

Star Gate 921

Chapter 921: Li Hao's Tyranny (I)

Li Hao handed over all of his resources to the Black Armor. He was so anguished about depleting his personal wealth that he kept a firm grip on his storage ring, unable to relinquish it.

The Black Armor held onto the other half of the storage ring in a standoff with the young man. "We can forget it if you're not willing," he finally said.

"I'm willing!" It hurt Li Hao so much to let go of the storage ring. That contained the sum total of his personal fortune. "I'll ram my head against a wall and die here if we don't seize the mine!"

The Black Armor couldn't be bothered to respond. It'd be best if you did that, it'll save me a lot of trouble.

Seeing the man walk off to the side to recover his strength, Li Hao transmitted, "Brother Wang, what's up? Why are you so afraid of him? Is his old man the Human King or something?"

"Don't talk nonsense!" transmitted a horrified Director General Wang. The kid was so ridiculous sometimes.

"Are you that afraid of him?"

"You don't understand... Forget it, I'll summarize that you should stay away from him if possible. He's... different and the classmate of Evenround Martial's principal. He's the junior of the Human King and they basically count as the same generation, do you understand? He's not like us, students in name only after thousands of years. He was a right and proper student at Demonic Martial, just a few years after the greats. The key thing is that he's a premier personage himself..."

"That's all in the past." Li Hao struggled.

“No shit, so you can set it aside. But can I set it aside?” Director General Wang rolled his eyes. You’re not of that age, so of course you don’t care. Can I do the same? “How did you get him here? Apparently... he doesn’t have a good temper and is more... aloof...”

“I spent money to do so.”

The director general didn’t know what to say. Was this a matter of simply spending money? Though, he had to say that he was much more at ease now that this one was here. He’d been slightly worried before, but now all was fine.

Li Hao sighed and sat down cross-legged, seven auras shimmering over his body. All sorts of animals and plants appeared around him as the auras enveloped him. A peculiar energy began fortifying him as it was shifted from the secondary dimension.

Preoccupied with recovering his strength, the Black Armor suddenly looked at Li Hao and the nat Director General Wang. “What is that?” he transmitted.

“Special energy from the secondary dimension, I think?”

“He’s... found it?”

“Mmhmm.”

The Black Armor was rather surprised. Li Hao had mentioned it before, but the former had thought it would be very difficult for Li Hao to locate the dimension. It was a similar instance to the person who first discovered the core origin universe.

Whoever discovered it first would occupy the absolute first mover’s advantage. In New Martial, that was the Heavenly Emperor, was it not? Therefore, he became the strongest in the world.

A variety of thoughts assailed the Black Armor as he looked distractedly at the young man. Li Hao hadn't mentioned that he'd already located the secondary dimension!

Director General Wang laughed to himself when he saw his martial uncle lose his train of thought. Don't you like putting on an unconcerned air? You can't keep that up now, can you? He hastily blanked his mind when the Black Armor looked over. Was this one... spying on his internal ripples?

I'm an Immortal, you can't peer into my thoughts!

"I once studied psychology," the Black Armor's voice sounded in his ears. "I'll teach you how to be a proper person if you look at me with that look again!"

"....." Director General Wang inwardly reeled with horror and quickly sat down with his eyes closed to meditate. It was such an uncomfortable feeling to be in close quarters with this one!

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Li Hao wasn't in a rush to take action. The faint energy ripples in the air told him that the city formation was in the process of activating. There weren't strong ripples in the city yet, so he wasn't in a hurry. There were some other plant spirits that hadn't joined this operation, so he needed to be on guard against trouble from their instigation. At the very least, the plant spirit of the Inspectorate wasn't involved.

The Ministry of the Inspectorate, Finance, and Internal Affairs... might have abstained from this operation. However, their plant spirits were latent sources of trouble all the same. They needed to be eliminated.

As for too much energy accumulating in the central region after eliminating them... That was hardly an issue. He had a bunch of starving plant spirits on his side! Therefore, there was no problem at all in killing them. The eight from the Wind and Cloud Pavilion alone could absorb all of the energy emanated from the premises, to say nothing of anything else. They were almost starving to death. How would there be a problem with too much ambient energy?

A tremor suddenly ran through the ground.

“Another formation has been activated!” Director General Wang’s eyes shot open. This was the second formation—the military formation!

The first one had been the one of the guardian plant spirits. That one was already active. With a second coming online, Li Hao opened his eyes as well.

A faint halo of energy manifested in the surroundings and slowly came down on one side of Skystar Town.

“The formation will isolate this part of the world once it is activated!” Director General Wang explained quickly. “It was meant to protect the town’s residents, so it could envelop the entire town. Times are different now, so it can only cover one part of its territory.

“The plant spirit formation doesn’t possess any offensive power—it’s only good for defense. The military formation possesses offensive capabilities, fulfilling that gap. These guys are preparing to attack that vice commander and also prevent other plant spirits from involving themselves.”

The bramble rose was very shrewd. Of course it’d be concerned about someone sneaking in and making off with the mine. The plant spirit formation was being used to seal off the mine so that the other plant spirits couldn’t enter. Meanwhile, the military formation that old Skystar King Jiang Chen activated was meant to kill that vice commander.

“Does it have strong defensive capabilities?” Li Hao raised an eyebrow.

“Very strong!” nodded the director general. “But that was back in the day, it’s hard to say now. It depends on how much energy is stored inside the town and whether or not the plant spirits are cooperating. Even with joint coordination from the participating plant spirits, they may not be able to bring the formation’s full strength to bear.”

He looked at Li Hao. "Don't worry, we should be able to make it inside. Martial uncle is here."

The Black Armor was silent.

"We might need to pay attention to the plant spirits outside as well," Li Hao took a deep breath. "We need to act both inside and outside at the same time. Firstly, we need to eliminate the plant spirits and prevent any word from reaching outside."

He was being very cautious to prevent any haphazard surprises.

"I'm certain that the Inspectorate and some of the other ministries are not involved, but they may be paying attention to any happenings. If one of them has any armor with them, they'll easily communicate with those inside the town and expose our presence. Therefore, we need to strike fast and fiercely to spontaneously eliminate these guys!

"It's not easy to take down the nine ministries in the outside world," the young man declared. "Their elimination will easily raise a disturbance through the dynasty.

"Please wait a moment, everyone. I need to be certain of how many plant spirits have remained at their stations. Additionally, I need to take care of some business outside."

"Now?"

"Now!" nodded Li Hao. "They won't succeed at the mine that easily. If they could, there would be no need to wait until now. We can make use of them trapping themselves in place with activating the formation and go about our own business with peace of mind. We won't be raising much attention that way.

“Senior, we’ll need you to sweep away the disordered core origin here.” Li Hao looked at the Black Armor. “The senior can move toward the direction of the Inspectorate’s plant spirit while Director General Wang heads towards Internal Affairs’ plant spirit...”

“The rest of you can wait here for my arrangement. I’m going up to confirm each side’s plant spirit location and who has remained behind. If one of them’s left, that means their disordered core origin might’ve already been cleared. We need to be sure of this...”

No one said anything about his swift arrangements. They were here at Li Hao’s behest and his pay. Everything would be as he said it was. It was his responsibility to bear alone if anything undesirable happened.

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The young man swiftly walked out of the ruins and accessed the armor’s communication system. Figures flew through the air moments later; heavyweights quickly convened. Even Yao Si at the Night Watchers presented himself.

This disturbance caused a ripple effect through the city. The Skystar Commander Office had just eliminated the Wind and Cloud Pavilion. Were they going to do something else now?

Li Hao’s voice rang through the air as large screens appeared throughout Skystar City. They protected the young man’s stern figure.

“According to our latest intelligence reports, the three great organizations had infiltrated the capital and seek to topple the dynasty! The Skystar Commander Office will fully take on this responsibility. The city is hereby sealed and all superhumans inside are to present themselves at the central plaza for registration!

“Skystar’s Demon Hunter Army, Night Watchers, and commanders of the four directions will fully mobilize to hunt down unregistered superhumans! Night Watchers will personally visit the eight ministries, royal family, prince’s complexes, and noble manors to register their superhumans!

“No one is to obstruct the Night Watchers! Those who do will be found guilty of colluding with the spies! We request everyone’s participation to complete the registration of superhumans. Any who hides unregistered personnel will be sentenced as insurrectionists!”

The city shook from his announcement.

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“This impudence!” Even the Skystar King could no longer sit still in the palace. “Where do you steal such gall from?!”

How was that bastard Li Hao so bold?! He was going to seal off the city and investigate the number of superhumans each faction had. This was completely unacceptable to everyone, not to mention that the royal family was included in his scope!

Was Li Hao crazy??

Or did he know that multiple powerhouses had entered the ruins and was doing this on purpose? He wanted to antagonize his enemies so they sent out their experts, as well as confirming just who was in the ruins?

Countless possibilities ran through the king’s mind as his children arrived at the throne room.

“Royal father,” one of them raged as soon as they crossed the threshold. “This Li Hao really thinks of himself as the emperor! The Skystar Commander Office is just one of the commanders. Where does he get the authority to search the royal palace?!”

These royal descendants were quite enraged. Such blatant provocation!

Chapter 922: Li Hao's Tyranny (II)

At the same time, various forceful presences rose from all around Skystar City.

“Night Watchers, mobilize!” echoed Yao Si's voice. “Seal off the city gates and execute anyone who tries to cross them!”

“The Inspectorate will assist the Skystar Commander Office in this investigation!” another voice rang through the city. “Order will be restored to the capital. No one is permitted to cause trouble!”

The Skystar King's expression changed drastically as he roared like a wounded lion, “Bastard!”

The Inspectorate!

So the Inspectorate was involved in this! Didn't this announcement also declare that they had sworn fealty to Li Hao? Damn it! Thank goodness they hadn't let the old man from the Inspectorate participate in the operation. There would be enormous trouble if they had!

But damn it all the same!

“Royal father...”

“Shut up!” yelled the Skystar King, interrupting his children. He quickly took stock of the surroundings, his face tightening when he detected eight Arcanus presences around the palace.

Silver Moon powerhouses!

He swiftly walked out of the palace hall to see He Yong hovering in the air, followed by Earthturner Sword, Sky Sword, and one thousand Demon Hunters.

“The Skystar Commander Office is in pursuit of evil supernaturals!” He Yong called out with a complicated expression. “We are here to ensure order in the dynasty and to protect the king. The knaves might be hiding in the palace, so we request the Skystar King to permit the Demon Hunters to enter the palace and search for superhumans. These cretin will not be permitted to harm the king!

“Everything being done today is for the dynasty and the royal family! Everyone is responsible to do their part for peace and order throughout the land. I will seek forgiveness and appropriate punishment on the morrow for my offenses today! Right now, we request that the Skystar King open the palace doors and command your superhumans to convene in the plaza outside. They are to present themselves for registration!”

“Are you rebelling, He Yong?” someone yelled before the Skystar King could respond. A figure rose into the air, their face mottled with anger.

The nine ministries had never dared barge into the palace in all these years. But today, He Yong brought troops straight to their doors! He deserved death!

“Such is the law,” He Yong answered aloofly. “Everyone should follow it. Not to mention, all that we do is for Skystar Dynasty, the royal family, and the world. If even the royal family can disregard the law, then how will the people respect it?”

He manifested a screen of light with a wave of his hand.

“Prince Ming, the entire city’s residents are watching us right now. How will the other institutions obey if the royal family does not respect these orders? He Yong is doing this for everyone’s good. How will we explain ourselves to the world if enemy spies really have infiltrated the palace and hurt Your Majesty?”

There had been nine princes in the royal family. Two were dead, leaving seven alive. Prince Ming wore an unpleasant expression on his face. He Yong was live streaming this raid to the rest of the city! And since when did Skystar City have so many screens that they could be set up everywhere?

There seemed to be one on every street and crowds gathered around each one.

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The Ministry of Armed Forces.

Yuan Shuo had come in person with many Demon Hunters and some Night Watchers. He looked coldly at the middle-aged man in front of him.

“Open up the ministry and assist the Skystar Commander Office in this investigation! Qi Dinghai—Minister Qi—you are a soldier, so you should do what a soldier should do! Do you think I’ll retreat just because you have one of my disciples standing in my way? You’ll be responsible for the consequences if you enrage me!”

Yuan Xingwu didn’t say a word and hung his head, not daring to look at his teacher.

“Why do this?” Qi Dinghai sighed and set foot into the air. “In doing so...”

Yuan Shuo’s presence flared as he bit off, “What will Armed Forces do in return? Rebel? Qi Pingjiang isn’t here, and even if he was, would you force him to mutiny as well?”

“...very well, conduct your investigation!” Qi Dinghai smiled after a long look at the old man. “Armed Forces is not afraid of an investigation, but you truly are over the line!”

“Hmph!” Yuan Shuo ignored his counterpart and waved his hand. “Set up shop in the Ministry of Armed Forces and gather all superhumans in one area! Any superhumans that have not convened within fifteen minutes will be executed!”

Qi Dinghai didn't say a word. The ministry's doors were quickly opened and troops of Night Watchers marched in. Some were excited, others were apprehensive.

This day had come too quickly. The Skystar Commander Office was going to investigate and clean house at the nine ministries and royal family! This was... incredible! But as one of the investigating personnel, the Night Watchers were too agitated for words. Since when could they so openly enter the ministry and demand to see their superhumans?

It was... unbelievable.

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The Ministry of Finance.

"I hope you can cooperate, Minister Liu." Deputy Zhou was in residence. "It's just a registration list, nothing else."

"Of course we will." Liu Yunqing was all smiles. "Don't worry, Deputy Zhou. The Ministry of Finance does not harbor any other thoughts."

"That's good." Deputy Zhou smiled in return. The Lius had started off as merchants. When it came to merchants... the Lius would not stick their necks out if they were nicely addressed. Although both ministers of Finance were present, this was an easier place for the deputy to pacify.

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Both ministers of Internal Affairs were also present. Yao Si and Hou Xiaochen had come to visit. They held down the fort with their troops while Mu Hai looked on peacefully, permitting them to do as they would. He seemed to be lost in his own thoughts.

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The Ministry of Examination, Commerce, and Foreign Relations.

Of these three, only the current minister of Commerce was still alive. Qian Wanhao looked coldly at his visitor—Northern Fist. Not too far away was Tyrant Blade at Examination, and further away was Light Sword at Foreign Relations.

Of the latter two, the old ministers were in the ruins and the current ministers had been anticipated by Li Hao. None of the vice ministers dared offer any resistance, not to mention it was renowned Silver Moon martial masters on their doorstep.

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Silver Moon powerhouses settled in at various critical institutions, but no one came to the Inspectorate. Just as inspectors looked at each other curiously, Chen Yao stepped into the main hall and coughed for attention.

“All Inspectorate headquarter superhumans are to present themselves and assist in the registration! Superhumans outside headquarters are to coordinate with the Skystar Commander Office and carry out their registration duties!”

The announcement stunned many. They could say before that they were helping the office out of obligation and duty. But now... the Skystar Commander Office had sent people everywhere but the Inspectorate. Chen Yao was voluntarily assembling his subordinates for resignation. What did that mean?

Some grasped the connotations of their minister's actions and shifted uneasily, not knowing if this was good or bad. The vice ministers swallowed hard. Who would've thought that our minister would... join Li Hao's side without making a peep? Oh my heavens, this is such a huge surprise!

“Alright now, stop thinking so wildly,” laughed Chen Yao. “The Inspectorate and Night Watchers were one family to begin with and the Skystar Commander Office comes from the Inspectorate. We are all one big family. All we need to do is coordinate with the Skystar Commander Office. Don’t cause any trouble now!”

No one made a sound as they quietly formed lines at their designated spots for registration. Chen Yao looked into the distance, at where the Ministry of Administration stood. That was the first among the nine ministries! Although Zhao Tianyang wasn’t there at the moment, his son, the current minister Zhao Huaimin was, and he was no weakling.

Suppressing Administration was key. Who would be assigned that task? Would Li Hao go himself? It would be hard to bring them to heel without a heavyweight on the scene. Problems could easily develop.

As Chen Yao mused, his eyes picked out a crowd of people heading over from Administration. His jaw almost dropped with shock when he saw his father beaming at the head.

“Sage nephew Zhao thinks of the entire world from his position as the first among the nine ministries,” Chen Zhongtian announced brightly. “Of course he would cooperate with the registration!”

Chen Yao couldn’t pick his jaw up off the ground. When did my dad run out? And... to suppress the number one ministry! This meant that it was open hostility with the rest of the nine ministries, that the Inspectorate was seceding from them!

Chen Zhongtian’s appearance meant too much.

Another person arrived at the Inspectorate as Chen Yao grappled with his shock. He seemed unwilling, unhappy, and rather despondent. The man raised a cupped fist salute from far away.

“Kong Jie of the Silver Moon Inspectorate greets the headquarter inspector general! Just give me a copy when you finish the registration list...” He left unwillingly after delivering the message.

Everyone else had gone to suppress a faction, but he'd come to be an errand boy to his old boss. Damned if it wasn't annoying!

Chen Yao's already assembling the list without me here, what else can I do? I'm going to see what fun there is to be had at the other ministries!

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The Ministry of Administration.

Zhao Huaimin was shocked by the turn of events. "To think that Uncle Chen would..." he whispered after a long time. "Ai, does Uncle Chen also think that the Skystar Commander Office possesses a brighter future than the nine ministries?"

He sighed, not knowing what to say.

Although Chen Zhongtian was less than Zhao Tianyang and Qi Pingjiang, he'd always been firmly number three and part of the core of the nine ministries. His personal attention today represented too much. The nine ministries' confidence would be shattered from here on out.

Two of the old ministers were dead, four of the remaining seven were in the ruins. One had come in person to suppress them and the ones at Finance and Commerce refused to show themselves. Zhao Huaimin was gripped by inexplicable sadness. The alliance of the nine ministries... had broken.

Not only him, but everyone paying attention to the happenings quieted. Chen Zhongtian... the Chen family had completely dedicated themselves to Li Hao's cause. The various screens depicted what was happening throughout the city.

There was even one in front of the palace that the Skystar King was watching. Chen Zhongtian... The internal discord between the nine ministries wasn't severe. It'd been a source of entertainment for him in the past.

But now, the number three that was the Inspectorate had quietly joined Li Hao's banner. Too much information was contained within this realization.

Chapter 923: Li Hao's Tyranny (III)

Sky Sword, Earthturner Sword, and Southern Fist were in place at the royal palace. The Skystar King stared at Earthturner Sword. The man's presence was so overwhelming that the king's heart leapt with alarm.

Was that... six element Arcanus? He'd improved so quickly! And Sky Sword was extremely domineering as well! Since when did the Skystar Commander Office have the strength to dominate all sides? Although the other ministries didn't have many powerhouses—one or two at best, this was still a frightful development for the royal family. Silver Moon martial masters had grown so strong under Li Hao that it was horrifying.

Some of the prince's complexes inside Skystar City were being overseen by other powerhouses. The six veteran Silver Moon martial masters—Thunderbolt Fist and the others—had swiftly descended upon them to keep them in line. Filled with blood qi, their presences rose high in the sky. It was all very baffling.

They were obviously still martial masters, but why were their presences so strong?

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A figure manifested on the screen and explained in a calm voice, "The registration will begin now. Everyone is to enter their name, level of strength, supernatural attribute, faction, age, and identity. Anyone who falsifies their information will be hauled off to the gaol for further determination!

"No superhuman is to leave the premises during the registration period!

"The four city gates are shut. Any supernatural that attempts to flee may do so. Their presences will be recorded. The Skystar Commander Office will expand the registration to the rest of the world

after the one at Skystar City is complete and these deserters will face the consequences of their actions then. They will be found sooner or later even if they run to the City of Supernaturals...”

Some superhumans in the city listened with pounding hearts, but Li Hao’s words reminded them of another option. There weren’t many powerhouses standing guard at the city gates. Any superhuman with problems in their background was thinking, why don’t we... flee to the City of Supernaturals?

Apparently the meeting to select cabinet ministers was still ongoing at the City of Supernaturals. Nearly one hundred Arcanus had gathered in a dominating show of force. Even Li Hao would have to steer clear.

Should they... run?

Some agents of the three great organizations and scouts of various factions watched with their hearts in their mouths. Their only thought now was to run as fast as possible.

Large sums of Night Watchers mobilized, nearly each one equipped with a supernatural probe. If these secret agents lingered, they might truly be captured and executed. The royal family and nine ministries didn’t seem ready to resist. If these secret agents stuck their head out, they would truly be courting death.

The royal family and nine ministries weren’t fighting back partially because their premier powerhouses weren’t present, and partially because they didn’t wish to cause new complications. In their view, Li Hao was doing this to humiliate them. The young man wanted nothing more than for these factions to summon their heavyweights back. Otherwise, so what if a superhuman registry was being created?

So what if everyone’s strength was openly listed?

The more Li Hao behaved thus, the less they could bring back their powerhouses. At the very least, the young man hadn’t made up his mind to declare open warfare on the royal family and nine ministries. He was just intimidating all sides.

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Inside the palace.

The Skystar King took a deep breath and intoned, “Cooperate with their investigation.”

“Royal father!”

“Royal brother!” A group of heavyweights protested beneath the throne, the epitome of embarrassment and fury.

“The heavens will make someone arrogant first when they seek to destroy them!” the Skystar King said coldly. The current Li Hao was far too brazen. Did he think he was invincible just because he’d eliminated the Wind and Cloud Pavilion?

It was simply that no one was offering resistance at the moment. If a fight broke out... Li Hao would have no advantages or upper hand to speak of. This was true even with Silver Moon martial masters being stronger than previously anticipated.

Li Hao quickly received word that the old ministers of Armed Forces, Administration, Examination, and Foreign Relations were absent. This meant that these four ministries had gone to the ruins and their plant spirits... were most likely part of the operation. The plant spirits of the other ministries were probably still in place at their spots.

“This means that only the plant spirits of Internal Affairs, Finance, the Inspectorate, and Commerce are still present...”

The Skystar Commander Office.

Li Hao transmitted through the armor after receiving new reports, “Keep an eye on everyone and don’t let any superhuman approach the ruin entrances! Keep them at bay at all costs, even if it means starting a feud. There’s no need to be afraid of anything!”

He’d sealed off the outside world from communicating with those inside. That was the first step. With his lack of ample personnel, he had the Inspectorate participate directly to keep all parties in check. The presence of only four plant spirits on the other side made for an easy operation.

Director General Wang would be in charge of one, the Black Armor in charge of another. The redwood would take one, and the little tree, the weak plant spirits, and the two puppets could take care of another.

So long as they successfully eliminated these four and set the eight from the Wind and Cloud Pavilion to take over their spots, whichever of the four remaining ministries left that wished to enter the ruins would do so to their doom. He could issue a forewarning to the Inspectorate first, just in case they accidentally sent someone in.

There would be no permissible contact between the two worlds! As for the other ministries, he simply needed to seal off the entrance. No problems would arise if there were no plant spirits below and those above could not enter.

“Go to the ruins and relay my orders,” Li Hao said to Yu Luochoa. “They are to wait for my command and either not take action, or make sure it is fatal if they do. The four plant spirits need to die swiftly without too much of a disturbance. The eight plant spirits of the Wind and Cloud Pavilion should be ready to absorb energy at a moment’s notice. Those on the inside cannot be permitted to detect an anomaly!”

“Understood!” Manager Yu was very excited by the young man’s forcefulness today. Having the Skystar Commander Office seal off Skystar City was incredible!

But one had to say, there were countless heavyweights at the office these days. Their targets were not ready to fight to the death and four of their premier ministers were not in attendance. There would be no widespread bloodshed that occurred.

The ministries and royal family did not have the strength to pit themselves against Li Hao, so they could only choose to concede. At the very least, it was just an assessment of their strength and not outright eradication.

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At the same time, news swiftly spread throughout the land.

Celestial.

In a palace hovering over the sea, the Celestial Sword Immortal glanced at a transmission pendant.

“Who would’ve thought that Silver Moon would truly rally together so swiftly?” she sighed with emotion. “It has been hard for anyone to unify Silver Moon’s martial world ever since the ancient times. This Li Hao does have some skill to his name.

“With the Inspectorate also throwing their weight behind him, this registration of strength is just the first step. He might use this to determine if he can send his entire force to eliminate them next!”

“Noble Celestial, will Li Hao really dare attack the royal family and nine ministries?”

“Why won’t he?” Celestial smiled. “But... it doesn’t have much to do with us at present. However, Li Hao is gradually completing his grand endeavor. He’s becoming harder to withstand.”

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Yama headquarters, deep within a mountain.

The tyrannical Yama looked at the dozen court masters below him and said in a muffled voice, “This Li Hao... possesses quite some gall! What surprises me more is that the trash at the nine ministries and royal family have just rolled over, just like that? Can it be that their powerhouses aren’t in residence at their headquarters?”

He frowned with the possibility as there were still premier heavyweights on the other side. Jiang Chen, Qi Pingjiang, Zhao Tianyang were all elite powerhouses. Had all of these legendary figures just accepted their fate without breathing a word of protest?

How strange!

This burly, hulking figure of a man suddenly realized something and snorted, “Can it be... that they’re absent from their posts?”

Li Hao might know something and his current actions were a venting of his irritations. Could it be that he was making use of the opportunity to cause trouble? Had all of these guys gone to the Skystar Town ruins?

That was very possible!

Having been forced to this step... perhaps... these guys... really did have designs on the Skystar mine.

“In that case, Li Hao will be in grave trouble once they succeed. I wonder if his action will force them to come back? But just that’s not enough. It’s best if they start fighting, that will ensure that the powerhouses will return. Otherwise, Li Hao’s moves might be ignored.” Yama had guessed at everything and suddenly understood the young man. Perhaps he was starting to panic and hoped to use these developments to force out the powerhouses. As for whether or not the attempt on the mine would be repeated at a later date, no one knew.

“Have our people withdraw from Skystar City! Don’t give the Skystar Commander Office any trouble...” Yama laughed. “If Li Hao is willing to fight them, then let them fight! Our people shall not be involved.”

“Understood!” Someone quickly ran off with these orders.

Chapter 924: Li Hao’s Tyranny (IV)

Over on Red Moon’s side, Ying Hongyue also immediately guessed at the reason behind Li Hao’s actions. He frowned slightly as he conversed with the scarlet cloak in front of him.

“Even if Li Hao forces these people out with his moves, it is only drinking poison to quench his thirst. I don’t think his goal is that simple. If it’s just to lord it over his enemies and force them to abandon their plan to seize the mine... that would be too juvenile.”

Indeed, juvenile.

The young man’s movements had exposed the fact that the Inspectorate had joined his side. If this wasn’t blatantly made apparent, the most the public could do was suspect that the Inspectorate was with him. Now, he’d fully exposed all of his forces.

It was not a good development for Li Hao.

“Then... does the Red Moon leader think that Li Hao has another goal?” whispered the scarlet cloak after a tremor ran through it.

“Sealing off Skystar City with such fanfare and forcing the nine ministries and royal family... Do you think it’s to draw attention from those below ground?” Ying Hongyue nodded after some thought. “I don’t believe that Li Hao is uninterested in the Skystar mine. If the nine ministries and royal family are paying attention to what is above ground, will he do something beneath?”

Everyone was interested in the Skystar mine. It was the singular biggest mine in the world and the most well-preserved one. Its explosion would outright start the second awakening. The mine was

sufficient to support the revival of a lot of powerhouses. It was just that the outside world did not currently support large quantities of heavyweights from appearing. Otherwise, even with so many plant spirits present, the mine would've been long seized by someone else.

"I know a bit about Skystar Town," the scarlet cloak said softly. "There are ten plant spirits still in residence and the bramble rose is near the Saint level. The other nine are all Immortals and they've recovered to a greater degree than plant spirits elsewhere.

"Even if Li Hao has designs on the mine, do you think he can defeat the plant spirits? Not to mention, these plant spirits have yet to take the mine for themselves because its guard was the vice commander of Skystar Town back in the day. He was near Saint level himself and might have set foot into it by now.

"Li Hao will have to fight at least two Saints if he wishes to seize the mine!" laughed the scarlet cloak. "He'd need two Saints among his own people... and they have to be entering from the outside world. He won't stand a chance otherwise. Of course, there's a possibility that he allies with one of them to move against the other. But the two are on similar footing strength-wise, or there would've long been a conclusion to their fight. I don't think Li Hao can do anything..."

There was a Saint in residence at Battle Heaven; all of the eight main cities had one. The key wasn't in whether or not they had revived, but whether or not they could leave the ruins. No matter how much the young man schemed and plotted, all of it was useless when it came to the mine.

"Our consideration at present should be if this will herald the second awakening ahead of time. The bramble rose may have truly set out to march against the vice commander. Once the two sides are caught in the thick of battle and the mine erupts from being destroyed, energy will flood into the world and set the second awakening in motion. How to occupy the upper hand is what we should consider."

Li Hao's actions were proof of this outcome. As for whether or not the young man would emerge with any gains from muddled waters... the red cloak didn't think so. Where would he go to obtain two Saints??

Not to mention, he wouldn't be able to transport them to Skystar. The stronger the heavyweight, the harder it was for them to leave the ruins.

“Is there no way at all to move a Saint to Skystar Town?” Ying Hongyue frowned slightly. He wasn’t fully convinced as Li Hao had become ever more difficult to see through. He’d known that the young man was out of control ever since Li Hao broke the mallet of the Honges. This was no longer a lad that he could reshape at will.

“None!” The scarlet shadow shook its head. “The stronger one is, the more difficult it is! The only exception is if a modern human reaches the Saint level. Otherwise... the world might have developed its own consciousness. It will further exclude those of New Martial. The stronger one is, the greater the repulsion!”

“Apexes might be able to use some powerful treasures to protect themselves and force themselves into the world. However, they won’t be able to use their full strength in a fight. But if a Saint appears, that will ignite an explosion in the void and even summon the appearance of heaven’s will to kill the Saint!”

“Heaven’s will?” Ying Hongyue murmured thoughtfully. “Do you think Li Hao is favored by the heavens?”

“That’s hard to say,” mused the scarlet cloak. “To be honest... you have more of a chance of that. But... are you really unable to combine the seven bloodlines as one? If that is still the case and Li Hao continues to grow stronger, then we are indeed in trouble.”

“No, I can’t.” Ying Hongyue shook his head. “It was because your people prevented me before, now I find that that is no longer the issue. The stronger Li Hao grows, the more the seven bloodlines agitate and no longer listen that well to my commands.”

“The Red Moon leader misunderstands, we have never prevented you from combining the seven bloodlines...”

Ying Hongyue smiled without a word. You know as well as me if you’ve obstructed me in the past. At the moment, he continuously turned things over and even put himself in Li Hao’s shoes. If all of

the commotion was only to prevent the various sides from exploring Skystar Town, then the young man's actions were ridiculously unwise.

If they couldn't do so today, they would do so tomorrow. If not tomorrow, then the day after tomorrow. They wouldn't stop unless Li Hao decided to declare open warfare on the royal family and nine ministries. If he didn't, all of these moves were a joke.

Therefore, Li Hao's plots absolutely involved the mine. But it was just as the scarlet cloak said, if the young man lacked sufficient strength to see his plans through, he could only choose to partner with one side.

The bramble rose was impossible, so that left the vice commander of Skystar Town.

"Do you think Li Hao's reached some sort of agreement with the vice commander?" asked Ying Hongyue when his thoughts traveled here. "Is he doing this to distract the bramble rose and take coordinated action to eliminate these plant spirits?"

That was most likely!

And yet, the scarlet cloak laughed at the question. "He won't, don't worry. Even if he has the most silver tongue beneath the heavens and somehow manages to see the vice commander, and even manages to trick him... The final result will not be that of Li Hao benefiting."

"Why is that?" The look in Ying Hongyue's eyes shifted as he began to understand something. The vice commander... might be connected to the scarlet shadow...

"You'll know sooner or later," chuckled the scarlet shadow. "This is not the time to worry about that. Right now, we wish for you to swiftly reach an agreement with one of the nine ministries so that Red Moon's people can be installed there and control one of the ruins' ten entrances. Otherwise, Skystar Town will be fully isolated from the world."

“Do you need to contact one of the powerhouses inside?” Ying Hongyue raised an eyebrow. “That shouldn’t be hard, should it?”

“There’s still an inherent difficulty level to it.” Scarlet Cloak smiled.

Ying Hongyue quickly concluded that it wasn’t difficult to contact the plant spirits because they were near the entrances, but to contact the vice commander where the mine was... that was indeed difficult because one needed to traverse the territory under plant spirit protection.

So that meant that the scarlet shadow wanted to contact the vice commander?

Added to what he’d said before, Ying Hongyue could almost be certain that the two were in cahoots. That the greatest mine in Silver Moon could be preserved to present day had much to do with these people too, right?

Then the first and second awakening... All of these critical timings were grasped in these guys’ hands. They’d long arranged for resurrection, hadn’t they? This wasn’t a random course of action!

Then why didn’t they control any one of the entrances? Had other changes occurred, or was there another reason?

Various thoughts filled through Ying Hongyue’s mind. There might be their people among the plant spirits, but perhaps they’d turned traitor later on or other developments had occurred. Perhaps they were the forces behind one of the nine ministries?

Despite his plentitude of questions, Ying Hongyue didn’t ask a single one. And still, he remained uneasy. Would Li Hao benefit another so easily?

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Skystar Town.

A ring of light manifested in the mine area and enveloped the four corners. The immense defensive power could even obstruct some premier Immortals. Saints would need some time if they wanted to break through it.

There had been a miasma of black fog outside the ring of light—disordered core origin. Some of the fog had dissipated, and some of it remained.

The Black Armor hovered outside one of the patches of black fog and looked inside it. Various plant spirits were absorbing energy inside it. The fog itself trembled, as if wanting to break itself apart as well. But without the bramble rose helping them on the outside, it was still a dangerous endeavor.

A golden light appeared in the Black Armor's eyes; he could hear the plant spirits on the inside cursing someone.

“That damned bramble rose wants to take the mine for itself! And those idiots, those absolute fools! We'll only be working for its benefit if the nine of us don't cooperate! Is that rose such an easy one to get along with?? Stupid!” This was one of the plant spirits not part of the operation.

It was furious as the nine plant spirits had once reached an accord to stand against the bramble rose together. But today, some of its kind betrayed the former alliance. How detestable!

“That damned Chen Zhongtian is such a piece of trash that he's only good for kindling!” It turned to cursing someone else after the bramble rose. “Why did the bramble rose form an agreement with the others and not you? It must be because you've devolved into hostilities with the other nine, you bastard!”

Chen Zhongtian no longer visited it in recent times or supplied it with mysterious power stones. After discussing their exchange rate and being rebuffed, the man no longer showed himself.

Damn it! Would you have made it to your current heights without my support? How dare you haggle with me!

It suddenly looked to the other side of the black fog. Its... heart had pounded just now. What had happened?

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In another spot.

Director General Wang materialized and looked at the black fog. "I hope it hasn't revived by much or else... it won't be easy to kill!"

If they'd all revived, they would be Immortals and not that simple to take down. Granted, it was still possible, just not as easy. As a powerhouse of the human race, he was not afraid of this plant spirit from the wilderness.

Although they were once guardian plant spirits of Skystar Town, their legacy had become scattered. He would be able to take three of this kind of Immortal on in a fight!

Chapter 925: Li Hao's Tyranny (V)

At the same time.

"Behave. We need to work together, understood?" the redwood tree warned the little jujube tree next to it. "You see it too, even that great one has come to join Commander Li. There will be good things in store for both of us if this succeeds. You know the consequences if it fails!"

"I don't need you to warn me," the jujube tree sneered through mental ripples. "It's always been you targeting me. Go for that imperial guard if you're so brave!"

Targeting you?! The redwood cursed. Have you forgotten what your replica did to me? I didn't say a word about not working for Li Hao, yet you tried to steal a march on me and have Li Hao bring your primary body out to kill plant spirits. You tried to cast me in a loathsome light! This is just an eye for an eye, a tree heart for a tree heart. I am completely justified!

As for the imperial guard... why don't you go rot in a swamp somewhere!

Setting aside the fact that the imperial guard was the leader of the plant spirits that Li Hao had personally raised to such heights, the key was that the guard possessed the projection of the imperial palace. The redwood tree was well aware of this key detail. Not to mention, the imperial guard's identity was so lofty that everyone should show it respect!

Didn't the jujube tree see how dismissive Director General Wang was towards them, but so polite toward the imperial guard?

Even though New Martial was no more, all related parties were remnants of that age and as such, still observed the requirements of status and position. The imperial guard's position was higher than the redwood tree since the latter was only a communication tower guard. It was also naturally much superior to the jujube tree.

The Wind and Cloud Pavilion had occupied a high status in the past, but it was no longer so now. It was a captive of war and so any of its plant spirits possessed a lower status than the little jujube tree. Such was reality.

The more the redwood mused, the more the jujube tree irked it. It had to team up with the jujube tree to eliminate a plant spirit! Meanwhile, the imperial guard had taken the two puppets and eight weak plant spirits to move against the final enemy plant spirit.

From how the situation looked, it was the redwood and jujube tree that was the weakest combination. The redwood didn't dare promise success. But if it failed... that would be the start of real trouble.

A figure appeared on the scene, startling the redwood out of its thoughts. Li Hao had come in person.

Indeed, the young man was here because he wasn't at ease about this site either. The little tree had the corner of the imperial palace to fall back on and multiple plant spirits under its command. There was a strong chance of it prevailing. On the other hand, the redwood tree was a slippery character afraid of death. The little jujube tree wasn't that strong yet. It was difficult to say if this duo would be able to eliminate their target.

If anything untoward developed, it would expose his strength of his side and goals.

By now, temporary arrangements were in place for everything outside. The young man had come with Panther, hoping that the plan would proceed smoothly. The black dog was quite strong when it gathered the strength of its bloodline.

"This is... Internal Affairs territory." Li Hao quickly identified the area based on information previously received from Chen Zhongtian. This used to be Skystar Town's Energy Department—one of the core institutions. The plant spirit in residence was a sunflower that used to be an initial Immortal.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs had supplied it with mysterious power stones, so it was difficult to determine how much it'd recovered by. It was also hard to confirm if the ministry had arranged for large numbers of powerhouses to be in residence in its ruins.

Their current and old ministers were all aboveground. It was not that straightforward to identify the powerhouses below ground. Various thoughts floated into Li Hao's mind as he looked at the black fog, then at Panther.

"Eat the black fog in a bit. After you do, both of us will strike and quickly wrap up the conflict. No one is to be left alive!"

The two plant spirits snapped to solemn attention and indicated their understanding of their orders. Li Hao waited for a bit, manifesting his tattered armor to facilitate communication. There was no problem on Director General Wang or the Black Armor's side. The young man had given the little tree a transmission pendant, so it should be able to receive the news as well.

“Begin!” he issued through the armor.

BOOM!

A massive boom rang out in the distance as a barrier outright shattered—that was where the Black Armor was. Li Hao’s group also made their moves. Panther immediately turned into the golden dog and devoured the black fog in one swallow.

“Who is it!?” A sunflower waved in the breeze on the other side of the black fog. It was highly alert—who was disrupting the disordered core origin?

The black fog dissipated with a rumble, revealing several figures flashing out of it.

“Who... are you guys?” The sunflower jerked with alarm. It wasn’t the bramble rose or any plant spirit it was familiar with. There were two unfamiliar plant spirits and a dog, as well as a human. Where had these people come from?

Several people manifested near the sunflower. “Li Hao...” they identified with consternation.

BOOM!

A ray of sword light illuminated the premises, obliterating those people. Li Hao showed absolutely no mercy. It would be the greatest of losses if these people ruined his plans.

“KILL!” His shout sent the redwood into full speed. Massive quantities of branches appeared and penetrated heaven and earth, sealing off the area. The little jujube tree fired off thousands of jujube fruit!

Not only that, but the two plant spirits summoned the avenues of their great daos without hesitation and brought them down on the four corners. In a previous fight, the redwood had been unwilling and not daring to utilize its core origin. It learned its lesson after a scathing lecture from Li Hao and struck with everything in its arsenal at the first opportunity. The massive dao of core origin materialized in the sky to suppress the void!

Panther's blood disengaged from its body to become a golden shadow with a single horn. The power of thunder and lightning gathered around the horn; the shadow whipped its head around to smite the sunflower!

"The Monster Spirit Envoy..." gasped the sunflower. It hadn't anticipated that its visitors would appear with the intent to fight to the death. Utilizing core origin dao wasn't of much use in this age, but its mobilization represented one thing—the opponent wanted to sever its target's great dao. Not even one's core origin would be spared. It was an indication of a duel to the death!

As dismayed as the sunflower was, it instantly leapt to action. No matter how surprised or shocked it was, it had to set all that aside for the sake of survival.

"Wind!" A gale wind picked up with Li Hao's utterance; thunder and lightning erupted. A cage of the five elements appeared and slammed down over the sunflower.

The plant spirit attacked the domain of the elements with a barrage of sunflower seeds. Despite the ripples that shifted over the domain, it didn't break. The seal complete, it severed the connection between the sunflower and the rest of the world.

Rumble!

Stellaris appeared to cut down its target. A mirror manifested at the same time, making the sunflower look around blearily. There were sword shadows everywhere it looked. This kind of momentary distraction was sufficient to be fatal in a clash of heavyweights.

The redwood was highly anxious. It sent countless branches piercing through the air and even took human form, punching the sunflower. It could not leave a bad impression in Li Hao's mind! The redwood had previously thought that the young man needed it. But when Director General Wang appeared, it felt that its position decreased in importance. Once the Black Armor showed itself, the redwood felt that it was rendered completely irrelevant. Hence, it had to tightly latch onto the young man's thigh or else face elimination from the world!

Boom!

Numerous heavyweights had struck at the same time. Panther's thunder and lightning was the first to arrive. It charred the sunflower's golden leaves with a loud crack, prompting an agonized scream. When a sword hit its main stalk, blood quickly welled out of the mark it left behind and dripped onto the ground.

The redwood's punch landed squarely on the target as its branches had locked onto the other. A loud crack echoed upon collision and something similar to a heart appeared over the branches.

The redwood beamed with delight! The greatest credit goes to me this time! This was the sunflower's heart of life. Punching it here had been a gamble that the redwood had taken, but it'd paid off.

It was about to shatter the heart when the jujube tree appeared in a rush of core origin. Its indestructible matter burst open as a ray of sword intent erupted from the tree!

Crack!

The heart of life shattered; the redwood flew into a rage. You pathetic pile of kindling, you stole my credit!

This was no time to take the jujube tree to task for its impudence. Core origin dao fluctuated wildly in the air as it began collapsing. "Why did you guys kill me..." the sunflower howled with despair and reluctance.

Its primary body was shattered at the first engagement and its heart of life broken. It was beside itself with fury and hopelessness. It'd thought at first that the bramble rose had come to visit it!

The sunflower wanted to warn its nearby brethren with its shouts; perhaps someone would come to rescue it. Preparing to howl with indignation, it suddenly paused.

A shadow fragment manifested in the distance as a core origin dao trembled. A fist landed on the ground without a sound and shattered the great dao.

Dead! Another plant spirit was dead before the sunflower!

His mission complete, the Black Armor looked in Li Hao's direction. Although they were very far away, he was able to assess the situation here. He couldn't be bothered to look further upon seeing there was only the shadow of a great dao left and promptly vanished on the spot.

He had another mission to complete—as the strongest personage present in the ruins, he was to kill all of the humans in the territories of the plant spirits that'd left to join the bramble rose. There might be personnel from Armed Forces and Administration active below ground. Although Li Hao had isolated their headquarters aboveground and made it difficult for these people to emerge, the young man had still decided to kill them.

Li Hao didn't pay attention to the Black Armor's side. The dean of education was strong; it was to be expected that he was the first to finish. The young man grunted, slashing a domineering burst of sword intent at the core origin in the void. The sunflower's great dao shook violently from the impact.

The other two plant spirits put everything they had in fixing the sunflower's great dao in the air. As Stellaris was much more fortified compared to before, the great dao shattered after the sword swung down!

The sunflower knew that this was the end of the road for it. “None of you... will meet with good ends! That we survived these years was a purposeful decision by them. The powerhouses of an entire city might have all revived a long time ago... Do you think you can win?”

Li Hao raised a brow and wanted to ask questions, but the sunflower smiled ghastly and completely faded away. The young man put the matter out of his mind with a frown. Dead was dead! As for the city it spoke of and why they’d spared these plant spirits... he would know, sooner or later.

Chapter 926: Trust (I)

“Go help the rest!” fired off Li Hao. “Help the imperial guard and others!”

The two plant spirits immediately flew toward the little tree.

A corner of the imperial palace projection—the little tree’s core origin dao—came into view in another remote corner. It suppressed a trellis rose. Despite utilizing this ace, the group still had trouble overcoming their Immortal opponent. The main issue was that the eight plant spirits were almost useless as they’d recovered to a negligible degree.

Even further away, Director General Wang smashed punch after punch at the void. He roared consecutively, anger building within him. It was one thing for the Black Armor to be the first to finish with his target, but even Li Hao was faster than him! This was humiliating!

The shadow of a large shield erupted over the director general. It hovered on the edge of visibility and took the shape of a turtle. Completely ignoring any attacks that came his way, Director General Wang smashed a willow tree to pieces!

When the tree’s great dao appeared, the director general flung out the city lord seal. Although the item didn’t have the power to kill a Saint, its appearance instantly crushed the great dao. Director General Wang bellowed and unleashed a flurry of hundreds of punches. The void trembled, the great dao crumbled, and an agonized wail rang out!

Three sides of combat were over in the blink of an eye.

The Black Armor spontaneously appeared in numerous locales and delivered light palm strikes to kill humans that'd yet to come to their senses. He was so fast that his speed couldn't be imagined. Some people didn't even have a chance to see a figure.

The people left behind by the various ministries served to simply maintain communications with the outside world. They weren't strong. If they were heavyweights, they would've been deployed elsewhere a long time ago.

All of them died in a heartbeat.

Back in the imperial guard's corner, the eight surrendered plant spirits abruptly erupted with all of their strength, even at the cost of their core origin dispersing. They needed to kill their target before the redwood and jujube tree arrived! They would be in dire straits if they didn't accomplish that!

With so many plant spirits lending a hand and the coordination of the two puppets, neither was the little tree willing to have someone come to its aid. The imperial palace trembled; there seemed to be a faint shadow that appeared over it—a cat.

CRACK. The great dao of the plant spirit standing in their way was fixed in place and started crumbling away! That finally spelled the end of this corner's plant spirit.

The little tree retracted the imperial palace projection and waved its branches with fatigue. It looked toward the rear and saw that the redwood and jujube tree had just arrived. Thank goodness they'd killed their opponent before reinforcements came! It'd be too mortifying otherwise.

After all, Li Hao wanted it to lead the plant spirits under his banner.

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At the same time, the outside world.

An old man suddenly frowned at the Ministry of Finance—the old minister. He looked at the rear yard. Had... a ripple emanated from the ruin just now?

But there were people on duty aboveground, preventing anyone from slipping into the ruins. Deputy Zhou was the heavyweight in residence at Finance.

The same scene could be found elsewhere. In order to prevent the various ministries from sending concealed heavyweights to the ruins or having the three great organizations infiltrate their ranks, the powerhouse assigned to that locale took up a position near the ruin entrance. The various ministries weren't too concerned since these people would only be going to their death if they were so bold as to enter the ruins.

And yet, the old Minister Liu didn't quite understand what he'd detected. Had it... come from a plant spirit?

He swiftly walked to the rear and smiled at Deputy Zhou. "Deputy, the Ministry of Finance will fully cooperate with the registration. Why don't you have a seat in the main hall..."

"There's no need!" Deputy Zhou smiled radiantly. "Being paid by the government means I need to steadfastly carry out my duties. The Skystar Commander Office is investigating all corners of the city, I cannot neglect my responsibilities. Don't land me in hot water, old minister. I'll just stand guard here for a bit.

"Don't worry, I won't brashly enter your ruins. Wouldn't that be nursing a death wish?"

"I didn't mean it that way," smiled the old minister. He was still uneasy. Had something... happened?

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The same scene played out at the Inspectorate, Commerce, and Internal Affairs.

Chen Yao flicked a glance at the Inspectorate ruins and couldn't be bothered to respond. That thing was probably dead. Who cared? It was the plant spirit's fault for ripping them off!

Over at the Ministry of Commerce, its old minister was dead and the current minister didn't sense anything. He simply found old fart Northern Fist to be an eyesore in the rear yard. He was incredibly irritating and wouldn't stop jabbering about his rules.

It was damned annoying!

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At the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Yao Si and Hou Xiaochen were present. The old minister frowned at the rear yard. Yao Si was there while Hou Xiaochen drank tea with them in the main hall.

The current minister Mu Hai smiled easily when he saw his father look to the back. "Director Hou, if I may be so bold, my daughter hasn't committed a grave crime. When will the Skystar Commander Office release her?"

"I gained a daughter in my old age and my father quite likes his granddaughter," the minister continued meaningfully. "If Commander Li is willing to release her, then... the ministry can discuss anything."

"Don't worry, it'll be soon, very soon!" Hou Xiaochen laughed heartily.

Father and son looked uneasily at each other. Was this operation today only to investigate the number of superhumans at each institute? Why were there ripples coming from the rear yard?

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There was quite a disturbance at the ruins that saw the death of a plant spirit. Those that didn't also had heavyweights at their ruin entrance. Both Sky Sword and Earthturner Sword sat at the doors of the royal palace entrance, forbidding anyone from leaving or entering. The nearby princes and royal descendants were so livid that they wanted nothing more than to kill the two martial masters on the spot!

Since when did anyone dare treat the royal family thus?!

"Sky Sword, how long is your investigation going to last??" someone shouted angrily.

"Until Commander Li tells us to withdraw," Sky Sword said bluntly. "That is when our investigation will end!"

"....." The crowd nearly choked to death on their rage! What kind of response was that?? Would the investigation last the rest of their lives if Li Hao never gave the order to withdraw?

He Yong's hearty laughter came from the main hall. He was having a delightful conversation with the Skystar King that no one knew anything about. Everyone was blithely unaware that great changes were taking place in Skystar Town. Four plant spirits had been executed where they stood.

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Inside the Skystar Town ruins.

Li Hao's people quickly convened, absent the eight Wind and Cloud Pavilion plant spirits. They split up into duos and took root where the four dead plant spirits had stood. Energy flowed into their

withered bodies; the flow of energy within the city started anew after a brief hiccup when the plant spirits died.

Four corpses laid in front of Li Hao. Abundant Water of Life flowed from them. He collected all of it and looked at the little tree. “Imperial Guard, you can devour three trunks and one third of the core organ power. Senior Jujube can devour the fourth and a third of the core origin power. The rest will go to Senior Redwood.”

The imperial guard was embarrassed by the division. “Um... I...”

“Senior Imperial Guard’s palace projection is highly useful,” Li Hao explained. “Not to mention, you are of a lower cultivation level to begin with. Swallowing these will give you a chance of becoming an Immortal. Senior Redwood and the others are all Immortals. They won’t make it to Saint if they devour the trunks. This is the best use of our resources.”

“The commander is right!” the redwood hastily said. It was satisfied with the division. One third of the core origin they’d collected was more than a singular plant spirit’s core origin. That made it better off than the eight from the Wind and Cloud Pavilion, no?

Those guys were so pitiful that they were only rewarded with the ambient energy in the surroundings. And strictly speaking, most of this wasn’t its battle loot. What it and the jujube tree had received exceeded the value of the plant spirit they’d killed.

The imperial guard didn’t say anything else. It knew that it was weaker than the rest. A massive trunk emerged and branches reached out, grabbing the corpses of three Immortal plant spirits. It would take a while to fully digest its gains.

The jujube tree was also highly delighted. It’d recovered much before, but these were bonafide Immortal-level plant spirits in front of them. It would recover a great deal more after devouring it and the core origin power. It might even return to peak condition!

Although it wasn't as strong as the redwood, it wasn't any less than the sunflower they'd eliminated. As it thought, the future was bright with Li Hao! The young man was nothing like that unreasonable, miserly Sky Sword!

Li Hao collected the fruits of the plant spirits. This was another wonderful resource that he didn't have time to use at the moment. He gave some Water of Life to Director General Wang, then looked at the Black Armor.

Did he need any?

The Black Armor didn't say anything because he hadn't expended much in the battles. Everyone's gazes snapped to a certain section of the city—a massive ball of light had appeared there. That was a production of the city's formation activating; some energy ripples undulated from it.

Perhaps the fight was already happening inside. It didn't look to be over yet. Li Hao took out a mirror and looked at the Black Armor. "Will they sense anything if I use this mirror to probe them?" The perception of powerhouses was very strong.

"A copy of the Mirror of Wind and Cloud?" The Black Armor identified it with a single glance. "No, because battle is occurring inside and the energy ripples are too strong. Even if they sense anything, they will think that it's a probe from their opponents. The weak will not sense it in ordinary times, but Immortals will surely detect a thing or two."

Li Hao understood. As he thought, there were limitations to the mirror.

"The main thing is that you're too weak," said the Black Armor as the young man began to draw certain conclusions. "If I were to wield it, perhaps even Empyrean Kings wouldn't be able to sense the probe. This item is a derivative of the wielder's strength."

Fine then. Li Hao didn't mind a sudden dig at his abilities.

Chapter 927: Trust (II)

Li Hao ultimately decided to scan the mine with the mirror. Having a full grasp of the enemy's strength was still more desirable than anything, just in case unexpected problems developed.

Although his side was very strong, he wasn't certain of the Black Armor's capabilities. Not to mention, the Black Armor counted as a one-time use item. He lacked a physical body, so once the energy within his body was exhausted, he wouldn't be able to battle with the force as befitting of his cultivation level.

Neither did the young man know if the heavyweights within the mine were just everyone he'd identified from the nine ministries.

He infused the mirror with a large quantity of mysterious power stones when his thoughts traveled here. The mirror floated into the air and erupted with scintillating light that disappeared after it spread through the void.

Ripples appeared over the mirror as dense clusters of light appeared. Various powerhouses were reflected; everyone's eyes immediately focused on a Gold Armor. Its light burned like the blazing sun.

Li Hao frowned. He could more or less match life energy to cultivation level for those weaker than him. This one, however, was plainly much stronger than him. It was difficult for him to determine just how strong the Gold Armor was.

There was one benefit for using the mirror, and that was that those beside the young man also fell within its range. Director General Wang's form appeared—much weaker than the Gold Armor. Meanwhile, the Black Armor... almost had no pinpricks of light around it.

"I am lingering mental strength," he said when Li Hao looked at him. "Your item can only detect life force. My life force is not dense, so scanning me will lead to an inaccurate picture."

Very well then.

The young man looked at Director General Wang; the director general looked at the mirror. “That guy... really has entered the Saint level! He’s initial Saint level from the looks of it...” The director general then looked at another ball of light. “Judging from the life force, the bramble rose is slightly weaker than it, but not by much. It’s probably set foot into the Saint level as well.

“All of the other plant spirits have weakened, but the bramble rose has grown stronger. That’s very strange!”

After all these years, the plant spirits had trouble maintaining their own bodies due to lack of energy. And yet, the bramble rose was stronger! It was very perplexing.

The vice commander’s condition was normal because he resided in the mine. It was to be expected that he was stronger than he’d been. However, the amount of energy that exuded from the mines was insufficient to permit the bramble rose to take another step forward.

Director General Wang looked at the other balls of light and continued, “There are four more plant spirits on the scene, with two nearing peak Immortal. The other two look to be on par with those we just killed.

“So there are powerhouses left among the mine defenders!” The director general raised an eyebrow. “There are six Silver Armors. Five of them are near Immortal and the sixth is an Immortal. They all look to be alive.”

Six Silver Armors and one Gold Armor, all of them alive. Alive meant that their physical bodies and mental strength were still present. Being nurtured by the mine all this time made them stronger than they were in the ancient times.

Apart from that, the other Bronze Armors and Black Armors simply flashed across the mirror. There was no life force to display, which meant that their physical bodies were gone. If they didn’t reach Apex back in their time and continue to fail to progress during these years, even a golden body was insufficient to withstand the passage of countless eons, despite ample energy.

Several more figures appeared in the mirror. Li Hao recognized one of them—Qi Pingjiang. His life force didn't seem any weaker than Li Hao's. The others were of a similar level. Only the old ministers of Examinations and Foreign Relations were much weaker.

“Qi Pingjiang, Zhao Tiangyang, and Jiang Chen are all seven elements?” Li Hao was rather surprised by the findings, but quickly accepted them. That made sense. A casual blow from Qi Pingjiang before had contained the strength of peak six elements.

It was just...

“Are they planning on not leaving the ruins since they've set foot into seven elements?” Li Hao frowned.

“Modern humans of seven elements can likely survive in the outside world,” the Black Armor said faintly. “The world has been much more stable as of late—they can probably sense it as well. They have you to thank for this.”

“Do you mean that this is a result of the supernatural characters?” Inspiration struck Li Hao.

“Most likely,” the man answered calmly. “The will of heaven senses that a great dao of the new world is forming. Although it is a prototype, it can relax some of the restrictions it levies over the world. Given its bias toward modern humans, it shouldn't be that difficult for modern humans to enter the so-called level of seven element Arcanus.”

Li Hao nodded. The mirror continued to take in energy and reflect powerhouse after powerhouse. There were two Saints, five Immortals, eight Apexes or seven element Arcanus, and vast quantities of Black Armor, Bronze Armor, two inspector generals, and many army heavyweights. This level of strength would be a premier force anywhere in the world.

Li Hao was about to put the mirror away after scanning his foes when it trembled. A red shadow briefly hovered in sight before vanishing. The mirror trembled again, as if suffering backlash, before it dimmed.

The young man's eyes widened and the Black Armor cast a sharp look into the distance. "Put the mirror away, something's wrong inside the mine. There may be a similar existence to me in its depths!"

Li Hao quickly stowed the treasure as the Black Armor assessed the new information gravely. "No life force was detected, so perhaps its physical body has decayed, leaving only mental strength behind? How strange, is there such a powerhouse deep within the mines?"

Li Hao frowned when he thought of the smear of red they'd seen. "Ying Hongyue seems to have the support of such a heavyweight."

"Can it be one of the powerhouses that attacked Skystar Ruin?" gasped Director General Wang. "Who was it that lacked a physical body and nurtured their mental strength within the mines?"

That would mean that something was amiss with the vice commander. Previously, his thoughts were that the vice commander might not have turned traitor, that he might have just neglected his duties. He might not attack them during this operation, but now... the director general shifted uneasily.

Damn it! If that ray of mental strength was left behind by one of those who attacked Skystar Town, did the vice commander know if it?

If he did, then that meant the guy was one of the traitors that year!

Many doubts surfaced in Director General Wang's mind. If the vice commander had turned traitor, why let the mine stand? It was still here, why didn't he take it with him or fully excavate it? How had these plant spirits survived throughout the years? That they had, did it mean they'd sworn fealty to the other side? Then why were they erupting in hostilities now?

Various questions appeared in everyone's minds.

“The others might not have sensed our probe, but that surge of mental strength...” intoned the Black Armor. “It might have sensed the probe. We’ve alerted the enemy ahead of time.”

Li Hao was frowning so ferociously that his entire face was scrunched together. The situation at the mine was much more complicated than he thought. There were many powerhouses, but when it came to Saints... there was nothing he could do.

“Both sides are very strong,” the young man took a deep breath. “Strictly speaking, we’re on par with one side at most. If we brashly head over and the two sides ally together against us... we’ll find it difficult to handle them. Can the dean handle two Saints?”

“It’s not out of the question, but the mysterious power stones and Water of Life that you supplied before are insufficient,” Black Armor said faintly. “Two Saints are nothing worthy of note if the resources are doubled.”

“.....” Pretend I didn’t say anything. Li Hao possessed plenty of Water of Life, but almost no mysterious power stones. “C’mon, let’s draw closer.”

Numerous thoughts swirled in the young man’s mind. These guys are so strong... It’ll be a lot of trouble if they decide to work together instead of fighting each other. Are they fighting now? If they are, it’s ridiculous that not a single powerhouse has died yet!

He’d taken out four plant spirits, but none of these guys were dead yet. Even all of their Black Armors were still in place. What the heck was going on?

.....

At the same time.

A surge of scarlet energy materialized deep within the mines. It took human form and frowned toward the outside.

One silent beat later, it decided not to pay it any attention.

A large lake could be found near the scarlet shadow; a physical body floated within it. Sparkling with golden light, endless energy surged into it. Not only that, but stands of golden matter floated within the waters were quickly absorbed by the body. Many other treasures floated within the lake and slowly crumbled away. A peculiar energy drifted into the body.

As the physical body grew stronger in the lake, the scarlet shadow silently watched it and waited. The ripples just now seemed to have come from something similar to the Mirror of Wind and Cloud. The Hong?

The situation was indeterminate.

The scarlet shadow set it all aside. In this age, whether it was the Hong or the Fangs, all were isolated within this minor world and counted for nothing.

.....

Rumbles sounded outside the mine.

The bramble rose exchanged blows with the Gold Armor. In the form of a beguiling woman, the rose looked furiously at its opponent. "I just want some energy from the mine! I'll retreat if you give it to me!"

It wielded a weapon similar to a bayonet—transformed from one of its own thorns. It broke through the void with each of its moves.

The Gold Armor was having a difficult time. Not only did the formidable rose thorn pierce through the void with each jab, it could even stab through the armor.

Jiang Chen and the others were in a ball of light not too far away. Each of them had coalesced rays of domineering energy and shaped them into a variety of weapons. They were in pitched battle against six Silver Armors. Reinforced by several plant spirits, they suppressed the Silver Armors to the point in which they couldn't move.

Even with the Silver Armors moving with smooth coordination and assembled in an army formation, they were still unable to stand against four plant spirits and the city's military formation. They were constantly on the back foot and losing ground.

Two squads of Black Armor clashed in the distance. The royal family's Black Armatures were exceedingly capable, but the one thousand Black Armors they faced were also quite valiant. They were far superior to the Black Armors of Battle Heaven as the latter lacked city. The soldiers here had ample energy to draw on.

It'd been a while since battle broke out, but the two sides were evenly matched. The Gold Armor was slightly stronger than the bramble rose, yet the four plant spirits alongside the military formation that Jiang Chen had activated were able to suppress the six Silver Armors.

If it wasn't for the four plant spirits recovering to a low degree, the Silver Armors would be no match for them.

Chapter 928: Trust (III)

Inside the ball of light.

Jiang Chen manipulated the formation into becoming weapon after weapon, bringing them against the Silver Armors. "I am a descendant of the Jiangs and now the division leader of the Eight Division in the Skystar Army. Thou are guilty of insubordination and disregard of military regulation. It looks like you have indeed turned traitor!"

"A descendant of the commander-in-chief would not collude with plant spirits to seize the mine," dismissed the strongest Silver Armor. "You are the one who has turned traitor. We do not recognize your position of division leader!"

The soldier roared and swept out with his spear, forcing a plant spirit back. “All of you are traitors! New Martial will never fall! When it returns, you and those behind you will all die with dishonor and ignominy!”

Boom!

The battle abruptly turned fierce. Jiang Chen wavered and looked back at Qi Pingjiang. “Unseal me fully! Are you going to restrict me even now?”

Qi Pingjiang looked at Zhao Tianyang; the latter inclined his head. Two shadows emerged from Jiang Chen’s body and vanished. The old Skystar King’s presence billowed and strengthened the formation by thirty percent!

Bam!

A humanoid shadow gathered from the military formation and pounced on the Silver Armors!

“Assemble!” howled the Gold Armor close at hand.

Bam!

Thousands of Black Armors instantly shifted into another formation. A strong current of energy flowed from it and barreled through large sums of Black Armaduras in a fatal surge. Jiang Chen’s eyes widened and he glanced at the Gold Armor.

This formation was a bit different from before. It wasn’t listed in the information that they possessed. Had this vice commander modified the formation?

“I said that I only want a bit of energy. Must you be like this?!” snarled the bramble rose.

“No traitors are allowed to obtain energy!” the Gold Armor declared coldly.

“Traitor?” sneered the bramble rose with hints of derision. “I’d repeat the same words to you! You’re the greatest traitor!”

“We will not be swayed no matter what you say!” the Gold Armor retorted frostily. “Protecting the mine is our duty. Give up the thought, Rose! You will not seize the mine so long as we stand!”

“You bastard!” The bramble rose flew into a rage. Immense strength unfurled in all directions. “The rest of you guys are idiots! Sun Xin is the biggest traitor! You put your lives on the line for him—your commander would die of anger if he was still alive! How did New Martial produce such idiotic troop leaders such as you guys!”

The bramble rose was cursing up a storm at the Silver Armors. They were quite strong in their own right and skilled at military formations. With their physical bodies still existing, their cultivation level might be a bit weaker than the plant spirits, but humans were the stronger race. Not only were their joint efforts obstructing the four plant spirits, but even Jiang Chen’s formation couldn’t fully corral them. He could only confine their movement.

The Gold Armor vice commander—Sun Xin—sighed. “Stop trying to trick them, Rose. These are all my brothers of many years through life and death. We are soldiers and protecting the mine is our responsibility that we must fulfill even at the cost of our lives. We trust each other no matter what you say!”

“You disgust me!” The bramble rose disappeared. A shower of sharp thorns rained down on the Gold Armor. “You are so hypocritical even now! Let me tell you something, so long as I live, none of these people will enter this land! They’ve tried over the years, but I killed them all. I was a slave for humanity in New Martial. I am no longer willing to be so in the new era! I am a Saint now! In this age, who can withstand me so long as the world is stable?”

BOOM!

Another loud collision rang out.

“Stubborn and obstinate, you... deserve death!” sighed the Gold Armor. A long blade manifested and swung down!

The void broke and the formation shook. Two Saint-level experts raged through the ruins. Their great daos manifested and core origin shook.

.....

Moments later.

Li Hao's group arrived. The ball of light enveloped the area, sealing off the premises. This was the formation of the plant spirits inside the city. Li Hao swept his eyes over the light, but was unable to see through it.

“This is the Lock Formation of the Four Directions,” identified the Black Armor. “It is primarily used for defense, to prevent foes from entering the city to threaten the citizens. Plant spirits are responsible for constructing and activating it. Thus, plant spirits are sometimes hailed as guardian plant spirits.”

“Can it be broken?” asked Li Hao.

“It can! But that might not be a good move.” The Black Armor nodded. “Once it breaks, both sides will discover our invasion. It's best to slip in undetected...” He looked at the formation. “There are ways to infiltrate the formation.”

“Infiltrate it?” Li Hao glanced at him. “This formation is airtight, literally. I've studied it, there are almost no cracks to be found...”

“That you can’t does not mean I can’t.”

“That’s right, martial uncle surely has a way!” Director General Wang hastily agreed. “The Lock Formation of the Four Directions is the heritage formation of martial uncle’s family. No one knows how to slip inside, but martial uncle will know!”

Li Hao blinked. A heritage formation?

The Black Armor ignored these words and said calmly, “That is incorrect, my grandfather would not teach me this. It was the Evenround principal who identified it through research. Grandfather would not purposefully leave such a loophole behind for others to take advantage of, not even for family! Your words insult him!”

Director General Wang found himself in incredibly awkward straits. I was just offering some flattery, who would’ve thought it’d have the opposite effect? Since it was the principal who figured it out... Fine then, there’s nothing I can say about that.

The Black Armor carefully investigated the formation. “We are at the primary battleground. The disturbance would be too great if we took action here. Go to a side flank. Also, I recommend that we go to the depths of the mine first, not mire ourselves with these guys. There might be greater trouble in the depths of the mine!”

He walked as he spoke, heading in a particular direction. “There are usually companion treasures to be found in the core of the mine. Some are very valuable! The shadow we detected before might be among them. I don’t know how long it’s been in there, but it must be strong!

“There should be treasures at the heart of the mine. The shadow might be staying there for the treasure, or possibly for something else. Regardless, we should enter the mine as soon as possible as well. All mines have self-detonation mechanisms located at their core.”

Li Hao nodded continuously with grave solemnity. “Then do you think... is that guy hiding there so he can detonate the mine at a critical moment and start the second awakening?”

“That’s hard to say.” The Black Armor couldn’t come to an answer and seemed to laugh. “It’s alright, a mine isn’t so easily detonated just because someone wishes it so! The Human King assured his rise through detonating mines, so he arranged for certain countermeasures to prevent enemies from using the same methods against humanity or human cities. So long as the enemy doesn’t detonate the mine the moment they see us, they’ll have no hope to do so otherwise!”

Countermeasures?

Li Hao was puzzled, but didn’t ask further. “Then is there anything I can do later?”

“Of course! You’re the one who started all this, of course you need to do something. Wang Ye says that you once entered the secondary dimension. Our opponent may be a difficult character, so even I cannot guarantee killing them!

“For you... you should enter the secondary dimension and suddenly appear at a crucial moment to deliver a fatal blow. Your aura will do. Incorporate the seven elements into it and deploy it through Stellaris. It will have a wondrous effect at a critical time!”

Li Hao blinked. “I can enter it, but it’s difficult to find my way out of it.”

“I know,” nodded the Black Armor. “I hear that it was your master who pulled you out. Therefore, send word for your master to arrive as quickly as possible. He can pull you out when needed.”

Li Hao’s expression shifted slightly. He didn’t mind taking risks himself, but hadn’t let his teacher join them this time as the enemy was too strong. But now, the Black Armor wanted him to summon his teacher!

“Are those of your age unwilling to fight for yourselves?” asked the Black Armor. “Do you hope for New Martial citizens to kill New Martial citizens for you, and then seize the benefits for you?”

“I paid the price...” Li Hao protested.

“Yes, but it’s not enough. I said before that if it’s just those two, I wouldn’t need any other reinforcement. But with an existence outside of our predetermined parameters, this is an additional complication.

“You are unable to emerge at the needed moment, so we have to have your master join us. He will instantaneously yank you out at the right timing. To powerhouses, an unexpected factor at a critical moment might result in securing the life of their opponent! I am unable to guarantee success of our operation otherwise.”

The Black Armor turned to look at Li Hao. “We still have some time, but not that much. Once fighting outside ends and there are no large-scale casualties, we will not be able to fish in troubled waters anymore. The plant spirits we killed will be exposed, and they will only ally together against us when they see us. We are the unexpected factor. Eliminating us first is the New Martial consensus!

“Do not think of allying with one side to eliminate the other, that will be impossible! As one of New Martial, all humans and monster spirits know this logic—kill the third party first! They are the uncontrollable element. Only after we are eradicated will they fight each other to the death. You must believe the influence of the Human King on that era. If not, you can try otherwise to your detriment!”

“That is indeed the logic, Li Hao.” Director General Wang nodded as well. “If you want to collect easy pickings in terms of allying with one side against the other... you will not succeed.”

Even the redwood and little jujube tree concurred.

Indeed, they would not succeed that way. There were too many examples like that from New Martial. The Human King always killed the third party first, no matter how strong, terrible, or evil his enemy was. Whenever a third party appeared to benefit, the Human King would choose to kill them first, even if it gave an advantage to the enemy...

After a while, all of humanity and New Martial understood one point. The battlefield must be cleared first before battle began. If a third party appeared halfway, the combatants would first coordinate to eliminate the third party. Cooperation with the suddenly appearing force was never an option.

All of the combatants on this battlefield were once part of the New Martial system. They would share this common understanding. Hence, as soon as Li Hao's group stepped into view, the bramble rose and vice commander would immediately choose to kill them first. Granted, the caveat had to be that both sides had betrayed New Martial. Otherwise, the vice commander would not choose to go on the offensive since the Black Armor and Director General Wang were both present.

Chapter 929: Trust (IV)

Li Hao frowned. "I stand a chance of finding my way back if I leave a treasure behind..."

"There's too many accidental factors with that. Although there are successful cases, why take the risk in this exact instance? Are you looking for more uncertain elements? Is your teacher not willing to expend the slightest effort on your behalf?"

Li Hao cursed to himself. That wasn't what he was saying! It was impossible to communicate with this guy. There were countless powerhouses here and quite a few Saints. Although his teacher's strength had improved recently, Li Hao estimated it to be six elements at most. It certainly hadn't reached seven elements. That would make Yuan Shuo cannon fodder here!

The young man didn't want anyone to be taking a risk in coming to the mine. As for the powerhouses already here, it was quid pro quo. He'd hired them...

"Is there a deciding factor by when I should make my move?" Li Hao set his jaw as thoughts ran wildly through his mind.

“You can determine that yourself,” the Black Armor said faintly. “A new enemy suddenly appearing from an unknown source, deploying the strength of an Apex through a formidable Stellaris... The gap between you and an Immortal or even Saint is not that great in this age that lacks core origin.

“The greatest difference is found with your physical bodies. However, the enemy is just mental strength. When it comes to you, you are a grave threat to purely mental existences! Your aura is directly attack core origin, a detail that makes this age different. Back in the day, only core origin could damage the core origin of powerhouses. The aura seems to ignore all of this...”

Li Hao took a deep breath and said no more, swiftly passing messages through his tattered golden armor.

.....

The ruins of the Skystar Commander Office.

Manager Yu was on duty and rushed out of the ruins as soon as she received word, passing it along.

“The commander has given orders for Yuan Shuo’s swift return! He is to aid the commander in eliminating strong enemies! Chen Yao and Kong Jie of the Inspectorate are to head to the Ministry of Armed Forces to keep it in order!”

.....

The Inspectorate.

Chen Yao was enjoying the show when he suddenly obtained word from Kong Jie.

“Upstairs has given word for the two of us to suppress Qi Dinghai in Yuan Shuo’s stead. Do you have any objections?”

“The two... of us?” Chen Yao blinked.

“Quickly now!” Kong Jie answered brusquely, then grinned. “How nice!”

He could finally come off the benches on the sidelines. Chen Yao hesitated, then smiled as well.

“Indeed, this is very nice!” He’d been envious of the Silver Moon martial masters suppressing the four corners and demonstrating their might to the public. But now that he thought about it, he wasn’t the strongest.

And yet, was Qi Dinghai stronger than him? Chen Yao was a second generation minister as well, why was he afraid of Qi Dinghai? His old man had said that he was less than Qi Dinghai and Zhao Huaimin. Pfft, his old man only knew to lift others up and put down his own!

Two figures dashed out of the Inspectorate.

Over at Armed Forces, Yuan Shuo frowned and glanced at Jadelight Sword. “I’m going back for a bit. Chen Yao and Kong Jie will be taking my place. Be careful!”

Jadelight inclined her head.

Yuan Shuo swiftly departed his post near the ruin entrance, ignoring Qi Dinghai looking at him. He addressed Yuan Xingwu not too far away, “As your teacher, I will give you a way out. Leave this place now and take control of the eight hundred thousand troops of the Skystar Army camped outside the city. Ensure that they do not rise up and cause any disturbances. You will stand a chance for mercy. Otherwise, once the royal family and nine ministries are eliminated, there will be rivers of blood if the army chooses to agitate then!”

He left without a glance back.

“Yuan Shuo, you think too highly of the Skystar Commander Office and of Silver Moon!” Qi Dinghai frowned.

Yuan Shuo sneered and whirled around with a punch! A ferocious tiger flung its head back at the heavens!

Boom!

Qi Dinghai flew backward, blood welling up in his mouth and shock filling his eyes.

“Have your father say these words to me, you are not qualified to!” Yuan Shuo regarded him frostily. “Your father tried to assassinate me when I came to Skystar City thirty years ago. My master defeated him. When your mother exchanged blows with me, I heavily injured her with one punch. What the hell were you worth then?!”

Qi Dinghai’s expression shifted and he growled, “You... were the one who attacked my mother thirty years ago?!”

“No, it was your Qi family that attacked me and was defeated in return!” Yuan Shuo snorted with utmost arrogance. “I can’t be bothered with those in the military. I came to Skystar only to search for my dao. I didn’t care about your silly little matters. If it wasn’t for Zhao Tianyang putting in a showing that day, I would’ve sought revenge on your entire family!

“If it wasn’t for your father’s generation trying to keep me in place with their authority, I would’ve swept through Skystar’s martial world long ago! There would be no place for you guys to strut around like this!”

Kong Jie and Chen Yao arrived at this point.

“Execute this guy on the spot if he so much as puts a toe out of line.” Yuan Shuo rolled his eyes. “He’s been an eyesore for the longest time!”

He rose into the air and swiftly flew away, leaving Chen Yao awkwardly rubbing his nose. Why did that... seem to include me as well? He smiled radiantly at Qi Dinghai as the man rose to his feet.

“Don’t mind that, Brother Dinghai. Yuan Shuo’s too full of himself, I’m not as arrogant as him. I’ve come to check in on my good brother, nothing else. Everything will be over after the registration list is complete. My old man’s always said that I’m less than you, so please don’t provoke me, Brother Dinghai. Otherwise... I’ll want to see just how I am less than you!”

Qi Dinghai looked coldly at Chen Yao. As fellow second generation ministers, the nine of them were playmates when young. They’d terrorized the streets of Skystar City together and shared such a wonderful childhood. The nine of them were fast friends back in the day; everything changed when they became ministers.

Hence, Qi Dinghai couldn’t abide the sight of Chen Yao lording it over him. “Uncle Chen has always been opportunistic. I hope he isn’t disappointed this time!”

“How would he be?” chuckled Chen Yao. “Brother Dinghai, we’re old friends and brothers who went to the brothels together. Be nice to me!” His laughter echoed throughout Armed Forces. “Stop provoking me, eh? We did a lot of things together back in the day. You’ll lose a lot of face if you force me to speak of them!”

Qi Dinghai’s face flickered through a variety of changes; he decided to ignore Chen Yao. This was someone just like his father—utterly shameless! He’d thought nothing of anything when they were frivolous youngsters. Now that they were older, the others wouldn’t speak of their prior escapades out of consideration for their dignity, but this unrepentant guy would truly go around and make it widely known everywhere.

At the moment, his questions were—where had Yuan Shuo gone? What was he doing back at the Skystar Commander Office? And where was Li Hao?

Yuan Shuo was also very strong; his physical body was domineeringly strong! Qi Dinghai had sensed it when the old man defeated him with one punch. Yuan Shuo's body was so strong that it was much greater than regular martial masters'. How had he done it?

.....

At the same time.

Yuan Shuo swiftly returned to the Skystar Commander Office and entered the ruins with a smile. Damn if it didn't feel good! The kid still had to depend on him when push came to shove!

As expected, I'm the one he trusts the most and the strongest! Look at people like Zhou Chuan and Hong Yitang—they're all sitting outside! It's only minor scuffles taking place outside. What happens inside determines who is the victor.

Li Hao didn't ask for any of them, just me.

Yuan Shuo mused with satisfaction at how the previous operations against the City of Supernaturals and Wind and Cloud Pavilion were just minor matters. The battle here would determine the future of the nine ministries and Skystar Commander Office.

And here I am!

Yuan Shuo flew very swiftly toward the ball of light and quickly landed on the ground.

"Teacher, you only have one mission," Li Hao immediately explained when he saw the old man. "Senior Black Armor wants teacher to pull me out when I need to appear on the battlefield. Stay far away at all other times!"

Yuan Shuo's mouth dropped.

“We’re going up against a Saint and you’re too weak,” Li Hao said brusquely. “He’ll blow you to death with one exhale. Don’t insist on putting yourself in danger. Teacher will have succeeded when you pull me out at the critical moment!”

“.....” Fuck! Yuan Shuo cursed to himself. And I was in such high spirits for so long! This is what I’m here for?? You little bastard!

“Fine!” he responded shortly with a frozen look on his face. It was a short response compared to the hefty round of cursing he was delivering internally. A Saint... forget all of my previous thoughts.

The Black Armor smiled at Yuan Shuo when he saw the man. The two had never met before, but now that they did, the Black Armor said meaningfully, “Heaven may not favor one person alone. Melding five auras together and grasping the aura of heaven and earth, and for a while by the looks of it... The master of the world does not need to be Li Hao.”

“The senior praises me unduly.” Yuan Shuo grinned after flicking a look at the Black Armor. “Of course I’m stronger than my disciple, but what the hell is a master of the world worth? I like answering to know one and beating opponents to death with a punch. The same goes for anyone, whether friend or foe. People say that I am a lone wolf, that not even the heavens can corral me!”

The Black Armor blinked and had no response to that. A lone wolf? Perhaps!

People like Yuan Shuo walked with a certain charisma. Another person came to mind—solitary, selfish, bold, arrogant, and ruthless. Such had been Exalted Emperor Qin of the New Martial Era.

The Black Armor was momentarily lost in thought before abruptly waving his hand. He melted the durable ground, quickly bringing an edge of light into view. One hand seal later saw the boundary of the formation begin to melt as well.

“Go on in. As powerhouses, digging holes is a must. Those who do not know how to perforate formations are not true heavyweights!” The Black Armor’s words were at odds with his usual

character. Li Hao wasn't sure how to respond, but Director General Wang nodded rapidly with enthusiasm. There was nothing wrong with that!

A powerhouse that did not know how to dig a hole wasn't worth their salt. Supreme Zhang of Capital Martial once even traveled to Demonic Martial to learn the skill from the Human King! A year later, he popularized the skill in Capital Martial and focused his efforts on digging holes to mines. It was a skill that many exalted emperors held in high esteem.

Li Hao blinked, at a loss. The heck? Who says that powerhouses need to know how to dig holes?

And who would've thought that his master would be nodding next to him as well, seeming to very much agree with the Black Armor? "There's nothing wrong with what he's saying," he transmitted when Li Hao looked over. "Someone who can dig holes is the truest powerhouse!"

Aha! That's right, my master is the biggest tomb raider of this age. Of course he would know this skill!

Li Hao didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Fine fine, whatever you guys say is right. He took a deep breath when he burrowed into the ground and summoned the ferocious tiger. Darting into the creature, he looked at his teacher.

"Take Stellaris with you," Yuan Shuo transmitted. "I have the stone blade and will use it to pave the way back. The five auras will be the catalyst!"

Only through absolute trust could Li Hao enter the unknown dimension again without any preparation. Yuan Shuo took a deep breath and spat out a mouthful of glittering blood, branding Li Hao with it.

"Go on, then!"

Li Hao said nothing else before vanishing on the spot. The Black Armor looked at where he'd been. His eyes twinkled as he wondered—the secondary dimension? The great dao universe of this age? How... extraordinary!

Chapter 930: Battle With the Scarlet Shadow (I)

The cosmos.

Stars filled the void.

A tiger of fire shone brilliantly in space. A variety of other creatures traveled through the void—dragons, phoenixes, brown bears... It was a dreamscape.

Li Hao was in the form of a ferocious tiger. He no longer cared about the outside world. He wandered around leisurely in the cosmos, not daring to go anywhere else. He tilted his head up to look at the stars around him. What a rare moment of peace!

Li Hao smiled at the existences around him that were mentioned only in legends. In the distance, a longsword illuminated the void. He looked at it quizzically. A sword?

Is that my sword intent? Sword aura? Or someone else's?

According to his teacher and his own conjectures, this patch of universe was the great dao universe. The supernatural locks of modern humans might all be found here. The sword might belong to a swordsman.

A certain possibility occurred to him—was it Hong Yitang?

He didn't think further on it as the sword was too far away for confirmation. Li Hao didn't dare move about randomly at the moment.

Further inspiration then occurred to him. Since his physical body had entered the secondary dimension, then... could his physical body directly absorb energy from the universe?

The energy here was very unique in that it perfectly supplemented the issue of the human body being weak. To think of the idea was to execute it; the young man operated the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. As for what changes or unexpected developments might result from it, the daredevil Li Hao didn't care.

One could die immediately after learning the true meaning of dao. Understanding what the final destination of martial dao was a much more meaningful undertaking than killing people. If it wasn't for his teacher people outside, he'd want to roam freely through this universe!

If it wasn't for his tie to his teacher, nothing in the world would be able to stop him. The pursuit of absolute freedom was a very thrilling prospect.

The breathing method operated in full glory! Tendrils of unique energy quickly gathered around him. A shift took place through the universe as various celestial bodies hovered in and out of view. Li Hao's presence seemed to light up the cosmos. He was the brightest star among the vault of heaven.

The secondary dimension... doesn't have a name yet. Li Hao's thoughts ran wild. There was no master of this universe. It belonged to this age. Perhaps it was a great dao universe that had just formed. It should have a name, should it not?

I like picking names.

A smile appeared on Li Hao's face. He had nothing else better to do anyway, so why not choose a name for this universe? There was the core origin universe in New Martial, which later gave birth to core origin dao.

The core origin universe... What a lousy name.

“The myriad of stars are resplendent and a myriad of daos cross the void. Why not call it... the Hao Cosmos!” Li Hao declared with satisfaction. A name was boring unless it contained his own name!

My name is Li Hao. This place has a bright moon as the backdrop and thousands of sparkling stars dotting the surroundings. The character for ‘bright’ is the same as my ‘Hao’, so I shall call this universe the Hao Cosmos. That makes me very happy indeed!

As he operated the breathing method, several other major celestial bodies appeared next to him. There were ones of wind, thunder, fire... Li Hao manifested his supernatural characters and sent them out with a single thought.

They vanished and reappeared as brands on nearby stars. There seemed to be a Li Hao on each of the celestial bodies. This piqued Li Hao’s interest—or rather, his heart of pursuing dao.

Five of the celestial bodies were respectively shaped like a willow tree, golden egg, the seas, a ferocious tiger, and a mountain peak. They draw near each other and formed a massive circle, separate from others in the void.

The celestial bodies of wind and thunder were ostracized.

Seven Li Haos peered curiously around them and paid particular attention to the five celestial bodies in the circle. Five secret arts operated, those of the Weeping Willow Sword, Skyshaker Fist, Nine Forged Force, Earthturner Sword, and Golden Spear Method. Some of them came from the Steppe Prince’s collection, some came from the heritages of Silver Moon martial masters. Some came from Yuan Shuo’s teaching.

Five secret arts operated in conjunction and Li Hao temporarily set the Five Styles aside. Instead, he directed the five celestial bodies to deploy the five secret arts. The void shook as energy surged into them.

“Revolve!” Li Hao shouted and sent them into a jerky revolution. After some thought, he called out, “The Breathing Method of the Five Styles!”

Boom!

The five celestial bodies operated the breathing method at the same time; their revolution abruptly smoothed out. Not only did they lose their previous jerkiness, but they circulated at a much faster speed.

Li Hao's eyes widened. His teacher's breathing method was awesome! It could operate even in the Hao Cosmos. This was a circulation, wasn't it? A complete circulation!

His wind and thunder elements were ostracized because they couldn't become part of the Five Styles. They could only watch on as the five elements had their fun.

"What a pity..." The young man found it regretful, but soon thought of something else. He deployed the Wind Thunder Sword and sent the two planets revolving as well.

He then closed his eyes in meditation. A dark star abruptly appeared—there was no Li Hao on it. This was the star of darkness. It started turning as well when the Ghost Shadow Sword was deployed.

The young man then activated the light secret art and produced a star of light. There was no Li Hao in residence on it either. He had nine elements that produced nine celestial bodies. Of them, the five elements were of one system and wind and thunder of another. Light and darkness were independent of each other and didn't combine as one.

"Nine elements... If I can combine them as one, I might be able to become a nine element Arcanus!"

But how should he accomplish that? Li Hao thought of The Accounts of Evenround, the microcosmic disassembly and reassembly that it described. That was the heart of battle methods!

Secret arts such as the Five Styles were different as they were a combination of breathing method and unique ripple. His teacher must have observed a special shared resonance to create the secret art. Only then could he combine five secret arts together to form the Five Styles Breathing Method.

It's not as apparent in the outside world, but it will certainly be apparent in here...

He commanded the five stars to disperse and operated the five secret arts again. While his teacher may not have used the same secret arts to create his Breathing Method of the Five Styles, all roads led to the same end. It was all the same; there must be a special point of connection between them.

He might be able to discover something if he took the microscopic perspective. He could then connect the nine stars to each other and form a secret art of nine elements. By then, he wouldn't need to cultivate nine secret arts separately. He could do them as one.

Not only would that save a lot of time, but it would combine nine elements as one to strengthen the organs, body, and skeleton.

By now, Li Hao had almost forgotten that he had business to attend to outside. He utilized a macroscopic view to assess the dao universe, then used microscopic methods to analyze and dissect it. The Hao Cosmos was a heaven of martial dao. One could infinitely magnify supernatural abilities or infinitely zoom in on secret arts.

It was incredible!

As for the special energy in this universe that strengthened the body, Li Hao now found it to be of secondary importance. It was only a matter of time before the body was strengthened. Comprehending dao, however, was an opportunity to be fully grasped when it presented itself.

The young man lost himself in taking apart what was in front of him, continuously rearranging the celestial bodies. The more he reassembled them, the more he found the dao of all things to be endlessly changing and incredibly interesting. So there was a certain basic logic and rules to them!

Fire and water could coexist, but they needed to be disassembled to their basic foundation to do so. There was a reason that his fire and water had become one before.

Two celestial bodies collided in the void. A star of water with waves rearing over it, and a star of fire with a ferocious tiger howling from it. The tiger swallowed the waves until it could gradually step on them, thus melding fire and water together.

“I see...”

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At the same time, the outside world.

Heaven and earth overturned. Rain suddenly poured from the sky, followed by a sunset that glowed like a fiery rainbow in the firmament. Multiple powerhouses lifted their eyes to the sky. Earthturner Sword, Sky Sword...

These premier martial masters looked overhead, finding the world shaking beneath their feet. Fire and water energy seemed particularly active; the rate of energy production in the world accelerated.

Outside Skystar City, the Skystar Sea rocked and waves reached for the sky.

Inside the royal palace.

Hong Yitang looked at the sky. A couple of royal descendants found the phenomena strange and looked at the sky. It was blinding as the power of fire manifested.

“What’s going on?”

“I don’t know.”

“Energy seems to be available in a denser concentration around us.”

“Is it the second awakening?”

“Not that, it wouldn’t come around so slowly. There’s just a bit more energy in the environment...”
Conversation flourished as Hong Yitang watched the sky. He closed his eyes. An empty universe appeared behind them and he seemed to see fire and water melding together, as well as a tiger walking over the waves.

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In the ruins underground.

Yuan Shuo and the others were furtively digging a hole when Yuan Shuo suddenly stopped. Fire and water glimmered in his eyes as he quickly shut them and sat down cross-legged. The Black Armor tilted his head curiously at the old man.

Yuan Shuo didn’t explain himself and continued taking stock of what he’d sensed. After a while, he rose and transmitted, “Continue.”

“What was that?” transmitted a baffled Director General Wang.

“Nothing, just that a new era is about to arrive!” Yuan Shuo suddenly laughed with blatant cockiness. “New Martial is New Martial and Silver Moon is Silver Moon. Perhaps Silver Moon’s heritage stems from New Martial, but it has been one hundred thousand years since New Martial! The seas have turned into mulberry fields and Silver Moon has become the home of its people.

Silver Moon denizens are not of New Martial, and New Martial's martial dao is not Silver Moon's martial dao!"

"Whatever you like," the Black Armor transmitted calmly. "Innumerable worlds abound in the multiverse, New Martial is only one of them and not the entire universe. Pursuing a new dao instead of New Martial might be the beginning of civilization."

"Senior is certainly an open-minded person!"

"No, just that... I am unable to feel a kinship with this separate age," the Black Armor answered honestly.