

Star Gate 941

Chapter 941: Winding Up Loose Ends (I)

Yuan Shuo roared from close quarters and erupted with a domain of the five elements. He clapped it down over Zhao Tianyang, whereas he himself jumped out and pummeled Qi Pingjiang with punches. He delivered a barrage of one hundred punches until one connected squarely with his opponent!

He operated the Incantation of the Blade of Blood and summoned a massive bear with a howl. His chest caved in, Qi Pingjiang coughed up blood from the punch.

“You’re still... so strong...” he heaved for breath with a smile. “My wife... died to... one punch... through the heart... Yuan Shuo... you have truly... taken martial dao... to its extreme...”

He turned to look at Li Hao and the fallen Skystar King on the ground.

“Actually... that guy... was good enough,” he sighed. “He was... better than... his son. The nine ministries... could succeed... because that guy... chose to abdicate... at the end...”

He fell backward on his back and whispered, “Ole Zhao, our era... has finished!”

Boom! He crashed down with arms outstretched!

Zhao Tianyang heaved a long sigh within the domain. His old friends had left one by one. To the victor went the spoils. Everyone knew that there was no chance left the moment that Li Hao’s group appeared. And yet, it was still saddening to see people fall one by one.

“Yuan Shuo, Li Hao... can you erase this part of history when you write the history books in the future?” Zhao Tianyang laughed tragically. “Can you just... leave us eighty years in the past?”

Indeed, eighty years ago! That would be when the old ministers died! They all died after establishing the nine ministries.

“We can decide that later!” Li Hao frowned.

“What a pity!” Zhao Tianyang erupted with a powerful surge of aura and broke the domain of the five elements. He was as if a demon god come to life, descending upon the world with a punch and beating Yuan Shuo back. “Don’t you like using the fist? I will grant you your wish!”

RUMBLE!

Punch after punch followed, shoving Yuan Shuo to a wall. He roared with fury and responded in kind!

Fist matched fist for hundreds of punches—both of their hands were nearly completely shattered! Zhao Tianyang and Yuan Shuo disengaged at the same time. The minister’s presence was in disarray and he smiled at Yuan Shuo. “The Five Styles secret art... is incredible!”

BAM!

His arms exploded, his organs crumbled away, and Zhao Tianyang toppled over with unspeakable regret in his eyes.

I used to be a hero renowned throughout the world eighty years ago! Perhaps... we should’ve all died when we overthrew the royal family!

He closed his eyes and looked no more upon this world.

The premises quieted as four ministers and the old Skystar King were all dead. Their demise meant that curtains had been drawn on the Skystar Dynasty. The status quo of the nine ministries and royal family existing in conjunction would soon fade away.

Under orders from their Silver Armor troop leaders, the Skystar Army rushed the Black Armaturas. The royal family had brought a sizable force with them—almost one thousand, but not many were left by now. The survivors were being cut down by the Skystar Army.

They had their own Silver Armors, but those were of the Jiangs.

No one said anything as they were elites. The Black Armaturas fought on even though they'd seen the old Skystar King die with their own eyes. They would fight to the last. It would seem that the Jiangs had raised some loyal troops after being in command for two hundred years.

“Chaaaarge!” called out one of the troop leaders. The remaining one hundred assembled themselves for one final charge.

This army had once swept through the world, marching through ninety-nine provinces, ever victorious and all conquering. And yet, it was still unable to withstand an army of the ancient civilization. They were actually of the same system since they were both bestowed with a Skystar Army designation. Their armor was of the same system, but the bodies littered the ground now.

The one hundred troops left readied themselves for a final charge. A Silver Armor held the royal pennant of a golden dragon high. A Bronze Armor from the Skystar Army cut it down moments later.

The pennant dropped and its bearer was similarly hacked to death. The Black Armaturas died to the last. Blood flowed in rivers over the ground!

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Li Hao watched silently without too many thoughts. To the victor went the spoils. That had ever been true. He didn't need to think too hard or too much on the events of the day. There was no need to regret anything. Whether these people had been the hero or villain back in their time, they'd all fallen in battle today.

It was time for the name of 'Skystar Dynasty' to disappear from this world. As for how history books would speak of them... he didn't care. Whether it was to praise or deride them, all of it would be in the past soon enough.

He looked at some other parts of the battlefield.

Director General Wang and the redwood tree were very powerful. They suppressed two plant spirits, leaving the remaining five Silver Armors to coordinate with the jujube tree to bring the other two plant spirits under control. There would be no further unexpected developments taking place today.

Li Hao lifted his head to look at the void. A very romantic sight filled it as countless rose petal leaves dyed it red. The bramble rose chuckled alluringly.

"Of humans, beasts, and plant spirits, the plant spirits have ever been the weakest. Monster spirits have a Monster Spirit Envoy and a Sea Pacification Envoy, but there is no plant spirit powerhouse that can truly take a stand beneath the world to unify us! Whether it is the Cat Tree or Sky Wood, neither of the two secured better status or benefits for plant spirits...

"The beast spirits have some status to speak of. Plant spirits are living beings as well, but we can only supply life essence to humans while we till your fields, and raise your crops. How is this fair?!" The bramble rose flashed a radiant smile.

It was indeed very unfair! Whether it was human internal discord or wars with external enemies, it was the plant spirits that always walked away worse for the wear. They were needed to supply endless Water of Life when war began, then needed to raise crops for humanity when war ended.

What could the bramble rose do one hundred years ago when humanity fought among itself and Skystar Town was destroyed? It was humans who came to raze their own cities, how was it supposed to safeguard the town?

And one hundred thousand years later, the grandson of the supreme came to kill it. The bramble rose didn't think that it'd done anything wrong. It only felt that its kind would forever be slaves to humanity if they didn't produce a heavyweight.

No one was willing to be born into a life of servitude or to be someone's vassal! Plant spirits were no exception.

"Zhang An, if you see some of the more powerful plant spirits, please tell them why we are unable to produce a definitive heavyweight. It is because none of us carry the plant spirits of the world in our hearts! We deserve our fates of never being able to exalted emperors! Hahaha!" the bramble rose tinkled with peals of laughter.

Beast spirits had exalted emperors, but plant spirits... did not. Even one as strong as the Sky Wood, just one step away from crossing the threshold, was unable to do so one hundred thousand years ago. This was a fate well deserved!

Kaboom!

The world shook as a massive rose petal exploded.

"I will not leave my corpse for you. I lived as your servant and do not wish to die as your food."

Rose petals rained from the sky as tinkling laughter dissipated upon the wind. Dark red filled the air. The petals drifted away, leaving only Black Armor Zhang An standing in the void.

He looked at the massive petal burning away. He could've taken the bramble rose alive at the last possible second, but he chose not to do so. Was the plant spirit wrong?

Zhang An knew that the rose was wrong from humanity's perspective, yet it hadn't seemed to do anything wrong from the perspective of its freedom. Plant spirits had indeed always been weak.

Even strong existences such as the Cat Tree hadn't been able to set foot into exalted emperor by the end of New Martial.

Therefore, plant spirits had never been held in high regard.

Since the other didn't desire to leave its body behind for humans to devour, Zhang An decided to permit the bramble rose its wish after some thought.

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On the ground.

Li Hao held out a hand for a drifting rose petal and watched it turn to liquid, then disappear. He didn't feel much regret or sadness about a wasted resource. The young man simply thought over the bramble rose's words.

Indeed, by what right did a race have to speak if they lacked a true powerhouse? Wasn't that the case in all of Silver Moon? Jiang Chen and the others were favored sons of heaven in this age, but they ultimately became servants and pawns of these ancient personages and plant spirits.

Although they were all humans, they were humans of different ages. Hence, they could be viewed as two different races. The strong fed on the weak. How would a race have any status to speak of if they lacked notable powerhouses?

Weren't the times today similar to times long ago? Was Li Hao truly in a better situation than the bramble rose? Although the formidable Black Armor and the still-fighting Director General Wang treated him well, what if he was unable to escort them out of the Star Gate?

What if they could only stay in Silver Moon?

If the main cities revived, if New Martial revived, would these people turn into his subordinates?

At present, they still nursed a bit of hope for leaving and returning to their homeland. What if those hopes were dashed?

Various trains of thought ran through Li Hao's mind when a loud impact rang out after Director General Wang's yell. An avenue of great dao appeared in the sky; a seal smashed right into it. An agonized wail rang out as the dominoes began to fall.

With the demise of their strongest member, the bramble rose, the other plant spirits knew that this was the end of the road.

"We surrender!" the rest bawled after Director General Wang killed one of them. "We didn't do anything, we were sent straight asleep when battle began. We're just fighting for our recovery. Everyone's doing the same, what wrong have we committed?"

Who would listen to them at this stage?

The entire group focused on the remaining plant spirits. Under such close attention, they couldn't self detonate even if they wanted to. All of their hearts of life were demolished, their great dao crushed, and their voices silenced moments later.

Only the sealed Sun Xin was watching them in the vast ruins. Despair filtered into his eyes. Defeat!

Although he hadn't nursed much hope, the bramble rose had died too quickly when it faced Zhang An. It hadn't given him a chance to break free.

Chapter 942: Winding Up Loose Ends (II)

The other Silver Armors present were quiet. Not only were they silent after killing the plant spirits, but so was the rest of the Skystar Army quiet as well.

The Silver Armors still possessed their physical bodies, but the bodies of others in the army were long gone. They held on in the shape of lingering will or mental strength, so they still had their own consciousness. That made them better off than those of Battle Heaven, but right now, they all grappled with the understanding that their vice commander had been lying to them this entire time.

They'd stood guard here for countless eons!

Blank looks filled the faces of some of the Silver Armors. Why had this happened?? The vice commander was in cahoots with the people who'd attacked Skystar Town?!

They hadn't believed it when the rose spoke of it, yet once Zhang An said the same thing, they knew that they had no choice but to believe.

The Black Armor landed on the ground and walked toward the sealed Sun Xin, ignoring everyone else. He undid the seal with a wave of his hand.

"I'm very curious, why did you betray New Martial?" There was no disappointment in his voice, just bafflement.

The vice commander of Skystar Army had been a peak Immortal back in the day, that made him a notable personage. Sun Xin was also a veteran general stemming from the early days of New Martial. How would he not know the might and terrors of the Human King?

Zhang An did not understand this betrayal.

Although Sun Xin was released from his seal, he didn't leap into any wild movements. He simply patted down his tattered armor so that he'd present a more dignified front.

The Silver Armors moved to the side without a word, silently regarding this vice commander who they'd spent endless years with.

“I’m sorry, I lied to you guys...” Sun Xin smiled apologetically.

“Commander.... why... did you...”

“I was just stuck at Immortal for too long and unwilling to accept that,” laughed Sun Xin. “As an old subordinate of Director Zhang, not many of us survived our deployment. I felt that I had certain merits to my name, but was assigned to a dreary outpost like Silver Moon and became a mine guard.

“My colleagues either became commander-in-chief of important armies or a local overlord in the main world. Why were my circumstances so unfair?? I was simply driven by jealousy and anger.” He looked at the Black Armor. “Such is mankind. We can suffer together, but find it unfair when rewards are being doled out. But betrayal never crossed my mind, I was simply envious and resentful!

“And then...” Sun Xin paused before laughing, “Someone came to me. They were very strong and very capable—they could even read minds! They were terrifying and knew that I was bitter, that I’d embezzled much ore from the mine...

“I was the protector of the Skystar mine and just wanted to take a little.” He shook his head with self-deprecating laughter. “I just wanted to make it to the Saint level. Who would’ve thought that I’d be discovered? You know as well as me that the Human King and his ilk have zero tolerance when it comes to such matters. I was afraid!

“Therefore, helping them once became the start of a slippery slope. I did a few things for them that became a few more things until eventually, I was in so deep that I could not extract myself!”

Embezzlement and neglect of duties were a severe wrong, but they didn’t deserve death. As Sun Xin grew further entangled with these mysterious people, he gradually came to understand that there would be no possible fate other than death if he was found out.

Such were people. Mistakes started from small transgressions and led one step-by-step into the abyss.

“And you were willing when they wanted you to safeguard the mine for so many years?” asked the Black Armor after he digested Sun Xin’s response.

“What could I do if I wasn’t willing?” Sun Xin asked softly. “I could only see this through to the end once I’d attached myself to them. Not to mention, I hadn’t thought that New Martial really would fall. The one in the depths of the mine has always been there, so you tell me, could I have harbored any other thoughts?”

“Who destroyed Skystar Town?” the Black Armor asked again.

“A lot of people!” Sun Xin laughed.

“A lot of people?”

“Yes, more than one city was involved. You might think that one entire city turned on New Martial... The truth is not that scary, but also even scarier. There were many and I recognized ones from the eight main cities, as well as premier wandering cultivators. Battle Heaven and Sword City were the only exceptions.”

Director General Wang quickly walked forward with an urgent expression on his face. “Was there no one from Battle Heaven?”

“I don’t know, but I didn’t see any that I recognized,” Sun Xin responded calmly. “Only part of the group showed their real faces, another concealed their identities, and a portion were very unfamiliar to me.

“On that day, two Empyrean Kings, at least ten Saints, and nearly one hundred Immortals ambushed us! Commander Jiang was quickly killed in the first wave of surprise and the one hundred thousand troops of Skystar Army swiftly routed. Powerhouses stationed at various points were murdered...

“But that shouldn’t be all! Energy spontaneously disappeared that day, as did core origin dao. Communication with the eight main cities was severed, so perhaps there were co-conspirators in all of the eight cities to prevent word of what was happening at Skystar Town from leaking.

“After the attackers defeated the Skystar Army, they excavated the mine and retrieved two-thirds of the ore, leaving one-third behind. You saw it too, it was done to nurture that one’s body and also to prepare for the future when energy awakened throughout the land.”

Li Hao hadn’t planned on interrupting the questioning, but he suddenly interjected, “Retrieved two-thirds of the ores?”

Sun Xin glanced at him and couldn’t be bothered to respond. There was still an air of haughtiness to him and he returned to the Black Armor and Director General Wang. “Bramble had surrendered by then, it was placed in charge of keeping Skystar Town isolated. I was given responsibility to oversee this area. I’d thought that the next step would come soon, but who would’ve thought that thousands of years would pass in the blink of an eye?”

“Who from the main cities participated?” frowned Director General Wang. “There were two other Empyrean Kings... which two? Also, did that scarlet shadow exist during Initial Martial, or was it from another world?”

Sun Xin looked at him and said after a long moment, “I didn’t recognize one of the Empyrean Kings and the other... was the patriarch of the Zhengs.”

“Him??” blinked the director general with sheer disbelief.

“Are you sure?” the Black Armor also asked coldly.

“I am,” laughed Sun Xin. “You don’t believe it too, right? I couldn’t either when I saw them!”

The Zheng family had been one of the twelve families in the sacred land of Tranquil Star back in New Martial. They had an exalted emperor among their ranks; it was only a side branch residing in Skystar Town.

It was incredibly hard to believe that a traitor had surfaced in a family with an exalted emperor. Even though they’d known early on that there was a possibility of one of the families in the main cities betraying New Martial, how could it be... the Zheng family?!

Although they said to themselves that everything was possible, it was still very difficult to accept when they actually heard about it!

Li Hao was suddenly reminded of the folk song and grew confused about it. He interrupted again, despite Sun Xin ignoring him. “There’s an old folk song popular in Silver City about the sword of the Lis, the blade of the Zhangs, and the trouble that is the Zheng young master. Did this song exist in the ancient civilization, or was it popularized later on?”

The group was puzzled and Director General Wang frowned.

“Of course it was popularized later on. The eight cities ruled over this world in our time. No one would dare deride them in such a fashion.”

“Then where did it come from?” Li Hao questioned. “The trouble that was the Zheng young master... doesn’t sound like a complimentary turn of phrase. Our captive here says that the Zhengs turned traitor, which makes the song even more curious.

“There must be someone who knew the inside story and shared it. Silver City has always sung this folk song, so this wasn’t a recent or temporary development. Perhaps it’s been passed down for thousands of years. I’m unsure of the specifics.”

The group was likewise baffled. Who'd created the song and shared it? No one was awake before and the ruins weren't open. Who could disseminate it in the outside world?

There hadn't been a single iota of energy in the outside world back then; Apexes might not have been able to extend a single tendril of mental strength. It would've been outright crushed to pieces. In those times, anyone from the ancient civilization was suppressed no matter how weak they were.

Who would be in the right frame of mind to compose a song of the insurrection and spread it? Even those such as Sun Xin had come in contact with the outside world in recent years. The crucial factor was that the bramble rose had stopped them before. Prior to that, the ruins were completely isolated.

Who passed on the song?

"Can it have something to do with their weapons or battle methods?" Li Hao recalled how most of the lyrics had to do with introducing the family weapons. Perhaps the same went for the Zhengs?

"The Zheng family is skilled at the whip and their heritage weapon is the Nine-Knotted Whip..." said Director General Wang. What did that have to do with being trouble? "The Zheng young master... Their patriarch had three sons. Does this young master refer to the youngest or another one of the three?"

He was quite confounded as well. The folk song seemed to hint at something. When combined with Sun Xin's words, perhaps the song was hinting that the Zheng family had betrayed them all. Could it be that an ancient powerhouse had emerged from one of the ruins a while back to spread the word?

However, they found themselves unable to enter the other ruins and might have been concerned that other communication methods would eventually die out. Therefore, they wrote a folk song as these were easily popularized and shared from generation to generation.

Silver City happened to be where the Li family had been headquartered during New Martial and where the Star Gate was located. Did they wish to notify the Li family through this method?

The group looked at each other. The various Silver Armors were also confused, but didn't offer a word.

Sun Xin continued to ignore Li Hao after another glance. "I do not know the other Empyrean King, but I recognized some of the Saints."

Director General Wang's face continued to darken as he listed people that had been noticeable personages in their time. Two of them were even senior executives of a main city—one was a vice city lord and the other was a reserve commander of one of the main city armies. He could command one hundred thousand troops!

As for the others, their status wasn't low either. However, those who wielded actual power were few and far in between.

Chapter 944: The World Changes Master (I)

Zhang An was silent for a long while before finally saying, "I'm tired. Wang Ye of Battle Heaven can decide how to handle the rest of you. I'm just the dean of education at a martial university, not your ranking officer!"

He vanished on the spot, possibly to muse over certain things.

Director General Wang looked at the group, then at Li Hao. After brainstorming for the proper sentencing, he said, "Although you did not wallow in the mire with Sun Xin, it is an incontrovertible fact that your incompetence led to misconduct and neglect of your duties! You aided and abetted the tyrants so that Sun Xin could recover and even advance further in his cultivation!

"In accordance with military regulations, all of you are hereby demoted three ranks, sentenced to five hundred lashes each, and assigned to the vanguard..." Although the vanguard no longer existed, such was Wang Ye's determination. "Whenever we encounter the traitors, you are to charge at the front of the army! Not a single step can be taken backward and you will fight unto the death!"

Boom!

Several hundred soldiers pounded their chests and lowered their heads. That indicated that they accepted their sentencing. Once war broke out again, they would be the vanguard. They would never rest and never give up. These soldiers were now deathsworn who would not return home until they vanquished the enemy.

Wang Ye cast another complicated look over the group and waved his hand. “Dismissed. Cleanse the town of all danger and fortify the defenses. The enemy might come back for you.”

“Understood, sir!” The soldiers shouted in unison and withdrew, reappearing among dilapidated structures to repair the ancient town.

Director General Wang walked back and plopped down next to Li Hao. He rubbed his head, despondent. Wang Ye was quite lost after all of the recent revelations.

“Do you know, Li Hao? I’m not afraid of any enemy, no matter how strong they are! Those of New Martial feel no fear. But once your old comrades turn into the enemy.... Li Hao, do you know the feeling? I feel nothing but despair!”

The typically merry ancient powerhouse was very emotionally fragile at this moment. Perhaps Zhang An was in a similar mood.

“It’s alright.” Li Hao thought for a moment and nodded. “If you can’t bring yourself to kill them, I’ll kill them for you. I’ll kill them all and prevent you from being irritated by any of them!”

Director General Wang started and looked at the young man.

“I mean it, be at ease!” Li Hao grinned broadly. “If you can’t bear to harm them and I don’t know them, I’ll kill them for you. You guys can be in charge of killing those you aren’t mentally burdened by.”

His comfort was particularly sincere, but it sent cold chills down Director General Wang's back. He seemed to read mountains of corpses and seas of blood in the young man's eyes.

"Li Hao, we've only heard from Sun Xin when it comes to certain matters..."

"I understand!" Li Hao nodded. Who the hell cares! I'll kill anyone who doesn't listen! I learned this from your Human King!

Of course, it was all just talk for the moment. We're running into Empyrean Kings and Saints for our enemies, it's not like I can kill them. When I can... I'll just off them all and call it a day!

With that, Li Hao ambled off to collect the bodies. There wasn't one to collect for the bramble rose, but there were four other plant spirits on the scene. Corpses were very valuable! He'd struck it rich!

As for the grudges and web of relationships from the last days of New Martial, Li Hao couldn't be bothered with any of that. It was none of his business even if the elder brother of the Ninth Division leader had turned traitor. That wasn't his brother.

Director General Wang sighed tragically to himself when he saw how excited the young man was. Forget it, he was just wasting his breath telling Li Hao any of this. He would just sit and sigh by himself!

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The four dead plant spirits were all Immortals and held fifteen thousand drops of Water of Life in their bodies. Much of it had been expended in the previous battles; there would've been more otherwise.

What was further left were their bodies and some fruit. There was one fruit bearing tree among the four—an apple tree. But since they were plant spirits, there were always mutations from their mundane forms. Li Hao didn't know if those were apples or not.

He collected twelve apples and a few sunflower seeds. Combined with the coconut seeds he'd obtained last time, that made for some growing reserves in his storage ring. More importantly was this mine and this town!

Indeed, Skystar Town itself was a treasure. There were all sorts of facilities, techniques, and equipment here that were enormously valuable. There must be a weapon forge around somewhere as well.

Although Skystar Town couldn't take to the air and conduct aerial battle like Battle Heaven, its defenses were strong and its facilities complete. With all ten of its guardian spirits dead, Li Hao felt that it should be easy to claim the town for himself. Although some troop leaders remained in its army, they were preoccupied with redeeming themselves. They took their orders from Director General Wang.

Although two-thirds of the mine was gone, Li Hao had never seen so many energy stones in his life. He'd find it a staggering amount even if only one-tenth was left. This was the most amount of energy stones he'd ever seen at any given time.

At this point, he didn't really care about the treasures that the dead ministers or the old Skystar King owned. He even wanted to feed the Saint-level weapons to Stellaris and be rid of them.

When he recalled that other people might need those weapons, he chose to save the weapons. Recently, the sword ate with gusto everything it was fed; there was no point in feeding it these particular weapons.

The Black Armor Zhang An seemed to be sorting through some thoughts. He remained in the depths of the mine and refused to emerge.

Director General Wang entered the town to see if there was a way to fully activate it. The remaining plant spirits dispersed, off to absorb whatever energy they could get their roots on.

There was no time to waste. Li Hao returned to the surface as there was much for him to do there.

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The ruins at the Skystar Commander Office.

When Li Hao arrived at the entrance, he left the ruins with the eight plant spirits separately blocking the other eight entrances. There were ten entrances total to the town. The remaining two were given over to the redwood and little jujube tree.

As for the imperial guard, Li Hao set it to watching the great mine. Energy was densest there; this counted as a token of appreciation toward the little tree.

The eleven plant spirits tightly sealed off the various entrances. If anyone wanted to enter from the outside world, they would have to pass through the gauntlet of plant spirits.

Li Hao and Yuan Shuo emerged from the ruins together. Yuan Shuo sighed the moment they walked out.

“Does teacher think that the ancients are too strong, or that we are... too weak?” Li Hao said softly, seeming to read Yuan Shuo’s mind.

The old man shook his head, surprising his student.

“I was reflecting on the fact that no matter how strong an era is, curtains eventually fall on it!” Yuan Shuo sighed again. “Skystar Dynasty was the strongest in our age—it conquered the central plains! The world was a chaotic mess prior to the dynasty’s formation.

“And here we see the even older age of New Martial. They were so strong and possessed countless powerhouses. Their Saints were as innumerable as drops of water in rainfall and their Empyrean Kings as common as clouds in the sky. They had exalted emperors, the Human King, their supreme, great emperors... Yet they are gone just the same.

“I suddenly feel that this is all there is to life at the end of the day. The world repeats itself over and over again. I... just don’t know what to say.”

He’d known before that the ancient civilization was strong, but it was his first time understanding how terrifyingly strong it was. This was just a minor world and one set of ruins—yet there’d been several Saints and large numbers of Immortals populating it. And this was when core origin had fallen silent! How mighty it must have been during New Martial proper!

It was incredibly hard to fathom that curtains had fallen on such an age as well.

“What’s gotten into you, teacher?” Somehow, Li Hao was laughing. “Isn’t this great? Don’t you like to pursue a stronger future? We have more opportunities when there is an unlimited future above us. Even if we can’t surpass it, chasing it is a great source of enjoyment, is it not?”

So his teacher was feeling emotional about this! How fascinating! He’d never thought that his teacher would be afraid of anything, that Yuan Shuo would only endlessly pursue and surpass his goals.

The old man smiled without a response. What his student said was true, but... he was feeling a bit empty after killing some of the powerhouses of the older generation. Those had been some of the strongest characters of this age!

They were just small fry in the great battle, as were he and his student. The true combatants had been the Saints. They’d determined the entire outcome while the rest of them could only clean up the remains of the battlefield.

These ancients were polite enough to Li Hao for now, but at the end of the day, they were the ones who'd guaranteed victory at the mine! Would Li Hao be able to say anything if they decided to keep the mine for themselves?

Of course, Li Hao was useful as a transporter of ancient personnel. That was his greatest function at the moment. These ancients wouldn't be able to enter the ruins otherwise and their range of movement would be greatly curtailed without the young man.

There were limits to both sides, but it was ultimately Li Hao who needed the other side more. The young man didn't care about any of this.

"We have a very solid opportunity to develop this time, teacher. If we also down take the nine ministries and royal family, I'd like to enter closed door cultivation and summon all Silver Moon martial masters to study the martial dao system. I'd like to reorganize it and perfect a new martial dao!

"I have an outline floating around my mind, but I still need everyone's contributions. The system right now is incoherent and martial dao a mess. Although this promotes freeform development of all possibilities, most of them don't have much of a future.

"I think that the Hao Cosmos is where the greatest potential of our future can be found!"

Yuan Shuo nodded, he quite agreed with his disciple.

Manager Yu arrived as they conversed; she was overjoyed to see the two of them emerge from the ruins. It'd been almost a day since Li Hao brought people into the ruins. Although their people were still standing firm at their respective posts, the longer this dragged on, the more dangerous their situation would be.

There was a limit to each ministry's patience. Immensely undesirable happenings might result if they erupted with dissatisfaction.

Chapter 945: The World Changes Master (II)

“How did it go?” Manager Yu hastily asked when she saw the two emerge from the ruins.

“It’s done.”

“Really?!” Sheer delight spread across the manager’s face. She could no longer contain herself. It was done!

Those words represented too much. It meant that the backers of the nine ministries and royal family had been swept clean. It meant that the premier powerhouses that’d entered the mines had all perished.

She couldn’t believe that they’d actually succeeded!

It was now December, but roughly two weeks left until the end of the year. They’d completed the encirclement of the nine ministries and royal in the 1730th year of the Star Era. Had the two hundred years of history for the Skystar Dynasty come to an end? Would it be a new history starting next year?

“Then now...” Yu Luocha murmured nervously. Should they go to the nine ministries? The royal family?

“We go to the nine ministries and royal family!” Li Hao nodded. “We go one by one and kill only the evildoers. We will conduct this in secret and quietly finish the transition from the nine ministries and royal. They will continue to reign for the moment...”

Completely overhauling the government in a split second was bound to create issues. The four continents were still in disarray and order hadn’t been fully restored to the central region either. The three great organizations were active, as were some of the divine mountains. It was not the best time to wholly change the world as they knew it.

Ensuring a peaceful transition would at least eliminate some of the bumps and hurdles. It would be the best outcome for all of Skystar. Otherwise... not only would they have to grapple with internal unrest, but have to fend against external worries as well.

The four nations surrounding them might be lying in wait, counting down the days until the central region utterly raged out of control. A transition of power would be when that took place.

These were not the concerns on Manager Yu's mind; jubilation and elation were the only its only inhabitants. "Silver Moon has never conquered the world, never since the start of time. The northern reaches are barren and impoverished. Although our warriors are valiant and our experts numerous, their foundations are too weak to subdue the world. People laugh at us for being northern savages, but now... we have a chance of uniting the world!"

"You are a martial master, what do you care about this for?" Li Hao burst out laughing.

"No no no, this is the pride of being a Silver Moon denizen!"

Li Hao laughed some more and didn't comment further. "Let's go to the Ministry of Administration first!"

This was the first among the nine ministries!

The group didn't object. Liu Long assembled a team of personal guards for Li Hao. They were comprised of the former Demon Hunters from Silver City.

Although night had fallen, lights blazed in Skystar City. The investigation continued as large numbers of supernaturals and martial masters were being registered. This was singularly the quietest and most bustling day the capital had ever known.

It was quite a contradiction!

The streets were quiet because everyone had reached an unspoken accord to not go anywhere, but they were also bustling because superhumans walked out of every corner to gather at the central plaza. There were more than one hundred thousand at the plaza, a figure far greater than previously imagined.

Skystar City was a metropolis of thirty million residents and the heart of the entire world. All the same, it was incredible that there were one hundred thousand superhumans not part of the various institutions' ranks. And this wasn't all!

The supernaturals within the military and various private armies were yet to be counted. All in total, there might be more than two hundred thousand supernaturals in Skystar City. While that numbered less than City of Supernaturals, the supernaturals in the dynasty's capital should be of higher caliber.

The City of Supernaturals was an assorted mix of talents from all walks of life. Their residents hailed from various parts of the dynasty and there were plenty of weaklings. They had many Starlight and even more Sunflare and Solar.

.....

The Ministry of Administration.

Chen Zhongtian was in residence and seemed to have dozed off. Zhao Huaimin was reading a book while the ministry's supernaturals waited silently in the courtyard.

Zhao Huaimin was seated not far from Chen Zhongtian. Only his faint turns of the page could be heard throughout the entire courtyard. There was no movement otherwise. Hence, when a disturbance sounded outside, it was particularly noticeable.

Raising his head, Zhao Huaimin glanced outside to see Li Hao stride imperiously toward him. The young man was dressed in silver armor as the gold armor had completely shattered. Zhao Huaimin sighed!

The man waved the door shut when Li Hao entered the great hall. Manager Yu went on the alert, but the young man didn't twitch a muscle. Zhao Huaimin sighed, his eyes red. He put down his book and smoothed his clothes. Instead of getting on his knees, he bent his body in a ninety degree bow.

"My father is dead," he whispered. "The nine ministries are a thing of the past. Sinner Zhao Huaimin greets Commander Li!"

"You know?" Li Hao raised an eyebrow.

"My father did." Zhao Huaimin lowered his head. "My father said that you would not idly sit by during their operation. When Uncle Chen's Saint weapon broke, it was likely for the purpose of killing the Golden Coconut. You must have known what was happening in the ruins. If you appeared and came to the ministry... that would mean they failed.

"I had thought that father was just being humble," Zhao Huaimin said ruefully. "To think that he would be right on the money!"

Li Hao thought back to Zhao Tianyang's expression in that last fight. He had been so unflappable from beginning to end. Only in his last moments did he ask to have history stop at eighty years ago.

So he'd long known that his group was likely to clash with Li Hao. What he didn't anticipate was this outcome, that Li Hao would bring a premier Saint with him and outright change the outcome of battle.

Zhao Huaimin didn't say anything else. Some items appeared in his storage ring.

"This is a census of the world as provided by the various provinces and Skystar City. All nine billion, six hundred and eighty-two million citizens are recorded here..."

It was a book... a pile... a volume that was the size of half of the hall. There was far too much information in there. Zhao Huaimin displayed it for a bit before putting it away and setting its storage ring aside.

“This is a list of all provincial government personnel throughout the ninety-nine provinces.” He took out another item from another storage ring. “It includes their resume and evaluation notes. All of this is from my father.

“Father once said that it was impossible for one powerhouse alone to administer the world, no matter how capable they were. It is too vast! Only those who know how to use people well can manage the world. If you wish, the commander can use your discretion as not all officials were wrongdoers...

“Sometimes, it is not the strong that can run the world. There are many heavyweights in Silver Moon, but how many of them can supervise the world?” Zhao Huaimin chuckled. “This information is at your disposal, commander!”

Li Hao nodded without a word.

“This is a list of personnel at the Supervisory Office, the supernatural organization under the Ministry of Administration!” Zhao Huaimin brought out more items. “There are two such offices that operate throughout the dynasty. The first one is out in the open and consists of ninety thousand members. The second in the shadows is composed of ten thousand members. Together, they make for one hundred thousand!

“The list of those out in the open and those in the shadows are here. The Supervisory Office will take orders from oneever who holds the medallion!”

The man set the medallion down to the side and continued retrieving items. “This is a list of Zhao family assets throughout the land, including some trading guilds, real estate, and family branches.”

That was another storage ring, and a final item rounded out the lot. It was a book, the book he'd been reading—The Skystar Tales.

“My father wrote this when he was alive. Perhaps... the commander might not read it, but my father said to give it to the commander if you came. This was the most valuable item in my father's possession. It recorded some of his experiences, what he saw and heard, his reflections, and some of his thoughts.”

Li Hao shifted from his spot and took a step forward to accept the book. There were only two lines of text on the title page—the nights are long with no sign of the sun. A sky full of stars pales in comparison to one with the sun.

The young man looked at the second sentence. A sky with a sun... Sky... sun... the characters of ‘tian’ and ‘yang’! Zhao Tianyang!

Li Hao took a quick glance at the book. Its pages recorded what Zhao Tianyang had witnessed and experienced as a minor official, some of the people he'd once met and the deeds he'd done...

“Then I accept this.” Li Hao inclined his head.

“My thanks to the commander!” Zhao Huaimin sighed again.

“You are far too polite.”

Manager Yu didn't know why their enemy was offering his thanks. It was a very strange situation. The Zhaos had known early on that they might die!

“My family has done wrong, but we have also strictly adhered to the law,” Zhao Huaimin continued. “The commander has newly conquered the world and cannot kill everyone who stands in your way. My father is dead, I shall follow him. But the rest of my family... If the commander is

willing to show mercy, please just cripple them of their cultivation and exile them to the mountains.”

Li Hao did not say a word. Zhao Huaimin didn't continue pleading either. Blood seeped out of his mouth and he raised his head to look at the young man. “The core nature of the nine ministries was to strive for peace beneath the heavens. But our ability proved to be less than sufficient and we lost our way.

“We began in high spirits and shrank at the end. We did not fulfill the duties that our positions required of us.” He smiled at Li Hao. “I hope that the commander does not repeat our mistakes and adheres to stamping out wrongdoing, that you hold fast to your duties. Be wary of the four nations attacking the central plains...”

Li Hao nodded.

Zhao Huaimin said no more and sat down ramrod straight. He looked at Chen Zhongtian before closing his eyes.

There was neither joy nor excitement forthcoming in Chen Zhongtian. He was simply lost and a little saddened. He'd watched Zhao Huaimin grow up and knew that this day was forthcoming. Whether it was Li Hao or someone else who claimed the ultimate victory, this day was written in stone. But to watch his nephew personally shatter his heart's meridian, crush his organs, and end his life...

Chen Zhongtian's heart was heavy and his despondency hard to mask. Zhao Tianyang and the rest were dead. The nine ministries were a complete construct of the past.

Chapter 946: The World Changes Master (III)

Chen Zhongtian suddenly recalled when the nine old ministers gathered together eighty years ago. A scholarly air had wrapped around Zhao Tianyang then while he denounced the incompetence of the Skystar royal family. Qi Pingjiang induced solemn respect as he expended the family fortune to raise funds for an army to charge into Skystar...

Chen Zhongtian's thoughts wandered back to those people and the great matters they'd accomplished together, and how he'd cheekily called them big brother and second brother. He might've had some personal motives in mind then, but he was also so daring and motivated with the rest of them. He wanted nothing more than to change the world, overthrow the dynasty, and build a utopia.

What a pity, what a tragedy it had all come to this!

"Commander..." Chen Zhongtian inclined his body. "The Zhao family has lost Zhao Tianyang and Zhao Huaimin. These two were their heart and soul. The Chens... are willing to be the guarantor for the rest of the Zhao family. My family will bear the price if any uprising starts from them..."

"Do you know that a wildfire will spring back to life if it is not fully extinguished?" Li Hao said after a drawn-out silence.

"Commander, I..."

"It's fine, take them!" Li Hao suddenly smiled at the man. "You are in charge of the Zhao remnants! And not just them, but you can take anyone of the nine families if they have not committed wrongdoing."

Chen Zhongtian was rather surprised by the young man's generosity.

"How am I to start a new age if I'm wary of even these people and seek to execute them to the last?" Li Hao continued calmly. "Killing the new and old ministers of the other eight ministries was necessary! When it comes to the rest, release them if they are innocent. Execute them if they are guilty!"

He'd wanted to kill the ministers before because the land would not know peace if these people were still alive. There would always be someone who wanted to take advantage of the situation or think there was a chance for their own plans.

Li Hao did not wish for such a development to occur. Unless they were like the Chens who'd sworn fealty to him beforehand, the young man wasn't going to show mercy to the rest of them. At the same time, he didn't care about anyone other than the old and new ministers. He was hardly inclined to slaughter them down to the last.

Such was the martial world. Even one who'd offended as many as Yuan Shuo ultimately did not see that many actually knock on his door for revenge. If he insisted on killing all of his opponents, half of the martial world would be dead and their sects eradicated.

"Bury Zhao Huaimin well!"

Zhao Huaimin had set foot into five elements, but didn't resist in the end and chose to end his own life. Thus, Li Hao treated him well after his final moments.

Chen Zhongtian nodded and didn't say a word.

"Seal off the Ministry of Administration and don't let anyone in or out!"

"Understood, sir!" A runner quickly went off to carry out his words.

Li Hao stepped forward and headed to the next ministry—Armed Forces.

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Kong Jie and Chen Yao were in residence here. Minister Qi Dinghai watched as Li Hao and Chen Zhongtian approached at the head of a group. Li Hao's group realized something when they saw Chen Zhongtian—he was supposed to be keeping Administration under control, he should not be here instead!

No fool could make it to the position of minister; Qi Dinghai smiled when he saw Li Hao's group. "Commander Li, Uncle Chen, come in and have a seat!"

Li Hao walked straight in. Qi Dinghai headed for the head seat; he regarded Li Hao when he sat down. "Has Brother Huaimin died?"

"Yes."

"What a pity!" Qi Dinghai sighed softly. "Then... my father is dead too, right?"

"Correct." Li Hao inclined his head.

Qi Dinghai was a bit anguished, but quickly laughed, "That's just as well. He often said that the true Qi Pingjiang died eighty years ago! These recent years have been marked with disorder in the army, insufficiencies in various local troops, killing the innocent to exchange for military merit, collusion with bandits and pirates, and sometimes the government being less than robbers.

"Brother Huaimin died a bit of a wronged death, but my Qi family died a deserved one! Brother Huaimin was a good talent for administering the world. If the commander had been willing to accept him... But of course, that is all the past and further discussion is not beneficial!

"When it comes to my family, I do deserve my death! The disintegration of military discipline began with me. It didn't have much to do with my father." Qi Dinghai smiled. "Will the commander kill me now, or wait?"

"What do you want to wait for?" Li Hao looked at him.

"For the armies to be gathered and a public execution in front of them?" He shook his head after the question. "Forget it, I have been so conspicuous my entire life that such an ignoble death... I would ask the commander to permit a spar with Yuan Shuo. Life or death do not matter—I would like to witness the might of the Five Styles. Perhaps my father died to him?"

Qi Dinghai looked at Yuan Shuo. “What do you think, Old Demon Yuan?”

“I killed your father on the spot despite him being of seven elements.” Yuan Shuo looked coldly at him. “You wish to try fighting me?”

“Let’s!” Qi Dinghai smiled. “There’s more dignity dying to you than to other alternatives!”

“How fares the military?” asked Li Hao.

“Not well,” laughed Qi Dinghai. “There are roughly thirty million troops in Skystar Dynasty. I cannot command them all. There are seven million stationed in the central region and approximately two million answer to me. You can take over with this command token!

“It is up to the commander whether you wish to disband them or whatever else you’d like to do. Military discipline is lax and beyond repair. The situation is better in the central region, but military discipline exists in name only in the four continents. Putting military affairs back in order may be one of the greatest problems facing the commander. I hope you do not find it irksome!”

Qi Dinghai tossed a token onto a table. “This is what will give you command over two million—they should listen to you. As for the rest... good luck. I cannot direct them either.”

Li Hao didn’t say a word after taking the token. A surge of power circulated the surroundings with a wave of his hand. Qi Dinghai immediately summoned a spear and charged Yuan Shuo. He was of five elements, not yet six, and particularly ferocious!

His formidable spear method blazed with immense killing intent. Unfortunately for him, his opponent was Yuan Shuo.

Yuan Shuo brought out the Tiger Fist and no other methods. After exchanging three blows, his fourth broke Qi Dinghai's throat!

Qi Dinghai stabbed his spear into the ground and stared at Yuan Shuo. He exhaled his last breath while on his feet. It'd only taken four blows for Yuan Shuo to kill him.

"The Qis have strong bones!" Yuan Shuo breathed out. "But it's also the Qi father and son that lacked managerial capability. The thirty million troops in the world nominally answer to Armed Forces, but in reality, not even the troops of Silver Moon obey their orders. Military discipline is indeed in disorder!"

Chen Zhongtian heaved a long sigh as he looked at Qi Dinghai. When he turned to Li Hao, the young man inclined his head. Qi Dinghai sighed again and set foot forward to collect his other nephew's body.

Those who entered behind them were shocked to near insensibility. Chen Yao looked at his father; Chen Zhongtian didn't make a sound.

The Ministry of Armed Forces and Administration were in the bag and further attention didn't need to be devoted to Examinations and Foreign Affairs. Their old and current ministers were dead. The Inspectorate had sworn fealty and Judiciary was no more.

That left only Internal Affairs and Finance to wrap up.

On the Commerce side, the old minister was dead and the current minister was not the most competent. It was plain that this ministry wouldn't be able to raise much of a fuss. Given the scope of its jurisdiction, it didn't matter if it fell into disarray. Finance was the key.

"We go to the Ministry of Finance!" Li Hao commanded. This was the first ministry he'd offended after entering the capital, and they were the ones who relinquished the ruins of Evenround to him.

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The Ministry of Finance.

Liu Yunqing suddenly felt ill at ease. His father glanced at Zhou Chuan—the Silver Moon deputy had just walked out of the ruins and no longer sealed off the entrance.

The old minister frowned. This was not a good sign!

“Deputy Zhou, is Commander Li... about to come?” asked the old man.

“Why do you ask?” blinked an affable Zhou Chuan.

The old man smiled in return and looked outside. Seeing that Li Hao was yet to arrive, he took a deep breath and said, “The Liu family is willing to pledge our allegiance to the Skystar Commander Office. We will dispense the family fortune and ensure that Skystar’s financial system continues to operate smoothly. We will oversee a smooth handover to Silver Moon!

“After the transition is complete, we ask for nothing but a small island somewhere among the four seas where the family can live out the rest of our lives. Any wrongdoers in the family will be given over to the Skystar Commander Office!

“This old man neglected to properly teach and discipline the family before, leading to some erroneous actions being taken. I am willing to assume all responsibility, just let Yunqing leave with the family...”

Deputy Zhou raised an eyebrow while color drained from Liu Yunqing’s face. Why was... his father suddenly saying these words?? It could only be because... but that was impossible! There were so many powerhouses in the ruins, had they all been defeated?!

That was impossible.

But apart from that, why would his extremely shrewd father suddenly choose to surrender? He was even willing to sacrifice himself to save the rest of the family!

“The old minister is astute and keen of judgment,” Li Hao’s voice sounded in everyone’s ears. “But I am not interested in killing everyone. The Zhaos and Qis see father and son keeping each other company on their next journey. Everyone else in those families will be sentenced according to the law!”

The old minister heaved a long sigh and bent at the waist. “Sinner Liu Fu greets the commander!”

Liu Yunqing’s face was stark white as he bowed alongside his father. They’d lost! Although this result had been expected, he hadn’t thought that it would occur so quickly.

In Liu Yunqing’s eyes, perhaps only Li Hao or Ying Hongyue would be able to conquer the world. He hadn’t thought that the young man would defeat the nine ministries and royal family so swiftly and complete his conquest!

Li Hao strode into the hall. It was unacceptable at present for the entire financial system to fall apart. The military was already disorderly. It was fine if it grew a bit more out of hand. When it came to administration, the various provinces already operated independently, so that wasn’t a concern either.

Only when it came to finance was future operations a concern. The Liu family controlled the dynasty’s banks, taxes, creation of star coins. There was upheaval in the world now, but star coins still possessed great purchasing power.

If that crashed as well, it would lead to tremendous disaster.

Chapter 948: Cleaning Up (I)

Outside the palace.

Li Hao walked through the palace doors, followed by Chen Zhongtian, Chen Yao, Kong Jie, Tyrant Blade, Northern Fist, Thunderleg, Light Sword, Yu Luocho, Panther, Jadelight Sword, and Yuan Shuo.

Yao Si and Hou Xiaochen swiftly arrived as well. They gave up overseeing the Ministry of Internal Affairs, leaving it to a group of Night Watchers. Earthturner Sword and his group also quickly convened.

Li Hao smiled at the palace in the distance and proclaimed slowly, “Kill all those of the royal family—the Skystar King, princes, dukes, and royal children—that are supernaturals!”

His people started at the command. The young man hadn’t been so vicious even toward the nine ministries.

“Did you not hear me? Kill them!” Li Hao repeated without hesitation. The nine ministries had at least done some good in their time, the royal family hadn’t done a whit of it in theirs. All they had in their minds was how to subvert the world. How would he overthrow Skystar in turn if they weren’t dead?

Glances were exchanged in the group before they growled, “Understood, sir!”

Figures darted into the palace and sounds of conflict rang out from all corners! It was in this moment that everyone knew there would be a new master in Skystar once the royal family was eradicated!

One thousand Demon Hunters also marched into the palace; they were met by squads of Black Armaturas. Even further in the distance, a middle-aged man with a crown on his head soared into the air. He looked at Li Hao with a frosty look in his eyes.

These might be the final moments of the Skystar that belonged to the Jiangs.

Li Hao took to the air as well and flew towards the man. The Skystar King coldly watched his approach. He summoned a golden broadsword as opposed to saying anything and sneered at the young man.

“History is written by the victors. Who knows who will win the ultimate prize today? Kill!” The world shook at the king’s bellow. He’d managed to cross into seven elements as well! The void crackled wherever he went.

Clashes reverberated on every side as Silver Moon martial masters erupted with their full strength, instantly slaughtering any royal powerhouse they came across.

The Skystar King said nothing and did nothing. They stood a chance only if they killed Li Hao.

This time, the young man didn’t give any preferential treatment or show any courtesies to this king. This one... was less than his father!

A sharp sword manifested in the air—Stellaris. A variety of auras gathered as a surge of tremendous strength. Sword intent erupted and ripped through the void. Stellaris was unfathomably strong. It wasn’t that impressive against Saints, but against this one...

The sword descended!

Boom!

The firmament tore open as the longsword in the Skystar King’s hand fell apart as dust. A bloody mark trailed down his face; he stared at Li Hao with some incredulity. This highly ambitious sovereign never expected his downfall to be thus.

“You’re the most annoying one yet out of the entire Skystar royal family!” Li Hao snorted. The royal family had given the order to kill the governor general of the three northern provinces. The

resulting disorder caused by his absence continued to today. Countless casualties continued to pile up, instilling in Li Hao a deep hatred of the man!

A brief hush stole over the battlefield before fighting resumed.

“The Skystar King is dead, kill!” Shouts rang through rafters as the copy of the Mirror of Wind and Cloud isolated the premises. Only screams, wails, cries, and curses made it to the clouds.

The royal family that had overseen the world for two hundred years met with an extinction-level event today. No one had fathomed that the world would change in this manner less than three months after Li Hao arrived at Skystar City!

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Panic started gripping the rest of the royal family members when the king died. The slaughter continued. Li Hao hovered over the palace, watching as various heavyweights were cut down. In the distance, some of the princes roared with outrage. Large numbers of Black Armaturas charged through their foes inside the building structures.

“Kill Li Hao!” roared a prince. Utilizing his supernatural abilities, he picked up a palace hall and threw it at the young man.

Li Hao brandished his sword, mountains trembled in its wake. He summoned a mountain to block the attack, splitting the hall open. Rays of sword qi further cut down the prince in the distance.

“Li Hao, the royal family has treated you handsomely and made you the Skystar governor general and Skystar Duke! We helped you establish the Skystar Commander Office! Is this how you repay us??” It was the seventh princess. The mysterious woman who held sway over the Nine Dragons Pavilion could no longer keep her composure.

Her heart wept with sorrow as she shouted with anger!

Li Hao had been a country bumpkin the first time he visited the Nine Dragons Pavilion! Who would've thought that he would lead troops to the palace a few months later and execute the Skystar King?

The Jiangs did not fall to the nine ministries, but were defeated by Li Hao instead.

"Treated me handsomely?" the young man asked coolly in return. "It was simply an arrangement of mutual benefit, what gratitude is there to speak of? If we must really get into the details, the White Shark Raiders of the North Sea are backed by the Jiangs. You are patrons of various factions among the four seas.

"Not only that, but you secretly support many of the rebels agitating through the dynasty. The biggest group of them in the three northern provinces is called the Heaven Reclamation Army. Their name is a nod to restoring a dethroned monarch. Your family should be supporting them from the shadows.

"The Jiangs have done right and wrong over these two hundred wrongs, but your wrongs greatly outnumber your rights. You are far more villainous than the nine ministries! The ministries had their moments of clarity, but the Jiangs were muddle-headed and incompetent apart from when you conquered the world. You tell me, seventh princess, can the Jiangs be spared?"

"It's just a matter of the victors being proclaimed king, Li Hao!" shrilled the seventh princess. Her form was bathed in blood. "Any royal family is always marked by heartlessness! The world may be in disorder now, but it was in even more of a disarray before the Jiangs took power!

"The ninety-nine provinces clashed against each other in endless friction and countless people died every year. After my family conquered the world, peace reigned for at least two hundred years. Why do you not speak of such feats?!

"Compared to an era of pandemonium, the people could at least eke out a survival after Skystar Dynasty was formed!"

The seventh princess refused to accept such denouncement! The world had wavered uneasily two hundred years ago. Battles raged across the land as feudal lords vied bitterly for supremacy. The situation was much more chaotic then.

The Jiangs had at least stopped that age of endless wars. Why did Li Hao not speak of that?

“And that is why the Jiangs enjoyed two hundred years of being treated as royalty.” Li Hao remained calm. “Effort is rewarded by gain. The first Skystar King did indeed establish a grandiose and noble enterprise. He brought into being a dynasty that unified the central plains. This great accomplishment shall never be overlooked.

“Yet, you Jiangs also lived in the lap of luxury for two hundred years ,did you not? And now, the unrest in the world is because of your family!”

“If it wasn’t for the nine ministries suppressing my grandfather, if it wasn’t for the three great organizations agitating in the four corners, if it wasn’t for your Silver Moon martial world stirring up trouble, this world would still be a peaceful world!” the seventh princess angrily retorted. “You won’t necessarily be any better than my family, Li Hao! You’re just being used to cover up scandal! Even though my family has fallen, what goes around comes around. You will not escape the reckoning of ending a dynasty!”

Li Hao did not respond to those accusations. Who knew if what she said would really come to pass? The Jiangs were unwilling to accept this outcome and felt that this was a process that every dynasty underwent. He didn’t want to engage with that line of thinking, nor did he know where to begin.

Such was history.

Although the mistakes of the past were recorded in every book, generations of emperors and kings continued to repeat them. It was quite a marvelous phenomenon. Apart from the first emperor of a dynasty, any sovereign should have read a few books of history. How could they not see what was written about the end of the prior dynasty?

And yet, what was meant to be would come to be. After all, they would one day become part of history and be one of those recorded in the books.

As Li Hao grew lost in thought, Yu Luocho slammed her palm down and hit her target so badly that they vomited blood. “Have you run your mouth enough yet?”

The seventh princess blathered too much!

Unable to stop coughing up blood, a vicious look appeared on the seventh princess’ face. “Bitch! None of you will end up any better than my family. Just wait and see!”

Her longsword stabbed the air, sending killing intent soaring to the sky.

Yu Luocho readied a response, but Liu Long suddenly appeared and struck with his ax, breaking the sword. Up until now, he’d led the Demon Hunters that’d stayed close by Li Hao as the young man’s personal guard.

The seventh princess took a few steps back, her expression shifting.

Standing with his back to Yu Luocho, Liu Long regarded the princess coolly. “I’ll kill her!”

Yu Luocho was rather surprised by the action. Liu Long typically kept a low profile and didn’t compete for rewards or honor. Why was he fighting her for merit today? The seventh princess was quite strong; he was much weaker than her.

Liu Long didn’t say anything. He simply struck with his ax and kept up a fierce offensive. The Nine Forged Force erupted with towering waves. His killing intent was shocking! Several dozen Demon Hunters assembled into a formation on the ground below to supply a steady stream of blood qi.

The seventh princess was a ruthless character. Though her longsword was broken, a searing radiance shone from her delicate hands and she slammed a palm strike at Liu Long. This was the captain of Li Hao's personal guard. If she could kill him... it would bring a certain kind of pain to the young man.

The two sides clashed repeatedly, exchanging a dozen blows in the blink of an eye!

Liu Long roared and summoned the waves, hacking with his ax. His sternum was the first to break as even his armor slightly caved in from the impact. However, he was able to chop off his opponent's arm.

The seventh princess grunted with pain as an unforgiving light dawned in her eyes. "To think that a nobody like you can also kill me..."

Liu Long panted heavily and struck again without responding; his blow was even more valiant than his last. He forced his opponent back until the seventh princess crashed to the ground with a loud impact. She coughed up blood before Liu Long smashed her into the crowd.

"Hurry up and kill me," she vomited blood. "How dare you humiliate me??"

Even Li Hao was surprised in the distance. Liu Long was a quiet character who kept to himself. Why was he attacking the seventh princess today? That had been Yu Luocho's target.

"Kill her!" Liu Long growled. An armored warrior walked out of the Demon Hunters, summoning a water dragon that took the shape of a sharp sword. It ran through the seventh princess' heart, drawing a look of surprise from the woman.

Why...?

Chapter 949: Cleaning Up (II)

The soldier's visor retracted, revealing Yun Yao's face. She looked at the seventh princess, who looked back at her.

"It's you... no wonder..." The princess suddenly smiled.

"It's me!" The look in Yun Yao's eyes was calm. "We were good friends when my father was alive. Who would've thought that you would betray my family and kill hundreds of students and teachers at my school! I have returned, Jiang Rong!"

"Hahaha... how laughable!" The seventh princess laughed and looked at Li Hao in the distance. "How laughable..."

She toppled over with a bam.

Liu Long spat out a mouthful of blood and looked at Yun Yao. "We kill her first, then all of them one by one. I'll avenge all of your grievances!"

There were just six members of the Demon Hunters—Yun Yao, Liu Yan, Wu Chao, Chen Jian, Liu Long, and Li Hao who joined at the very end. Liu Yan's enemy was Red Moon, Wu Chao's was Celestial, and Yun Yao's was the greatest faction of Skystar City.

The seventh princess had once directed the Nine Dragons Pavilion to move against the Skystar Academy. She killed most of the students and teachers, captured some, and forced others into unwilling labor for the Nine Dragons Pavilion.

Yun Yao used to be friends with the princess since she was the royal family's spokesperson, a fellow woman, and the royal family seemed to be willing to support Yun Haoran. It wasn't long after that that the Yun family was eradicated.

The seventh princess had been greatly involved in that operation.

Yun Yao nodded and didn't say anything. There was no need for expressions of gratitude from the Demon Hunters. They nursed such feelings in their hearts. Liu Long had helped and looked after them ever since Silver City. That was true even today.

Perhaps Li Hao had forgotten some things or didn't feel them as acutely, but Liu Long had committed them all to heart.

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Off in the distance.

Li Hao understood the reasons behind Liu Long's actions; his own mood was slightly complicated. Liu Long's ever-constant goals were simple. Protect Silver City and the Demon Hunters. That was the man's wish. And while Li Hao had given the team plenty of resources after bringing them out of Silver City, he didn't interact with them in the same congenial way anymore. Neither did he tease or curse with them like one would with family.

He knew that Yun Yao's enemies were the royal family and nine ministries, but he hadn't thought of letting her take vengeance with her own hands. He'd felt that success was defined by him killing all of these people.

Liu Long, however, had kept the details of everyone's wishes in mind.

There were a select few who had great influence on Li Hao ever since he left Silver City. His teacher was one, Hong Yitang was another, and strictly speaking, Liu Long counted as one. The man had spared no effort to help him when they were in Silver City.

Li Hao exhaled gently. There were so many things that needed to be attended to that he'd set the Demon Hunters aside. He'd promised Liu Long before that they would return to Silver City sooner or later. It now looked like they wouldn't be able to do so in the short run.

The slaughter in the palace continued—a man broke through the air at this time. He Yong.

He carried a bloody figure in his hand and looked at Li Hao. “He Yong would like to request a favor from Commander Li!” he asked solemnly, no sign of his usual flippancy to be seen.

Li Hao immediately recognized the young man covered in blood—the ninth prince. He was twenty years old this year and He Yong had joined the royal family twenty years ago. The ninth prince had received He Yong’s heritage his entire life. Southern Fist was a prime reason behind the prince’s martial accomplishments of today.

Of course, the prince had also repaid He Yong with plenty since the latter’s cultivation had progressed to the point of being able to unseal himself.

Li Hao knew what He Yong wanted as soon as he showed himself. Other people were returning from their skirmishes as well. Northern Fist walked through the air after killing a prince.

“What are you blathering on about, He Yong!” he grunted when he saw someone in He Yong’s hands.

The royal family had been toppled and the Jiangs slaughtered. The ninth prince possessed strong potential and tremendous battle strength. There were even calls among the royal family for him to be the next king as soon as the current one was summoned by heaven.

This was no fringe character.

No one would think much of it if He Yong begged mercy for someone of a royal side branch. Silver Moon martial masters always repaid their debts and collected on their grievances.

However, this was the heir apparent! It would be too much of a disaster if they let this person survive! He Yong was over the line!

“Commander, I left my home and came to the royal family in search of a chance to break through.” He Yong lowered his head with a heavy expression. “I don’t care what happens to the royal family, but my life was tied to his many years ago. He Yong does not seek any merits or recognition in this operation, just that... I beg the commander to spare his life!”

He begged!

He Yong knew that great trouble might arise from not killing the ninth prince, but he could not cross the threshold of his heart. He looked at Li Hao, pleading in his eyes.

The ninth prince in his hand continuously coughed up blood and seemed to come to his senses. He struggled and coughed again, “There’s no need for this, Master He...”

“Shut up!” growled He Yong as he punched the young man unconscious, then looked at Li Hao again.

More and more powerhouses gathered by Li Hao’s side. Some frowned, others glared. Apart from the Skystar King, it was these male children that posed the greatest threat from the royal family. The Skystar royal family had reigned for two hundred years. There were still powerhouses loyal to them.

The Prince of Southern Conciliation remained holding down the fort in the South Sea, to say nothing of anyone else. He led six hundred thousand troops—elites, one and all—and faced off against the Valiant Duke of the south.

Once the ninth prince survived and fled to the south, great troubles might arise.

“This is but a small matter.” Li Hao smiled when he looked at He Yong.

“Commander!”

“Li Hao!” Many glanced sharply at the young man.

“I know a bit about this ninth prince,” the young man said softly. “He has a deep relationship with Martial Uncle Southern Fist and carries himself with the air of a Silver Moon martial master. We of Silver Moon pay back our debts of gratitude. Since he has rendered a great kindness to Martial Uncle Southern Fist over the years, then he can be spared.”

Li Hao laughed and looked around the premises. “Having one more person is not one too many, and one less person is not one too few. There are many who wish to kill me. Both the former and current Skystar Kings died in my hand. The ninth prince has not coordinated evil misdeeds and he was not a guiding force in the royal family. He suffered bullying and humiliation from childhood. It was only through Martial Uncle Southern Fist’s help that he rose to his current position...

“Take him away with you, martial uncle!” The young man smiled.

He Yong looked at the young man with a complicated look in his eyes. “I’ll cripple his cultivation. There won’t be anything to be concerned about with a cripple!”

“That’s alright.” Li Hao waved a hand. “He inherited the way of the Skyshaker Fist and thus counts as martial uncle’s heir. Wouldn’t crippling him be wasting years of martial uncle’s hard work?”

The group looked at the young man, not knowing what to say. This could be the start of endless trouble! To go from a punching bag in the royal palace to a state in which the royal family recommended him to be crown prince was no small feat!

It was a given that the ninth prince could bear disgrace and a heavy burden, that he was shrewd and possessed sophisticated methods. And if they didn’t kill him today...

Those assembled turned to He Yong, some with angry glares, others with resigned looks. This was just how that bastard operated at times. He knew what sparing the ninth prince meant, but he wanted even less than to carry regret for the rest of his life.

Li Hao didn't say anything and looked around him, seeing that fighting was starting to peter out. Various powerhouses were dying on the battlefield.

Two of the nine royal princes had died before today, another three had just died inside the palace. Four remained alive, including the Prince of Southern Conciliation in the south and three others. Two resided in Skystar City and another could be found on the western shoreline of the central region. He was in charge of keeping the west in order and faced off against the Tranquil Duke.

Large numbers of palace servants, maids, and eunuchs were being corralled from all directions. More than ten thousand people quickly gathered at the central courtyard. Some shook uncontrollably like a leaf while others had long lost their wits from abject terror.

The nine ministries had never set foot into the royal palace over the years. They'd clashed with the old Skystar King in the dark. After overcoming the royal family, they established the nine ministries and coexisted peacefully with the royal family.

But today, the royal palace was breached!

Wails and sobs echoed off the walls. There were more than ten thousand servants alone in the vast palace. There were also a great number of Black Armaturas being rounded up. Together, they summed nearly twenty thousand people.

And this was now. There were even more people eighty years ago.

"Take off your armor and surrender your arms, Black Armaturas!" Li Hao called out as he looked at the crowd. "You will be shown mercy! Everything will continue as before for palace servants. Those who wish to leave may register and await release. I will methodically process your freedom later on. No one is to leave the palace in the short term!"

“All royal members still alive are to be taken into custody first to await further judgment! Those who resist will be executed with no exception!”

The teary sniffles grew quieter after his announcements. Though apprehensive, they were reassured to see the heavyweights surrounding them not immediately pounce in gory slaughter. Whether it was a change in dynasty or the world, it didn't matter to a lot of people.

All that they cared about was if they survived. They didn't feel much loyalty to present circumstances.

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Li Hao walked toward the palace's main hall. This was the central building of the dynasty, the Skystar Hall. Glittering with light, a dragon throne sat in the center of the hall.

The young man walked straight to it and sat down. Those who followed him watched him with strange looks, but didn't say a word.

Chapter 950: Cleaning Up (III)

Li Hao looked up from the dragon throne and tilted his head at the ceiling.

“This throne is so uncomfortable, it's too hard!” he laughed after a moment. “Whether it's authority or position, none of that needs this thing to draw attention to them. It looks like it's made of gold... I'll just melt it! Ah, never mind, we can keep it around so anyone who wants to sit in it can do so!”

He kicked the dragon throne aside and waved a chair to him. this was much softer.

“Let's leave the matters outside to the Demon Hunter Army. Come in, everyone! We're going to have a quick meeting!”

Powerhouses quickly filed in.

“Have a seat, everyone!” chuckled Li Hao. “All of you are my seniors, so there’s no need to stand on ceremony. The imperial court is the martial world too, the martial world is everywhere. Please be at ease, seniors!”

Yuan Shuo immediately plopped down into a chair. His actions inspired the others to do the same. Although there were quite a few people in Li Hao’s group, the massive hall was much more sparsely populated than a regular day at court.

“Who would’ve thought that we’d complete our encirclement of Skystar City so quickly?” Li Hao sighed emotionally as he looked at everyone. “I’ll cut to the chase. Conquering the world is hard and keeping it is even harder. I don’t wish for the world to be shaken with unease just because we’ve eliminated the nine ministries and royal family…”

“Therefore, I need everyone to help me complete a stable transition of the dynasty. Skystar City will remain sealed for the immediate future. Deputy Zhou will oversee Administration, Chen Yao will continue to manage the Inspectorate. As for Armed Forces… I will send Commander Huang Yu over as soon as possible.

“Examinations and Foreign Affairs don’t need anyone at present. We can leave Internal Affairs alone for now. The Liu father and son will stay on at Finance for a limited period of time, so we’ll need someone to take their place. This is an important post—who is up to the task?”

The group looked at each other; no one made a sound. Everyone knew that it was time to divvy up the spoils. The world was theirs, and while they hadn’t fully conquered the dynasty, taking a position at one of the nine ministries now might mean that it would be theirs in the days to come.

However, everyone was of the martial world. Few were those who could excel in these positions.

“Is no one skilled at this kind of work?” Li Hao asked with a frown. “Then let’s set it aside for now. Putting both Director Yao and Director Hou in charge of the Night Watchers is a waste. Director

Yao will continue to hold down the fort at the Night Watchers, whereas Director Hou will take over at Commerce. We still need that ministry as society will not advance without business...”

Hou Xiaochen wanted to decry the young man for what was surely a joke. How come I’ve been sent to the Ministry of Commerce?? What kind of commercial abilities do I have?! Li Hao, you’re just randomly assigning people to places!

“I trust Director Hou,” smiled Li Hao. “The director is a great hand at conducting transactions. You’ll have help from others and will be primarily there to manage people. I’m not sending you to open a business. The director’s been an official for several decades—too few of us have this kind of experience. You’re it!”

“.....” Hou Xiaochen felt a weariness deep in his soul.

“Also, the director has tremendous mental strength. That will be useful for tasks involving calculation and numbers. It’s a good fit!”

A resigned Hou Xiaochen could do nothing but nod in silence.

“Of course, this is just a temporary post.” Li Hao looked back out over the group. “These duties should be left to professionals in the end. We’re all laymen and this isn’t the time to relax with enjoyment. The three great organizations are still active in the world, the ancient ruins and plant spirits are still present. The three dukes have yet to be eradicated as well...”

“We’ve only defeated a portion of leaders installed by the previous government. This was more of a special ops mission than anything. It will not result in peace throughout the land...” Li Hao rubbed his temples. “I’m not adept at any of this either. In fact, I’m rather lost when it comes to organizational stuff! A greater burden falls on those who are capable. Anyone who speaks up can give anything a try.”

Still, no one made a sound. They simply looked at each other. It was one thing to kill people, but to run the world... forget it.

“Ahem!” someone coughed at this time. “Director General Zhao of Silver Moon can do it! He’s overseen the province for decades and it’s always remained in good order...”

Deputy Zhou was a good candidate as well, but there was only one of him. He couldn’t clone himself to finish everything. So it came down to Li Hao to transport more people from Silver Moon.

Of the four guardians of the province, three of them were at Skystar City. That only left Director General Zhao at Silver Moon.

“No, Silver Moon cannot fall into disorder.” Surprisingly, Li Hao shook his head in refusal. “We have great things to accomplish next. Disarray can grip Skystar, but it cannot find Silver Moon! The province is close to the Great Li dynasty. Although there is no news of the dynasty, that doesn’t mean it is gone. Senior Northern Fist once traveled through it and knows that its armies and martial dao are very strong.”

Silver Moon could not be left empty. If all personnel were redeployed from it, then even their home base would fall.

Li Hao sighed. It was... such a hopeless notion for a bunch of martial blockheads to administer the world. He wanted to set a few tasks for Hong Yitang, but he knew what the man was thinking. Therefore, it was better to have Hong Yitang focus on the Skystar Martial Academy first.

“The commander has forgotten one person...” Sky Sword suddenly said.

“Who?”

“Lin Hongyu!” Sword Sovereign answered candidly. “That woman can keep the mess that is the City of Supernaturals in order. There are more than one million supernaturals and a dozen aristocracies in the city. Each of them try to cheat or outwit the other.

“Not only is she strong, but she has the potential to be quite a bureaucrat. Since she can bring a million supernaturals to heel, I’m sure she can do the same for Skystar City even though there are more people in the capital!”

Eyebrows rose at his words. Lin Hongyu! This was someone that no one had thought to consider.

“Is this a good idea? She’s not from Silver Moon...” someone asked.

“You’re being too narrow-minded. Can you run the world’s operations? She is not of Silver Moon, but we sit in Skystar City at the moment. This is the heart of the world. Are we to rule the land with just Silver Moon people?”

“Fair enough.”

“.....” A lively discussion ensued. Some people disapproved of the suggestion, others found it rather nice. Li Hao felt that it was a sensible one after some thought. It was proof of her competence, if nothing else, that Lin Hongyu was able to manage the City of Supernaturals so well.

Everyone present was a solitary wanderer—Sky Sword was the only master of a faction. But to be blunt, his Sky Sword Manor was just a den of swordsmen. People went back to train and sleep when they had nothing else to do. Who would remain at the manor if they did?

“Do we still use the name of the Skystar Commander Office, or is it something else now?” Yuan Shuo suddenly asked. It would be an illegitimate and unjustifiable usage of the office in their future endeavours. Although they had to conceal their movements for the time being, they needed to play new cards later on. They couldn’t use the office’s name forever, could they?

Everyone looked at Li Hao now.

“Let’s just have Li Hao be the emperor,” Northern Fist said frankly. “All of us can be an army general or governor general or something. We can do anything we want then!”

Eye rolls abounded in the crowd. They were turning themselves into bandits!

Chen Zhongtian coughed gently. He hadn't said anything yet, but now chuckled, "Commander, I think we should use the name of the Skystar Commander Office for a bit. Everything else can wait for the moment. We can discuss them after we resolve the most pressing matters at hand."

"There's no need to decide on that right this minute," Li Hao nodded. "We don't possess sufficient strength. It's wintertime and the ground is frozen solid. Let's get through winter first and send out our troops after the land thaws. We'll exterminate whoever needs to go when spring arrives!"

"Our operations are spread too thinly for now, we lack sufficient people. We should slow our pace for a while. The central region needs to be stabilized, to say nothing of the other locations..."

"There are many factions in the central region, but the biggest one that has been in constant contact with Skystar City is the City of Supernaturals. However, that is now ours. So long as we force the three great organizations to leave or outright eradicate them, it won't be difficult to claim the central region. We'll be able to swiftly wrap up the central region when spring is here."

Heads bobbed through the crowd. It wasn't like they cared much about what should happen next—or rather, they didn't know what should happen next.

Li Hao didn't know either. He sighed heavily. When others conquer the world, they have plenty of people who march under their banner. I... have a bunch of martial brawn. They could fight and kill, but when it came time to govern, the young man felt ready to explode.

They had a great time killing people, but after they finished the deed... who could administer the world?

"Let's set that aside first. There's a lot of supernaturals at the City of Supernaturals going through the registration process. There are also supernatural armies at the nine ministries and royal family that we need to swiftly take control of. Those places can't be permitted to dissolve into discord!" Li

Hao made snap judgments for people to take charge of the supernaturals. Any of his people were good at killing and setting fires.

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After the hubbub died down and the meeting concluded, Li Hao left the palace. This cold and cheerless place was no location to linger in for long. It was strewn with bodies and a highly uncomfortable residence.

The copy of the Mirror of Wind and Cloud remained in place over the palace, keeping the area sealed off. The situation would remain under wraps for a while longer.

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Silver Moon martial masters mobilized in all directions. Residences that held nobles were quickly seized. A great disturbance embroiled Skystar City on this night.

The Skystar Commander Office announced to the public that the three great organizations were causing trouble through a general uprising. Evildoers were being arrested, so all that citizens needed to do was remain at home.

The blockade against the eight ministries and royal family was gradually relaxed. Those not in the know thought that Li Hao was giving up on pressuring these factions.

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Red Moon headquarters.

Ying Hongyue's brows had been knit in a deep frown for a very long time. "Is there any word from Skystar City?" he asked slowly.

"In response to the leader, the Skystar Commander Office has temporarily given up on the eight ministries and royal family. A portion of Silver Moon martial masters have withdrawn, but the city remains under lockdown."

Ying Hongyue lifted a tea cup; its contents had long chilled. "Summon all Red Moon members and have them retreat from the central region as soon as possible!"

His people stared blankly. Retreat? Why?

Ying Hongyue didn't explain himself. He simply gazed into the distance and lifted his head to look at the air. There seemed to be red threads in the void; some were very fragile.

Li Hao had swallowed a few more weapons with Stellaris. Perhaps the Windchaser boots and the blade of the Zhangs were no more. Three out of the eight were gone. Under what circumstances would he do so?

He'd done so the first time against the Wind and Cloud Pavilion. Maybe he'd done so this time to move against the nine ministries and royal family.

No, not maybe. It was a certainty.

And he was still alive! So... did that mean Li Hao had won?

Ying Hongyue wasn't certain. He knew a bit about the Skystar ruins. There were many powerhouses there, so if the young man could prevail even in such circumstances, that would make him terrifying indeed.