

Star Gate 871

Chapter 871: Cooperation (I)

The Black Armor looked at Li Hao after a while. “Do you truly wish to take some of them with you?”

The young man swallowed hard. Can I say not anymore? I was just throwing an idea out there, but I feel like those puppets will smack me to death if I say no now. And didn't you already turn me down? Why are you asking me again? Just keep putting your foot down and forbid them from heading outside!

“You just had to rile them up,” the Black Armor said faintly upon seeing Li Hao remain quiet. “Here, take two of them with you and come back after taking a turn outside. Don't go anywhere you shouldn't.” He looked at the assembled puppets. “Two, and no more. It will be zero if you guys keep complaining!”

Li Hao was considering the dean's words when large collisions and explosions rang out!

More than one hundred puppets were abruptly locked in a pitched melee. Many of them were thrown out of the crowd. One of them smashed into the ground at Li Hao's feet and wailed with despair, “I can't go out anymore!”

Li Hao gaped at the puppet. And what the heck was this?

“They're selecting their candidates,” the Black Armor said calmly.

Damn, is this how they choose their people? They fight at the drop of a hat and there's no room for ambiguity in their actions!

Rumble!

Crashes continued to sound as nearly one hundred puppets flew out of the fray. They crashed heavily to the ground, splitting the earth apart. Li Hao stared with a dropped jaw!

There were only a dozen puppets left in the field after a short interval. To the young man's immense surprise, four of them were robot cats. Were they stronger than the rest?

"These cat puppets are fashioned out of better materials. The other puppets were created at random back in the day, but the principal himself crafted the cat puppets," the Black Armor said faintly.

I see!

BAM!

The four cat puppets joined forces amid Li Hao's astonished eyes. They threw out the other eight, leaving only the cat puppets in the center. Just as Li Hao thought that a massive battle was about to erupt, the four cat puppets raised their paws for... rock paper scissors!

Li Hao blinked. Four cat puppets cycled through a flurry of rocks, scissors, and papers before two of them dejectedly walked off ten seconds later. The remaining two popped up in front of the young man, highly excited.

Li Hao looked at the pile of fallen puppets around them, then at the two victors. Was one of them... the one who'd hit him? He couldn't make a clear identification because they all looked the same. The brawl earlier had been a confusing mess, so he wasn't sure who was who.

"Are the two of you sure that you want to head out?"

"Yes!" The two cat puppets were resolute. Of course! They were almost out of their minds with boredom here!

The Black Armor sighed and glanced at Li Hao. “Do as you see fit. You’ll be in a lot of trouble if anything happens! You just had to create trouble for yourself!”

Li Hao was equally resigned. I want to turn them down, but if I do so now, will I be able to walk out of Evenround Martial?

“Stay with him after you guys leave and don’t run off!” The Black Armor turned back to his students. “Although the void may not cut into you since you are puppets, it is hard to say for certain. I will be unable to help you if someone captures and dismantles you!

“Also, mind your tongues when you leave and don’t spout nonsense. Exercise caution, the human heart is hard to measure!

“Finally, do not brashly take action. Don’t fight just because this guy wants you to. Gain a complete understanding of the situation first. He is of the new era and you two are of New Martial, do you understand?”

“We do!”

Li Hao wanted to roll his eyes, but could accept the words of admonishment since the Black Armor delivered them openly. The young man was still adjusting to his change in circumstances when the two robot cats grabbed his arms and marched off with him.

“C’mon, let’s go, you should be more efficient in your affairs,” one of them said urgently.

“.....” Li Hao didn’t know what to say. I should be more efficient? Who are you kidding? And why do you sound like the one who hit me earlier?

The young man quickly vanished from the ruins, ‘escorted’ by his seniors from school.

“Don’t create any trouble for me...” sighed the Black Armor after they left. “They really... don’t know the meaning of danger. Does Li Hao know that Evenround Martial University is filled with troublemakers? They won’t be easy to keep in line.”

I didn’t want you to take anyone with you out of consideration for your own good. These guys are here because they wouldn’t be accepted anywhere else. Do you think there’s a lack of premier martial universities on the main world, that Demonic Martial and Capital Martial are just for show? Why are they here? Because they’re out of sight, out of mind for their families!

But here you come, wanting to take them out. You’re in for it if they die, even if all that’s left of them now is a puppet.

“It’s good to suffer some,” the Black Armor suddenly laughed. “It’s best if he doesn’t dare come again!”

It was enormously irritating that the kid came here whenever he had nothing better to do. Hopefully, he wouldn’t come anymore after getting off worse for the wear in this exchange. That would be for the best.

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Outside the ruins.

The two robot cats propped up Li Hao and peered around curiously, soon finding the surroundings uncomfortable.

“Energy is very sparse in the environment, alright,” one of them said uneasily.

“That’s right, it’s agonizing.”

“You’re dead, what are you agonizing over?”

“You’re dead too!”

“.....” The two cats bickered back and forth to the point in which Li Hao could barely tell them apart. Truth be told, he couldn’t do that to begin with.

“Ahem... ladies!”

“We are your seniors at school!”

Smack smack! Each of them swung a paw at Li Hao. He hastily dodged out of the way, but was still struck on the head. That was surprising.

“Ah... how should I call the two seniors?” They had to have a name...

“I’m Jiang Yingli!”

“I’m Li Shengzhang!”

“.....” Li Hao stopped in his tracks. What were these weird names? They were just a combination of surnames! “Seniors, um...”

“Um what?”

He couldn’t tell which was which.

“My family surname is Jiang,” one of them said scornfully. “My name is Jiang Yingli, my father is called Jiang Yueli. My family is from Tranquil Star and my ancestors were one of the many kings of the town. The Li in our names has nothing to do with your family. It refers to another.”

Li Hao’s jaw dropped. These names... were certainly casual. ‘Ying’ was the same pronunciation for the character of ‘victory’, and ‘yue’ the same pronunciation as ‘surpass’. This Jiang family wanted to triumph over this other Li family so badly that they named their family members for that act!

“My surname of Li is also a different Li from your family,” said Li Shengzhang. “I am one of the Lis that her family wishes to defeat, but my family can’t be bothered fighting them. My ancestor is also from Tranquil Star and one of my family elders was an exalted emperor!”

“.....” Li Hao was speechless. Your family couldn’t be bothered with the Jiangs, but they sure as hell didn’t like the Zhang family. Your character of ‘sheng’ is the same pronunciation as ‘victor’, so you guys wanted to be the winner over this Zhang family!

“My ancestors were focused on taking down another exalted emperor, the one from the Zhangs...”

Li Hao wanted to hold his face. Did these ancient parents all choose names in such a haphazard manner, and both of these cats had exalted emperors in their families? Having once witnessed the might of that kind of personage, the young man’s heart still pounded when he thought of it. These two would be typical young masters in their times, ones that no one would dare say no to.

As for which one he’d touched before, he couldn’t determine that anymore. They were pretty much the same! They came with incredible backgrounds, just that it was no longer the New Martial era, so any sort of status was useless now.

“Of the Lis... wasn’t it my family’s ancestor who was the strongest?” Li Hao suddenly asked. How come the first one’s name didn’t reference surpassing his ancestor?

One of the robot cats looked at him and answered after a beat, “What are you talking about? Of course it’s my Tranquil Star Lis who was the strongest among our surname. Your family can count

as number two, and that's only because the second exalted emperor in my family couldn't be bothered with rankings..."

Damn, two exalted emperors in one family? What about the Jiangs?

"Is that true?" Li Hao looked at the other robot cat. "The Tranquil Star Lis were number one?"

"...pretty much!" Jiang Yingli didn't want to admit to it.

"What do you mean, pretty much?" Li Shengzhang retorted. "Besides, your ancestor was my ancestor's foster son!"

"That was so many years ago!"

"And still true!" The two started bickering again, giving Li Hao a headache. What happened to them being very quiet before? They started arguing when he simply asked their names.

"Oh, right, I almost forgot," Jiang Yingli said before Li Hao had a chance to interrupt. "Who says your family is the number one Lis? What about the exalted emperor from Capital Martial?"

"He's not stronger than my family's ancestor!" Li Shengzhang huffed.

"That was before, who knew later on?" With that, battle was rejoined.

Li Hao sighed to himself as he listened to them argue. My ancestor seems to have done very poorly for himself. He wasn't number one of the Lis and might not have been number two either. He was possibly number three at most.

How tragic! No wonder General Pagoda and the others had looked wordlessly up at the sky when I asked them if my ancestor could rank in the top ten of the ancient civilization.

“We should get back to my people first,” he quickly halted the argument. “Ah, was Tranquil Star a sacred land in the ancient civilization?”

“Of course!”

“The thirteen families of Tranquil Star... later twelve families, were all very strong! They each had more than one exalted emperor in their ranks. It was the Chen and Shen families that started New Martial. The Li family always held down the fort in the center, whereas the Jiang family was just there for show.”

“Pfft, your family was there for show! The Jiangs were crucial!”

“Wasn’t it the Human King who established New Martial?” Li Hao was completely confused by what he heard.

“No, it was the Shen and Chen families who started it, then Supreme Zhang outside Tranquil Star who held up New Martial for many years, and finally the Human King.”

Li Hao understood now. So that was the case! As it turned out, the Human King wasn’t the first batch of powerhouses to establish New Martial. He’d read about some of the others in books before, but they were described so clearly. Everything was clear now.

Chapter 872: Cooperation (II)

In the ancient civilization, Tranquil Star was a sacred land with twelve powerful families in residence—it bore a certain resemblance to the City of Supernaturals. No wonder those who built the city said that they’d imitated Tranquil Star. From there, two of its families ushered in the New Martial era. A supreme titan of the Zhang family, located outside the town, strengthened the budding age. Then it was the Human King who fully raised New Martial to dominant ascendance.

“Supreme Zhang...” Li Hao repeated the name. “Supreme shares the same ‘exalted’ character as the exalted emperor cultivation level. Does that make them the same?”

These people labeled everyone else as exalted emperors, what made this person different?

“His strength might have been different, and his status certainly was,” one of the robot cats answered frankly. “The supreme’s status was exceedingly high. The Human King was the Human King, but Supreme Zhang was once the Human Emperor. Even the Human King said that while he was the king of New Martial, Supreme Zhang was the emperor of New Martial. It was just that the supreme didn’t really care about these titles.

“That’s why my family is stronger than the Zhangs. My family’s other exalted emperor was once ranked higher than Supreme Zhang...”

“.....” Li Hao lost the train of conversation again. But he could understand that these two robot cats came with quite the background. They mentioned kings and emperors at the drop of a hat. His own ancestor couldn’t even get a place on the ranking with them present! That was a bit tragic.

“Seniors, you must listen to me in the outside world. There might be a ton of trouble otherwise!” he swiftly said, setting everything aside. The Black Armor would create a lot of trouble for him if anything happened. The young man wasn’t going to send them back after bringing them out. This was a strong addition to his battle forces!

And the key was, these two wouldn’t raise any disturbances so long as they didn’t fight. They lacked core origin, so they were the same as two chunks of metal if cast off to the side. That was good.

Li Hao took out two cloaks. “Please wear these, seniors! It will make our movements more convenient.”

The two robot cats were too conspicuous as they were as big as barrels. With the cape around them, the hood was barely sufficient to cover their heads. However, they presented a less comical appearance when dressed like this. They simply appeared a bit fat.

“Out here, please do not speak carelessly,” Li Hao coughed. “In order to keep your identities a secret, I will not be referring to you as my seniors either. That might invite unwanted action if someone discovered your identities. How about... the Black and White Devils!”

The young man arched a brow. “One of you can be General Black Devil, and the other can be General White Devil!”

What a lousy name! Both robot cats were unwilling. The name was shit!

“No!” Jiang Yingli immediately refused. “I don’t like that name. We had our own duo name back in school!”

“Yeah!” Li Shengzhang interjected.

“What was it?” Li Hao was curious—so there was a name for this duo?

“The Devilish Beauties!”

“.....” Li Hao rolled his eyes. What the hell? Was this name to be proud of? “You’ll be the Black and White Devils!” he proclaimed. “Or I’ll send you back immediately! Jiang Yingli is General Black Devil, Li Shengzhang is General White Devil!”

The two were highly put out, but quieted down when they heard the threat of sending them back. They didn’t want to go back yet, the ruin was too small. They’d finally awoken a little and didn’t have to remain trapped in the darkness. Who wanted to stay there forever?

Li Hao didn't care that much and asked as they traveled, "Can the two of you only physically ram yourselves against enemies? Can you still use your secret arts or techniques?"

"No. We can use martial techniques, but not secret arts. Many of them require a combination of blood qi, mental strength, and core origin. Without that, we can only rely on martial techniques to battle."

Li Hao inclined his head. That meant to say they didn't have much strength to call upon.

"What level of strength were you before?"

"Immortal," Jiang Yingli answered directly. "Part of the students was Immortal, another part Apex. We were naturally the Immortal group!"

"You weren't that old then, were you?" Li Hao took a sharp breath. From their immature ways, they were probably both very young.

"Of course!"

"We're geniuses!"

"I am, you're not. You got to this position thanks to your ancestor and grandfather..."

"You too!"

"....." The two bickered again, exposing every last secret about each other in the process of doing so. Second and third generation descendants were very different from the rest of the population. They were tempered with indestructible matter at a young age and bathed in Water of Life. Born as innate eighth ranks, they easily comprehended core origin and quickly set foot into Apex.

“What a pity that I was born late,” Li Hao sighed emotionally. “I missed out on those times!”

“You wouldn’t have enjoyed this treatment even if you were born during our times,” Jiang Yingli said quietly. “Your Lis... were very poor!”

“.....” Now that was a bit too much, wasn’t it? “My ancestor was the Sword Sovereign!”

“The Sword Sovereign is very strong, but he was probably the poorest out of all the exalted emperors,” Jiang Yingli whispered. “He depleted ten to one hundred times the resources of others in each of his battles. If it wasn’t for the Human King supplementing his resources... he would’ve had to sell his sword to get through the days!”

“.....” Li Hao knew a bit of what she spoke of since he’d watched the Exalted Blood Emperor persuade his ancestor to absorb the world first. His consumption rate was too high. But... had he been so poor to the point of needing to sell his sword?

Was that necessary?

“Our principal also secretly supported him,” mumbled Li Shengzhang. “Otherwise, apparently the Sword Sovereign was having trouble buying food.”

This was curiouser and curiouser! It sounded like the ancient Li city had been filled with his starving family! But the Human King and his younger sister had helped his ancestor a great deal? Then it would seem that they were on good terms with each other.

“All families supported him, didn’t they?” Jiang Yingli muttered. “After all, he protected everyone back in the day...”

Li Hao's ears perked up. Although this was ancient gossip, it was nice to listen to it. So his ancestor had been well liked?

Jiang Yingli didn't mind that Li Hao was eavesdropping and said casually, "When the heavenly war occurred in New Martial, the Human King said that we needed to leave some people behind as seeds for vengeance and to ensure the heritage of our civilization. Hence, the Sword Sovereign did not participate in the battles.

"He evacuated the elites of various families to another locale, but they met with a lot of danger there. He protected everyone then, which is why everyone treats the Sword Sovereign with a great deal of respect..."

"Evacuated?" Li Hao blinked.

"Yes."

The young man frowned. Evacuated? Why wouldn't a sword cultivator participate in a war?

"The Human King wanted the Sword Sovereign to lead the evacuation as he trusted the Sword Sovereign the most..."

I see. Li Hao didn't say anything. This was just gossip and he couldn't be bothered to investigate ancient matters that deeply. They were too far removed in the past. With that, he brought two chatterboxes back to the Skystar Commander Office, surprising the group waiting for him.

Who... were these two? Li Hao's return with two fatties in cloaks was quite perplexing. However, they quickly realized who these two might be.

"Puppets from school?" Sky Sword asked curiously.

“You’re the puppet!” Jiang Yingli retorted.

Li Hao could begin to tell them apart now. Jiang Yingli’s voice boomed and she had a fiery spirit, whereas Li Shengzhang was a tiny bit quieter and a hint more gentle. It took careful discernment to tell the difference between the two.

The biting response stopped Sky Sword in his tracks and he nearly choked on his own spit. The group was very surprised that Li Hao had managed to coax some puppets out of Evenround. The young man really had a few tricks up his sleeves!

Sky Sword and the rest were ready to go; Panther suddenly appeared as well. As for why the dog came back so coincidentally—it was apparent from the black armor hanging around his neck.

Where did it get that from? I don’t think I gave it a set, did he steal it? wondered Li Hao.

“Should we notify your master?” Sky Sword was the more responsible sort among the group.

“No, he’s in closed door cultivation lately and we’re only up against the City of Supernaturals. We can grab him for the Wind and Cloud Pavilion.”

Up to you. Sky Sword dropped the matter.

The task force consisted of Li Hao, Sky Sword, Hou Xiaochen, Chen Zhongtian, Deputy Zhou, Hong Yitang, Panther, and two puppets. Six humans, one dog, and two puppets. Li Hao felt that they could go anywhere in the world.

After some thought, he took out the sets of silver armor. “Take one each. It’d be good to conceal your identities a little.”

This left only four sets in his storage ring. While the others were just startled, Chen Zhongtian took a sharp breath. He knew the situation with silver armor. That made one a troop leader! Could Li Hao assign these at will now?

Over on the royal family side, although the old Skystar King wore golden armor, they didn't hand out silver armor like this. Each recipient had to fight for the honor. The royal family had troop leaders, but they'd won that distinction through struggles of life and death. No one haphazardly received their rank like Li Hao was handing them out.

The puppets weren't interested in the armor. Jiang Yingli took one look before shifting her attention to Panther. She suddenly plucked up its ear with curiosity. "Is this dog the descendant of the Monster Spirit Envoy?"

"Probably!" Li Shengzhang nodded.

"So cute!" Jiang Yingli caressed its head. "I wanted to pet it last time, but didn't dare to. What a pity it's not a cat."

"Are you thinking of using your family's fur-brushing heritage?"

"....." Li Hao had no idea what they were talking about. How was there such a heritage? The heck?

The group was also at a loss and looked at the two puppets, then at Panther. The dog grinned foolishly back at them and didn't dare resist the puppet's petting. It seemed to sense something.

This picture of docility irritated Li Hao and he kicked Panther.

"Arf arf arf!" Panth immediately bayed with a fury, fully demonstrating the idiom of threatening others based on its master's strength.

Jiang Yingli didn't mind. She casually scratched Panther's neck, putting it so at ease that it wanted to yawn. The dog quickly realized something was wrong and barked again, "Arf arf arf!!"

Chapter 873: Cooperation (III)

"How come you're not saying anything?" Jiang Yingli asked curiously. "You're almost an Apex, you should be able to talk. Although your bloodline is weak, the Monster Spirit Envoy knew how to transmit its voice at this level of cultivation. Is your voice not pleasant to the ear?"

"....." Panther couldn't be bothered to respond and avoided the robot cat. It swiftly ran to Li Hao's side. What were these guys doing out of the ruins? This wasn't a good development. They weren't afraid of it at all!

"Seniors, try not to speak when you're outside. Everyone here knows you, but try to keep a lower profile when you're out and about!"

"Don't worry, we're very subdued!"

Yeah right! Li Hao said no more and summoned his golden armor. "Let's go to the Sky Sword Manor first!"

The rest of the group put on their armor without a word to conceal their identities. As for whether or not they would still be recognized, it didn't matter if they were—with the exception of Chen Zhongtian. He needed to keep to himself to prevent anyone from picking up on his identity.

Chen Zhongtian was no fool, he kept a very low profile these days. He even had his son put on an expression that his old man was dead. His Saint-level weapon was no more, after all, a loss that might've been sensed by others. Therefore, he had Chen Yao pretend that his father was dead—possibly assassinated by Li Hao.

Of course, nothing was publicized.

The group didn't keep to themselves. They soared out from the Skystar Commander Office, catching the morning sun's rays with glittering golden and silver armor. They were a very conspicuous lot.

"Let's go!"

BOOM!

The six instantly vanished after creating quite a disturbance.

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Not far away, the Ministry of Armed Forces.

Qi Pingjiang walked out and frowned. Li Hao had just returned from spending a few days in Silver Moon. Where was he going now? He didn't take that many with him, however—less than ten. Yao Si and the like were still present, as was He Yong. Sky Sword and Earthturner Sword seemed to have gone with the young man.

"Have they discovered traces of the Wind and Cloud Pavilion?" Qi Pingjiang turned to the middle-aged man next to him—his son.

"Possibly," Qi Dinghai responded. "Those from the Night Watchers and Skystar Commander Office have been investigating the faction lately..."

"Let them fight among themselves! There is more to the Wind and Cloud Pavilion than meets the eye," Qi Pingjiang responded easily. "Don't judge them for being new players, I suspect that they have far more Arcanus than we have estimated. If Li Hao really is going to go toe-to-toe against them and bringing just those people, he's in for a huge surprise!"

"Does father think that the Wind and Cloud Pavilion can withstand them?"

“Why not?” Qi Pingjiang asked calmly in return. “They’ve plumbed the depths of so many powerhouses, do they dare casually announce their findings without having some real skill to their name? Won’t they be afraid of offending people? The Wind and Cloud Pavilion is just like Li Hao—a bunch of shitstirrers. They want nothing more than for the world to be engulfed by chaos.”

They were all the same.

“Father’s analogy... isn’t the best,” laughed Qi Dinghai.

“The entire dynasty is a cesspool!” Qi Pingjiang didn’t care. “There’s nothing good or bad about it. I am and they are as well. No one is better than anyone else. We were of a mind to clean up this mess back in the day, but we completely lost that desire long ago.”

Qi Dinghai couldn’t find the proper words and could only sigh softly.

Qi Pingjiang remained calm and looked at the royal palace, then at the Ministry of the Administration not too far away, and finally at the Inspectorate. “What are those guys at the Inspectorate doing? Even their Saint weapon has been destroyed. Has Chen Zhongtian been seen since?”

“No, Chen Yao’s acting like this old man has died. But if he really is dead, how can Chen Yao be so unmoved?”

“Perhaps... there’s another reason in play.” Qi Pingjiang furrowed his brows. “I hope he hasn’t reached an accord with the royal family. Chen Zhongtian rose from his origins as a thug to his current position. He wouldn’t die so easily. If Li Hao’s side is really that much stronger than him, he would surrender instead. He’s incredibly thick-faced and won’t be eliminated so effortlessly. We should keep an eye on the Inspectorate more often these days.”

“Mmhmm, I understand!” Qi Dinghai continued softly, “Father, the City of Supernaturals is going to hold a meeting in two days to establish a cabinet for their government. What does Lin Hongyu

mean by this? She's already reached an alliance with the Jade Flute and Sunset Mountains. If she continues to consolidate the forces of the twelve families and wandering cultivators, then she will be a tough target to take down."

Qi Pingjiang inclined his head. The City of Supernaturals was not weak to begin with, not to mention that they were reinforced by two divine mountains now. Although the faction kept a low profile, they were quite strong. With these three striking up a partnership and then further consolidating the City of Supernaturals, she would absolutely be a force to be reckoned with after everything was said and done.

"Go create some trouble for them, but don't invest too much into it. With the Skystar Commander Office in place, Li Hao does not wish for supernaturals to exceed their current placement in society. He might interfere, so let them fight amongst themselves!"

"But..."

"There is no but about this." Qi Pingjiang frowned at the royal palace in the distance. "Our most pressing task at hand is not this. The royal family has sent word—they wish to work with us to dig a tunnel to the mines. Even if they don't trigger the second awakening, they wish to seize more of the ores! These plant spirits have all set a high price for Water of Life. In contrast, the royal family is willing to pay a great deal of Water of Life for this operation. I'm debating whether or not to join them.

"Li Hao's side is improving very quickly, but there's a limit to his resources. It's only a matter of time before the treasures that he's seized are exhausted. The same goes for us. In all of Skystar, the greatest treasure is beneath our feet!"

They would receive large sums of benefits ahead of the second awakening if they could punch through to the mines. True, the nine ministries bore an immense grudge against the royal family, but the pressure was too great now. They would be flung far into the distance if they did not improve soon.

So, a partnership?

“Father, the one at the royal family is a peak Immortal!” Qi Dinghai protested. “The old Skystar King is also a seven element powerhouse. The Ministry of Administration has no fear, but father...”

He wanted to say that his father was a bit weaker and thus might find it difficult to secure benefits out of this situation.

“Everything will be fine before the passageway is complete.” Qi Pingjiang was well aware of his son’s concerns. “The Ministry of Administration won’t sit idly by either. It will take three or four plant spirits working in conjunction to take down the bramble rose. Therefore, he’ll only agree to the proposal if the royal family gets a few others on board.

“The Ministry of the Judiciary and Inspectorate are obviously struck from the list of possibilities. Internal Affairs is also a bit unstable and will be passed over. The Lius of Finance haven’t made a move in all this time. No one knows what they’re thinking, so they won’t be considered either.”

That left only five out of the nine ministries that were potential targets for partnership. Either they all worked together, or another one or two were eliminated from the group. There were also caveats to some of these ministries working together.

Li Hao had killed the current ministers of Examination, Foreign Relations, and Commerce. Perhaps the young man was more irritable in their eyes than the royal family. Hence, the royal family wasn’t haphazardly proposing a partnership at this time. They were making a calculated bet with the right timing.

If Armed Forces didn’t agree, they might be excluded from future operations.

“Then is father... prepared to partner with them?” Qi Dinghai asked solemnly. “The Skystar vice commander outside the mines is also strong. It’s one thing for our plant spirit to be involved, but are you going to fight yourself, father?”

“I’m not sure!” Qi Pingjiang shook his head. “We’ll see.”

“Then... when do you go?”

“In a few days,” replied Qi Pingjiang. “After Li Hao summons the Silver Moon powerhouses again and engages the Wind and Cloud Pavilion. That clash will not be resolved in a day or two, which will be the best distraction for us. If we go before that, he might seize the opportunity to capture the rest of you!”

They were on guard against Li Hao. The young man’s next target was uncertain as of the moment. Although he’d left, he might come back anytime. Nothing could be undertaken with peace of mind unless battle erupted in a certain locale. They would be at ease only after he was preoccupied elsewhere. Otherwise, Li Hao might really seek to take down the rest of the ministries in one go.

What would they be able to do then?

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In the air.

Li Hao flew through the air and enveloped the rest of his people with his domain to ensure that everyone was traveling swiftly. Although it slowed him down, their overall speed was very fast.

The two puppets looked around curiously at the domain surrounding them. Being from Tranquil Star, they knew its ultimate arts well. They’d looked carefully at Li Hao when he first coalesced the supernatural characters. They were even more intrigued by his personal domain.

“Are you building a minor world?” Their knowledge ranged far and wide. Though they’d never seen this before and were dead on top of that, they could still identify key details with a glance.

“No, this is a personal domain!”

“I see!” Li Shengzhang responded, then hesitated. “But I sense that your domain is such a mishmash! I’ve heard the seniors of my family say that all things return to chaos. However, your miscellaneous collection of energy isn’t chaos, just simply a mess.”

“All things return to chaos?” Li Hao repeated.

“Yep!” Li Shengzhang’s energetic nod was slightly comical given her current outfit. “That was apparently how the Human King’s inner world was, but we don’t know if that was truly the case.”

Li Hao pondered their words, as did the rest of the group listen silently.

“Seniors,” a curious Deputy Zhou suddenly asked. “Is there a future in a dao of purely the physical body?”

“Of course!” It was Jiang Yingli who responded. “My forefather was a powerhouse of the physical body dao! Although he wasn’t on par with the exalted emperor of Capital Martial, his body was so strong that it was a rare sight among the exalted emperors.”

She glanced at the deputy amid her excited chatter. “So you can achieve nine revolutions of the golden body, that’s very impressive! Did someone change you through manmade means?”

“Yes.”

“Who did that?” Jiang Yingli was curious. “Although quite a few people know how to achieve that, they must’ve been an incredible powerhouse to do so for you in this time period. It can’t be someone from my family, can it?”

“.....” Deputy Zhou coughed. “Probably... not?” How awkward would that be?

Chapter 874: Cooperation (IV)

“Deputy Zhou, did you reverse your body in Silver Moon?” Li Hao was also curious.

“Yes.”

“In one of the main cities?”

“No, just a small ruin.” He was quite resigned to see Li Hao’s evident curiosity. “It really was a small ruin. I didn’t know who the senior was either. I barged into it by accident and he was at the end of his tether. He perished soon after modifying my body.”

Li Hao nodded and didn’t ask further.

“Was there a name to those ruins?” The two robot cats remained curious.

“No particular name, just that it was called Golden Body Hall.”

The two robot cats searched through their memories—Jiang Yingli seemed to remember something after a while and said regretfully, “I think I know who it is. Little Li, do you remember a genius senior student who left Capital Martial?”

“I do. Ah... I remember who...”

The rest of the group were curious and Deputy Zhou couldn’t help but say, “Do the two seniors know that one?”

“Yes, he was a senior from Capital Martial University and came from the main world. He wanted to borrow the Formation of Heaven and Earth to suppress himself and break through the limits of the golden body. Nothing was heard from him after. He was very strong and set foot into the Saint level early on. To think... that he wouldn’t make it through.”

“That’s only to be expected. Didn’t our teacher almost fail to make it to present day as well? The dao of the golden body produces those with weak mental strength. It’s incredible enough that he made it to present day through just his physical body alone...”

“That’s very true!”

The two found their identification regretful, but it wasn’t as if they’d known that senior well either. They weren’t that much better off themselves. Was it a much better outcome to survive in the form of lingering mental strength and having become a puppet?

Their teacher was a Saint, but his physical body was also gone and he lingered on as mental fragments.

.....

The group chatted with each other while making fast time. It took only three hours before Li Hao saw a towering mountain. As opposed to being by the sea, it was in the middle of a mountain range. He saw it with a single glance because sword intent flourished from it.

The Sky Sword Manor, a sacred land for sword cultivators around the world!

Sky Sword stepped forward without another word. His armor faded away and sword intent surged. The manor immediately responded as heavyweights appeared in the air.

“Mountain lord!” they hailed as they looked at the group.

“Mmhmm. Has all been well?”

“Nothing has happened!” With that, everyone focused on Li Hao and the rest. The mountain lord didn’t have many friends and very few visitors came to the mountain. Their lord had apparently gone to the Skystar Commander Office in Skystar City. So... did that mean Li Hao was among this group?

Their guess was confirmed when they saw Panther. Li Hao should be part of this group—he was likely the Gold Armor.

The young man chose to dismiss his visor at this time and looked at those assembled below. Sword intent bristled from roughly one hundred people. That wasn’t many, but all of them possessed a sword aura. Some of them had very strong auras that were stronger than Liu Long’s! They would likely reach the stage of unsealing themselves if they continued down their paths. Once they did, that meant they’d reached the metamorphosis stage.

No wonder all of Sky Sword Manor was hailed as a cultivation sacred ground for the sword. It was exceedingly difficult for pure sword cultivators to reach this step.

Sky Sword was a man of few words and didn’t choose to engage his people in conversation. “Continue cultivating!” he commanded. Those hovering in the air swiftly landed on the ground, but remained looking curiously at the visitors. Li Hao and the rest follow Sky Sword toward a certain spot on the mountain. They soon stopped in front of a residence door.

“Here it is!” Sky Sword pointed at the door. “The ruin is inside. I don’t come here that often either.”

Li Hao focused on the door—there were characters over it. Empty Spirit Manor. The young man looked at the two puppets. They stared back at him. What are you looking at us for?

“Do the seniors know this Empty Spirit Manor?”

“No. There were plenty of heavyweights in the world and we were just students, how would we know so much? Not to mention, this is Silver Moon. We don’t know much about it either. We don’t really go anywhere besides the eight main cities and Skystar Town.”

Fine then, this was a nobody!

“I’m here, senior!” Sky Sword transmitted.

A tendril of mental strength unfurled, but hovered around the door as it sensed something. “You can come by yourself, why... bring so many?” came a wizened voice.

“We need to go against a strong enemy, so we wish for the senior to sever an Apex replica to help us!” Sky Sword said bluntly.

“.....” You’re being too blunt! Even Li Hao was speechless at the man.

The existence in the cave was plainly shocked beyond belief. It took a while for it to respond. “I’ve had you supply energy stones to repair my body and core origin over the years. You’ve given me less than five hundred thousand stones altogether... and now you want me to split off enough core origin for an Apex replica?”

Are you kidding??

Li Hao couldn’t help but look at Sky Sword as well. Five hundred thousand energy stones were just five million mysterious power stones. That was only one hundred drops of Water of Life! As one of the seven divine mountains, that was indeed a bit miserly...

Well, perhaps Sky Sword was poor and five million stones a lot. But just that amount alone... would truly make it difficult for the plant spirit to recover by too much.

“It’s better than not supplying any,” Sky Sword intoned. “There are many plant spirits who have awakened in the world these days and some don’t even have people to partner with. Senior should be satisfied!”

Satisfied with what?? You are one of the seven divine mountains and the lord of Sky Sword Mountain! Although the plant spirit had never ventured forth from the cave, it knew a bit of the world thanks to conversing with some people and the occasional eavesdropping on the mountain.

Sky Sword was a very decisive sort who didn't like for things to drag on. "This will be beneficial to you, senior! I've brought the commander of the Skystar Commander Office with me. A partnership will bring you only benefits, and a lack of cooperation will only bring death!"

"Are you threatening me?" The plant spirit was stunned.

"Yes, I'm threatening you!" Sky Sword nodded. "We killed the Golden Coconut of Skystar Town not too long ago. There is no use for the senior if you do not cooperate, so there is no need to keep you around. We'll kill you and exchange you for a plant spirit who will work with us!"

"....." All was quiet. Li Hao and the others held their faces. Was this how a negotiation should be conducted? Was this how Sky Sword always talked to the plant spirits? And we thought you would advise them earnestly and kindly! You came out with guns a-blazin'!

The plant spirit was utterly shocked and couldn't find the words it wanted. "You can kill an Immortal..."

"It won't cooperate, kill it!" Sky Sword turned before it had a chance to finish.

"....."

"Cough cough cough..." Hou Xiaochen couldn't contain himself and broke into a coughing fit. We know that you're a decisive man, but this isn't when you should be decisive!

The deputy was equally at a loss.

“We haven’t really discussed anything yet, Senior Sky Sword.” Li Hao grinned. “You’re in too much of a hurry. We can talk first and consider killing this plant spirit senior if it’s really unwilling to join us...”

The surge of mental strength swept through the mountain cave, not knowing whether to fly into a rage or what. Why was this happening!

It’d been incredibly unlucky back in the day to run into this fellow. It’d thought that the man would devote himself to collecting energy stones, but he focused on cultivation most of the time and didn’t venture out of the mountain.

When he did, it was just to kill some people. He traded whatever mysterious power stones he collected and didn’t if there were none to pick up. If it wasn’t for him being strong enough to kill some powerhouses and seize their mysterious power stones, Sky Sword might not have afforded even ten drops of Water of Life.

Most of the one hundred he’d traded for had taken place in recent times. The instances that he’d acted on Li Hao’s behalf had brought him some gains. Although he hadn’t purposefully taken the treasures from those operations, he’d still benefited in other ways.

Otherwise, all that Sword Sovereign had traded for in the past decade was just a few drops of Water of Life.

“Anyone can boast.” The plant spirit in the cave grew irritated. “Just try killing me if you wish to...”

“Let us go, let us go.” The two robot cats were the ones to fly into a fury before Li Hao could even become agitated. “Give us some energy stones, Li Hao, we’ll kill it. This little plant spirit doesn’t listen to orders! It can see you’re in a commander’s armor, but it still doesn’t listen. It must have turned traitor, we’ll exterminate it!”

“Commander’s armor?” It was then that the plant spirit in the cave noticed the presence of golden armor. It jerked with shock when it noted the aureate sheen and that the rest of the group was dressed in silver armor. Troop leaders?

The Battle Heaven Army! It recognized some particular marks on the armor—that was the armor of Battle Heaven, one of the eight main cities! And one of their commanders stood in front of it! How could this be?

The main cities had fallen silent, how could there be a commander here?

“Senior, we’re being polite right now,” smiled Li Hao. “We really will have to exterminate you if you continue to refuse us. Also, the two beside me are students of Evenround Martial University. Perhaps the senior has not heard of the institution before, but one of the two is from the Li family of Tranquil Star, and the other is from the Jiang family of Tranquil Star. Does the senior wish to continue your resistance?”

“Tranquil Star... how is that possible... New Martial humans died long ago...”

“Give us energy stones so we can kill this little plant spirit!” raged the two robot cats. “How dare you!”

Li Hao was caught between a rock and a hard place. I do have some mysterious power stones, but only a couple million of them. I need to use them sparingly. Aren’t we still negotiating right now? I would agree to your request if I wasn’t short on mysterious power stones, but I... am short of them!

Mental strength rippled within the cave as light shifted over a big jujube tree. Mental strength extended toward the two puppets to sense the form of the robot cats... Its heart quailed to find that the New Martial humans had resurrected! Even puppets were extraordinary as it meant a powerhouse had safeguarded their mental strength.

It had heard of Evenround Martial University before and Tranquil Star was a familiar name! But severing an Apex replica... It wasn’t like it’d recovered enough for that!

The amount of core origin it had left might not make it as strong as the little tree; it would have to separate out sixty percent in order to create a replica. That was half of its life! It would stand no chance of defending itself if those outside rushed in—the jujube tree could already sense some danger.

At the same time, it faced a main city commander and New Martial human survivors. It wavered between different states of terror.

Chapter 875: Audacious in the Extreme (I)

“My strength is very weak and I’ve recovered very little. My core origin might outright disperse once I sever an Apex replica. This is no joking matter... I only barely managed to set foot into Immortal back in the day. I would not have survived to present day otherwise...”

Any being still alive in the world was at least an Immortal. Li Hao had yet to encounter an Apex survivor—the little tree was a unique case because its father had sheltered it. There would be no little tree if not.

“Don’t worry, senior, it will be very safe this time,” Li Hao chuckled. “We’ll bring your replica back. If any accidents occur, we’ll kill an Immortal plant spirit to nourish you with.”

The power of seven elements circulated his body as the others released their presences as well. Even Panther borrowed the group’s influence and emanated a peculiar presence.

“Then we’re heading in, senior...”

The jujube tree was quite resigned by the situation outside its front door. It wouldn’t necessarily lose in a fight, but where had all these people come from? All of them seemed to have quite the background, would a bigger development occur if they really engaged in a battle?

And didn’t modern society say that there were few powerhouses in the outside world, that their strongest was Arcanus? Why had the world changed in this way in the blink of an eye?

“I’ll cooperate...” It sighed deeply with helplessness after a long moment. “It’s just... you’re too heartless, Sky Sword!”

Sky Sword was an utter bastard!

The man remained calm. What was there to be heartless about? It wasn’t like they were that familiar with each other! It wasn’t like he didn’t pay anything when trading with the ancient plant spirit. All it did was supply some Water of Life—he’d paid a great sum of mysterious power stones!

His partnership with the plant spirit didn’t run that deep, unlike the nine ministries that’d almost become one with theirs. He’d simply exchanged a few words from beginning to end.

A ghastly scream rang out from the cave before long. The mental strength behind the door immediately weakened and a storage ring floated out. Li Hao frowned when he inspected it and saw a little tree standing in the object.

“This is an Apex replica? It’s at most peak six elements!”

The jujube tree looked wordlessly at the world beyond the door. Weak ripples came after another long pause, “I will... die... if I sever more.”

Li Hao sent his consciousness into the ring without asking permission and took stock of the replica. “It’s seriously weak and doesn’t even feel as strong as the little tree. If I’d known ahead of time, I would’ve said to just outright kill it!”

“.....” The jujube tree didn’t make a sound. If I’m weak, it’s all Sky Sword’s fault. I’ve never met a less motivated fellow.

“Forget it, it’s better than nothing. Don’t worry, senior. With this level of strength, you may not have a chance to fight. I’ll bring it right back to you!”

The mental strength disappeared from outside the mountain cave and the tree fell silent. Having half of its core origin forcefully taken and being called weak... was too humiliating.

“Senior Sky Sword gave it too little,” sighed Li Hao. “It hasn’t recovered much.”

“I thought it would recover on its own without need for my help,” Sky Sword answered awkwardly.

“.....” Alright then, Sky Sword’s train of thought was unusual. Li Hao could only treat this as an unexpected surprise. It was nice to have a peak six elements plant spirit replica, but it was too weak. Thank goodness he’d located some puppets to help him, or it would actually be difficult to handle any Immortal plant spirits that he encountered.

The group wasn’t in a hurry to leave as the City of Supernaturals’ meeting wouldn’t happen for another two days. They could wait until tomorrow to leave—they weren’t too far away.

.....

At the same time, the City of Supernaturals bustled with activity, as if a momentous occasion was upon them. Countless supernaturals had returned to the city, thronging the streets like it was the new year.

Inside the city lord manor.

Lin Hongyu continuously sent out her senses to scan the streets. Had Li Hao’s group come yet? How many would he bring? Or would the young man not show at all because he wasn’t at ease about their partnership?

Various thoughts ran through her mind and she conversed with the replica in her storage ring. “Milord, we might need you in the end.”

The redwood tree didn't respond. Need me? It felt like it'd sold itself in this operation and hadn't even fetched a high price for its services! What an utter loss!

.....

Li Hao's group made quick time to the City of Supernaturals on the second day. They split up—Li Hao, Chen Zhongtian, Panther, and the two puppets in one team. Earthturner Sword with Sky Sword, and Hou Xiaochen with Deputy Zhou.

The latter two teams of government authorities and martial world cohorts were used to working together. Li Hao stuck with Chen Zhongtian in a half defensive, half observation position to prevent the old man from running off on some other duties. He wouldn't betray them, but his reputation was even poorer than Southern Fist's. He might very well abscond halfway to go make more babies with someone else.

.....

A light flurry of snowflakes drifted from the sky. It was almost December. Since the City of Supernaturals was in the central region and not too far from Sky Sword Mountain, Li Hao wasn't in a rush to complete the trip. He tightly wrapped himself in a fur coat and rode on a horse—Panther had turned into a rather ugly horse.

The two puppets from Evenround Martial looked around curiously, quietly taking in the sights and flanking Li Hao as if they were his guards. Chen Zhongtian had wanted to fly on his weapon, but when he realized the slow pace that Li Hao set, he bought a donkey from an old man by the side of the road. The donkey was quite curious about Panther and occasionally rubbed itself against it, immensely irritating the dog.

Roads in the central region were mostly level and cars sometimes passed by them. There were also plenty of passersby rushing to and fro. Refugees from various parts of the dynasty could also be seen. They resolutely walked forward, possibly wanting to head to Skystar City. The clothes on their backs were threadbare, but having reached the central region, at least they stood a chance.

Li Hao looked around from his vantage point on Panther's back, seeing hints of corpses that'd fallen from cold or starvation. He only watched and didn't alight from his mount.

Chen Zhongtian was a shrewd man and looked sidelong at the young man when he noticed that Li Hao spent the trip in silence. "Eighty years ago, frozen corpses like these littered the side of the road whenever winter arrived.

"It pained me to see them too, so I was determined to change something. Back then, robbers were everywhere to be found. The world under the Jiang family rule was a study of suffering and misery...

"I went to Skystar City later on and spent some time climbing up the ranks. I then overthrew the royal family alongside those people and built the nine ministries. The Inspectorate was my choice of establishment as I wanted to ensure safety for all."

Li Hao didn't deny those words. Perhaps that really had been Chen Zhongtian's aspirations back in the day. No matter what, this was the truth.

"But things changed ever since the first awakening twenty years ago," sighed the man. "The army lost its greatest function and it was difficult to conduct Inspectorate affairs. When one person's strength was greater than the collective's, we found the situation difficult overall. And then the plant spirits revitalized, and not in a feeble form as they did at first, but with immense strength.

"They'd awoken long ago, but were in a half dead state. The times then were not the times now. Everything changed twenty years ago.

"Ying Hongyue and his comrades broke a sealed vein in a ruin twenty years ago," Chen Zhongtian continued upon seeing Li Hao remain silent. "That instigated the first awakening. Sometimes I think that if the awakening hadn't occurred, we might've been able to complete the reforms that we planned. Perhaps... we wouldn't be the infamous nine ministries now."

“Perhaps!” Li Hao nodded. “Without superhuman strength, the army would still be the army and the Inspectorate would still be the Inspectorate. You don’t need to explain yourself, just admit that you’ve committed certain acts.

“The Inspectorate is corrupt now as well. I’ve seen its people take thousands of refugees for the mines. I’ve seen local inspectors collude with robbers. I’ve seen soldiers pretend to be pirates. I’ve seen a director general be the chief of a pirate faction and a duke that is the patron of pirates...

“The officials are not the officials and the robbers are not the robbers. The nine ministries are plainly very strong, but say that they’re constantly on guard against the royal family. Excuses are just excuses at times. If you can divert so many personnel to kill me, can’t you divert some to cleaning house?”

Those were just excuses. Look at all those Arcanus that’d appeared to kill Li Hao! With all those Arcanus, any group of pirates would face nothing but death!

Chen Zhongtian inclined his head and didn’t defend himself. Next to himself, the two puppets looked around for a while.

“This is boring, I want to go back to school!” Jiang Yingli suddenly said.

“.....” Li Hao blinked.

“Me too, I want to go back!” agreed Li Shengzhang. “I thought there was just less energy in the world, but now I see how messy, how poor, and how pathetic it is. Silver Moon was very prosperous in our time. Although we focused on military matters, the people were very prosperous. It was completely different from the sight presented now.”

They didn’t want to stay anymore, or perhaps they felt that this place was no longer the era of their memories. It was New Martial no more, but an ignorant, blighted, chaotic time period that’d fallen behind. It neither felt like home nor seemed familiar. It was just a foreign place to them.

Li Hao didn't say a word. Perhaps they could dismiss the world as a messy place they couldn't stand, but could he?

Probably not, I was born in this era. Everything I do now is to make it better, isn't it? Hong Yitang says that our period will only become worse if no one does anything. Only when someone takes action will light gradually shine on this time period, right?

Li Hao smiled, not finding fault with what the puppets had said. This world deserved scorn from the ancients. It was just a backward and dark era. But aren't I taking action? It will not continue to be like this very soon.

"Li Hao, do you want to be the emperor of this age?" Li Shengzhang suddenly asked.

"I don't know." Li Hao smiled.

"Don't know?"

"I don't care if I'm emperor or not, people just have to listen to me."

Isn't that the same? Chen Zhongtian looked at the young man with surprise. "Commander Li, do you think imperialism is better when world peace is achieved, or a democracy?"

"I don't know, so long as people listen to me." Li Hao smiled.

Chen Zhongtian started. What kind of answer was that?

"I don't know what kind of system is good, I just know that I like to pick out the thorns. Any system will work if I don't see a problem, and it has nothing to do with the system if I do see a problem. It has to do with the person!"

So an authoritarian rule? Chen Zhongtian didn't think that was a good idea either. But he simply thought about it and then set the matter aside. The group continued forging onward amid the snow.

Chapter 876: Audacious in the Extreme (II)

It took the group about a day of walking to reach the City of Supernaturals. The metropolis sprawled amid the biting harsh wind and blizzard. A hubbub of voices rose from it and supernatural ripples undulated. Mysterious power exuded from the city walls to expel the bitter cold and snow from its vicinity.

The city towered like a miracle of the age. Its vast walls reached one hundred meters! One could sense supernatural ripples from the top. City annihilation cannons mounted the ramparts and powerhouses manned them. Troops of soldiers stood atop the walls, clad in a variety of armor as they patrolled in all directions. More troops stood on the city gates. They were all supernaturals!

The people coming to and fro were almost all supernaturals down to the last. They were rarely seen in other areas, but everywhere to be found here.

This seemed more like a city of hope and the playground of supernaturals. Another group of supernaturals arrived while Li Hao and his group took in the sights. Some flew overhead with their weapons and others traveled on foot. Some drove on the roads; everyone was in a hurry.

Blood stained the body of one of them—he was naked from the waist up in the dead of winter.

“That wench tasted good!” he boasted to his comrades. “I told you guys to have a taste too, but you guys weren't willing...”

The two puppets understood the man's words. Anger stirred in them and they wanted to take action, but Li Hao sent his voice reverberating in their minds with a soft grunt.

“Stay quiet! You listen to me here. Don't move without my command!”

The two puppets were furious and didn't want to listen to Li Hao. They were out in the world just to take a look around, why did they have to listen to him? But upon seeing him glare coldly at them with a chilly look in his eyes, he seemed completely different from before. The two puppets quieted down, slightly afraid like they'd bumped into a family elder despite the young man being very weak.

Li Hao said nothing and continued on his way with Panther after he was certain that the two would remain quiet. The guards wanted to stop him at the gate. He whipped one of them into tumbling over the ground. "Are you blind to stop just anyone you see??"

Although the soldiers didn't recognize Li Hao, fear spasmed their hearts. Someone who looked like a leader hurriedly walked forward. Wreathed in smiles, he apologized, "Please forgive us, milord. These guys are blind and you are so right to beat them. I'll teach them a proper lesson, so there's no need to waste your time with the likes of them..."

"Get out of here!"

"Yes, of course, at once..." The fawning man quickly backed away.

As Li Hao's group sauntered past, they could hear the leader lecturing his men. "Are you guys idiots?! Didn't you see the two guards following the young man? It's obvious to see that he's no ordinary person, how dare you stop him?? A lot of great people have been coming to City of Supernaturals, so sharpen your wits! I'll hack you all to pieces if you keep stirring up trouble!"

"Yes yes yes, don't waste your time with us, sir..."

"....." The voices gradually faded into the background.

People and vehicles abounded within the city; it was the heights of prosperity.

Jiang Yingli couldn't help herself and asked, "Why did you hit people?"

“I’m stronger than them, so I can hit them,” Li Hao chuckled. “Is that wrong?”

“Very wrong!” she raged. “How can you be so bad? The strong are supposed to protect the weak, not bully the weak! Is there any sense of accomplishment in bullying the weak? They are just loyally carrying out their duties. Should they not look into those entering the city? Why did you not follow the rules and hit them instead??”

“What would happen in New Martial?” Li Hao asked instead of growing impatient with them.

“Your head would swing by the city gates tomorrow!”

The young man inclined his head with a smile. “But this is not New Martial.”

The two angry robot cats didn’t want to talk to him anymore.

“I was just seeing how the twelve families manage the city,” Li Hao explained slowly. “It looks like their management skills are mediocre. These guards are nothing good either. Take a closer look. They raise all sorts of difficulties when weaker supernaturals enter the city. But when powerful supernaturals enter, they bow and scrape before them. It’s said that mundanes are killed outright when they wander into the area...

“So, do you still think that these guards are innocent?” The young man smiled.

The two blinked and didn’t say anything.

“Therefore, what you see may not be real. It looks like you guys never suffered back in the day, so you are unaware of the evils of the world,” Li Hao laughed. “Your temper is explosive and you’re too quick to lose it. Although you are of the Immortal level, your temperament... is run-of-the-mill. You’re still too young.”

The two puppets wanted to erupt with temper anew at his words, but ultimately snorted and ignored Li Hao. The group was walking down a main avenue, surrounded by crowds of supernaturals. Storefronts lined the side of the street, some dealing with mysterious power stones, some in weaponry, others in mysterious power stones, and a variety of other items to be found as well.

There was food, drink, and entertainment galore. Heavyweights roamed the streets, with some supernaturals preferring to be beggars in this city than a millionaire outside. After all, mundanes were not permitted entry here. Li Hao even saw a brothel. It was... quite the eye-opener.

The topic on everyone's mind was the formation of the government cabinet tomorrow. Who would be a cabinet minister? So-and-so was very powerful; the Skystar Commander Office was a hot topic of discussion as well.

"What shitty Skystar Commander Office? Didn't they say they want to regulate all of the supernaturals in the world as well as City of Supernaturals? Bullshit! Once the cabinet is formed, we'll march with the two divine mountains and exterminate the Skystar Commander Office! Let's capture that Li Hao, chop his head off, and hang it on the city gates!"

"Hahaha, that'd be letting him off lightly! Apparently he looks good, so why not... heh heh heh."

"Damn your tastes run heavy!"

"Hahaha, won't it be such a sense of accomplishment to screw someone as highly placed as him?"

"That's right, hahaha!"

"Damn it, it's all that bastard's fault. The Night Watchers seem to be sticking their noses in more things now. I accidentally killed a few people a few days ago—those assholes actually issued a warrant for my arrest! They're being all cocky because of who they have backing them. None of these dogs dared fart in front of us when they saw us before!"

“It’s the City of Supernaturals that’s the best, what does Li Hao know? We have superhuman strength and should be rulers of the world. Are we supposed to obey the rules and laws like those mortals? Why are we to be arrested if we kill a mortal? There’s billions of them and just a few supernaturals!”

“He doesn’t know diddly squat, he just wants to glorify himself and have the whole world know of Li Hao the Mighty. He ain’t shit!”

“Hahaha, that’s right! Our City of Supernaturals is truly growing stronger this time! I’ve called all my friends here—the world will be ours soon!”

“Isn’t that right!”

“.....” Such was the conversation on every street and alley. Everyone had somewhat dreaded the formation of the Skystar Commander Office, but as the days went on and neither the Night Watchers nor Li Hao came by the City of Supernaturals, people forgot about him. The city was rapidly growing stronger!

Transformed into the shape of a horse beneath Li Hao, Panther wanted to bite people! Chen Zhongtian looked at Li Hao, but the young man’s expression was calm and he wasn’t mad. He just found the conversation laughable.

“Tell me, Minister Chen,” he sighed as he rode Panther. “Have these people forgotten that many of their relatives, their friends, and their elders are ordinary people? Why have they lost themselves after gaining a little bit of power? Why do they think they are the sons and daughters of heaven and the center of the world, that mundane people are the tools by which they can murder and loot?”

“Their power came too easily for them,” Chen Zhongtian responded after some thought. “As did their wealth. With strength and wealth, but a lack of supervision... They can kill for whatever they want and no one can keep them in check. Of course they strike back when someone wants to curtail their activities...”

“That’s not right either,” Jiang Yingli suddenly said. “Suddenly obtaining power is not bad, but what’s wrong is that there is only consideration of strength in their minds. They have no concrete goals or faith, so it is a lack of proper education!”

“What do you mean?” Li Hao asked curiously.

“If they were educated from young and possessed basic critical thinking, morals and ethics, they would identify right from wrong. They would not lose control with power!” Jiang Yingli said seriously. “Many people suddenly come into power, but so long as you aren’t ignorant, you won’t lose control like they have!”

“So you mean that it comes down to education again?” Li Hao asked thoughtfully.

“That’s right!” Jiang Yingli tilted her big head. “If you were properly educated since young, your first thought upon receiving great power wouldn’t be to destroy something. You’d help yourself live a more comfortable life at most. You wouldn’t run around savagely and be at a loss of what to do. Therefore, I think it’s a lack of education that’s caused this.”

Li Hao nodded. That made sense. He’d also suddenly come into power, but had he spontaneously turned into a despot when he did so?

No, because he had a basic rationality and logic to his thoughts. He also possessed a fundamental set of morals that denoted bullying the weak as wrong. He had been educated in this manner, but these people felt that they could do anything they wanted when they grew strong because that made them a god!

Chen Zhongtian also quietly turned over the puppet’s words in his mind, debating something.

An enormous inner city rose in the city center, occupying nearly half of the City of Supernaturals. They could hear from the crowds around them that this was territory belonging to the twelve families. They were the dragons and phoenixes of the City of Supernaturals, their people lived inside the inner city.

Stronger wandering cultivators could also enter the inner city. There were storefronts and residences there, but regular supernaturals could not patronize the establishments. They would have to be at least a Solar to pass through. Solar was quite strong amid wandering cultivators.

There was also a plethora of supernatural academies within the inner city. The three great organizations, nine ministries, and seven divine mountains except the Sky Sword Manor had local branches as well. Sky Sword didn't like to get involved in these matters and hadn't sent a representative.

A red light sparkled in Li Hao's eyes as he looked at the inner city. He raised a brow to find significant numbers of powerhouses. At his level of strength, he could read quite a lot from a scan with his eyes.

There were many supernaturals inside the city, ones that were universally stronger than the ones in the outer city. Dense clusters of balls of Solar light moved around inside. There had to be at least one thousand of them! Li Hao had never seen so many gathered in one place before.

There looked to be one hundred Novas and quite a few Arcanus as well. They centered on a few spots, likely the residential complexes of each family. Every family had a few; they'd likely all come back for the cabinet meeting.

Li Hao didn't look closely at the group of them. Just scanning them once was enough. Keeping his eyes trained on them would raise Arcanus attention.

Chapter 877: Audacious in the Extreme (III)

"Not bad!" laughed Li Hao as he looked at the inner city again. It was very big. Although he had a few mirror shards, it would be difficult for them to cover the entire inner city.

Of course, the meeting tomorrow wouldn't take place throughout the inner city. It might just be in a small location, so the mirror fragments would be able to cover that much ground. If not, he'd brought the void chain. It would be a chance to test its abilities.

The group walked forward; the guards of the inner city were much stronger and were at least Sunflares. Chen Zhongtian took out a medallion without another word. The sight of it made the guards respectfully give way.

He alighted from his donkey to explain to the rest, “This is a medallion that the city previously gave to all of the major factions. It’s to prevent their subordinates from inadvertently offending heavyweights. Mine was given to the Inspectorate, and it’s only natural for the Inspectorate to send someone to observe their cabinet formation. All factions will likely have representatives in attendance tomorrow.”

Li Hao inclined his head and put on his cloak. He couldn’t be bothered to disguise his face, so a hooded cloak would serve his purpose. Many people on the street were dressed thus.

Chen Zhongtian didn’t put on a cloak, but his entire being turned younger. He seemed much younger than his son, Chen Yao, and there was quite a debonair around him. Granted, the donkey that he led detracted from his suaveness.

The two didn’t purposefully isolate their voices from the crowd. Regular people couldn’t hear them and it’d take someone stronger than Li Hao to eavesdrop.

“Do we go to the Lin family right now or...?” asked Chen Zhongtian. “We can find a good hiding spot first if we want to be more cautious and then decide how to take action tomorrow.”

“It’s fine!” Li Hao shook his head. “Since Lin Hongyu dared invite us, I’ll let her know that I’m bolder than she thinks! It’s fine if she’s sincere about casting her lot in with me. If this is a ruse just to lure me here, I’ll play right into it! Going straight to her will push her off balance instead.”

Chen Zhongtian raised an eyebrow to himself. Li Hao was sometimes overly careful, such as when he handed the Wind and Cloud Pavilion. He was at times uncommonly daring, such as this moment. Was he not afraid of being besieged by powerhouses?

The young man naturally wasn’t afraid. The talented were intrepid! He’d made many preparations for this trip, the two puppets were the most conspicuous example. Although he might not use all of

his arrangements, they were immensely capable. For example, he carried a good sum of energy bombs at the moment and could take out half of the city with him if they detonated.

.....

The Lin family, city lord manor.

The manor was an exceedingly large complex located at the center of the inner city. It was the Lin family's territory. A group of old men standing beneath Lin Hongyu were discussing something in the main hall.

They glanced at her from time to time, with one grumbling, "Hongyu was too impetuous. She should've proposed it to us first if she was going to build a cabinet. We needed to be prepared so we could occupy more seats within the cabinet. Now look at things—there isn't enough time and this has caused such a great hubbub. All sides are prepared with everything they have, but we're not ready yet. Isn't this outright handing over our authority?"

"That's right. Hongyu, you should've discussed something as monumental as this with the family before coming to a decision."

"Quite right. Also, why has Milord Redwood sealed off the entrance lately? I wanted to exchange for some Water of Life so I can take another step forward in my cultivation, but was mystified by the closed door. Do you know the details of the situation, Hongyu?"

"....." The old men exchanged words with each other, some with dissatisfaction, some with complaints. Everything had been too rushed this time and they didn't have enough time to prepare. They'd wanted to increase their strength, but the redwood tree suddenly refused to see anyone. No one could trade for Water of Life.

Lin Hongyu sat above everyone, leaning against her chair and propping up her chin with one hand. She silently watched the discourse beneath her and smiled when the old men finished grumbling.

“Elders, family seniors, there is no use in complaining about any of this now. What I’d like to know is where the family’s ultimate weapon is?”

Someone frowned at her response and an old man with whitening hair objected, “That is the weapon that holds our fortunes together. It will naturally be given over to you when you are stronger. For now... the Lin family elders will keep it for safekeeping.”

“There are even seven element Arcanus on the rankings from the Wind and Cloud Pavilion now,” Lin Hongyu smiled. “I am only a peak six elements. How am I supposed to stand against them without a single trump card? The elders are truly... short-sighted!

“Will I treat the family poorly when I’m strong? How much of the weapon’s strength can you guys bring to bear? Do you have fancies of overthrowing me? Doggedly holding onto it will weaken the Lin family. I would be able to contend against seven elements otherwise. You are as stubborn as a donkey!”

“Lin Hongyu!” shouted the white-haired elder. “Is this how you talk to your seniors?”

“Then how should I talk to you?” Lin Hongyu laughed lazily. “My potential is greater than everyone and my strength is stronger than even you lot of antiques. None of the other eleven families dare resist my authority as city lord. They have to do so quietly to themselves even if they do.

“But you old fats only know to complain from day to night, concealing and hiding all the treasures, and sucking all the blood out of the family. So what if the ultimate weapon is in your hands? Senior elder, can you be the city lord? Would you dare accept the position if I gave it to you?”

The old man flew into a fury! The other elders’ jaws slackened as well. As curt as Lin Hongyu may have been in the past, she wouldn’t be so direct as she needed to rely on the Lin family. But here she was, openly mocking them today!

She was running absolutely wild!

“Lin Hongyu, are you rebelling against the family?!”

“You show a complete lack of decorum and respect!”

“I’ve long said that a woman cannot be the head of the household! You all didn’t believe me, now look at her. Is there any respect for the rules around here?”

“Thank goodness we didn’t give her the familial weapon. Would there be a place for us otherwise?”

“.....” The group erupted with outrage, while some took Lin Hongyu’s side and attempted to mollify the general resentment.

“Hongyu is doing this for everyone and the family’s good. You see it too that seven elements has appeared on the Arcanus Ranking. Hongyu is feeling the pressure as Li Hao prowls on the sidelines with the City of Supernaturals in his sights. In my view, Hongyu stands a chance against the Skystar Commander Office and seven element Arcanus if she gets to wield the family weapon...”

“Pah! That Li Hao is a little brat wet behind the ears, he won’t dare provoke us! The joint efforts of the twelve families will easily keep him in line. Those Silver Moon barbarians will only come to their deaths if they dare bother us! I say you guys are trying to throw us out and wield the reins of power only in your hands...”

Lin Hongyu couldn’t be bothered with a retort. What bullshit reins of power? The Lin family couldn’t see further than their own nose! She would’ve obtained the ultimate weapon long ago if it wasn’t for her own family getting in the way. She might’ve brought the other eleven families to heel a long time ago. But instead... these old things hem and haw, refusing to bring it out to her. Even though she’d led the Lins to these heights and the head of the twelve families, that did not change their stance. They were afraid that she’d seize control of the family!

It would be fine if times were as before. Lin Hongyu wouldn't be in a hurry and she would be confident of standing against any enemy. But now? Seven element Arcanus had appeared, yet the family still took the same stance!

In that case, don't blame me for showing you no mercy!

She couldn't be bothered engaging them any further. It was time for these Lin antiques to awaken from their daydreams of dominating the land. How could a family that didn't support its own geniuses hope to conquer the world? And they wanted to build a sacred land on par with Tranquil Star... Dream on!

She would've lost her mind a long time ago if she didn't constantly remind herself that they were one family. Lin Hongyu felt that she had herself to blame as well, because she lacked the decisive impulses of being a dictator. How would any of these old fogeys be afraid of her, given that? They levied the rules of the family on her and being of the same blood at every possible occasion.

Her eyes widened when she suddenly sensed something. The surge of aura was very familiar—the guy was incredibly bold! Lin Hongyu could scarcely believe it! She'd thought that Li Hao would come, but she hadn't known that he would be so daring as to come openly.

She swiftly rose and walked outside, ignoring the bickering elders.

"We're not finished here, Lin Hongyu, where are you going?!"

"Get back here!"

"How impudent! She's completely out of control!"

.....

Outside the door.

“Isn’t Lin Hongyu the head of the Lin family?” laughed Li Hao. He could hear the exhortation coming from inside.

“These ancient aristocracies sometimes have a lot of rules,” chuckled the alert Chen Zhongtian. “It’s said that those that can trace their roots back to the ancient civilization have a horrifying amount of family rules.”

“By ancient civilization... do you mean us?” Li Shengzhang asked with a strange expression. “Do we have a lot of rules?”

“.....” Li Hao started.

“We do have rules, but we often set them aside as well,” Li Shengzhang continued in a soft voice. “Showing respect for our elders and loving the young is a virtue, but when it comes to actual work, it’s the capable who are revered and the mediocre who fall in line. Take this family, for example. If such a genius had appeared in one of our families, one that possessed both strength and ability, then the family would unequivocally support them. The family would expend everything to support the genius’ rise.

“The Human King is a prime example. Supreme Zhang felt that the Human King would do a better job than him, so he voluntarily abdicated his position and stepped behind the curtains. It was a peaceful transition of power.

“Our voice at the table is as loud as our ability. Those without ability to their name should retire from the heart of power, even if they are a family elder. They can enjoy their twilight years. If they truly find themselves with too much time on their hands, they can take up a teaching position to nurture the new generation for the family and humanity.”

Li Hao nodded. This was a good mindset to have. Of course, he didn’t feel much either way because he was the only one left of the Lis. There was no one to curtail his actions. As for his teacher, he

could still do whatever he wished. Yuan Shuo never commanded the young man to do anything, forced him to action, or created a set of rules for him.

Chapter 878: Audacious in the Extreme (IV)

The guards outside the door were on high alert. They didn't know what these newcomers wanted. Although their duties called for expelling trespassers, danger prickled their backs whenever they thought of taking action.

A figure rushed to the scene just as they hesitated. The guards hastily bowed. "City lord!"

Lin Hongyu inclined her head at them and looked outside the door, recognizing Li Hao with a single glance. It was Chen Zhongtian who posed an unknown to her. Who was this? Her expression slowly changed when she took stock of his strength. This man could absolutely hold his own against her!

He wasn't a Silver Moon martial master, but he felt very strong. He had to be at least a peak six elements. Peak six elements... Lin Hongyu quickly flipped through the names on the Arcanus Ranking, suddenly thinking of someone after a very long time.

Surely not!! Chen Zhongtian?? Is it him?!

She'd never seen a young Chen Zhongtian, but she'd met an old Chen Zhongtian before. If she compared this youthful face to the one she knew... there was indeed a resemblance between the two.

Lin Hongyu's gaze then traveled to the two standing behind Li Hao. She couldn't read anything from them, but they didn't seem to be alive. As for the horse next to the young man... An ugly horse... It's probably that dog?

All of this quickly flashed through her mind as she collected herself. "Welcome..." She smiled at the group, not sure of how to address them. They were so audacious that they'd presented themselves at her front door!

“Just call me Brother Demon, don’t be shy!”

“.....” Lin Hongyu stared, then quickly squeezed out a smile. “Brother... Brother Demon? Please come on in, I thought you guys would arrive tomorrow...”

“We just arrived. Today or tomorrow, it’s all the same.” Li Hao walked straight in, the others were close behind him.

A group of old men stormed over from not too far away. The one in the lead declared angrily, “Hongyu, you are—”

Boom!

A surge of aura erupted as Lin Hongyu’s eyes narrowed. “Get out of my sight! Old things that take advantage of your seniority, don’t you see that I’m entertaining guests? Make yourselves scarce!”

Her sudden flaring of temper shocked the old men. They glanced at Li Hao before quickly running off, for no reason other than Lin Hongyu was overflowing with killing intent. The family genius rarely lost her temper. Today, however, she looked ready to kill at a moment’s notice. Stunned, they also found it bizarre that she was suddenly entertaining guests. Who were these people?

“My apologies for the ludicrous showing!” Lin Hongyu retracted her aura. “My family’s elders have gone muddleheaded in their seniority. I can’t be bothered with them normally, which has given them leeway to become even worse.”

“This rather changes my view of you,” Li Hao smiled. “You’ve certainly got some skill to become city lord with these useless lumps dragging you down!”

“Strength is king!” Lin Hongyu smiled as she led them to the rear yard. “Of course, sometimes I am envious of others, such as... Brother Demon here. You have people helping you every time something happens.”

“That’s true.” Li Hao nodded. Silver Moon’s martial culture was decent. At the very least, they were all a loyal bunch.

“Is this all of you that’s come?” the city lord asked as they walked. This was too little!

“We have more.”

“That’s good.” Lin Hongyu relaxed slightly. “Then how would Brother Demon like to act tomorrow? What is the plan?”

“How to act? Plan?” Li Hao blinked. “It’s very simple. I’ll seal off the four corners when the people arrive and kill everyone who won’t submit, makes trouble, or should die. Those who listen can stay. How’s that?”

“.....” Lin Hongyu was too stunned for words. Was that it? “There really might be almost one hundred Arcanus tomorrow. My thoughts are that I can raise the matter of partnership with the commander when the meeting starts. There ought to be people who support the idea. We can bring that portion of people to our side first, then I’ll make the first move. The commander can take your time and wait for me to hold the higher ground before striking...”

“That’s too much of a hassle!” Li Hao shook his head.

“.....” Lin Hongyu nearly burst out with curses. I know you’re strong, but look at the number of people you’ve brought with you! Once those powerhouses utilize the ultimate weapons of their families, three of them together might be the equivalent of a seven element Arcanus! Do you really think that you’re invincible??

It’s only because I don’t wield my family’s weapon myself that I’m afraid of you. I wouldn’t think much of you if I did! I thought you were here early to discuss a plan with me and that you’d come fully prepared. So you’re just here to put in a showing??

Although she bitterly groused to herself, the smile remained on her face and her movements were natural and unfettered.

“Why complicate matters that are simple?” Li Hao smiled, like he knew she was cursing him.
“Don’t worry, I’ll be right by your side tomorrow. Just tell me who needs to go—I’ll kill those first to intimidate everyone, then take care of the rest one by one...”

“No, I mean...”

“Why join my banner if you lack such confidence in me?” Li Hao looked at her.

“It’s not that, but that there really will be a lot of powerhouses this time!” Lin Hongyu furrowed her brows.

“I know!” Li Hao nodded. “Then is my force of 7 six element Arcanus and 3 seven element Arcanus sufficient to set you at ease?”

Lin Hongyu blinked.

“Of the six elements, more than half are peak six elements, so they can just manage to hold their own against a seven element Arcanus. Do you think that’s sufficient? If not, there’s still time. I can get more people to come.”

Lin Hongyu was tongue-tied now. Are you joking with me?

A faint tendril of core origin wafted from her body as another voice spoke up, “Commander Li... is truly... full of surprises!”

“My apologies for killing one of senior’s replicas earlier,” Li Hao smiled without skipping a beat. “The senior’s strength exceeds my expectations as well. Having lost one Apex replica, you have coalesced another near-Apex so quickly. You must be a titan among Immortals.”

A personal domain manifested, isolating the vicinity from heaven and earth. The redwood tree’s replica quickly sensed some pressure.

“You praise me too highly,” it quickly said. “It’s just... the two behind Commander Li...”

“Students of Evenround Martial University.”

“I see!” The redwood tree seemed to understand the ramifications as humility crept into its voice. “Greetings to... the two imperial descendants.”

The robot cats couldn’t be bothered to respond. They didn’t like that moniker, but some monster spirits liked to call them that. It was difficult to correct them otherwise, but normally speaking, they ignored the moniker.

The redwood tree didn’t mind their reactions—or perhaps it was used to such responses from back in the day.

“In that case, there is nothing to be worried about,” the tree said to Lin Hongyu. “There shouldn’t be a problem with the two imperial descendants present.”

The backgrounds of those from Evenround Martial were incredibly lofty. Even if these two didn’t appear out of the ordinary now, they were sure to be uncommon.

“Please don’t say that, senior,” laughed Li Hao. “We might need a great deal of help from the senior tomorrow.”

“Not at all, this old tree has the will, but lacks the strength to...”

“Surely not!” Li Hao chuckled. “I’m going to eliminate the primary bodies of their plant spirits after we take care of these people tomorrow. Attack with me to exterminate them by the roots!”

“.....” The redwood tree froze.

“The senior’s primary body is very strong. I’ll seal off the area with my personal domain so that core origin does not leak out. We won’t go too far—most likely just staying in the inner city. We’ll enter the ruins and kill their primary bodies. The senior will receive core origin and we’ll be able to eradicate our enemies down to the last. Whyever not?”

The redwood tree nearly choked on its response! I thought I wouldn’t need to do anything, but you’re planning on killing the plant spirits’ primary bodies!

“What does... the senior think?” Li Hao grinned widely, then continued when the redwood tree stopped to think things over. “It’s fine if the senior isn’t willing, I’ll come back and take care of them later. But... once you miss this opportunity, the senior likely won’t have a chance to swallow this much core origin in the future!

“There are plenty who wish to be a part of operations like these! My thoughts are that the plant spirits of the other eleven are likely mediocre and weaker than the senior. This is why there’s a chance for the senior!”

The redwood tree sank into deep thought before saying, “These... those fellow daoists are old acquaintances of mine. We are all familiar with each other...”

“Then forget it!”

“No! I mean to say that their existence is too painful, that they struggle on the verge of life and death. I will... free them of their misery!”

Lin Hongyu's jaw dropped! Were these the words from the timid and cautious redwood tree that she knew??

The plant spirit plainly had its own plans in mind. Its current thoughts were that two imperial descendants from Evenround Martial were present for meeting, guaranteeing their success. There might really be no chance for it in the future if it didn't participate. In that case... it would take the gamble!

The young man in front of it was terrifying. Just his personal domain alone might result in changes to this world. In this moment, the redwood tree truly felt that Lin Hongyu had made the right choice. If they'd persisted in their resistance, great misfortune might've befallen them. Who would've thought that Lin Hongyu would have this kind of eye for talent?

The young man was supported by powerful backers in the form of Battle Heaven and Evenround Martial University. The redwood tree quickly came to the conclusion that, as opposed to permitting other plant spirits to benefit, why doesn't it reap the harvest instead?

Lin Hongyu was also stunned beyond belief. She hadn't thought that the redwood would capitulate so quickly. Hadn't it blustered up a storm before?

Despite her inner sarcasm, she quickly flashed a smile. "Then... I wish us success tomorrow!"

"It will succeed," Li Hao smiled. "If it doesn't, then it will be the city lord who leaked word ahead of time."

"....." What was she supposed to say to that?

Chapter 879: Massacre (I)

The City of Supernaturals bustled with ever more activity on this day. Some people learned that guests had arrived at the Lins'. But with Lin Hongyu leading them directly to the rear yard, no one within the family dared ask for details.

Since the Lin family themselves skirted gingerly around this topic, the rest were even less likely to inquire further. None of them sought to seize the position of city lord, so although they cared that there were strangers inside the inner city, they didn't place too much importance on it. Perhaps the Lin family had invited helpers to join them in hopes of fighting for an additional cabinet seat or two?

The visitors had come openly, as opposed to skulking around in the shadows. No one would consider Li Hao being one of the guests—their thoughts were centered on wondering if it was powerhouses from the Jade Flute and Sunset Mountains.

And so the night passed amid a mixture of uncertainty and anticipation. The cabinet meeting of the City of Supernaturals was about to commence. It might herald the start of the city's rise to dominion and becoming a ruling force of the world!

.....

The next day, the city lord manor.

The cabinet meeting was being held here. The large plaza in front of it was filled with people early in the morning. Various heavyweights had come with their followers or family.

The twelve ancient aristocracies were once martial world tyrants, and some even hailed from Silver Moon. Silver Moon's martial world had always been a sacred land of the martial world. It was just that it experienced such heavy infighting that families who left en masse were the ones who thrived. Those of the twelve once sent people to Silver Moon, wanting to collect their secret arts.

Their representatives didn't meet with good ends.

And now, the twelve families each occupied a corner of the plaza. A massive ring was placed in the center. Apart from these constituents, the wandering cultivators had one small spot to themselves.

There was another elevated platform to provide seats for factions present only to observe. This cabinet meeting was open to all.

.....

The Lin family occupied a center spot in the plaza, thanks to their connection to Lin Hongyu. Their delegation was filled with heavyweights, elders, and the young. Many were looking for Lin Hongyu.

The family had been quiet after she lost her temper yesterday, but now that she was still nowhere to be found, some of the old men couldn't help mutter under their breaths again. Shouldn't Lin Hongyu be here early on such a momentous occasion?? She was the city lord! Was she going to stroll in as the last attendee?

"Is she still in the rear yard?"

"In response to the senior elder, yes."

"Ridiculous!" the old man cursed under his breath. She was a woman at the end of the day, it was a stain to the family reputation that she'd spent the entire night in the rear yard with some strangers!

When it came to Lin Hongyu, the family was of only one mind—either she lived a solitary existence for her entire life, or her husband married into the family. As for who that might be, that was naturally up to the family elders as well.

Otherwise, Lin Hongyu would make off with the family businesses!

Some of the elders brooded as they recalled the man leading a donkey looked like he could be a bit of a boy toy. They didn't recognize that it was a young Chen Zhongtian—he really had looked the part of a boy toy to be kept by older women when he was young.

The crowd jostled for space and snatches of conversation could be heard everywhere; the various factions had all sent representatives. Fourteen raised platforms were full of people and mysterious power drifted through the air.

Some of the watching powerhouses widened their eyes at the scene. The twelve families indeed possessed deep foundations! Not only that, but some of them had strong beast spirits as their steeds.

There weren't many monster spirits in the world yet; their factions looked to Phoenix Mountain as their head. There weren't powerful monster spirit factions on land. That meant a lack of places to go for large numbers of monster spirits. The City of Supernaturals was the center of supernatural commerce in the world. There were many monster spirits here—some captured, others who'd sworn fealty of their own accord.

.....

On the observation platform.

The eight ministries, royal family, and three great organizations had sent representatives. Their people looked on solemnly.

"There's a lot of them."

"Indeed, the twelve families quietly raised a bunch of Arcanus for themselves."

"This is all Li Hao's fault. If he hadn't killed so many of our experts, our Novas would've progressed to Arcanus. How many powerhouses of the nine ministries and three great organizations did he kill?" someone cursed through transmission.

Li Hao's side had killed too many—a dozen Arcanus alone, to say nothing of Novas! Based on known cultivation rates, those Novas all stood a chance to become Arcanus if they received

sufficient resources. If the young man hadn't killed them all, there would be at least forty more Arcanus among the nine ministries and three great organizations today.

That was no small sum! And yet, they'd all died in Li Hao's hands.

"Li Hao is busy going against the Wind and Cloud Pavilion these days," someone laughed upon hearing Li Hao's name. "He's stayed out of our hair since. I hope the Wind and Cloud Pavilion can keep him preoccupied for longer!

"Apparently, he left Skystar City two days ago and someone saw him head to Sky Sword Manor. There's been no word of him since. It'd be best if he can come to the City of Supernaturals!"

The group roared with laughter, meaningful looks in their eyes. The city had suffered very small losses after the most recent clashes. Some of their Arcanus had died, but not their strongest. Most of the twelve families hadn't lost a single person.

On the contrary, as Li Hao made life more difficult for supernaturals, more of them fled to the City of Supernaturals for shelter. They threw themselves on the mercy of the ancient aristocracies, bolstering their strength instead.

It would be to everyone's great delight if Li Hao really did show up. Whether it was the City of Supernaturals killing the young man or him killing more of the city's powerhouses, any of these outcomes were good for the other factions.

Of course, such daydreams should not be spoken of at this moment. A group of people walked into the plaza from the rear garden as the group chatted. Lin Hongyu stood at their head! Wearing red robes today, her heroic figure was quite festive for the occasion. The group drew looks from everyone.

Some cloaked people followed by her side. No one minded their presence; some were curious, but didn't say anything since the City of Supernaturals was the host today. Perhaps these people were Lin candidates for positions of cabinet minister.

Upon seeing Lin Hongyu appear, a muscular middle-aged man seated on the first platform to the left called out, “Everyone has been waiting for you, City Lord Lin. We’re all waiting to hear the structure and constitution of this cabinet!”

“That’s right! You’ve only talked about choosing cabinet ministers—but how? Is it through fights in the ring or what? We’ll become the butt of all jokes for other factions if the city lord doesn’t properly explain due procedure...” There were discontented members of the audience as Lin Hongyu hadn’t given them much time to prepare. She’d simply announced that a cabinet would be formed and given no further details about anything else.

She ignored the voices and sat down at the head of the Lin delegation. She glowered when she saw the elders next to her. “Move away, these are seats for honored guests!”

The elders paused, then flushed beet red! This impudence! Had Lin Hongyu gone crazy?! She humiliated her own elders in front of so many visitors! What honored guests, how were vaunted elders of the family worth less than some outsiders?!

Seeing as the senior elder’s face was mottled with anger, his young grandson next to him snapped out, “Hongyu, you...”

Lin Hongyu was of the same generation as him and, in fact, a few years younger than him. Her expression chilled and she turned to him. “You have no notion of proper etiquette. Is it your place to call me by my name?”

The man’s expression darkened as well.

Meanwhile, surprise gripped the four sides of the plaza. It quickly changed to merriment. How interesting! They were greeted with a show as soon as they arrived. Were the Lins going to fight among themselves?

Although the cabinet establishment was yet to begin, it was just as nice to watch the entertainment that the Lins were providing. The other eleven families also beamed widely. The Lins were the strongest among the twelve, with Lin Hongyu possessing utmost potential and domineering strength. Apart from her, there were nine elders that were almost all Arcanus. The senior elder seemed to still be a martial master, but could bring the strength of an Arcanus to bear.

This was why the Lins could dominate the other families. They possessed overwhelming strength! The other families also had Arcanus—seven or eight at most, three or four at worst. They were no weaklings, but their battle strength did not hold a candle to Lin Hongyu's and they lacked Arcanus compared to the Lin elder council. It was naturally a most wonderful development to see the Lins quarrel between themselves.

Lin Hongyu looked frostily at her family's elders; the senior elder was absolutely livid. He cursed to himself when he saw that everyone in attendance was looking at them. He would turn the family into a laughingstock if he erupted now! Lin Hongyu, you bitch, just you wait! As soon as the family produces a peak six elements and wields the family's weapon, you'll be the first one suppressed!

As expected, you're an ingrate that can't really fit into the family!

A myriad of thoughts swarmed in his mind, but he chose to back to the second row with a snort. He cast a sidelong glance at Li Hao's group, the look in his eyes growing colder. Where had these bastards come from?

The matter settled, Lin Hongyu ignored her family and looked at the assembly. "The cabinet ministers will naturally be chosen based on strength! We will conduct the process through sparring!" she declared. "Of course, we are all powerhouses here and Arcanus. The ensuing ripples will be too strong once the fighting starts. To avoid injuring the supernaturals within the city, the city lord manor will be sealed off. No one will be allowed to approach!

"City defenders, designate a radius of one thousand meters around the city lord manor as restricted area. No one is permitted to draw near. Those who violate this order will be executed!"

There were plenty of soldiers outside the manor. Several of its generals shouted back, "Understood!"

A large number of troops rushed out to expel supernaturals in the vicinity. The factions seated in the audience had no opinions about this command. It did indeed cause a great disturbance when Arcanus fought. It was right to clear the area.

Not to mention, they didn't want weaklings to be able to study them. Only the strong had the right to observe when the strong fought.

Chapter 880: Massacre (II)

"In order to prevent shockwaves from damaging buildings and harming innocents, the city lord manor will be enshrouded by a divine weapon as well. This will also prevent those on the other side from spying on us!" Black cubes appeared in Lin Hongyu's hands.

"Is there a need for that?" Someone frowned.

"And why not?" she questioned peremptorily. "The Skystar Commander Office is determined to conquer the Skystar Commander Office. This is to prevent Li Hao's side from throwing a wrench in our works and also to keep them from plumbing the depths of our strength! Must you really showcase your abilities to everyone in the world?"

No one said a word, but neither did anyone display signs of disagreement. There were too many Arcanus present. Lin Hongyu could seal off the premises if she wished. They could break it open anytime.

The city lord flung out the black cubes; they melded into the void and gradually formed a defensive shield. Those from the nine ministries and royal family studied it, with someone transmitting, "This is similar to our Sky Gander fragments. It looks like the Lin family's foundations run deep..."

A sheen of light enveloped the surroundings. The crowd watched without protest. It felt like the plaza was isolated from the rest of the world when the barrier of light was complete and the power of the five elements wafted through the air.

“This is a shield of the five elements that even Arcanus will find it hard to break,” Lin Hongyu said calmly. “It is sufficient to endure the clashes between Arcanus and prevent aftershocks from reaching others!”

Nods rose and fell in the crowd. This was a wondrous treasure to be able to defend against an Arcanus attack. Next to Li Hao, Chen Zhongtian could barely believe his eyes. These guys were all fools, weren't they? They were just letting Lin Hongyu set all of this up as she would.

Of course, overconfidence was a factor. There was no helping it, there were too many Arcanus present. Everyone was highly assured of their abilities. They could fight a seven element by themselves, to say nothing of the fact that some had core origin replicas or ultimate weapons on them.

What could a mere defensive shield do against them?

Meanwhile, Li Hao was directing his supernatural characters to seal off the area. The black cubes were indeed the mirror fragments he'd collected from others. His loot combined with the Inspectorate's property made for six pieces. Hence, there was one in each cardinal direction as well as one above and below. With his supernatural characters working in conjunction, one could say that this area had spontaneously turned into a cage.

Of course, in the eyes of the powerhouses, they could easily break an ancient defensive weapon with the one hundred Arcanus on the scene. And so, they simply watched as the barrier of light vanished and the power of the five elements faded away. With the seal complete, the surroundings were isolated from the rest of the city.

“The City of Supernaturals is building a cabinet of ministers not to vie for supremacy,” Lin Hongyu intoned when someone else wanted to offer their opinion. “But to withstand potential attacks from the Skystar Commander Office!

“The ministers will not be chosen for a life of luxury. I will call upon all sides to levy an offensive at the Skystar Commander Office. If there are any who are unwilling or afraid of death, you can step forward now. We do not need those of two minds!”

The crowd erupted with laughter at her words. The muscular man who'd spoken earlier roared with mirth. "This is right up my alley! The Skystar Commander Office is arrogant and cocky—they even want to establish rules for all supernaturals in the world! Li Hao has yet to finish growing, but he talks quite the talk!"

"This is good, the Skystar Commander Office has a great reputation these days. If the City of Supernaturals can defeat them, we will surely rise to greater heights!"

"Precisely, we should start with them. But Silver Moon has plenty of powerhouses and they're very strong overall. With the nine ministries, royal family, and three great organizations in attendance today, we should all ally together! We have countless heavyweights as well! How can we let Li Hao throw around his weight like this?"

"Those guys in Silver Moon cultivate the secret arts we don't want and proclaim themselves as the legitimate rulers of the martial world. How ludicrous!"

"....." One patriarch after another of the eleven families spoke up in loud agreement. Attacking the Skystar Commander Office was good! Of course, the caveat was that they could bring others into the fold. Otherwise, the City of Supernaturals would be the only one to suffer heavy losses in this operation.

"Does anyone wish to withdraw?" Lin Hongyu asked amid heated discussion. "No blame will be assigned if you withdraw now. Otherwise, desertion from the battlefield will be punished by death!"

She looked at the wandering cultivator side, where there were a dozen cultivators standing. "All of you are wandering cultivators and as such, free and unfettered. There will be no retreat available if you insist on participating in the cabinet minister election!"

"The city lord thinks too little of us," beamed an ethereal old man. "That Li Hao knows not the heavenly dao or the meaning of death, yet seeks to enact rules for supernaturals! What a joke! We are wandering cultivators and unwilling to be subject to his fetters. If we really do become one of the ministers, we will naturally charge at the forefront. Executing Li Hao is a task that all supernaturals are willing to undertake."

“The world’s miseries have long been inflicted by Li Hao!” sighed a person in the crowd. “Would so many supernatural powerhouses have died if not for him? They are our forefathers, but that demon killed them all! What a shame that we lacked sufficient strength to right this wrong. We would’ve killed that animal long ago!”

“.....” Various wandering cultivators brimmed with righteous indignation. Everyone would have their actions curtailed if Li Hao didn’t die, who wanted that? A strong faction such as the City of Supernaturals being willing to take a step forward was something they were all delighted to see.

Lin Hongyu, however, sighed to herself. You guys all have a death wish! I gave you a chance, especially to the wandering cultivators. Some of you rushed here from other places and aren’t a resident of the City of Supernaturals. I gave you a chance to withdraw. You might not have gotten away, but at least you wouldn’t die.

But now... you no longer have that chance.

She inclined her head and looked at Li Hao. I’ve done everything you wanted me to do, it’s up to you now. I’d wanted to bring some people over to our side, but you said there was no need, so I wash my hands of this.

.....

Li Hao was scanning the crowd and sighing to himself how many Arcanus there were. Of the twelve ancient aristocracies, the Lins boasted the highest number of Arcanus within their ranks—ten total. There were roughly fifty wandering cultivators and ten Arcanus on their side as well. Li Hao was astonished—how had they cultivated to this level?

Had they entered ruins or become the pawns of certain factions? Did they seek to infiltrate the City of Supernaturals?

When it came to the other eleven aristocracies, the more numerous ones possessed eight Arcanus while the lesser ones possessed five. They averaged five Arcanus per family, making for a total of nearly sixty.

Those in attendance to observe from other major factions were nearly all Arcanus—there were a dozen of them. There was a sum of one hundred Arcanus on the scene! One had to say, these people did have the right to be so confident.

Apart from these Arcanus, there were also some followers and family members that numbered approximately one hundred people. The grand total of nearly three hundred people on the scene was all very powerful. If he took all of them out in one fell swoop, wouldn't that exterminate nearly all of the heavyweights in the supernatural world, apart from the major factions?

The crowd agitated with impatience when Lin Hongyu still didn't speak of rules or procedure.

"Are we not starting yet, City Lord Lin?"

"Yeah!"

Lin Hongyu looked at Li Hao again; her gaze was followed by many others. The young man smiled and looked at various parts of the plaza.

"The world's miseries have long been inflicted by Li Hao... This is... something truly unexpected!"

Someone's eyes widened in the crowd as a streak of sword light illuminated the world!

"Kill them all!" An arctic yell sounded. Certain people hidden in the crowd made their moves, as did Li Hao draw his sword.

Swish!

An Arcanus was run clean through, a blank look on his face.

“Li Hao, that’s Li Hao!” someone yelled!

The twelve families were still at a loss, coming back to their senses with incredulity only when they heard the shout. The senior Lin elder purpled with fury as he roared, “Lin Hongyu, you traitor!”

The strongest of his family had colluded with Li Hao! The city lord of the City of Supernaturals had ushered the wolf into the house and permitted Li Hao to come to this locale! It was unbelievable!

The elder wanted to escape as soon as he denounced Lin Hongyu, but a pain in his chest commanded his attention. He looked down to see the boy toy having punched through his chest.

“We’re not the ones who want to kill the Lin elders.” Chen Zhongtian smiled meaningfully.

Lin Hongyu stood off to the side with an impassive expression. She’d given the order to kill all of these antiques, just in case they caused trouble later on. Having reached the position of city lord, she wasn’t someone who overflowed with mercy. These family members hemmed her in at every turn and treated her as a tool to facilitate the family’s expansion. They were best at getting in her way.

In that case, all of them could die!

She saw some family members fleeing madly for their lives. A curved blade appeared in her hand and vanished to behead a running youngster. Resentment and fury filled the youngster’s eyes, but Lin Hongyu didn’t care. Dead was dead, what was the point of hate?

The other families came to their senses and shouted with fury. “This is a trap! These bastards!”

“Kill them!”

Clashes sounded through the wandering cultivators as Sky Sword, Earthturner Sword, Hou Xiaochen, and Deputy Zhou erupted in unison. Sword light flashed, golden fists manifested, and a spear split the void as rumbles rang out!

Explosions detonated, instantly wiping out half of the wandering cultivators. Some of the Arcanus were dead on the spot—the survivors tried to run, but a blow that overturned heaven and earth churned their way!

The wandering cultivators were all dead after two swords swept through the area. Of their four powerhouses, the weakest was six element Arcanus. The gap was too great between them and their attackers. Although there were a dozen of them, they all passed to the underworld in the blink of an eye!

It only took the span of a breath.

Over on the Lin family side, Lin Hongyu and Chen Zhongtian attacked in tandem. Although some elders mourned a furious resistance, two peak six elements made quick work of them. The Lin elders were the first to die, but there was one survivor apart from Lin Hongyu—an elder that looked at the city lord with eyes of horror.

“Third elder, watch the show with me,” Lin Hongyu said calmly. “You are the only one who says a word in my defense in normal times. Today, you can be spared!”

“Hongyu...” The third elder was ashen-faced as he looked incredulously around him. Even now, the scene happening in front of his eyes was impossible to believe. Lin Hongyu never resisted the family, so they could safely ignore her indignation. Although she’d lost her temper yesterday, there hadn’t been much killing intent in her. Who would’ve thought that she’d kill everyone today!