who sat above them, just that he didn’t react at first light. It was only now that he recalled how violent and domineering that one was.

He was no Yellow Dragon!

If this was still Yellow Dragon’s time, it would already be the meat vendor’s good fortune that he wasn’t beaten up for disturbing the Night Watchers. What kind of shitty business was this?

The five Night Watchers promptly lost all other thought; one of them darted forward and kicked the scrawny marquis representative to the ground.

“Do you want to die>?” the Night Watcher demanded. “You refuse to settle your debt? You’re with a marquis? Which marquis? Out with it!” He widened his eyes in a vicious look. “We Night Watchers happen to lack a few heads to fulfill our missions. So tell us, which marquis is it? Some mewling pathetic little thing like a marquis thinks he’s the king or something, huh? I’d like to see which marquis it is who can’t afford thirty thousand coins!”

He kicked Scrawny into a rolling tumble over the ground.

Scrawny didn’t think that the Night Watchers really would get involved. He immediately shrank in on himself and clutched his head, howling with tears. “Sirs, I’ll pay, I’ll pay up! It’s not that I didn’t want to pay off my debts, but that I didn’t have enough money on me a few days ago...”

“It’s not like you owed me this for just a day!” snarled the meat vendor. “You’ve had an outstanding account for two years! My stall’s only been open for a few years...”

Scrawny inwardly cursed out the man, but he didn’t dare say anything else. He rifled through his pockets and came up with a collection of bank-sealed star coins. That wasn’t enough, so he quickly

produced a few small gold coins. “Here, I have it, I’ll pay right now! Don’t hit me anymore please...”

The Night Watcher grabbed it out of his hands and casually counted the sum. There were more than thirty thousand here. He couldn’t be bothered with the particulars and tossed it all at the meat vendor.

“If you dare come back for your money.” The Night Watcher spun around with a ruthless look. “Or do anything about this, you can kiss your head goodbye!”

Scrawny bobbed his head up and down, but cautiously added, “Sir, I’m not a superhuman, I’m...”

Bam!

A kick sent him rolling over the ground.

“So what if you’re not superhuman??” cursed the Night Watcher. “You still can’t break the law! Remember who’s in charge of the Inspectorate now and that the Night Watchers are one family with the Inspectorate! I’m also an inspector!”

The people had indeed forgotten this detail. That’s right! The Night Watchers usually have a position at the Inspectorate! Their system is the same! So doesn’t that mean they’re in charge of both superhumans and mundanes?

The crowd in the surroundings had been very uneasy before this. Someone suddenly applauded and cheered, “Nice! Good job beating him, sir!”

“He owes me money too, sir!” another vendor hastily raised.

Clap clap clap!

Many praised the Night Watchers, each of them excited beyond belief. Scrawny flushed with dismay as more vendors quickly stepped forward in protest.

The Night Watchers were quite nonplussed by the sight of an entire crowd applauding them. They hadn't witnessed this scene for at least five years. It wasn't like they occurred with regularity before either, because they didn't involve themselves in mundane matters. Hence today... they felt an inexplicable awkwardness.

Was it discomfort? Or distaste?

That wasn't it. It was just an impulsive desire that they didn't know how to express. The Night Watcher who'd beaten Scrawny leered and suddenly grabbed the man by the neck.

"Pay up, right now!" he snarled, possibly affected by the applause. "I'll chop off your head right here if you don't, and then behead the marquis you serve!"

He wouldn't possibly have said these words before, but he suddenly did today. It was a surprise to even himself and he subconsciously looked around the streets, afraid that this unknown marquis really would hear him.

In this day and age, a marquis still counted for something as the royal family still existed.

The cheers grew louder and someone echoed, "Well done, Night Watchers! Cut off his head!"

"Yeah, cut off his head!"

“Behead him and hang it on the northern gate! It’s not the first day that this guy’s terrorized the market! We don’t know if the marquis hasn’t given him money, but he owes this street at least three hundred thousand coins and has a ton of wives...”

Scrawny’s expression rapidly flitted through alarm and horror. He might actually die here today! It wouldn’t have been possible before, but after several hundred nobles died yesterday, what wasn’t possible anymore?

What did nobles count for anymore? Even the old minister of the Judiciary had been executed yesterday. His head and corpse still swung in the air by the city gate!

Scrawny deeply regretted having so much time on his hands today. He should’ve stayed at home for a few days!

“Sir, I’ll pay, I’ll pay everyone! I’m completely in the wrong, I’ll make good on all of my debts, alright?”

The Night Watcher was completely roused by the shouts and slammed the man into the ground, forcing a mouthful of blood out of him. “You damned bastard, this is a street of mom and pop shops! How dare you owe them so much money?? You’re a piece of shit strutting around in your master’s glory. I want to see which marquis it is that’s so poor! Have they not given you money or has it all gone into your pockets?!”

He dragged the man up again. Spit flew into Scrawny’s face as he roared, “Take me to your marquis! I want to see what kind of second-rate noble is this guy! He doesn’t have to eat if he has no money!”

The other Night Watchers looked strangely at their comrade.

“Oh great, third brother’s gotten too caught up in things,” one of them muttered.

“No shit, you’d be caught up in it too if everyone looked at you like that and kept complimenting you!”

“We should tone it down a bit before we actually offend that marquis...”

“What are you afraid of? Do you think everything is still like before?”

“No, but... it’s not like that one will be here forever, right? The nobles are here forever, but the officials change like flowing water. The one above us might go on the run tomorrow. When that happens... won’t third brother be in trouble?”

“You seriously think too much. If he runs, then we run too! We’ll go to the north, to Silver Moon. Those northern savages... ahem, didn’t you see those northern martial masters yesterday? Damn, that’s a good way to live! You fight if you don’t accept things and kill someone if you want to. Apparently, the northern Night Watchers all live like lords themselves. They investigate whoever they want and kill any of the three great organizations that they want.

“Those organizations don’t even dare fart in the Night Watchers’ direction when Silver Moon Night Watchers are done. My friend lives there and says that there aren’t many strong guys in their branch. Even Sunflares are executives. There will definitely be a place for us if we follow him!”

His words shed a light for his concerned brethren. That was right! Night Watchers should be the least worried group these days! They could just go to Silver Moon if all else failed! Those northern barbarians were something fierce!

“Third brother, let’s haul him back to his marquis!” one of them roared. “I want to see which marquis it is to be so juvenile. The northern city gate lacks a marquis head!”

Even his third brother blinked in astonishment. Holy shit, what’s gotten into this kid? He’s usually afraid of even a scratch! Do you know that I regretted my words as soon as I yelled them?

The applause strengthened around them as the crowd grew more excited.

“You are mighty, sir! This guy’s from Marquis Changxing! He’s one of the kitchen boys who runs some errands, but he throws his weight around like he’s someone! Kill him!”

“.....” Scrawny was almost peeing himself with terror. This had been a small matter of not paying, it wasn’t his first time doing so over the years. This had never happened before! He was part of a marquis’ household!

A profusely sweating fatty squeezed into the crowd before the Night Watchers had a chance to take action. His clothes were luxurious and he fished out a mysterious power stone exuding power.

“I am the steward of Marquis Changxing’s household, the marquis doesn’t know about this! Please don’t misunderstand, everyone, this guy’s behind it all! I don’t have money on me, but this mysterious power stone is worth money, a lot of money! You recognize it, don’t you? I’ll leave it with the Night Watchers as collateral and promise to pay off all of his debts, with interest, in an hour! There won’t be a single coin missing!”

He grit his teeth and kicked out, breaking Scrawny’s leg as the man yelped. “I’ll break both of his legs for what he’s done!”

Those in the surroundings quieted down. There was a promise to pay on the table and they did know that mysterious power stones were valuable. This steward was also ferocious to break a person’s leg with one kick.

The Night Watchers was prepared for this to be the end of the matter when their timid colleague suddenly grabbed the steward’s neck. “You’ve got some nerve, damn you! This guy falls under our jurisdiction because he’s broken the law. Since when is it your turn to break his leg? Take him back with us, take both of them back! They really think they’re something!”

“.....” His third brother looked blankly at him. Um... were they arresting the steward too?

Heavens above! This little brother is usually as scared as a mouse! How is he so bold today?

But it made sense since they'd already offended the marquis beyond redemption. There was nothing to fear anymore! How dare members of the marquis' household conduct private punishment??

"Take them all back with us! Don't worry, the money will arrive soon. We'll interrogate them well!" The Night Watchers were newly invigorated by their arrest of a steward. This was nice! How about chopping off a marquis' head to add to the festivities as well? Whatever, they were going back to headquarters first!

Chapter 700: Changes (III)

The steward's expression shifted and a vicious look flashed through his eyes, but it promptly disappeared when something else occurred to him.

"I was too hasty just now," he hastily admitted with fear. "I know my fault and admit to it..."

It was just a matter of a broken leg and paying off the aggrieved parties. If Scrawny didn't raise a fuss, he'd be in jail for a year and a half at most. They couldn't take a hard tone with these Night Watchers anymore, that would result in the loss of their heads. The times now were different from before!

As to be expected, the steward quickly thought things through. Only people of uncommon talent would be a steward of a noble's household. Even though these Night Watchers were much weaker than him since they were either Darkmoons or Sunflares, he permitted them to grab him by the neck. He was a Solar, but he didn't resist and docilely left with the Night Watchers.

Cheers ripped through the air as they left! Those newly come to the area quickly asked the rest of the crowd what was going on. They were highly excited when up-to-date on the happenings. So this was possible? The Night Watchers would arrest even the steward of a marquis just because some money was owed?

That was a marquis! A major personage! Since when were the Night Watchers so tough? Of course, it must have much to do with Commander Li. He even dared kill a minister, so what was a marquis worth?

The news quickly spread, starting as arresting the steward to killing the steward. The final version was that the Night Watchers chopped off Marquis Changxing's head because he owed thirty thousand star coins. His head now hung on the northern city gate!

The news traveled so far and fast that a steady stream of visitors soon visited the marquis, only to find that the subject of the rumors was alive and well. So how was the gossip mill saying that his head was swinging from the northern city gate?

The marquis was equally aghast and quickly sought help from the nine ministries. What if the rumors turned real after a while? He went to the palace when the nine ministries ignored him and decided he wouldn't emerge for the short term, even on pain of death. It was too dangerous!

Everyone said that Li Hao had stayed to arrest and kill people. There was no marquis, duke, prince, or minister safe from him! And yet, the royal family had gone utterly insane to give him the title of Skystar Governor General. Even the nine ministries fell under his purview now. While they wouldn't respect his authority, he could execute them with a legitimate reason.

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The slums.

A group of children eagerly discussed the events of the day.

"Sis, sis, the Night Watchers are incredible! Marquis Changxing had his head chopped off because he owed street vendors thirty thousand star coins! Everyone's talking about it right now!"

Yu Qi was slightly befuddled by what she heard. Was that person... that ruthless? He would kill even a marquis for a mere thirty thousand coins?

One had to say, the news had spread so quickly and broadly that the entire city was in an uproar. The people were more invigorated than yesterday. Everything had seemed so far removed at first. All that talk of filing reports or making their grievances known were actions that the people did not dare undertake.

But now that they heard of a pork seller calling out to the Night Watchers to demand settlement of debts, and the Night Watchers actually responding to the point of beheading the recalcitrant marquis... Everyone truly believed that the Night Watchers were different now!

They could make the decisions!

Countless people stirred to action. If a marquis was dead for such a small matter, then what else wouldn't the Night Watchers dare do? Even if the news turned out to be false, it was still electrifying!

No one wanted to pursue whether or not this was real. It wasn't like Marquis Changxing was stepping forward to clarify. Perhaps he really was dead.

Excited, Yu Qi looked at her younger brother not too far away. She jogged over, wiped off her hands, threw off her apron, and whispered, "Have you heard the news, lil bro? I want... to visit the northern quadrant of the city tonight!"

"Sis, this talk of the marquis being dead must be fake..." Yu Ming replied softly.

"I know!" Yu Qi rolled her eyes. "I'm not an idiot. But... haven't you realized that things are different now?"

Yu Ming thought it over, then nodded. "If sis wants to go... then I'll go with you."

“It’s fine, I can go alone. You stay at home. No... you head out first and find a place to hide. I’ll go find you when I come back!”

Yu Ming nodded after thinking about it. He didn’t say anything else. Meanwhile, Yu Qi was energized and slightly anxious. She checked the sky—why wasn’t it dark yet? It was a bit scary to attempt this during the day, someone might see her. If she wanted to raise an issue, it was better to do so at night.

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Stories about the Night Watchers flurried through Skystar City.

The Night Watcher headquarters.

Yao Si was confused by the talk on the streets and looked at the exuberant Little Ye. “Did Li Hao really kill Marquis Changxing?”

“No, Commander Li is in closed door cultivation and helping the Silver Moon martial masters heal. He hasn’t come out yet...”

“Then this news is ridiculous!” Yao Si didn’t know what to say. “I’ve received eight communications this morning, all wanting to know more. Who do they think I am? This is just a piece of fake news!”

“Director, whether it’s fake or real news, haven’t you noticed something?” Little Ye bubbled with excitement.

“What?”

“Everyone’s really happy!”

“Who?”

“Everyone! The people outside are happy, the Night Watchers are happy. Have you seen it, director? Headquarters used to be a stifling place, but everyone’s talking about the gossip today!”

They were all wondering who was that ferocious as to kill Marquis Changxing. Upon further inquiry, they learned that it was some of their most timid members, the ones out on patrol. No one believed it, so another uproar ensued when the team returned with a Solar level steward!

Some other Night Watchers declared that since some Darkmoons and Sunflares dared arrest a Solar, then they had to bring back a Nova to maintain their standing among colleagues!

“Little Ye, do you really think this is a good development?” Yao Si wearily rubbed his temples.

“Of course!” Little Ye nodded. “Why isn’t it, director? Everyone’s saying that the Night Watchers are doing a great job and have done well on the streets. The noble and powerful are afraid of us. Isn’t that how things should be for a law enforcement agency?”

“People know to seek out the Night Watchers if they’ve suffered a wrong. They know that we’ll take action if they come to us! We’ll arrest or kill whoever’s responsible, no matter who they are. Isn’t that how things are supposed to be?”

Was that so?

Yao Si sank into deep thought. He walked over to a window and looked outside. Some Night Watchers passing through the yard seemed to be walking with a lighter step. They occasionally exchanged a few words with each other, truly in different spirits than usual.

It was just rumors and those present knew that they were all fake. Marquis Changxing hadn't been arrested, it was his steward. Thousands of nobles had been arrested before, which made a steward a nonentity!

However, it was a very different feeling to the Night Watchers. The ones arrested before had been at Li Hao's hand. This time, it was by their hand. So they had the right to do so as well! And they weren't faced with curses when they took someone, but applause, cheers, and laudatory yells! So they could be this kind of Night Watcher as well?

Yao Si looked down with a frown, then smoothed out his forehead and shook his head with a sigh. "We'll be in trouble if Li Hao runs off..."

"Then we'll just run to Silver Moon with him!" Little Ye answered matter-of-factly.

"Eh?" Yao Si blinked, as did Little Ye.

"I... I didn't say anything!" she stammered as the color drained from her face.

"So this is what everyone thinks now?" Yao Si raised an eyebrow. "You'll follow him if he runs away to Silver Moon? He's only been here a few days, but you're all ready to abandon your homes to go with him?"

He hadn't thought that this would be their mindset! It was so surprising!

Little Ye was afraid, but also determined to speak her mind. "What would be the big deal in that, director? It's work no matter where we go, it's just another way of living. I hear that Night Watchers in Silver Moon live with dignity, that they are part of the four institutions. Those who want to kill someone from the three great organizations can go on a patrol anytime.

“Apparently, their cultivation resources come from killing the three great organizations or pirates. While their days are a bit harder, they live more freely! It’s a more dignified death if they die in battle because they can say they perished while fighting the enemy...”

“The Night Watchers have been battling the three great organizations for the past twenty years!” Yao Si retorted irritably. “Don’t we do the same?”

“It’s not the same...” Little Ye responded cautiously. “Our days were... full of suffering before! Dao Sword was the only one who dared randomly kill people. We didn’t dare, no one did. Important people couldn’t be targeted in case that created a bigger conflict.”

“How much better do you think Silver Moon is?” Yao Si asked wordlessly. That province was the same! The two sides kept each other in check! How did these guys think that Silver Moon was better than Skystar City?

“We might have our reservations if it was Director Hou in charge,” Little Ye mumbled. “But isn’t it Commander Li in charge now?”

Oho! Yao Si suddenly understood. So it’s not just me being insulted, but Hou Xiaochen as well! Nicely done! He suddenly wanted to laugh. Hou Xiaochen, did you ever think this would happen to you? Do you hear that?

People don’t think much of a Silver Moon that you oversee, but they see a future with the barbarian Li Hao, the brute and serial killer that they call Demon Sword. Aren’t you pissed about it?

The ball of anger in his chest was much doused. Yao Si laughed and took a sip out of his tea mug, finding the situation hilarious. He took another look at the ground and did note more of a spring in the Night Watchers’ footsteps. The stagnant pool that was Skystar City had indeed become much more lively after the arrival of the Silver Moon savages. He glanced at the Inspectorate nearby—what kind of scene might be found there today?

It might be a hotbed of activity, but that didn't matter. Since the Night Watchers had lost a few deputy directors, he'd put Li Hao's name forward to have the Inspectorate arrange a deputy director title for the young man.

That would piss the nine ministries off so much that they wouldn't know what to say! Hahahaha!!