

Star Gate 701

Chapter 701: Changes (IV)

The Inspectorate.

They were indeed holding a meeting at the moment and were short on two deputies. One was Yellow Dragon, the other was Yao Si. Yao Si had pled health too poor to attend.

The inspector general scrutinized a document from beginning to end. It was full of words, but they all boiled down to the same thing—Li Hao would start killing if he wasn't promoted! It wasn't the young man who'd written it, Yao Si had sent it over.

The inspector general mulled over it before saying, "Yao Si recommends promoting Li Hao to deputy director at the Night Watchers and vice minister here. He would be replacing Yellow Dragon's position. What do you guys think?"

No one responded. Their superior looked at them for a long moment before repeating, "I said, what do you guys think?"

"We leave it up to the inspector general!" the group hastily responded. Some wanted to refuse the request, but gave up when they thought of Li Hao. Forget it, they were all afraid of death. If they refused and Li Hao learned of it, what was the point of offending him when even the nine ministries couldn't take him down?

A bunch of ministers and vice ministers had died yesterday! This was just the position of vice minister on the table. If he wanted even the position of principal minister... So long as the inspector general was willing to step down, the rest of them wouldn't have any opinions otherwise.

The inspector general could discern what his subordinates were thinking. A wave of weariness washed over him. The fuck you guys mean by all this!

The nine ministries had lost the battle with Li Hao yesterday and ultimately chose to back down. Sometimes, backing down once meant that future salvaging of the circumstances would be difficult.

“He’s too young...” murmured the inspector general.

“He is indeed young, sir, but he’s the Skystar Marquis and Skystar Governor General. Most importantly, he’s very strong as an Arcanus. It’s not good to refuse him, is it?”

The inspector general blinked. I haven’t said anything about turning him down, but you bastards are in such a hurry to curry favor! Have you forgotten that the Inspectorate belongs to my Chen family?!

“So, you all think that he should be promoted?” The inspector general swept a wordless glance over the assembly.

No one responded—a sign of tacit acceptance. This was one of the very few occasions in which no one protested. One reason was that they didn’t dare, the second was that they couldn’t.

“He’s well known now, but he also represents the Inspectorate,” explained one of the deputies. “Being vice minister means that he’ll raise our profile with anything he does.”

Raise their infamy, more like! The inspector general cursed to himself before nodding. “Very well, then let’s do it like this!” He suddenly laughed, “Isn’t he Hou Xiaochen’s old subordinate? Hou Xiaochen isn’t a vice minister, isn’t he?”

No one made a sound as they didn’t understand what the inspector general meant.

“Then this is good!” The man stroked his chin. “This is perfect! Send the document to the Ministry of Administration. Don’t they like to make the decisions? Have them approve it!”

The appointment of vice ministers needed to follow procedure; both the Ministry of Administration and Examinations were required to verify the gesture. The inspector general wanted to see what those two thought at the moment.

Would they refuse? It'd be so interesting if they refused! Those who watched a show wanted nothing more than for the show to grow bigger. Since the inspector general hadn't been able to render timely instance in Li Hao's hour of need, then he would add flowers to the young man's glory. As for how he would offer additional splendor, that remained to be seen.

"Right, notify Li Hao that the Ministry of Finance relinquished a second rank ruin. It's the site of a martial university. Ask him if he's interested in exploring it. But it's very dangerous," laughed the inspector general. "Just go tell him!"

As he left, someone's whisper followed him out. "Inspector General, do we uhh... notify him of future meetings?"

"....." The inspector general paused. "No!"

He left in a hurry. Notify Li Hao of their meetings? How about no! What if the kid continued to take the opposite stance of him? Was he supposed to fight the kid? Or behead him? What if the kid beheaded him instead? Who knew what would be the outcome of everything?

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Skystar City was very animated on this day. Li Hao spent the entire day inside. A bunch of Silver Moon martial masters conversed with each other as they recovered from wounds and cultivated. This was a rare opportunity, so regardless of whether or not they shared grudges or other feuds, all of the martial masters took advantage of a temporary lull in fighting to exchange martial reflections.

Tyrant Blade had the floor in the middle of a large house. The domineering bladesman was denouncing with a cold expression, "Yuan Shuo, don't go thinking that your Five Styles is the only way! Your path of refining the spirit and strengthening the five organs may not be the right path!"

“So you’re saying that mine is a deviant, illegitimate way?” Yuan Shuo harrumphed with irritation. “Martial masters should focus on mind intent! When the mind is strong, everything is strong. I am a firm believer that when mind intent is strong enough, the effects are fed back to the body. The five organs being weak won’t be a problem!

“A strong mind intent means a strong body, we’re just in a period of weakness at the moment. When our mind intent transforms, it will naturally strengthen the body! We would even be able to discard the physical body then if we wanted to.”

“Bullshit!” He Yong grumped. “Blood qi is the key... All is strong when the physical body is strong. Have you never heard of the saying that through the body is corroborated dao?”

“No no no, I think the key lies with the aura...”

No one among the group of martial masters was willing to concede their points. Yuan Shuo sat comfortably, his leg crossed like he was out for a day of fishing. “Right right, all of you are right. Therefore, don’t strengthen the five organs. Whoever dares to secretly strengthen them is a pig!”

“.....” The premises were quiet for a second before even louder curses broke out!

“Everyone, isn’t it good to have a balanced development?” someone asked carefully. “I can tell that there’s only so many paths ahead of us, and they all have to do with the supernatural locks. My master places a high importance on the circulation of the five organs, but that’s not a major circulation either. If we combine all of our knowledge, wouldn’t that create a major circulation of the entire body?”

Yuan Shuo rolled his eyes and couldn’t be bothered to say anything.

“It’s easy to say so,” Hou Xiaochen said softly. “Judging from our current knowledge, there are at least twelve locks in the human body. Yuan Shuo has completed a circulation of the five organs—that is already a peak accomplishment. It’s not hard for us four to complete the circulation of our

limbs, that's a foundation. If your master can organize it all, then he'll complete the circulatory system of nine supernatural locks. In that case, that will be some clues for the road ahead..."

"That's the theory and we all know that it will strengthen us as a comprehensive whole," Sky Sword added faintly. "The key thing is, it isn't easy to cultivate and hard to organize into one system. Keep in mind how difficult it is to blend two breathing methods together, not to mention breaking twelve supernatural locks."

Li Hao nodded. He was a junior here, whether in terms of strength or martial dao understanding. After he raised the question, the general consensus was that just speaking of the theory was no use, he needed to actually put it to use and put everything together.

Who didn't know that it was better to develop as one comprehensive whole? As strong as Yuan Shuo's potential was, he'd only completed making a circulatory loop of the five organs to this day.

"Can the supernatural locks directly enter the circulation system of the five organs?" Li Hao asked after some thought.

"Cut the nonsense!" Yuan Shuo lapped him down verbally. "That's just playing house! Haphazardly connecting parts of the body will lead to death! Detonation of the body would be the easy outcome then! What are you thinking, or are you not thinking at all? Do you really think my Five Styles is the forced amalgamation of any random five styles? Don't go around telling people you're my disciple!"

Yuan Shuo found Hong Yitang nodding in accordance with his words and cursed to himself. "Forget it, even if you say that you're my disciple, you're not allowed to say anything else!"

"....." Hong Yitang looked innocently back at the old man. What are you glaring at me for? I was just agreeing with your words and not nodding randomly. You're the one who wanted to draw feet for a snake and add to what you said.

“We have a general picture of what everything thinks.” Sky Sword stood up. “I have things to take care of back at Sky Sword Mountain and am in no mood to argue with you. I take my leave!”

“Senior Sky Sword, you...” Li Hao hastily rose to his feet as well.

“There’s no need to say anything!” Sky Sword’s voice came back elegantly on the wind. “Whether it is martial masters or supernaturals, all should resolutely follow their own paths. There is no road ahead since this is a new era, so we can just make our own explorations! Study the supernatural when you have time to. Since the wind and thunder attributes have their locks, then what of the dark, light, life, space, and other special attributes? Don’t be like your master and shut yourself in with your own thoughts, thinking that the supernatural is a shallow field. The supernatural has its unique characteristics!”

The man was long gone. Northern Fist was the next to rise. “I should be going too! Send me out, Little He. Big brother hasn’t chatted with you in a long time...”

He Yong snorted. Who’s the big brother here? There might be a question of who’s stronger now!

“Where are your manners?” Northern Fist smiled at He Yong. The latter cursed to himself and rose as well. That old fart bullied me quite a bit back in the day. I’m going to find a place to fight him!

The Northern and Southern Fists left without saying a word to anyone. Tyrant Blade continued his aloof manner and vanished when he stood up.

“Mind intent lies with the brain,” he transmitted to Li Hao. “The aura and mind intent are not the same concept. If mind intent is a type of strength, then the aura is a kind of faith. You can call upon them again when you are familiar with their fundamental differences!”

“I should be getting back to Silver Moon.” Huang Yu got to his feet. “Xiaochen should be careful in staying behind. If Li Hao doesn’t wish to leave yet, stay. Let us know if you need help. Skystar City is a place of much trouble and you shouldn’t linger here for long!”

He left on foot. Each of these martial masters had come with decisive resolution and left with dashing grace. All good things must come to an end and everyone had their own thoughts. It was well enough for old friends to be gathered for two or three days. Any longer might lead to infighting.

Li Hao sent them off one by one. Martial masters were hot-blooded, emotional eccentrics. It wasn't good to force them together in tight quarters. None of them were weak since they'd all made it to their current heights by themselves.

As for the dangers of traveling alone, these martial world old hats were more aware of the potential concerns than Li Hao. Since they dared leave, they were also confident that they wouldn't be surrounded or hunted down.

Chapter 702: Gains and Reports (I)

It was only one day of conversation with these martial masters, yet Li Hao felt that he'd gained quite a bit. Although he was no longer a martial master, it didn't matter. There were similarities when it came to great dao.

The young man thought that his master might not leave this time, but Yuan Shuo stood up as well.

"I'm going back to Silver Moon! You be careful here. I'm going to converse with those old antiques and possibly change the overall situation for you. I was too weak back in the day and didn't dare go back. I am no longer weak, so I ought to look in on those existences!"

Li Hao's eyes widened, but Yuan Shuo waved him off. "There's no need to say too much. Just remember that you are my disciple, not someone else's disciple. Remember what is primary and what is secondary, that is all!"

He left with a jaunty air and didn't look back.

"Your master says that he knows where the rest of the Jadelight sword method is," Jadelight chuckled and looked at the young man. "I feel quite regretful that I didn't have time to exchange

sword dao reflections with you over these past two days. But the days ahead are long. There will be chances to after my Jadelight sword technique improves!”

“Are you coming or not?” Yuan Shuo called out impatiently.

Jadelight smiled, vanishing as a streak of sword light. That left only a few people in the large room—Li Hao, Hong Yitang, Hou Xiaochen, Yu Luochoa, and Light Sword.

“Golden Spear’s gone,” Yu Luochoa suddenly said.

“What?”

Manager Yu raised the transmission pendant in her hand. “Golden Spear sent me a message saying that he’s leaving. He didn’t make his farewells to the Silver Moon Guards. He’s regretful that he didn’t participate in the battle, but also felt that he wouldn’t have been able to help much. He said he wants to take a look outside. He won’t come back if he cannot break his internal demons!

“The message concludes with his gratitude toward the director for helping him all those years ago. He also asks that Li Hao takes care of the Silver Moon Guards... and that is all he said.”

The group blinked. Golden Spear... was gone. They were surprised, but it also made sense.

Hou Xiaochen sank into deep thought and sighed softly after a while. “Leaving... is just as well! He should take a look at the rest of the world! It will indeed be hard for him to break the intent that I left behind in him. I didn’t mean to do so, but he is unable to set things aside. He thinks too much and is too upright. If it was He Yong... he wouldn’t think so much... Golden Spear always felt that he owed me something...”

Hou Xiaochen shook his head with some regret. If Golden Spear didn’t return after this parting, that meant he would never return. Or he might find a place to live out the rest of his days. The Three Spears of Silver Moon might become a footnote in history.

But if he could return, then he would be very different from before. That Golden Spear would be once more renowned throughout Silver Moon's martial world and the head of the Three Spears. He would still be the fifth ranked among the Record, but looking at third place.

"I've decided to stay, how about you?" Hong Yitang looked at Light Sword. The woman had been with him all this time. "How about you go to Silver Moon? My wife's asked a few times why you keep following me..."

Light Sword started, as did the others! They all looked at Hong Yitang.

"She really did ask me!"

"You think too highly of yourself, Hong Yitang!" Light Sword raged! What do you mean by this?!

Hong Yitang didn't explain further. What he said was the truth, so stop following him! It was one thing when she was a man, and it would have been fine if she was as ugly as before. But now... at the very least, she looked like a middle-aged auntie!

Those not in the know might think that Hong Yitang had peculiar tastes!

"I'm not leaving," Light Sword snorted. "I'm staying to help Li Hao and also to take care of my excess of light energy. When I reach a balance between my yin and yang, you won't be good enough for my notice!"

"....." Li Hao ducked his head, deathly afraid that he would burst out laughing. But her words made him scratch his head. You want to follow me? Yu Luocho, Jadelight, Little Ye... are all very pretty. Even the women by Ying Hongyue's side are good looking. Why does Auntie Light want to follow me?

Hou Xiaochen took Manager Yu with him, leaving with a grand flourish. He wouldn't be involved in this matter any further, it had nothing to do with him. Besides, would Light Sword really be prettier after her yin and yang were balanced?

He didn't think so!

Of course, he wouldn't voice those thoughts out loud. That would be too antagonizing.

Hong Yitang didn't mind after this. "I'm going to take a turn around the city, I leave Light Sword with you. If my daughter asks about it, you have to bear witness for me that there's nothing between the two of us!"

He vanished as well.

Light Sword sneered and looked at Li Hao. "Li Hao, you have to believe me that once my yin and yang are balanced, neither Yu Luocha nor Black Spider will match up to me!"

Li Hao rapidly bobbed his head! Who would've thought that a group of aunties would jealously fight with each other? This was terrifying!

He started laughing after Light Sword stormed off and squeezed Panther's cheeks. "Aren't Silver Moon martial masters interesting, Panth?"

The dog nodded with resignation. It didn't know whether or not they were interesting, but they could certainly absorb energy. The dog hadn't siphoned off much sword energy over the past two days. It was best that they were gone!

The young man fell silent after laughing for a bit, wanting to consider his future.

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The supernatural coexisting with martial dao was Li Hao's current status. The discourse between the martial masters had given him some inspiration. All of this stemmed from problems with martial dao. He chose to stay in Skystar City not just for martial dao, but for other reasons as well, such as to cultivate the heart.

Martial masters train the heart was his most recent reflection. His aura would grow stronger if he followed his heart.

After running through some plans, Li Hao breathed out gently and outlined what he wanted to do next. He looked at Panther; the dog looked back at him.

"What are you still looking at me for?" Li Hao rolled his eyes. "The seniors are all gone. How are you so stubborn?"

The dog didn't hand over the storage rings when everyone was here. It didn't want the loot to be taken by another!

In actuality, only He Yong had the desire to split up the spoils. No one else was interested.

Panther barked incessantly, seeming to say that it was doing this for Li Hao's own good. The young man had consumed no end of wealth over the past two days. He'd burned mysterious power stones like they were worthless. A short conversation of dao between martial masters had costed Li Hao hundreds of thousands of stones.

There were too many martial masters and all of them were powerhouses. The rate at which they absorbed energy was frightening.

However, the young man did not lack for money these days. He'd obtained quite a bit from the executions, but this occasion was different. All of the dead were heavyweights and quite a few of them were Arcanus. Li Hao was curious if these people had good treasures on them.

The dog spat up some storage rings—not that many, just approximately two dozen. However, they seemed much more high quality from a single glance.

Li Hao picked one up at random, not knowing whose it was. He sucked in a sharp breath when he sent his consciousness into it. Who's was this?

It only contained a dozen mysterious power stones, but each of them felt bigger and stronger than the one Hong Yitang had taken out. If Hong Yitang's was worth three thousand regular pieces, then one of these was worth ten thousand. Incomparably dense energy swayed within, moving like water currents.

Although they were the equivalent of several hundred thousand stones, mysterious power stones of the caliber weren't easily traded for. They were impossible to find on the market and could only come from ruins. It was only the most premier ruins that would contain them.

Powerhouses are certainly different!

There weren't many mysterious power stones or other items apart from a small flask. Water of Life was almost standard issue for heavyweights of this level. There were ten drops inside. Li Hao truly wondered which poor soul had owned this storage ring that they'd died without using a single drop.

Further investigation revealed one more item that was very conspicuous among the general cultivation resources. He took it out for a closer look. It was a piece of amber that seemed to have a drop of something blood-red flowing inside it. It looked to be a phoenix or a roc bird...

"What is this?" Li Hao looked at it with confusion. Panther's nose twitched and it merrily lifted its head upward at the young man. Li Hao looked down at it.

“Arf arf arf!” Panther barked urgently. It even drew a small gash on its body to make blood flow...

“Essence blood from a major monster spirit?” A thought struck Li Hao.

“Arf arf arf!” Panther hastily nodded. That’s right, this was blood from a major monster spirit! It didn’t know how it’d come about, or maybe it’d been traded for...

“Sky Roc Mountain or Phoenix Mountain...” Li Hao mused. Those two divine mountains were ruled by flight type monster spirits. There didn’t seem to be particularly strong monster spirits among those of the ground or water. It was the flying types that’d produced two major monster spirits. Was it the land and sea monster spirits keeping a low profile, or was there another reason behind this?

This drop of blood might belong to one of them.

Li Hao was well aware that the blood of monster spirits could strengthen the body. Yuan Shuo had bitten into Panther’s blood last time to extract some blood to fortify his organs.

“Do you want it?”

“Arf!” Panther nodded. Monster spirits hunting others of their kind was their nature since the ancient times. Monster spirit blood contained power that was much more nourishing to the dog than sword energy.

“Here you go!” Li Hao didn’t spend further time wondering who it belonged to. He tossed it to the dog, who swallowed it with one gulp. There were no names written on the storage rings, but judging from the items inside, it might’ve belonged to the North Sea King. Yet if that was the case, the pirate was too poor! He had some treasures, but it paled in comparison to the identity of the greatest pirate of the North Sea!

“Maybe... he traded his treasures for the opportunity to break through to Arcanus?” Li Hao guessed. This was most likely the story. In that case, then the new crop of Aracanus were likely to all be very poor. They would’ve had to pay a price for their newfound strength.

The possibility pained Li Hao. What a shame! Why else would the greatest pirate of the North Sea be so poor?

Chapter 703: Gains and Reports (II)

The more Li Hao looked at the storage rings, the more shocked he grew. Hot damn! These guys were so rich!

There weren’t many treasures in the North Sea King’s ring; the one he was looking at next likely belonged to the Steppe Prince. As one of the nine princes of the royal family, there were so many treasures inside this ring that it blinded Li Hao!

It went without saying that there was an abundance of mysterious power stones in the rings. There were so many that he couldn’t be bothered to count them all. It might have something to do with the royal family excavating the ruins of Skystar City. There had been large mines there to maintain the operations of the eight cities.

The key difference was that there were a lot of books in the Steppe Prince’s ring. Li Hao casually flipped open one of them—they were all of martial dao secret arts! The personage who’d established the Skystar Troops had apparently deeply researched martial dao. It looked like he was a scholar.

Li Hao estimated there to be at least one hundred books of martial secret arts in the ring, and they had to be of uncommon knowledge to be collected by the prince. The young man even saw some that were famous in the Silver Moon martial world.

“Iron Shirt... Flies Over Grass...” His eyes widened. Flies Over Grass was Wu Xinghong, Wu Chao’s grandfather. It was said that Celestial had killed him back in the day and seized his secret art. So it was in the Steppe Prince’s storage ring!

So... did the Steppe Prince hire Celestial, or is he one of their backers?

Li Hao's thoughts then turned to Willow Sword. Did Willow Sword's death have to do with the Steppe Prince? The guy seemed to have been collecting Silver Moon secret arts.

Li Hao swept his gaze over the books. He also saw the secret Footjab art. Their representative character was Madame Bai, the woman who married into the Bai family. The Bais had been the city lords of the Silver Moon capital in the past. Did this mean that Madame Bai had volunteered her family's secret art?

The Bais certainly looked to have ties to the royal family if they'd offered up even their secret art. His senior sister and her husband Hu Dingfang were involved with the Bais...

Li Hao furrowed his brows and put everything out of his mind. There were also sets of black armor in the prince's ring. They looked very similar to his back armor, but weren't the same. Li Hao immediately thought of the Black Armaturas of the royal family!

This armor should belong to them. There weren't many, just three hundred sets. He also had a thousand sets of Voidbreaker armor on hand.

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Li Hao went through each individual ring and took a deep breath. He didn't look at any of the other treasures—a golden booklet manifested in his hand. This caught his eye the most out of all the treasures in the pile.

It came from Hu Xiao's ring and a nearly identical booklet appeared in his other hand. This one came from the old Duke Xu. Two golden booklets that were nearly the same! But there were minute differences. Both of them carried hints of an ancient air, while on the first one was written—Battle Methods of Core Origin: Offense.

A smaller line of text could be found beneath the title. Written by the Chens of the New Martial era.

The Chens, New Martial. A thought occurred to Li Hao as he knew of a Chen powerhouse who'd written down the basics of sword methods in flowing calligraphy. Headmaster Chen was skilled in the Streamflow Sword Method. Which Chens did this core origin battle method belong to? Were they actually the same family? Was this the method that the old ministers had utilized before?

He looked at the second golden booklet—Battle Methods of Core Origin: Break.

Another small line of text could be found beneath it. Written by the Jiangs of the New Martial era. Plainly, these core origin battle methods weren't the work of one family, but of multiple. Since one was with the old duke and another with Hu Xiao, then the other ministers might possess some as well.

Li Hao was slightly confused. Were they still exploring the same ruin? Otherwise, why would the Steadfast Duke of the east have one too?

Such questions swirling in his mind, he flipped open one of them and seemed to be transported to a scene within. An incredibly ferocious existence stood in front of him, so strong that it was unbelievable!

"The Jiang family's break incantation can break anything and everything! This king is titled the Battle King and is the king of battle for the human race!" An ancient voice projected into Li Hao's mind.

The Battle King! An ancient powerhouse!

A rumble echoed in Li Hao's mind as the skies and earth fractured—a break character appeared in blood. It broke through all obstacles with dao and reduced everything to dust.

The scene then brightened in front of Li Hao's eyes and he returned to reality. The Battle King, the Jiangs, the break incantation! The golden booklets were ancient marital heritages!

Li Hao was quite taken aback. Compared to what this one had just demonstrated, the old ministers had brought forth... trash! They insulted the battle method!

“Teacher says that this is the battle method of the ancient city called Tranquil Star. Xu Qing told me last time that the Xus excavated the city, so what’s with the nine ministries? Are they seizing the property of the Xus? Or are the nine ministries and Xus exploring the ruins together?” Li Hao was confused. He understood to a certain extent that these methods originated from Tranquil Star, but why did the nine ministries have them?

The martial universities!

That’s right, Battle Heaven had mentioned that the universities of old sought to embrace all knowledge and powerhouses back in the day. When any secret arts were created, they quickly disseminated the update as opposed to keeping it for themselves. In that case, it was normal for a secret art to be found anywhere it was found. Perhaps there had been a renowned martial university on Skystar Island.

Two premier secret arts... Li Hao flushed, but then quickly frowned with doubt as to whether or not he could practice them. They seemed to be part of the martial dao path—no, the core origin path. They may not be a good match with him. The old ministers had brought powerful attacks to bear, but theirs lacked the feeling of invincibility that should’ve been present.

“I’ll know if I give it a try.” Li Hao looked excitedly at the golden booklets. There may be more of them, possibly many more.

“Arf arf!” Panther barked, seeming to ask if the gains were great.

“The gains are very, very great!” Li Hao laughed. “There’s more than five million mysterious power stones alone. There’s only a dozen origin weapons, but the lowest is arcane level and there are a few earth levels. There’s not that much Water of Life either—fifty drops at most. There’s also a random assortment of other stuff. Are you happy with that?”

“Arf arf arf!” Panther was confused and seemed to be saying, why is there so little?

“Don’t look at me, almost all of the newly ascended Arcanus were poor as hell. Only Hu Xiao and the old duke were slightly richer.” Li Hao looked back with resignation.

But even so, they were still Arcanus and as such, very rich! Strictly speaking, however, that bastard Yellow Dragon had more mysterious power stones in his storage ring than any of them. He alone contributed eight hundred thousand pieces. That bastard was too good at seizing wealth!

Li Hao took a quick count—with nearly two million stones that he already had, his stones reached a total of more than seven million. He’d given away nearly twenty origin weapons before, but now he had more at forty high ranked ones.

When it came to Water of Life, he didn’t have much left after gifting some to the old seniors. With a sudden gain of fifty drops, he was rich again.

None of this even took into account the two golden booklets and hundreds of books of secret arts. There was also plenty of ancient armor. Apart from the Steppe Prince, the old duke held one thousand sets from the Voidbreakers, making it two thousand sets from the Voidbreakers for Li Hao.

He was a member of the Battle Heaven Army, but he actually had the most Voidbreaker armor.

“I have too many mysterious power stones now...” He scratched his head. He didn’t have use for so many! He wouldn’t be able to use them all even if he burned them daily for sword energy.

The little sword had also gotten a bit picky and wasn’t willing to absorb energy from these stones. The higher level ones were fine, but the lower level ones were on the outs.

The little tree... General Pagoda!

The young man suddenly thought of the old tree in Battle Heaven and the little tree in the abandoned palace. Director General Wang of the ancient city had told him that the city lacked life energy. That situation wouldn't be rectified until General Pagoda awoke, but it would take too much energy for that to be accomplished.

The little tree shouldn't be as strong as General Pagoda, but even it required vast sums of energy. It went without saying how much the old general would. At that time, Li Hao had wanted to cry when he fed a dozen pieces to the tree, but now he had seven million!

"If I go back to Battle Heaven now... will I be able to awaken the city?"

He was rich as hell with seven million pieces, wasn't he? Granted, if he went to the little tree now, he might actually be able to fully revitalize the tree since it probably needed less than General Pagoda.

Various ideas ran through his mind and he lost himself in thought as three red balls materialized in his hand. Blood pearls!

The three elders had been astounding as they all possessed peak metamorphosis power. He hadn't been the one to extract these; Sky Sword had thrown them to Li Hao.

Sky Sword had killed one of the three elders, Li Hao the other two. The young man hadn't paid attention to the possibility of scarlet shadows when he killed them. The three seemed to have been in Sky Sword's body all along. He was so ferocious that he moved around like he wasn't being invaded by three shadows.

Now they were blood pearls.

Li Hao had wanted to lay hands on one before, but dropped the thought after becoming an Arcanus. Now that he had one... should he make a trip back to Silver Moon? Whether it was the little tree, Battle Heaven, or the diagram of the eight trigrams in Skystar City... They were all in Silver Moon!

He grasped vast riches in his hand right now. Perhaps... it was time to make a trip back.

“Yang Shan hasn’t come back yet... but it should be soon.”

Yang Shan was only a metamorphosis and left on the day of the executions. It’d been four days—he might not be able to make it to the North Sea in four days. Who knew if he’d received the news yet? Since the North Sea King was no more, the previous agreement was naturally null and void.

Perhaps I should visit Battle Heaven again...

He could sit down with the director general, but he could forget about that commander in the army. He didn’t seem to like the young man that much, the director general was much easier to talk to. Now that Li Hao had money, perhaps he could go back for some tutelage.

Granted, who knew if the city would let him in now that he was a supernatural?

He was also in rather dangerous straits in Skystar City. It was better if he could improve some more or at the very least, obtain some more treasure to help others improve.

Chapter 704: Gains and Reports (III)

As various thoughts rose to the forefront of Li Hao’s mind, someone knocked on the door.

“Commander!” Mu Lin’s voice rang on the other side, surprising the young man. He’d given orders not to be bothered.

“What is it?”

“Someone wants to see you.”

“Who?”

“A little girl. She says that the commander gave her two hundred star coins the day you arrived in Skystar City, that you’re old acquaintances...”

Li Hao blinked, recalling the person in question. He grew distracted, what was going on? Did he accidentally pay her off with fake coins? That shouldn’t have happened. Or had the little girl recognized him and felt like the thigh of a hotshot was worth holding on to?

But... I only got a ride from you. There’s not much of a relationship between us, is there?

Mu Lin was still waiting outside and normally wouldn’t have called upon the young man for this matter. But the visitor had said she was a known acquaintance and that Li Hao had given her two hundred coins...

His mind was swiftly grasping at wild straws!

Under what circumstances would Li Hao give someone so much money? And a girl who looked like she was sixteen... So Li Hao was this kind of person?!

Heavens above!

The girl had come looking for him, could it be...

Some matters did not bear deeper contemplation. After all, why would someone hand over two hundred star coins for no reason whatsoever?

Li Hao was well known for being a miser. He wasn’t a skinflint when it came to cultivation resources, but very much a tightwad with regards to regular wealth. It was said that he’d always been short on money, so it was definitely a case of the sun rising from the west for him to give someone two hundred star coins.

“Commander!” Mu Lin reminded.

Li Hao waved a hand to open the door. “Did she say what she wanted to see me for?” he asked curiously.

“No, just that she has important matters to discuss with the commander...” Mu Lin answered offhandedly. “So she’s not lying about the commander giving her two hundred coins?”

“That did indeed happen.” Li Hao nodded.

Mu Lin understood the situation. He’s worse than an animal! She’s only sixteen!

Meanwhile, Li Hao didn’t think much of the possibilities. So what of two hundred star coins? It was a rare chance for him to be generous. He was just surprised that she’d come calling. After some thought, he rose to his feet instead of having Mu Lin send her away. “Let’s go take a look. Did I pay her with counterfeit coins or something last time?”

Mu Lin followed him without a word, his mind racing through endless possibilities. Could it be... No it couldn’t be! Was the commander about to become a father?

But, that also seemed like a nice development. They just had to be sure it was the commander’s. Mmhmm! Li Hao was so young that such matters needed to be taken seriously.

“What are you thinking about, Brother Second Mu?”

“Eh?”

“I’m asking you a question!”

“What?”

“I asked if there are any disturbances in the city today. How are the nine ministries?” Li Hao looked wordlessly at him. What’d gotten into Mu Lin today?

“Ah, nothing... The Night Watchers have demonstrated their might and the nine ministries are keeping quiet. There’s been no movement from them ever since.”

“I see.” Li Hao nodded. Was Mu Lin distracted because Golden Spear had left?

The young man walked outside. The city defenders used to be camped at the northern city quadrant, but this area had been temporarily claimed as the Skystar Commander Office.

To be honest, Li Hao should be focused on building the Skystar Governor General Office, but strictly speaking, that position was under the control of the royal family. He didn’t think much of the appointment either—being the Skystar vice commander was better. He was only under Night Watcher jurisdiction then and that agency was his home turf. The title was more humble, but he could avoid the royal family.

A girl waited anxiously outside the complex. A Silver Moon Guard invited her inside, but she insisted on waiting outside. Some of the martial masters within the Silver Moon Guard were agog with the spirit of gossip.

A very young girl was here for Li Hao! She said that he’d given her two hundred star coins!

These details were all over the Silver Moon Guards and even Manager Yu’s figure could be glimpsed in the distance. Perhaps Hou Xiaochen had sent her here to listen to the gossip.

None of this occurred to Li Hao. If it did, he'd probably kill a few people to shut up the rest! This was an affront to his reputation!

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Yu Qi was both excited and agitated when she saw Li Hao. She happily ran over from the distance and said apprehensively when she drew near, "Um... ah... Master... Master Li... Do you remember me? I'm the one who showed you around the Avenue of the Nine Ministries... I also said that you can come find me at the eastern city quadrant if you have need... I'm called Yu Qi..."

Li Hao nodded. Of course he did, his memory wasn't that bad.

The look in Mu Lin's eyes grew more complicated. Come find me if you have need? How... incredible!

"Yu Qi, is it? I remember!" Li Hao laughed loudly. "Those weren't fake coins that I paid you with, were they? I got those coins from killing others and I'll pay you again if they're fake!"

"No no!" Yu Qi hastily shook her head. How was this the conclusion that he'd jumped to? "I've come to you because I have some business, Master Li..."

"Just call me big brother!" Li Hao said casually, drawing attention from numerous people around him. He was confused by their attention. What, couldn't he have an acquaintance in the city?

Another thought occurred to him when he noted the gossipy nature of their looks and he turned to Mu Lin. When he read incredulity in the man's eyes and the suggestion that Li Hao was a downright animal...

The young man understood!

“C’mon, let’s chat inside,” he said smoothly. “I haven’t had the time to thank you for showing me to the Night Watcher headquarters last time! It’s not an easy thing to be working and supporting your family at such a young age!”

The crowd blinked when they heard these words. Showing him to headquarters? Was that it? Seriously?

Mu Lin also started. So things aren’t as I thought?

“Don’t just stand around, Brother Second Mu.” Li Hao clapped Mu Lin’s shoulder. “Go about your business!”

“Oh, I see, okay!” Mu Lin quickly nodded.

Li Hao walked inside with Yu Qi, but Mu Lin abruptly felt a piercing pain in his body not long after the young man crossed the threshold. He shrieked with agony in the next second, startling the Silver Moon Guards so much that they thought an enemy attack was upon them.

Mu Lin waved them off, his hair standing up straight as bolts of lightning exploded over his head. Electricity coursing through his body numbed him as he laughed ruefully. Was there any doubt as to who’d done this?

Incredible! Li Hao had likely sent mysterious power into his body when the lad touched him. It didn’t explode until he left, nearly turning Mu Lin into charcoal.

“It’s the girl’s words that were ambiguous and open to interpretation. What are you smiting me for?” It was clear as day that Li Hao had realized what was going on and taken revenge. The lad was so petty!

.....

Within the hall.

Li Hao laughed and looked at Yu Qi. “Go on, take a seat. What kind of business do you have with me?”

“Master Li...”

Li Hao didn’t say anything upon seeing that she hadn’t changed his honorific for him.

“I... I have a crime to report!”

A crime? Li Hao was rather surprised. “Does someone owe you for your taxi services?”

What else could there be, other than this?

Yu Qi looked glumly at him—how was that possible? Not to mention, who would use a bicycle for a taxi? Only Li Hao would be this foolish, erm, generous!

The little girl looked carefully around her; Li Hao couldn’t help but laugh at seeing her surreptitious demeanor. What was she doing?

“This is my territory, there’s no one else here. Not even the nine ministries reach this far! Tell me who you want to file a complaint against, I happen to need to kill people to establish my authority. Of course, we’ll have other people in the office take care of minor characters...”

“They’re all major characters!” Yu Qi hastily piped up.

“Major characters?”

The little girl decided to come out with what was on her mind. She was already here and thus naturally hoped for Li Hao's help.

“Master Li, I want to file a report against many people. Some of them are princes, some are high up in the nine ministries, and there's also the headmaster of the Skystar Supernatural Academy. Oh, and there's major characters in the Inspectorate!” She set her jaw. “I want to expose that they killed innocents and seized another's property!”

Li Hao furrowed his brows and took a closer look at Yu Qi. She was a mundane and a child. Her clothing was shabby and she searched for customers off the streets. Such an ordinary person wanted to accuse princes, headmasters, and those of the nine ministries?

As he continued frowning at her, Yu Qi once more grit her teeth. “I... I can offer a good benefit! So long as Master Li helps me, I can tell you the location of a ruin!”

“A ruin? You know about ruins?”

“Of course!” Yu Qi threw all caution to the wind and lowered her head, not daring to look at Li Hao. “I know the location of a ruin, one that's different from the rest. Most ruins are of martial dao, army sites, or sect headquarters. This ruin seems to be... where the ancient civilization conducted research. It's not a martial university, but possibly a research station or a research institution.

“So long as Master Li is able to help me, I'll tell you where it is and how to enter it...”

She really was putting everything on the line. “I don't dare tell anyone else, but I trust that you are a good person. You might be the only person in the entire dynasty who can help me and the Yun family!”

The Yun family?

One person came to mind—Yun Yao, the quiet healer of the original Demon Hunters. The thought vanished as soon as it came to mind.

“Tell me more details.” He looked at Yu Qi.

Chapter 705: Gains and Reports (IV)

“I... am Yun Yuqi, the third generation of the Yun family. My grandfather was Headmaster Yun Haoran of the Skystar Ancient Academy. Someone killed him at home five years ago, along with my grandmother, senior uncle, senior aunt, third uncle, third aunt, my parents, and youngest aunt...” Yu Qi lowered her head, grinding her teeth. “They were going to kill everyone, but my grandfather used a special method to hide me!

“They killed my entire family, not only killing my grandfather, but wanting to force out the location of the ruins from him. He refused to tell them and died a horrible death as he fought them! Not satisfied with just killing my grandfather, they killed a lot more people. They killed some teachers and many students of the academy, but told the outside world that the three great organizations did it.

“I know who was involved. When my grandfather fought them, he called out a few names...”

“The Yun family... Yun Haoran, the Skystar Ancient Academy...” Li Hao repeated with an ominous expression. He seemed to have heard of these names before. “I didn’t pay much attention when Martial Uncle Hong mentioned it before, now I remember. A few years ago... Yun Haoran... the Haoran Research Center...”

“Was there a Haoran Research Center in the past? Some academies recruited students for a while, but they later closed. I remember hearing at Silver City’s Veteris Institute a few years ago that there was a Haoran Research Center at the dynasty capital. It was the sacred land of research, the place of many people’s dreams, but closed not long after its establishment...”

He remembered!

“That’s right.” Yuqi quickly nodded. “My grandfather created it and wanted to recruit all people of knowledge in the world to popularize certain things. But after that... it was abandoned when my grandfather died. It’s been five years since then.”

Li Hao suddenly felt that fate was wondrous. The research center had already closed by the time he joined the Veteris Institute, but many in the institute still talked about it. Their source of news was plainly delayed. It wasn’t long after that that it turned out the headmaster’s entire family had been killed.

No, his granddaughter was still alive.

Li Hao found himself confused—why did these great personages bestir themselves to kill the headmaster of a school? Hong Yitang had mentioned that this person had sought to make certain things universal. Those movements came to a halt with the death of the headmaster.

Seeing that Master Li looked lost, Yu Qi knew that he didn’t quite understand the ramifications. She set her jaw and said, “You might not know what my grandfather’s achieved, but you definitely use his inventions everyday.

“The electric lights and system of electricity that you use come from my grandfather’s inventions fifteen years ago. The cars and trains that everyone uses now are also products that he developed. The system of transmission pendants and almost the entire system of communication is by his hand!

“My grandfather once said that the dynasty’s system of transportation and communication needs to be perfected first. That will swiftly unify the dynasty and ensure that information is shared as swiftly as possible. It will help the public more easily accept new information and help the population move from one place to another.

“Commerce will flourish, those from small places can enter the big cities and complete an overall migration of the population...” Yuqi didn’t know these latter concepts as well, so she only mentioned them in passing. “Five years ago, my grandfather wanted to join all of the ancient academies together and complete the reform of the education system.

“He was killed not long after that. These people didn’t want him to continue! They stole a lot of technologies and sealed the knowledge away. They didn’t want the technology to be universal!”

Li Hao was shocked by what he’d learned. “So you’re saying... that the entire electric and transportation system that we rely on now is the work of your grandfather?”

“Yes!”

The young man sucked in a sharp breath. He really hadn’t known about Yun Haoran’s feats, and it wasn’t that he was ignorant or ill-informed. Barely anyone mentioned the name these days. It was already an accomplishment that he knew of it.

But after Yuqi’s words, the situation felt a bit surreal to him. So... I’ve had contact with this person all along. Having electricity was one major step forward for the dynasty.

A lot of changes occurred after electricity was established as a mainstay of life. The appearance of cars also made travel much easier. Li Hao recalled that for a period of time, all cities were furiously building and maintaining roads. They seemed to want to cover the dynasty with roads—so it turned out that this had to do with Yun Haoran as well!

He suddenly understood why the royal family and nine ministries wanted to kill the man! Li Hao had just discussed this with Hong Yitang. The latter had mentioned that everyone hoped for the people to remain dumb and not gain intelligence.

But with the development of transportation and communication systems, the flow of information and people would increase. At that point, even citizens in remote locales would rapidly grow in intelligence.

If Yun Haoran’s proposed educational reforms took place, then what talk of destroying the people’s mind would there be? Who should die, if not Yun Haoran?

Li Hao frowned, this would not be an easy task to straighten out. He'd just concluded a massive battle with the nine ministries and they were barely maintaining peace on the surface. Even the royal family was involved now. If he started pursuing this matter, that would force the other two to ally against him!

Damn!

It was the conflict between the royal family and nine ministries that created such an opening for Li Hao. If he was of the mind to investigate Yun Haoran's death and take revenge for the late headmaster... he would be courting death!

Hong Yitang once mentioned that he wanted to join the Skystar Ancient Academy—the ancient academy, not the supernatural variant. He looked to be seeking inspiration from the Ancient Academy, so he should know of Yun Haoran.

“Do you have proof?” Li Hao asked after some silence.

“I do!” Yuqi looked back at him. “I have... very clear recordings! You might not know what it is—it's something that records your every move and gesture. This technology was actually pushed out to the public as well, but it was later erased...”

“Something like surveillance?”

“Yes!” Yuqi was surprised by the identification. “How do you know?”

“Silver Moon has such equipment, so of course I know.”

“Silver Moon has this kind of equipment?” Yuqi continued to be surprised. “But these technologies were forbidden after my grandfather died five years ago. Even if any were in use, they would've been destroyed. That was the order of the dynasty!”

“The dynasty’s hand does not stretch to Silver Moon!” Li Hao smiled. So it turned out that forbidden technologies were in use at the province? Granted, there were very few instances of them. He’d only ever seen such capabilities from the Inspectorate and almost none anywhere else. They’d probably all been destroyed.

“Where are the recordings?”

“So Master Li has promised to help me with this?”

“This is... a difficult matter,” Li Hao admitted with a headache. “I would love to just kill everyone involved, but you know just as well that that won’t work. I don’t have the strength to, but I accept your report of wrongdoing!”

“So... even you can’t do it?” Yuqi was disappointed.

“The nine ministries and royal family are acting together in this!” Li Hao didn’t treat her as an ignorant victim in this matter. “I alone, or even with Silver Moon, won’t be able to take them on. Of course, everything is possible. How about this, keep the recordings to yourself since you’re not fully reassured about me yet. I’ll make my own investigation to understand more about the situation.”

This was no small matter. Li Hao suspected that if he intervened, that would immediately draw backlash from the nine ministries and royal family. Hong Yitang wanting to join the Skystar Ancient Academy might also turn into a severe issue.

At the same time, they might not place too much importance on the matter since many things were lacking in the world now. Hong Yitang was not Yun Haoran as well. As he lacked the development of key technologies and talents, he wouldn’t reach the same heights even if he established another academy.

The ruin that Yuqi spoke of may be the key.

The girl was despondent, but she also knew that this was a tall order. “It’s alright... Master Li... I just... I just don’t want to leave things like this. I know it’s very, very hard, but there’s only a strand of hope with you. No one else can exact vengeance for my family.”

“Don’t worry, if what you say is true, then I will certainly ponder the matter,” Li Hao comforted. “But I need time! Also, is there anyone who knows about your identity?”

“No.”

“Then you... should stay here for now. Many people might have noticed your presence here today and further investigation could expose you.”

“I...” Yuqi wanted to go back, but felt that Li Hao was right upon further thought. Going back might drag her little brother and the others into this. With the situation as it was, she really couldn’t locate anyone other than Li Hao to help her.

“Master Li, I can tell you the location of the ruins if you want to know,” Yuqi offered upon second thought. “But... you may not be able to access it now. There should be a key to it, but the key’s been lost. I don’t know if the nine ministries or royal family took it. They don’t know where the ruins are, but I know.”

She decided to be a bit clearer, just in case Li Hao thought she was lying to him. That would be unnecessary trouble then.

“It’s fine, we’re not in a hurry for any of this!” Li Hao didn’t mind. He really didn’t, he cared more about improvements in martial dao.

Granted, it would be more effective to lay hands on research results from the ancient civilization. It would be of great help to Hong Yitang’s ensuing plans.

Li Hao summoned Xie Lan of the Jade Sword Sect and bade her take care of the girl. He didn't give many instructions, just that she should help the girl clean herself up...

That made the Silver Moon Guards look weirdly at him again, like they were looking at an animal. Li Hao suddenly wanted to beat them all into the ground! Had they'd forgotten how he'd defeated them when he first arrived at the Silver Moon Guards?

Chapter 706: Turning Into a Fatty With One Bite (I)

After helping Yun Yuqi settle down, Li Hao utilized Night Watcher resources to investigate Yun Haoran. He didn't go to anyone else because he was worried that the intelligence network might be infiltrated by others. He went straight to Yao Si.

The Night Watcher director readily cooperated this time. He had Little Ye send over a large sheaf of papers. The affair of the Yun family hadn't been a minor matter; it simply looked like the death of just one family on the surface. Even entire cities were razed to the ground these days. Nothing had come of the death of one of the founding ministers two days ago.

However, Li Hao still exercised caution. This was a target that the royal family and nine ministries had worked to jointly take down. He might give rise to no end of trouble if he didn't handle this well.

These people plainly didn't want the Yun affair to be mentioned again and didn't wish for those technologies to be once more disseminated across the land. Some things were hard to keep contained after they began.

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Li Hao carefully read everything as he sat in a rundown room. He gained an overall understanding of Yun Haoran's identity and status when he was done. The headmaster of the Skystar Ancient Academy had devoted himself to popularizing ancient technology a few decades ago. He'd received support from the nine ministries and royal family at first as Yun Haoran supplied them with many advancements.

He was the progenitor of their military arms such as guns, bombs, missiles, and the like. These types of technology were of use to the nine ministries and royal family controlling the dynasty.

After that, Yun Haoran began to diffuse the electrical system and the industrial revolution. Producing military armaments was difficult without a complete industrial system. Therefore, the innovation of the electric grid was the logical next step.

One had to say, Yun Haoran was no bookworm lacking knowledge in the workings of the world. He had certain strategies in mind. Those in charge would taste a hint of the sweet rewards before he sought to advance his agenda.

However, he gradually ran into severe restrictions.

Many facets were neutered when he sought to implement the communication system. Communication could only take place within the same city. Objects recorded in ancient records such as televisions were completely eliminated. Smooth communication was permitted within a narrow range, but not permitted over a wide range.

Yun Haoran had grown dissatisfied with the status quo five years ago and proposed the idea of educational reform. He'd posited the Skystar Ancient Academy as the foundation and received support from a wide range of other academies. He was prepared to establish more schools and accept large sums of age-eligible students. Ten million students was his starting point.

This idea scared the wits out of all sides and his entire family died not long thereafter.

"He took too big a step..." Li Hao murmured, finding that Yun Haoran seemed to have been in a hurry at the end of his file. His path had been plain sailing when he had support from the royal family and nine ministries. Why had he suddenly accelerated his plans five years ago?

The Skystar Academy hadn't been in a hurry after several decades of operation. It was strange that it'd suddenly agitated for action at the end. They'd suddenly wanted to expand to ten thousand more schools and matriculate ten million students. It was no wonder that the nine ministries and royal family would kill those responsible for the idea.

Did Yun Haoran still not know what these people wanted after so many years of partnership? Teaching so many new students in one year alone and wanting to establish that as regular operating conditions... The nine ministries and royal family would be pushed out of their positions of power after a decade!

Not to mention that he'd lacked sufficient capital, labor, and resources. He also didn't have enough teachers. If ten teachers were assigned to each school, that would still require at least one hundred thousand teachers. Where would so many teachers come from...

Not to mention, there might be resistance from other locales to this proposed plan of action. What had been going through Yun Haoran's mind in these final moments?

Li Hao's thoughts turned to Hong Yitang. Hong Yitang had constantly mentioned the problem of education. Was education really that important?

Li Hao could read and had been educated at the Veteris Institute, so he didn't have many thoughts regarding this matter. What he did know was that graduating from the Veteris Institute would change one's life. Alumni would start at a high rank in the Inspectorate.

Therefore, Li Hao didn't have a clear understanding of how crucial education was. Silver Moon didn't forbid its people from attending school either. On the contrary, the province even showed support. Li Hao had received government funding when he attended school. There was a provincial government fund for those from impoverished backgrounds. It wasn't much, but it was there.

That both Yun Haoran and Hong Yitang raise the issue of education, that means it is indeed the first step to awakening the minds of the people. The royal family and nine ministries are also very clear on this, so they do not permit it to happen. They monopolize technology, wealth, martial might, and educational resources...

Exercising complete control over these areas meant that those beneath the upper echelon had no capability to do anything else.

Inducting energy into the body to become supernatural is also under their control. Only the large factions or Night Watchers have the right to do so...

Li Hao sealed away the information in his hands. He had his own thoughts in mind—now was not a good time to erupt in open hostilities with both sides at the same time. On the contrary, he could not display any enmity toward the royal family, even if he doesn't accept their olive branch.

He had to pretend to be amiable and agreeable with them in order to jointly restrain the nine ministries. If not, he would be beset on two battlefronts.

I can break the monopoly that the nobles have on status, but I cannot shatter their foundations to become the Human King. They have their bottom line too—someone must unite the world and become the Human King in a critical moment. With such a foundation...

Li Hao fully understood what both sides needed in this moment. If that was the case... he could not push sweeping educational reforms. He would be attacked by both sides if he did.

To the royal family, abandoning a few nobles in crucial moments means they can actually win over the people's hearts. Me killing a few nobles is actually a good thing. It doesn't affect their fundamental interests and I'm actually killing more of the nine ministries at the moment...

The young man quickly saw through the royal family's reasoning. He suddenly smiled. Yun Haoran's matter had helped him see certain things clearly. Combined with Hong Yitang's words, Li Hao was more certain of how he should maintain the current balance.

He suddenly rose to his feet and walked outside. Panther was hot on his heels. The dog's fur was even more lustrous after devouring a drop of a major monster spirit's blood. Li Hao didn't know what its strength was now as Panth was harder to read than martial masters.

.....

The Avenue of the Nine Ministries.

Powerful presences overshadowed him as soon as Li Hao walked down the street. He furrowed his brows and looked in the four directions. “What? Can I not come here? Do you have a problem with me taking lunch at the Nine Dragons Pagoda?”

No one answered him, but the presences remained. Li Hao ignored them and continued toward his destination. He didn’t care that the presences followed him to the doors of the Nine Dragons Pagoda. The female manager was quite surprised to see him cross the threshold. She quickly came up in welcome, beaming from ear to ear. “The commander’s here!”

This smile was much more radiant than all the ones she’d displayed before.

Li Hao smiled back at her. See, this was the benefit of killing people. Killing people in sufficient numbers meant that these haughty royal agents grew more polite each time they saw him.

“Let’s go to the usual... Forget it, let’s go to the Ministry of the Judiciary’s room. I killed Ole Hu, so I’ll use his room in the future!”

Strange expressions crossed faces in the great hall when people heard him. Some immediately left. Those who had been conversing softly all fell quiet. There were even those who ran off as soon as they saw Li Hao. These days, the young man ran rampant in cocky glory. Who dared antagonize him?

Of course, there were also those who admired his arrogance! One had to know that the nine ministries surrounded this place. Was he not afraid of being mobbed? He was so bold! Most of the Silver Moon martial masters had left and very few were in the city. Was he not afraid?

And yet, the nine ministries seemed to be giving way. They didn’t make a move. The more confident Li Hao was, the more prudent they were. Having taken a few defeats and lost many

Arcanus, who dared start another battle? What if Li Hao had more trump cards up his sleeve, wouldn't they lose a ton more people in another fight?

Thus, no one dared make a move before absolute victory was guaranteed.

The female manager didn't say anything before rushing Li Hao upstairs. "The commander lives in the northern quadrant of the city, which is quite far away from here. If you would like to dine at the Nine Dragons Pavilion next time, you can send a message to us. We will deliver to you and save a trip for the commander."

It was indeed not that safe for Li Hao to be here, but the young man thought the manager was looking down her nose at him. "What, do I not have any money? Can I not afford to patronize this establishment? Do I eat and drink for free? Can I possibly not have any money after I killed so many powerhouses?"

Fine, he had indeed eaten for free the first two times. It might be the case this time as well. It was normal that others looked down on him.

The manager smiled in lieu of a response. She didn't need to say anything since Li Hao was so confident. They reached the ninth floor—it was as quiet as could be. Several ministers were usually in attendance for a meal, but not a single one could be found today. They either kept a much lower profile or were preoccupied with the royal family.

Li Hao entered the private room and cut straight to the chase. "Have your pavilion master come out for a chat."

"You may be unaware, commander," the female manager responded with some difficulty. "The pavilion master is a royal..."

"Is he more royal than the Steppe Prince?"

“Um...” The manager was confused. What did Li Hao want with the pavilion master? He seemed to be here for this. The manager wracked her mind—was he here to partner with the royal family?

But the royal family was no benevolent entity. As their secret agent out in the open, she knew a great deal about them. The royal family might be thornier than the nine ministries and Li Hao might be ushering the wolf into the house if he struck up a partnership with them.

However, she couldn't turn him down.

“Then... I shall make my report!”

“Go on!” Li Hao sat down with a flourish. Dishes were quickly served in plentitude.

Chapter 707: Turning Into a Fatty With One Bite (II)

Footsteps sounded at the door after Li Hao drank a few cups of tea and ate a few bites.

“Enter!”

The female manager led someone inside. Li Hao tilted his head to see a woman of moderate age—she seemed thirty years old at most. She wore a luxurious cloak with her hair done up in a simple bun. Once inside, the manager helped the woman take off her outerwear. The absence of a shawl and cloak revealed the woman's impressive figure and form-fitting brocade outfit underneath.

“I have long heard of your name, Skystar Marquis!” The woman smiled a perfect smile and appeared particularly enthusiastic, but Li Hao found the sight uncomfortable. This smile... was the same as the one he'd trained into himself at the Inspectorate.

It was a standard hypocritical smile.

“Commander Li, this is the pavilion master, the seventh princess of the royal family,” the manager quickly introduced.

Li Hao looked at the other and smiled, gesturing for Panther to move. The dog jumped down from the stool.

“Please have a seat, Your Highness!” Li Hao smiled.

“.....” The female manager’s expression shifted, but not a flicker crossed the seventh princess’ face. She walked up and sat down, not caring in the slightest that a dog had just vacated the stool.

“What an honor. It is said that Panther is the direct descendant of an ancient monster spirit and its bloodline is strong. Although the ancient civilization is no more, its bloodlines are passed on. This seat would like nothing more than to converse with the great Panther.”

The dog raised its head proudly, but otherwise ignored the princess. Li Hao inwardly marveled at the princess’ silver tongue. This is how you react when I have you sit in a spot where a dog was sitting? Why don’t you just marry Panther then?

“There will definitely be chances to!” Li Hao laughed and looked at this seventh princess with new wariness. None of the other royal family members were active outside the palace. The Steppe Prince had handled all outside matters, but this seventh princess was in charge of the Nine Dragons Pavilion. She was no ordinary character.

As for her strength... Li Hao couldn’t tell at all! She couldn’t be characterized as an ordinary martial master—she must be wearing something that concealed her presence. It even obscured all of her energy. The item must be a powerful origin weapon that concealed everything about the holder. It could even be a fragment of a bronze mirror!

Li Hao had one such piece and knew its immense capabilities well. He’d had the feeling of being kept under watch when he entered the Nine Dragons Pavilion. Therefore, there might be such an item in residence, or even on the seventh princess.

“A few days ago, the Skystar Marquis executed some bugs that undermine the foundations of our nation. Thankfully, royal father’s efforts have borne fruit. So it turns out that the Steppe Prince colluded with the nine ministries! He is truly the shame of the royal family. Thank goodness the marquis executed him. Otherwise, the outside would think my family is the same as the nine ministries—termites to be found everywhere!”

Damn if she didn’t know how to talk! She turned the Steppe Prince into a traitor as soon as she arrived.

The poor Steppe Prince had worked prudently and conscientiously for the royal family for many years, but such was his treatment in the end. Not only was he labeled a traitor, but he’d colluded with the nine ministries.

Li Hao immediately understood that there was no point in beating around the bush with this one. Her experience in such areas was so much more than his. Thus, he decided to cut straight to the chase. “I won’t waste time dancing around, there’s no point in that. Can you represent the royal family, Your Highness?”

“It depends on what the matter is,” chuckled the seventh princess. “Of course, I can contact my royal father if there is something I cannot make the decision in. Will the Skystar Marquis be satisfied in direct contact with my royal father?”

“I will!” Li Hao affirmed with appreciation. “Who says a woman is less than a man? I thought the royal family was filled with characters like Southern Fist. Ahem, well, that’s wrong. He’s a Silver Moon martial master, I almost criticized myself.”

“Master He is an authentic person who does not put on affected airs.” The seventh princess continued to smile radiantly. “He has been in his position in the palace for many years and raised an outstanding talent such as ninth royal brother. My younger brother has quite the valor of Silver Moon martial masters. All of the royal family quite likes Master He.”

Ninth royal brother?

He Yong had mentioned being close with one of the princes. Was it the ninth royal brother being mentioned now?

Li Hao wasn't too familiar with the royal family, he only knew that there were nine princes and thirty-six dukes. Not including ones who came into their dukedom like the Xus, those dukes were all of the royal family proper.

Li Hao had been led astray from the topic at hand, but he asked curiously, "Does the Skystar King have many children? You're number seven, so how old are you? You don't look older than thirty."

"....." The manager was seized by an urge to tiptoe out of the room or burrow into the ground. How could he just ask questions like that? That would easily raise royal enmity!

The seventh princess didn't mind and laughed softly. "The Skystar Marquis is as straightforward as ever. My royal father has twenty-two children—"

"That's less than Thunderleg!"

"....." The seventh princess kept herself contained with effort. "I'm ranked number seven and will forgo revealing my age. My ninth brother is twenty years old this year, the same age as the marquis."

"Twenty years old! He's so young!" Li Hao sighed with emotion. "So he was just born when Martial Uncle Southern Fist joined the palace?"

All of this was beside the point, so he brought conversation back on track after conversing a bit more. "The seventh princess also knows that apart from the Inspectorate, the rest of the nine ministries want nothing more than to eat me alive. That's what I get for killing five of their Arcanus and Hu Xiao in one go.

“It’s very dangerous for me to continue to stay here, but I’m a more explicit person at times. The more you want me to leave, the more I’ll dig in my heels and fight against you to the end!” Li Hao sneered. “Not to mention, I know they won’t dare easily take action or do anything to me while they face the royal family.”

The seventh princess dropped the pretense upon seeing Li Hao be so direct. “Then what would the Skystar Marquis like to accomplish on this trip?”

“I’m not going to help the royal family!”

“.....” The princess furrowed her brows.

“But I’ll continue to take down the nine ministries. So although I say I won’t help you, our goals are the same!”

The princess nodded.

“I will not tolerate living under the same roof as them, particularly the current minister of the Judiciary. He likely wants to eat my flesh and drink my blood. After repeated consideration, I find that I am still in danger at staying in Skystar City at this time...”

The seventh princess didn’t immediately understand his intent. “Does the marquis wish for the royal family to provide you with some shelter?”

“That isn’t it!” Li Hao shook his head. “There’s no need for that, not to mention I wouldn’t be at ease with you giving me shelter. Who knows if you’re looking to kill me and take my family’s weapon or not!”

“.....” The sharp seventh princess had nothing to say. She really couldn’t guess at Li Hao’s thoughts sometimes. What do you want then?

“I’m here for the royal family because I have a few matters I’d like your participation in. Or you can say your help. Of course, it’s to both our benefit!”

“Please speak frankly, Skystar Marquis!”

“Give me a complete dossier on the nine ministries, including the number of their powerhouses, level of their Arcanus, strength of their peripheral factions... I want the most complete version, not the neutered version that circulates outside. I’m sure you have it! Knowing my enemies as well as I know myself will ensure that I do not lose my battles. I’m sure you know these things.”

Li Hao raised one finger, then continued, “Second, I want to face off against the nine ministries and set up a Skystar martial dao university in the city. Earthturner Sword will be the headmaster. I also hope to make the Skystar Commander Office a separate faction. Or rather, an independent entity.

“Combined with the Skystar Martial University and the Night Watchers, the three factions would form a new agency. Perhaps it’d be more accurate to call it the tenth ministry! All I need from the royal family is a name. I don’t need you to invest anything.”

The seventh princess’ expression shifted slightly. A tenth ministry! Li Hao was... so very bold.

Not only was the young man bold, but he wanted to carve out the Night Watchers from the Inspectorate. It further shocked the princess and she asked in a low voice, “Has Director Yao Si agreed to this? And the Inspectorate...”

“Director Yao Si naturally has no opinions otherwise,” Li Hao laughed. “As for the Inspectorate... What of them? They wouldn’t find it too many if they gained an enemy, they wouldn’t find it too few if there was one less enemy. Isn’t the royal family concerned about me falling in with the Inspectorate thanks to our good relations?”

“In this regard, not only can you drive a wedge between us, but the Inspectorate is sure to be dissatisfied with me. Isn’t that a swell idea? It would be the Inspectorate that’s displeased, the royal family should be happy.”

The seventh princess inclined her head with confusion. “That the Skystar Martial University... is deemed one of the three parties... Is the university going to focus on martial students?”

She could easily see his plans with the Skystar Commander Office and Night Watchers, but what did Li Hao want with a university?

“Of course it will,” Li Hao bared his teeth. “Liu Yunqing said that the people’s heart is worthless. I want to show him that it’s terrifying! I’m going to create an image of being friendly to the regular people, so I’m going to recruit some mundanes for training. I’m going to go back to Silver Moon and seek out the ancient existences in Battle Heaven. They will supply me with large sums of armor so I can forge an army of martial masters to fight the nine ministries! I will use solely martial masters trained from mundanes. The nine ministries will know whether I, Li Hao, can give them a face slapping or not!”

“You... you can take the armor out of Battle Heaven?” gasped the seventh princess.

“I could before, I don’t know if I still can now.” Li Hao shook his head. “But since I am a supernatural now, there will be no rest for them until my vengeance is had! I don’t know if this is possible as Battle Heaven didn’t permit supernaturals from entering it before. I can only give it a try...”

“It’d be best if I succeed!” he sighed.

The seventh princess thought rapidly. There wasn’t much to opening a school for ordinary people. It wasn’t important either if he wanted to train martial masters and create an army. it mattered even less that Hong Yitang was to be headmaster.

These events would indeed raise a fuss among the people. This might be the first martial school to be officially open toward mundanes. But it wasn't like a bunch of martial blockheads could do anything. Whether it was the royal family or nine ministries, they weren't afraid of this.

Chapter 708: Turning Into a Fatty With One Bite (III)

One more group of martial brutes in this day and age wouldn't change anything. The royal family would pay more attention if Li Hao proposed cultivating a bunch of scholars as these were the types that fanned flames in people's hearts.

The seventh princess quickly weighed up the pros and cons. The young man's proposed course of action did indeed seem to be irrelevant to the royal family. It would actually further set Silver Moon and the nine ministries against each other!

"Additionally, I'm concerned that the nine ministries have yet to send out their greatest powerhouses," said Li Hao. "There might be some ancient heavyweights in store. Therefore, I'd like to make a trip back to Silver Moon and Battle Heaven. Perhaps I can request some of those ancient characters to emerge as well. If they really back me into a corner, I'll go toe-to-toe with them to the bitter end!"

"The Skystar Marquis... has reached an agreement with those existences?" The seventh princess was startled.

"What agreement?" Li Hao was baffled. "I am the heir to the Lis of the eight families, it's natural that they listen to me! Granted, I can't command them at the moment, I can only try negotiating with them."

"Can the existences in Battle Heaven... set foot into the world?"

"Can they not?" Li Hao asked with confusion.

The princess paused, on the verge of a slight mental breakdown. "Um... it's better if the marquis makes a full inquiry. These existences... cannot easily emerge in our world. The supernatural has just awoken for the first time, which means that there is not enough energy in the world to support

them. Second, the rules of dao have slightly changed, so these existences may not be able to adapt to the differences. All of this needs to be resolved by the second awakening...”

“The second awakening?” Li Hao was truly lost this time.

“It’s not just these ancient existences, but also us who need denser energy in the world to support us.” The princess nodded, she didn’t keep anything to herself. “Since we are inhabitants of this era, the effect on us is not as great. The reason why the Arcanus realm is not as stable at the moment also has to do with the lack of energy in the world. All of this requires the second awakening of the supernatural.

“The marquis is a core figure of Silver Moon, but you may not know yet that when the supernatural awakens for the second time, that is when all sides will invade Silver Moon.”

This was potentially a secret to Li Hao, but it was known to certain personnel of the province. The princess didn’t care whether the young man knew or not.

“We are not the only ones. Certain ancient existences also wish to set foot into the province upon the second awakening. Everyone wishes to intrude upon Silver Moon. I shall not speak further on why.

“The Skystar Marquis should not brashly invite those existences out into the open. It might give rise to unpredictable danger. This was why these entities didn’t appear in the battle between Silver Moon and the nine ministries. Otherwise, even the marquis’ master could have brought some to the battlefield...”

Li Hao glanced at her. She sure knew a lot!

“When is the second awakening?”

“We don’t know.” The seventh princess shook her head. “Everyone is waiting. It’s been twenty years since the last awakening. It might be soon, it might still lack certain turning points. However, I trust that it will be soon!”

She didn't go into the specifics. As much as Li Hao wanted to roll his eyes, he didn't ask further.

"Then I don't care, I'm just going to go ask around," the young man continued. "Apart from specific information on the nine ministries, the separation of the Night Watchers and others, I have another matter to request your help with."

"Please go ahead, Skystar Marquis."

"I hear people say that the current communication system and the transmission pendants were all created by something... called the Skystar... Research Center. I need some technological support. Additionally, I hear that the Nine Dragons Pavilion took in a batch of those people back in the day. I'd like to have them..."

"What??"

"What are you raising your voice for?" Li Hao looked wordlessly at the princess. "It's just some mundanes, but I need to build my own communication system. I can't keep using someone else's. Whether it's the Night Watchers, nine ministries, or even the royal family, how would I dare let you guys have control over my communications? I need to build my own intelligence network, what's so strange about that?"

"This is just a small matter." The young man looked on innocently. "I hear that the Nine Dragons Pavilion can instantly communicate with the entire world..."

"The marquis can use ours. I promise that we absolutely will not eavesdrop..."

"Heh!" Li Hao snorted with laughter. "Do you believe your words? Just say it if you're not willing to lend the people to me. It's a good thing for you guys if I find my footing in Skystar City. You had no opinions about my earlier requests, but you have issues with me borrowing people and building up an intelligence system?"

“Skystar Duke, it’s not that I’m refusing you...” The princess frowned. “But that these people have either died, scattered to the four corners, or been recruited by others. I don’t have many on hand either and need them to maintain the operations of our transmission hub...”

This really was a difficult task to fulfill! Some of these people grasped advanced technology, some others possessed top secrets. Their research head had died earlier, which created a problem for the Nine Dragons Pavilion. That Li Hao had chosen to borrow these people now...

To be honest, these people didn’t amount to much in terms of strength, but they were irreplaceable when it came to importance!

“So the princess means not to fulfill my request, is it? Just say so if you mean so!” Li Hao frowned and rose to leave.

“Don’t be in such a hurry, Skystar Marquis.” The seventh princess rose with a dismayed cast to her expression. “I... need to discuss this with royal father.”

She hadn’t needed approval for her earlier matters, but she did in this one.

“Borrowing a few mundanes needs approval from the Skystar King? Are you kidding me?” Li Hao asked with blatant incomprehension.

“No...” The princess wasn’t at liberty to go into detail.

“This is so much hassle!” Li Hao frowned. “Honestly, it’s not a difficult task for me. Battle Heaven armor can transmit messages every thousand kilometers, I can just put personnel for every one thousand kilometers! It’s just that I won’t have that much armor to spare when my troops increase in number and I’ll have to be careful of being ambushed by others if I arrange for people everywhere.

“This is just adding to surefire success, not giving a hand for needed aid. That you decline even this... Do you think that I won’t be of any help to the royal family upon staying?”

The seventh princess blinked and noticed a key detail in Li Hao’s words. “The marquis can activate the armor?”

“No shit!”

The princess didn’t mind his rudeness. She quickly recovered her smile after a momentary frown. “I wonder... how many sets of armor can the marquis activate?”

“Only one thousand for now.”

The princess heaved a slight sigh of relief and deepened her smile. “Then the marquis means to say that you can activate more in the future?”

“I naturally can if Battle Heaven doesn’t reject me as a supernatural. The concern there is...” The young man gnashed his teeth. “I will take the nine ministries to task sooner or later for their responsibility in forcing me to become an Arcanus. They’ve wrecked so many of my opportunities!”

That was very true; the princess nodded in agreement.

“That’s right, it’s such a pity. If the marquis had always remained a Silver Moon martial master and leveraged your identity as the heir of the Lis, you would be guaranteed the greatest of fortuitous opportunities in Silver Moon. You might even be able to dominate the world! But now... it is indeed a pity!

“Forget it, the key is that you won’t lend me the people. Then forget about everything!”

“We will!” The princess had thought things through. “You are in too much of a hurry sometimes, Skystar Marquis. I merely said to discuss the matter for a bit, not that I was refusing you. It’s just that I won’t have that many people to lend you. After all, I don’t have that many people. How about... ten?”

“Will that ensure smooth communication function?”

“It absolutely will!”

“Then that works!” Li Hao nodded. “With so few people you should just raise a few more. It’s just a few mundanes, but look at you hemming and hawing like this.”

The seventh princess smiled without saying a word.

“Then it’s settled!” Li Hao said nothing further. “These are the three main matters. Once I find my footing in Skystar City, just watch the hell that I rain down on the nine ministries!

“Oh, right, I might need to kill some people in my quest against the nine ministries to come. There might need to be some from the royal family among them, so give me a list of pawns you can discard or people who don’t listen to you. I’ll take care of them for you!”

“Um...” The seventh princess paused.

“Don’t tell me that you guys are completely working together!” Li Hao snapped. “Do you think I don’t understand anything? Don’t you know to eliminate those who are of no help to you? I need heads to establish my authority and weaken the influence of the nine ministries. Of course, I can’t let people think that I am afraid of the royal family, so I’ll kill your people along with the rest! The nine ministries will think I’m crazy then and wait for us two to start fighting. Do you really think that all I know is to be rash?”

A light danced in the seventh princess' eyes. This guy really wasn't brainlessly rash! If he killed people on both sides, that might induce the nine ministries to discuss the possibility of allying against Li Hao. If the royal family took advantage of the opening to raise some demands, but continued to secretly partner with Li Hao in the dark... That might lead to unexpected benefits.

But in that case, that would strengthen Li Hao's prestige.

Yet upon further thought, prestige was of no use in this day and age. Strength was king!

"Very well... but this matter needs to remain a secret!" The princess nodded after some thought.

"Of course! Am I supposed to announce to the world that I'm working with the royal family to help them eliminate dissidents? What a joke! Oh right, you must have proper evidence for these people. I don't kill random people, so don't give me a list of innocents. I have no interest in being your blade!"

"That won't happen!"

"Then here's to our partnership!" Li Hao grinned. "I shan't be staying then. Ah, yes, send a meal's worth of dishes to the northern city everyday. I'll settle the bill at the end of the year!"

"Oh, that's perfectly alright..." chuckled the seventh princess.

"Then I thank Your Highness for your generosity!"

"....." That stopped the princess in her tracks. Do you really lack this money, Li Hao? I was just being polite, but you took me at my word! Granted, this was just pocket change to her, so she didn't voice a protest. "As we should!"

Li Hao left without another word. The princess didn't see him out.

Chapter 709: Turning Into a Fatty With One Bite (IV)

The princess' thoughts turned inward after Li Hao left. What an interesting young man. The requests he'd raised weren't hard. It would be a good thing for the royal family if he could truly find his footing in Skystar City. After some musing, she took out a mirror that had a face reflecting out of it.

"You heard him too, royal father. What do you think?"

"Li Hao is quite interesting." An august voice slowly trailed out of the mirror; some amusement could be heard within it. "He wants to establish his authority and even manifest greater prestige among the people. He intends to create a scene of the four cardinal directions bowing to his every word.

"However, he overestimates the people. I don't know if he wishes to be the Human King, but Silver Moon has never been a place to bow to discipline. The world's chaos starts from the north! But chaos is good. Haven't we done everything we've done so far for this?

"Agree to everything he wishes! He has become an inalienable part of Silver Moon! Earthturner Sword, the Five Styles King, and the others have close relationships with him. We may need Li Hao's impulsive nature and ambitions if we want Silver Moon to further war with the nine ministries!"

Whether it was brashness or ambitions, all was fine. Li Hao's personality destined him for more clashes with the nine ministries.

"We should impose more restrictions on the nine ministries so that Li Hao has more room to develop and grow..."

"But royal father, what if... someone from Silver Moon fully finds their footing in Skystar City..." the seventh princess said softly.

“Do you think that is a possibility?” came the stately voice. “If we hadn’t kept the nine ministries preoccupied in the prior battle, those of Silver Moon wouldn’t have had good endings. This is Skystar, not Silver Moon! Do you understand?”

“Understood!” The princess nodded as the person in the mirror vanished.

.....

Li Hao walked out of the Nine Dragons Pavilion, accompanied by the female manager. He didn’t mind that she was as enthusiastic as ever. The young man was lost in thought.

Whatever the royal family was thinking, they would sit idly by while he built a reputation of irreconcilable differences with the nine ministries. There was even Battle Heaven and Silver Moon standing behind him.

That the royal family had been forced behind the curtains meant that they either were of the same strength as the nine ministries, or they were slightly weaker and needed his help. Although, were the nine ministries that strong? After setting foot into Arcanus, Li Hao didn’t think much of this level.

The nine ministries had eighteen ministers total, if counting the previous generation. Well, there were seventeen now. Even if they were all Arcanus who wielded ancient weapons, could they suppress the royal family with that?

The royal family possessed nine princes and thirty-six dukes, as well as twenty-two children in the youngest generation. There was also the Skystar King—was this level of force insufficient to battle the nine ministries?

Li Hao decided that he might need to wait until he obtained information from the royal family before he could complete his understanding. The most pressing task at hand was to return to Silver Moon for a visit. He needed to look in on Battle Heaven, the little tree, Silver City...

He’d told the royal family about everything—would they ambush him when he left?

Attacking from the shadows... they might as well ally with the nine ministries to kill him! Li Hao laughed. That might lead to greater overall losses for the royal family, so it was more worthwhile to let powerhouses of the nine ministries end him.

.....

The Night Watcher headquarters.

“You’re going back to Silver Moon right now?” Hou Xiaochen frowned slightly.

“Yes.”

The man continued frowning as he considered the notion. “Will you be coming back?”

“Of course!”

Hou Xiaochen thought it over again and again, his head aching. “I’m worried about you creating even greater trouble after you return to Silver Moon. Don’t do anything rash... Whether it’s Battle Heaven or others, it’s not time for those existences to emerge into the world yet! You raise disturbances everywhere you go. As opposed to generating more trouble in Silver Moon, you might as well stay in Skystar City. At the very least, this is someone else’s territory if you muck it all up. Silver Moon is our home.”

“Am I that kind of person? Am I such a troublemaker in the director’s eyes?” Li Hao exclaimed with indignation.

Are you not? Hou Xiaochen wanted to roll his eyes. How are you not? Think about what you’re saying! When do you not create massive trouble? First you attack the Steadfast Duke, then you attack the nine ministries. Are these the actions of a normal person??

As much as his head ached, he knew that the young man was going back because he had matters to take care of. “It’s fine if you want to make a trip back, just be careful on the road! Also, I want to remind you that the ancients are the ancients, and we modern people are modern people! The two are different, particularly monster spirits. They cannot be easily trusted!

“By the way, the Inspectorate says that the Ministry of Finance has relinquished a ruin. It might have belonged to a martial university. Do you want to participate in the excavation? But it’s not like they have good intentions...”

“I’ll consider it when I get back!” Li Hao swiftly made some calculations. “I’m fast since I have the Windchaser Boots and am of the wind and thunder attributes. It’ll only take me two or three days to go back to Silver Moon, and roughly a week total for the trip. We can discuss this when I return. You can talk to Director Yao about this, Director Hou. Have him join us with the Night Watchers and become part of the Skystar Commander Office or one of its subordinate agencies...”

“.....” Hou Xiaochen felt a migraine setting in. “Go speak to him of this yourself!”

“I’m not going!” Li Hao shook his head. “I’m a youngster with a hot temper. I might end up fighting with him. Director, you’re mature and prudent. You’re the perfect candidate to talk to him.”

Damn it! Hou Xiaochen wanted to smash the kid’s face in. Was Li Hao even listening to himself? Yao Si had been his supervisor to start, now the kid wanted to recruit him as an underling?? He was the one who’d set up the Night Watchers, but Li Hao wanted to take it for himself. His appetite was more than unusually big!

Won’t that old thing send me flying with a punch if I go talk to him?

“Maintaining the status quo is quite nice...”

“That gives rise to illegitimacy!” Li Hao shook his head. “The proper trappings of power are very important at times! Why else would the nine ministries establish themselves otherwise? The director should know more about this than me.”

No shit I do, but do you even realize what you’re doing? Why don’t you go yourself? You also know that if you go, you might end up fighting with Yao Si, don’t you? Not to mention that the entire Inspectorate might want to fight you!

“To the capable falls more responsibility!” Li Hao said sincerely. “The director is omnipotent in my eyes! Ask Manager Yu if you don’t believe me! Manager Yu, can our director convince Director Yao?”

“Of course!” Yu Luochoa immediately nodded.

“.....” Fucking hell! Hou Xiaochen wanted to curse at someone, but didn’t know who to curse. Little Yu’s mind... Well, it wasn’t her fault. After so many years, Yu Luochoa firmly believed that he could do anything and everything. But... but...

Hou Xiaochen didn’t know what to say! Li Hao certainly knew to pick his hapless targets well.

“Let’s talk about this later, I’ll try my best,” Hou Xiaochen caved with reluctance. “Additionally, don’t get too close with the royal family. They’re far more than they appear to be. They already commanded the Black Armaturas two hundred years ago, which means they obtained the legacy of some ruins during that time. You know how it is from your dealings with the Battle Heaven Army. The supernatural hadn’t arisen then, but martial masters were always present. Do you know what I mean?”

Li Hao nodded, he did. The royal family also had more than one thousand Black Armaturas. That meant that the royal family might’ve had a commander level officer in their own army two hundred years ago, or that they hadn’t activated their armor. Otherwise, they should have a full division of ten thousand troops!

The city of Tranquil Star City had had one hundred thousand city defenders. They were a bonafide corps when it came to military designations. Who knew what level the royal family had progressed to? If they sent in someone with a high level of authorization and was recognized as a troop leader, that meant their Black Armaturas might be one hundred thousand strong!

But that wasn't likely, was it?

Li Hao knew that the possibility was very difficult, unless the royal family had someone descended from the city defenders of old and snuck into the ancient city like he had. They would've nearly become a commander, and if he'd been strong enough, he would've been a first rank general to lead ten thousand people.

"Right, give these things to the provincial government." Hou Xiaochen took out a storage ring. "Don't look at it, there's no treasure inside. It's just some supplies that Silver Moon needs. Give it to the right people when you return!"

"Alright!"

"Be careful along the way. As fast as you are, keep an eye out for the three great organizations."

"Understood!" Li Hao quickly set out on his way. As for whether or not Hou Xiaochen and the rest would be safe in Skystar City, there weren't many issues with that at present. The royal family was still there curbing the nine ministries. The young man wouldn't leave so easily otherwise.

.....

Not long after Li Hao left the Night Watcher headquarters, a massive collision rang through the air. Yao Si sent a person flying as he roared with anger!

Hou Xiaochen sighed and permitted himself to soar back to his office building.

I knew this would happen!

It was one thing for Li Hao to be drunk on power and wanting to seize control, but to move the Night Watchers under his banner... This was truly adding insult to injury. It was mercy enough that Yao Si didn't want his head for it!

.....

Li Hao wasn't in a hurry to leave after departing from the Night Watcher headquarters. He set out only after taking his leave from Hong Yitang and Light Sword.

Chapter 710: Return (I)

Li Hao liked to travel at night. There was a certain air of unrestrained freedom to this time of the day that wasn't as apparent in the morning. A small car trundled along the wide streets; Panther was in charge of driving while Li Hao focused on studying the golden booklets. Those who saw them might suspect themselves of seeing things.

Li Hao didn't care about the reactions of the passersby. He looked carefully at the books—although the golden booklets spoke of different secret arts, they were similar in terms of core nature. One was for offense, the other for breaking through.

Using blood qi to trace words and forming them out of mind intent embodied the core origin path. It was an offensive skill that manifested the illusory into tangible attacks.

Most ancient secret arts are like these... Li Hao's thoughts turned to the Incantation of the Blade of Blood. The New Book of Five Styles actually borrowed from the incantation. Both blood qi and the physical body were very strong in the ancient martial dao.

The ancient civilization truly developed the human body to an extreme. The notion gave Li Hao a great deal more inspiration. As strong as blood qi is, there should be some restrictions to it as well. The ancient martial dao focused on the three truncanl cavities—the thoracic, abdominal, and pelvic.

We now focus on supernatural locks. Is the zifu the only supernatural lock of the physical body, and the spine the only one of the bones?

Sky Sword had told him that there were many unique supernatural attributes, that each one might correspond to a unique supernatural lock. He'd also said that the number of supernatural locks far exceeded what had been discovered thus far, they just hadn't been identified yet.

Teacher's Five Styles and Refiner of Spirit ultimately melds the aura into the supernatural locks. The aura and supernatural locks are one in the end, which is similar to the combination of mental strength and the aura in the ancient martial dao...

Whether it was mental strength or mind intent, there weren't many other combinations of what could be cultivated. These options were it. If one exceeded those possibilities, what else could one cultivate?

Li Hao mulled over his thoughts and returned to contemplating the secret arts of martial dao. If each secret art differed in its strengthening focus, did that mean that the peak of each secret art would develop a supernatural lock?

The Five Styles, for example, developed the locks of the five organs. Southern and Northern Fist's boxing methods developed the zifu, spine, and four limbs. Tyrant Blade's words... likely meant that he'd developed the locks of the brain that dealt with the mind.

Supernatural locks are ultimately meant to be eliminated. The shackles of the human body are to be broken. Whether it is supernaturals or martial masters, we have supernatural locks only because we must restrain the power that our bodies cannot control...

As his knowledge grew through seeing more of the world and fighting powerhouses, Li Hao was no longer the bumbling fool when it came to martial dao.

Then what is the aura? Another kind of peak representation? The Arcanus realm... is the combination of two elemental attributes. So are three attributes also Arcanus? What about four?

Would breaking all five locks in the organs still keep one at Arcanus?

Arcanus spans more than one cultivation realm. Or rather, supernaturals will dwell in the Arcanus realm in times to come. Those with strong organs will swiftly break their third, fourth, and fifth locks.

Li Hao thought of Ying Hongyue again. Was that guy a martial master? If so, what was his purpose in absorbing the bloodlines of seven families?

Innumerable questions rose from his heart. The young man hadn't noticed Ying Hongyue utilizing any powerful weapon. One had to know that Li Hao had two of the eight familial weapons now, his teacher had one of them, and Battle Heaven a fourth. There were four missing weapons; Ying Hongyue can't possibly not have a single one.

But the other hadn't employed a weapon from beginning to end.

Li Hao suppressed the various thoughts, vaguely understanding that the second awakening of the supernatural might come after everyone broke the five locks of the organs! It was just a hunch. Perhaps many were waiting for this timing to break the five locks—it was representative of entering the next level. Not only would that level be available to Arcanus, but it would also be the next level after martial masters refined their spirits.

This would also mean that most people will have fully released their potential...

And that was the last that Li Hao thought of the matter. He closed his eyes to begin cultivating, absorbing currents of dark and light elemental energy. With the number of people he'd killed, he didn't lack mysterious power. He had too much.

He also possessed a frightening number of mysterious power stones that spanned all of the elements. Li Hao had unlocked the wind and thunder attributes, so what would light and dark energy bring him? He hadn't absorbed much of these elements before because they weren't that

useful to him. The dark attribute only helped him somewhat conceal his presence. While it was better than nothing, it didn't enhance his strength like the five elements or wind and thunder.

His thoughts changed after he was supernatural himself. He wanted to manifest all of the supernatural looks on his body. Just how many locks did the human body have? Could they all be undone? Was it possible to break all of the locks?

Elemental power surged into his body. Both light and dark swiftly vanished without a trace into his body. The little bit of energy that wafted out was devoured by the dog. Not a trace was left and not a hint leaked.

In terms of strength, Li Hao did not register any increase. Those two elements were just like that. He didn't know which supernatural lock absorbed them. Currently, his five locks of the organs were arrayed in a circle, coiled in his five organs. The five auras were still and silent, as if awaiting for the chance of rebirth.

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The little car sped along the roads. They were finely paved in the central region and the car nearly flew over them with the dog at the wheel. No obstacles existed. If they encountered mountains or lakes, the battered car literally took to the air like a flying vehicle. It crossed land and water without any difficulties.

The dog drove through several provinces over two days until they reached the North Sea. This pace of travel nearly matched a powerhouse's pace at full speed. Panther was exhausted, parking when it reached the coastline and looked around at Li Hao. The young man hadn't moved for two days. He'd absorbed mysterious power all this time, but there wasn't the slightest change in his presence.

What a waste!

"Arf!" Panther barked. They were here. As for crossing the sea... it wouldn't do so. The North Sea was vast and it'd probably faint from exhaustion if it took a regular car over it.

Li Hao opened his eyes—light and darkness swirled within them. He was a bit lost in his thoughts and glanced at Panther. The dog shifted uncomfortably at the attention and barked again. The young man didn't respond. He quietly tasted and perceived the changes in his body.

Two small locks appeared within, one of light and one of darkness. He couldn't be certain of their position as they seemed to be swimming through his body.

Are those the light and dark locks? So they'd manifested, but they didn't seem to be stable yet. I've only just barely managed to materialize them after absorbing so much energy... Regular people might not manifest them their entire lives.

“Arf arf!”

“I heard you!” Li Hao snapped back to reality and looked wordlessly at Panther. “So you drove for two days straight, what are you making a fuss for?”

No one had bothered him during these days. It wasn't necessarily a secret that he'd left Skystar City, but still no one came for him. That was surprising, but also a rational outcome. He was now a renowned powerhouse after killing Hu Xiao.

Young man and dog alighted from the car, shivering in the biting wind and listening to the North Sea howl. Winter was officially in the north. Thin flakes of snow flurried—it was already mid November. The north had completely cooled down.

There were ships tacking their way through the waters and another fishing boat docked not too far away. A group of bedraggled people streamed off of it; the faint sounds of children sobbing could be heard from them.

“Don't stop, it's too cold here. Start walking south once you get ashore. We're in the central region now and there's more opportunities here. We'll find a way to live yet...” someone called out—a supernatural. He was very weak at only a Starlight; he also seemed rather young.

He caught a glimpse of Li Hao in the distance, but didn't come over to make his greetings. He didn't know the two and it was obvious that a young man and a dog enjoying the view on such a cold day was no one ordinary. They were either nobles out for a stroll or powerhouses here to take in the sights.

The young Starlight barely managed to raise a shield of energy and block the wind from blowing over some children in the ground. "Keep walking, don't stop! The three northern provinces are completely rotten and there's no hope of survival if you stay there! As chaotic as the central region is, it's at least warmer here and you won't die by the side of the road!"

"Thank you so much, Divine Lu. We wouldn't have made it through the North Sea without you..."

"Don't call me Divine!"

"Are you coming with us, Divine Lu?"

"I'll escort you part of the way before going back. I'm sure everyone knows that there are many people looking to cross the sea in search of survival. If I don't accompany them, they probably won't make it."

"The divine is right, it's all thanks to the divine..."

The crowd's conversation traveled into Li Hao's ears, bringing comprehension with it. The people suffered in abject misery in the unrest of the three northern provinces. The north was too cold and lacked food at the moment. Hence, the people started south in search of survival.

However, crossing the sea was no easy task with how vast the North Sea was. This young Starlight took on the role of a boatman, escorting ships of refugees to the north.

Li Hao listened silently. The unrest of the north had happened before he left. It looked like they'd reached a peak over the last couple of months.

“Are you doing this again, Lu Chuan?!” a voice roared. “I told you before and warned you to stop sending people over here! This is no place of mercy or kindness! If people don't find a job here, they'll still die sooner or later. It's better to remain in the three northern provinces, don't you understand?!”

Li Hao looked over to find an inspector wearing an Inspectorate uniform hectoring the young man.