

## Star Gate 611

### Chapter 611: Arcanus (II)

When it looked like some wanted to protest his decisions, the inspector general that didn't look too old slammed his hand on the table.

“These matters are so settled! They are such trifling issues. It is a loss to the dynasty that the previous duke has died, but Xu Qing's always been a slight irritant. Have the royal family bestow him with posthumous honors. Yellow Dragon, go make the request in a personal audience with the king!”

Emotion flickered across Yellow Dragon's face, but he nodded in acceptance. “Inspector general, is there any room for discussion when it comes to promoting Li Hao?”

A peacemaker commissioner!

That was a major figure in the Inspectorate hierarchy. Hou Xiaochen had been one before, as was Kong Jie now. Typically speaking, one province only had two serving in that capacity. The inspector general and director of their Night Watchers had to be strong enough to have both positions filled. If they were weaker, there might only be one peacemaker commissioner.

Strictly speaking, Yellow Dragon was also a peacemaker commissioner. Titles weren't as emphasized in Skystar City; strength and actual duties were.

“What, do you have opinions otherwise?” The inspector general cast a quizzical look at him.

“Not exactly...”

“Then it's settled! Right, I forgot that you're also the commander of the northern Night Watchers. I'm giving you a mission—arrest the five great bandits! Kill however many you can!”

Yellow Dragon suddenly felt like he'd swallowed a fly. However, the inspector general was correct. Eliminating bandits was indeed the responsibility of the northern commander. But these five were... Damn it! The weakest Yuan Shuo was an overwhelming character. A fully fused five auras at his cultivation level propelled him to metamorphosis! Not to mention, his disciple was very strong now as well.

To be able to escape from Xu Qing—even if he hadn't unsealed himself at first—indicated that Li Hao was at metamorphosis as well. The young man had the ability to defy metamorphosis experts, and one also had to keep in mind the methods he employed against Red Beard. How was Yellow Dragon supposed to defeat them?

He knew that this was the inspector general's punishment for him, a rebuke of him interrupting. The nine ministries had become the personal faction of whoever gripped the reins of power. Whatever the inspector general said was law and there was no room for contradiction. Yellow Dragon just didn't want to accept his circumstances!

Creating five new fugitives for Silver Moon wasn't a loss for the province. Yellow Dragon didn't care about the late Steadfast Duke either. However, one could clearly see that the inspector general was favoring Silver Moon. Why? He couldn't make sense of it.

The inspector general shouldn't be related to Silver Moon. Did he just want to sit back and watch tigers fight? And there was Hou Xiaochen to consider...

Yellow Dragon suppressed his urge to say more and raised another topic instead. "I'll do my best, inspector general! Also, regarding Deputy Hou Xiaochen's major disturbance at the Skystar Academy..."

"Right, although he was on a mission, his methods were too crude!" said an amused inspector general after some consideration. "He even killed a teacher while he was there! Judgment must be passed even if that teacher was guilty of a crime. The Inspectorate and Night Watchers may be law enforcement agencies, but we cannot use our power like this!"

He slammed his hand down on the table with some anger. "Hou Xiaochen is used to calling the shots in Silver Moon and forgot that this is Skystar City!" he denounced with slight anger. "He is to be demoted one rank to a high rank chief commissioner. His salary will also be garnished for three years as an example to others!"

Yellow Dragon frowned, a reaction echoed by another deputy director. “Inspector general, isn’t this... too lenient? The Skystar Academy is an institute of higher learning jointly established by the nine ministries and royal family... Hou Xiaochen was entirely too brazen.”

“That’s true!” The inspector general nodded. “The punishment is too light for him to remember the lesson...” He paused, but it seemed like a planned pause to give time for the others to fall silent. “How about this, isn’t he the Skystar commander? Charge him to arrest or kill one thousand members of the three evil organizations within three months. He has to count at least one hundred Solars and ten Novas among that number. That will make amends for his deeds!”

Expressions shifted at what the inspector general said. What did he mean? Did he want Hou Xiaochen to declare war on the three great organizations with open backing from the Inspectorate, one of the nine ministries? What did the inspector general want?? Did he actually seek official hostilities, or did he want to borrow another’s hand to kill Hou Xiaochen?

The group didn’t know because anything was possible. Or had the death of the previous Steadfast Duke caused this one to be unwilling to stay out of the limelight?

Whatever it was, it made Yellow Dragon fidget even more uncomfortably. Hou Xiaochen now had a legitimate reason and support from the inspector general to move against three great organizations. Given Hou Xiaochen’s character, he might use this as a pretext for his own ideas and deploy the powerhouses of the Inspectorate and Night Watchers for his own purposes.

Since it was the inspector general’s command, there would be no refusing Hou Xiaochen. Yellow Dragon and the Night Watcher director were just deputy directors at the Inspectorate. Their superior organization possessed significant charisma and execution ability among the nine ministries. Its authority remained strong.

“That will be all for now, dismissed!”

Seeing as the inspector general was about to leave with a flourish, a deputy director couldn’t help but interject, “There’s one more matter, inspector general.”

“Mmhmm, what is it?”

“Ah,” the person continued doggedly. “The Ministry of Administration has sent another letter mentioning combining our agencies for joint enforcement...”

The logic sounded simple; the Ministry of Administration proposed reforms throughout the ninety-nine provinces. They wanted to confirm the position of a provincial leader. Take Silver Moon, for instance, the provincial government should be officially instated as the commander-in-chief of the province. The other institutions should answer to it in the hierarchy of power.

The Ministry of Administration even proposed establishing a position of governor general as a permanent position overseeing all other officials in the province.

Some provinces already had similar arrangements, such as Near River. Their provincial government had been elevated to the Director General Office, and their governor general was their director general of their provincial government.

“Does he think the world isn’t chaotic enough already?” laughed the inspector general. “Establishing a local overlord would add to the mess. Or does he think that since he’s the loudest voice at the Ministry of Administration, he’ll be able to dominate the other eight ministries even if there is more confusion?”

No one made a peep—too much was involved in this matter. The Ministry of Administration had been ranked first among the nine ministries when they were established, but the Ministry of Armed Forces and Inspectorate were equally strong. Although the former was first among the ministries in name, the latter two respectively held the reins of military power and law enforcement. These were highly authoritative institutions as well.

The Ministry of Armed Forces had proposed establishing a Governor General Office multiple times over the years—the proposal had been declined each time!

The inspector general thought for a bit and smiled. “It’s not undoable, but he can’t just appoint the director general from the provincial government as the governor general. When the building is about to fall, how can a scholar helm the ship?”

Eyes widened at his words and some more cautious people said lowly, “Please be careful, inspector general!”

The building is about to fall!

Skystar Dynasty had stood for two hundred years. The nine ministries seemed stable and secure, the royal family seemed mostly secure, and all was at peace apart from the three great organizations occasionally stirring up trouble. As more technologies were excavated from the ruins, there even appeared to be a budding picture of prosperity.

It was horrifying for an overseer of one of the nine ministries to voice such words. Even if this thought was shared by many, no one dared voice it aloud.

“Hahaha, fine. Leave that line out of it and send them back this response.” The inspector general left.

The group heaved sighs of relief after he was gone and Yellow Dragon took advantage of the opening to complain, “Not only is the inspector general not punishing Li Hao of Silver Moon, but he’s promoting the kid! Isn’t that just fostering this kind of lawless atmosphere? I say that Li Hao is the source of chaos in our times. How many people has he killed in such a short while?”

“He barged into the Steadfast Duke’s manor today, he might barge into our offices tomorrow!”

Some nodded with a smile and others pretended not to hear him.

“Take it up with the inspector general if you don’t agree with his decisions. There’s no point in complaining about this to us.”

Yellow Dragon cursed to himself. Would I say this to you if I could get through to him? I obviously want all of us to rise up together!

The Night Watcher director that'd sat like a statue all this time suddenly took his big cup of tea and strolled outside. He hadn't said a word from beginning to end and was so relaxed that it was like the matter had nothing to do with him.

The others weren't surprised by his reaction. They began discussing other matters instead, such as the boldness and madness of Silver Moon martial masters, their strength, and how strong might those of the sixth cultivation realm be.

More news arrived amid their conversation. A high ranking officer walked in and announced, "A piece of news has just come in and is quickly disseminating..."

People cocked their ears to listen—they hadn't paid attention to any developments due to the meeting they were in. What news had come in?

The officer's scalp crawled to suddenly find himself as the center of attention. "Due to the appearance of a sixth level expert in the east, the City of Supernaturals has swiftly proclaimed the development and given the level a name. It is already being popularized..."

A shocked silence stole through the crowd before someone cursed, "The City of Supernaturals? What are they sticking their noses into things for? Since when did it fall to them to name a cultivation level?!"

This wasn't a matter about naming a cultivation level, it was an issue of governance over the supernatural domain. It should fall to the Night Watchers to create a new name, they were the official authorities and the only law enforcement agency with supernatural strength.

The City of Supernaturals was located in the central region, a city that was entirely forged and occupied by supernaturals. Someone had mentioned it to Li Hao before, but the young man hadn't paid attention to that trivia.

"We didn't think about this and they stole a march on us!" Someone slapped their head with regret. "These guys are assholes! So what name did they pick?"

"Arcanus!"

"What?"

"Arcanus!" the speaker repeated. Blank stares and faint frowns abounded in the crowd.

"Did they say why they chose this name?"

"Yes! It is said that the sixth realm is a result of a second broken lock of the organs and the fusion of two supernatural systems. One possesses supernormal powers after that level stabilizes and can truly destroy cities and nations..."

## Chapter 612: Arcanus (III)

Understanding dawned and someone denounced coldly within the crowd, "So it looks like there are already supernaturals of the Arcanus level in the City of Supernaturals! That's why they're so eager to declare themselves and publicize their strength. This will entice more supernaturals to take up residence there. It would seem that the effects of the eastern battle are making themselves felt!"

Those of the sixth cultivation realm couldn't withstand their impatience. The old Steadfast Duke had shown himself, as had Sky Sword. If no one else came to the fore, be it the nine ministries, royal family, or three great organizations... that would put those factions on the back foot.

Although the Steadfast Manor had suffered tremendous losses, one powerhouse of the sixth cultivation level was sufficient to make up for it all. Such a presence might even attract fealty from even more heavyweights or factions simply because they had an existence beyond Nova.

It wasn't important that the City of Supernaturals had chosen to publicize the name of the cultivation level at this time—the key was that they'd utilized a rather blatant way to lure everyone to the city. Come to us, we have Arcanus level supernaturals! How else would we be familiar with the level? They wouldn't be able to name it without in-depth knowledge.

The group in the Inspectorate quickly understood the city's intentions and Yellow Dragon couldn't help a snort. "The City of Supernaturals? They're a tumor that's not much better than the three great organizations. Look at them taking a stand!"

"Ahem!" someone coughed. This was a city situated in the central region with countless supernaturals living within it. It was a legitimate existence, so there would certainly be more than met the eye there. It was better to not cause trouble. They all had their guesses as to who backed the city, so there wasn't much that anyone could say.

"It looks like Xu Qing's death needs some more time to cook. Let's wait and see. Those of the sixth cultivation realm will jump out one after another. Any that don't are probably afraid of drawing wrong attention," someone laughed ruefully and shook their head with resignation.

"And what about the Inspectorate?" Another frowned.

That was right! If other factions had this new level of heavyweight showing themselves, then what were the Inspectorate's plans? Would there be any authority left to its name if it didn't possess such an existence? How would it keep the land orderly?

"Announce to the world that my father, the previous inspector general, has entered the Arcanus level," an amused voice traveled out. "Since the City of Supernaturals has declared the name, we'll go along with them!"

The crowd started. Your father? The first inspector general!

"The old inspector general... is still alive?" came a shocked inquiry.



“No shit. If Xu Qing’s old man is still alive, how can mine be dead?”

“.....” Alright, they had nothing to say to that. Various emotions flickered across faces. If the old inspector general was still alive, what about the other eight ministries? What of the previous Skystar King?

These had all been famed personages in the historic handover eighty years ago. They’d been forty to fifty years old then, making them more than one hundred years old now. That might not be old in the ancient civilization, but that was too old for this age!

Whether it was supernaturals or martial masters, the higher the cultivation level, the greater the danger. A strong body was useless if the organs were weak; one still ran a high risk of self-detonating.

How had these people managed to survive to present day? Did they depend on Water of Life? That would be terrifying!

The inspector general only sent his voice to the assembly—he didn’t show himself. The discussions didn’t continue as the people grew curious. What cultivation realm was their inspector general? As young as he looked, he was in his seventies now. Having held his post for thirty years, he was certain to be very strong.

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The aftermath of the battle continued to ripple outward, as did the name of the sixth cultivation level. The central region was the first to learn of it. When it came to the north, the senior executives were naturally first to know. Those below them might not know for a long while yet.

Arcanus!

The City of Supernaturals in the central region had bestowed a name and explanation at first light. Supernaturals of the sixth level commanded two elements. That combination gave rise to supernormal powers that could destroy cities through a single supernatural's efforts.

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Silver Moon.

Director General Zhao looked at Huang Yu. The commander-in-chief of the provincial armies thought for a bit before nodding. "The name isn't too bad. They obviously came prepared. Energies of the five elements abound in our environment and when two are combined, that does indeed give rise to a unique power with tremendous force..."

The director general agreed with a smile. "We also have word from the central Inspectorate that Li Hao is to be promoted, while the rest are going on the wanted list!"

"Then we'll put out notices for their arrest!" Huang Yu remarked with unconcern. "Disseminate the proper documents and carry out the dynasty's orders! We'll post a bounty—whoever kills one of the five demons will be rewarded with one hundred pieces of mysterious power stones!"

"....." The director general was caught off guard and couldn't immediately react. He smiled after a long pause. "Ole Huang, you... this is over the top!"

"One hundred pieces is a lot." Huang Yu seemed to be always coolly composed. "Silver Moon is too weak. When Li Hao wanted thirty thousand pieces, there was no way we had the reserves to satisfy his wishes. Upstairs didn't say anything about rewards, but we can't have people toiling away for free. One hundred pieces can be traded for ten thousand cubes of mysterious power or countless star coins. Killing one of the five demons means instant riches. That's sufficient!"

This is absolute nonsense! The director general inwardly rolled his eyes, but remained unflappable on the surface. You're joking! Granted, it was a good thought.

“Then let’s settle it this way. Send out the documents and share their photos. Whoever kills one of them will be awarded one hundred pieces of mysterious power stones. Silver Moon needs to support the dynasty’s rule!”

“Understood!” The two nodded at each other when their gazes met.

Off to the side, the overlooked Kong Jie didn’t say a word from beginning to end. He’d been contemplating something and still didn’t speak up when the discussion was over.

“Ole Kong, what are you thinking about?”

“I’m wondering... who is stronger—An Arcanus Sky Sword or us fully unsealed?” Kong Jie steepled his fingers. “Judging from the intelligence reports, we might have to fully break our locks to measure up to this new cultivation realm!”

It was a very irritating realization! Although the four great powerhouses on the scene hadn’t exchanged moves with the old duke, the fact that he’d chosen to act after witnessing their strength meant that the Arcanus level might be able to defeat Hong Yitang and the others. The old duke had retreated only after seeing Sky Sword.

“If you don’t fully unseal yourself or break one of your locks, you probably are indeed less than Arcanus!” chuckled Director General Zhao. “But fully breaking a lock requires some time to absorb and digest the energy. It’s very much similar to Arcanus. You can give it a try if you don’t believe me. Break one of your locks, you might directly ascend to the new cultivation level.”

He would just need some time to acclimate to the change. Xu Qing had almost been there as he’d thoroughly snapped one of his locks. He hadn’t dared attempt two as that might cause his strength to increase too rapidly and overload his body. A martial master’s internal force was too strong.

Kong Jie looked on wordlessly. What kind of bullshit is this? Why don’t you try breaking one of your locks? I’m not doing that!

“What is Sky Sword thinking?” Kong Jie couldn’t make sense of it. “Forget it, I’m not thinking about it anymore! Right now I’m wondering if Li Hao will be coming back? I’ll have a headache if he does, but I think I might have one if he doesn’t.”

What a troublemaker! He’d caused five powerhouses to turn into wanted criminals. It might be the entire province being arrested next time!

“The various factions will soon be displaying their Arcanus heavyweights, regardless of whether or not their expert is stable. Then we...”

“We have Sky Sword!” laughed the director general. “He’s the lord of Sky Sword Mountain Villa. Isn’t he from Silver Moon? He’s the one!”

Kong Jie lost his train of thought. Damn, we can play it this way? He rolled his eyes.

“Ah, right, about Yuan Shuo... He’s reached great perfection with his auras—do you guys think he’ll just set foot into the next cultivation realm? Or will he advance like us and saturate his supernatural locks, find a way to strengthen the organs, and then determine a way forward...”

“Ask him, how would we know?” The director general shook his head. “A lot of Silver Moon martial masters took a stand this time, but we also revealed our weaknesses. It’s such a hassle for martial masters to unseal themselves! Although practitioners of martial dao will focus on the body more than supernaturals, an inability to bypass this bottleneck means that the future of martial masters is still limited.”

“The supernaturals are the same, they haven’t solved their problem either,” Kong Jie murmured. “Present level Arcanus most likely use treasures, Water of Life, or blood pearls to maintain their condition. There should be that many who have solidly set foot in that level.”

“Ai, we’ll see!” That wrapped up their conversation. As for the wanted notices... those were a joke. They didn’t care about the official papers.

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News after news shook the supernatural domain on this day. Xu Qing was dead. Martial masters could unseal themselves. There was a sixth supernatural cultivation realm!

All of it was shocking beyond belief. In comparison, a piece of news that wasn't as eye-popping circulated among the youngsters.

The Divine Masters Ranking had been updated.

It'd been a long time since the ranking was last updated. The most noticeable change was the removal and addition of a few names. Demon Sword Li Hao was the most conspicuous name of them all.

He had been an insignificant figure in the north, but now he was on the Divine Masters Ranking of the central region. There were only supernaturals on it before, yet a martial master joined their ranks today. Li Hao!

The Divine Masters Ranking listed the strongest and most famous powerhouses below thirty years old in the central region. It wasn't that it excluded martial masters, but that there were none under thirty who were qualified to be listed on the ranking!

Li Hao wasn't the only unexpected addition as the ranking also accepted monster spirits. Any that had awakened for less than ten years were entered, so long as they were famous and strong enough. There was a new addition this time—Golden Hair Hunting Dog.

Indeed, it was Panther. Very few people knew the dog's name, breed, or monster spirit attribute. This was the name that was eventually settled on.

Li Hao ranked number twenty-seven on the ranking. Just twenty-seven. His strongest battle accomplishment listed was not the metamorphosis Red Beard or killing the Yellow Dragon, but

killing Xu Zhe. That was his only public record. Him killing a metamorphosis expert and escaping from Xu Qing's grasp also went unlisted.

#### Chapter 613: Focusing on Cultivation (I)

Many snorted at the ranking they received. What kind of amateur ranking was this? Demon Sword was twenty-seven? Then Red Beard, the Yellow General, and others who died to him had undergone such ignoble and useless deaths!

However, the Divine Masters Ranking also came with an explanation that they recorded only real battle strength. Li Hao's battle in the North Sea might be the truest demonstration of his strength. He'd killed Xu Zhen with one sword stroke, which placed his strength between late and peak Nova.

Thus, the ranking of twenty-seven was appropriate to Li Hao's strength. Granted, if viewed from the perspective of him having killed a metamorphosis expert, then he would at least be top three. He might even be able to make a play for number one.

Panther was ranked higher at eleven. Its accomplishment of suppressing peak Nova was also a result of the battle in the North Sea. No one had seen the dog swallow the peak Nova, so it wasn't recorded. Instead, its strength was listed as peak Nova.

Plainly, the top ten of the ranking was probably metamorphosis level. They averaged thirty years old and if they were part of the first batch of supernaturals, they might have been Heaven Favored at ten years old. In terms of qualification, some of them might even be local overlords.

The Divine Masters Ranking only circulated in select circles. The younger generation was the only one to refer to it; no one else treated it with much importance. Otherwise, if one believed it and treated Li Hao as an ordinary late Nova... One wouldn't even know how they died.

The greatest purpose of this ranking was to disseminate Li Hao's title of Demon Sword throughout central region supernatural society. Almost everyone knew of a martial powerhouse whose prowess spanned the eastern and northern continents.

This information had only been passed around the senior levels before, and no one went to the trouble of building Li Hao's reputation. This was what the Divine Masters Ranking did for the young man at this time.

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"How interesting!" Ying Hongyue laughed in a palace hall as he perused the ranking. "Isn't this something? It seems to me that this Divine Masters Ranking imitates a certain ancient powerhouse's actions. Collecting these powerhouses, sounding them out, and provoking them bit by bit! It's limited to the central region and youngsters at the moment, but is already beginning to include the other four directions. It might continue to expand until finally, all of the powerhouses in the dynasty and even the world are included. It will build its reputation first and then slowly increase in scope..."

The newly recovered Orange Moon lowered her voice quizzically, "Leader, do you mean that there's a backer for the Divine Masters Ranking?"

"Divine Masters Ranking... Ranking of Life and Death..." Ying Hongyue laughed. "Ever since the ancient times, those who create such rankings are either idiots or powerhouses themselves! They're also heavyweights with ill intentions as they just want to stir up trouble! Subordinates of the civil subjects are superior to those of martial subjects. Even if they don't wish to vie for a spot, they have no choice as a local tyrant!

"Are you not aware of how many died when the Record of Thirty-Six Heroes appeared in Silver Moon?" He smiled radiantly at Orange Moon. "And how many have died for this particular ranking? Ten thousand bodies are piled in a heap beneath one successful general. Who upon the ranking doesn't have a few resentful, wild ghosts behind them?"

Orange Moon nodded and said nothing else. She simply remained confused—who was behind the Divine Masters Ranking that not even her leader could determine it with his information network?

"My money is on the royal family," Ying Hongyue laughed. "If it's not them, that means another faction is rising and is currently hidden in the shadows. My intelligence network is quite capable."

The royal family!

“This does seem quite possible.” Orange Moon nodded upon some thought. “Leader, Li Hao is growing ever stronger and so are Yuan Shuo and the others. If the situation continues...”

Ying Hongyue’s small withered. “Have the elder council and Ancient Guard move out. Choose a good opportunity to eliminate Li Hao!” He looked back at Orange Moon. “And you guys should work harder!”

“I will.”

Ying Hongyue rose and walked inside. “Get Violet Moon back before Li Hao returns to the province. Huang Yu and them don’t wish to have open hostilities with us yet, so increase our offer to ten drops of Water of Life!”

“Thank you, leader!” Orange Moon quickly said with a shift in expression.

“As I should!” Ying Hongyue vanished with a smile.

Orange Moon promptly left. The leader had said to conclude this business before Li Hao returned. Plainly, he knew just as well that Li Hao was currently in high spirits and operating completely without principles. He might very well execute Violet Moon as soon as he returned—that could occur with ninety-nine percent probability. This was a highly crazed fellow that they were talking about.

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The shore of the East Sea, a slightly dilapidated manor with a view of the sea.



There was an additional scent of blood in it now.

“Damned unlucky!” Yuan Shuo cursed. His house still stood, but it’d become a pirate stronghold. When he arrived, some pirates were discussing where they should run to after the East Sea pirates had suffered such a blow.

Red Beard was dead, city annihilation missiles had taken out another large sum. The group at the house felt that life was getting too hard and wanted to take their nautical ventures elsewhere.

After Yuan Shuo and the rest quickly dispatched them, the old man muttered, “This house cost me quite a bit of money. It’s one thing if it was razed to the ground, but these guys turned it into their hideout?? How inauspicious!”

The others couldn’t be bothered to respond. Money didn’t matter to them. They tossed the bodies to the backyard and sat down to tend to their wounds, ignoring the blood around them. Massive sums of mysterious power stones materialized and sword energy urged forth.

The entire living room was filled with sword energy. Everyone was injured and two had unsealed themselves. Panther was also gravely wounded. In the absence of high quality stones, low quality ones shattered in an unending stream to be converted to sword energy.

No one gave thought to the struggles of the outside world, nor did they care to know how the Xus would proceed next. This was a detached house, so there was no risk of anyone else sensing their activities. It had been a pirate stronghold, so while some in East Shore might be aware of the location, no one dared approach a pirate hideaway.

The group spent significant time cultivating and repairing their wounds. Time passed, second by second. Resource consumption was noticeable this time around as everyone furiously swallowed sword energy. There might not have been sufficient energy if circumstances were as before, but Stellaris seemed to have grown stronger after devouring the earth dragon weapon soul. Its conversion speed was faster, which meant that it consumed mysterious power stones a little too fast.

Yuan Shuo took in energy for all he was worth, as did Panther. In contrast, Hong Yitang and Light Sword didn't consume as much, despite having unsealed themselves. Light Sword couldn't help but glance at human and dog. Both of you are gluttons, you guzzle down energy like bottomless pits! Dang you're fast!

The Breathing Method of the Five Styles was very suited to sword energy. Having just completed the fusion of five auras, Yuan Shuo was running very low. The great battle had completely emptied him. He absorbed sword energy at a pace almost visible to the naked eye; no amount seemed to be enough.

Four humans and a dog expended quite a sum of mysterious power stones. Li Hao was far from miserly this time. He'd hemmed and hawed at expanding resources for Light Sword, but right now, everyone was here to save him. He had to be more generous. Mysterious power stones continuously shattered like they were worthless.

He didn't stop before anyone called for a stop, even when his own wounds were healed. Three thousand, eight thousand, ten thousand, fifteen thousand... It wasn't until they expended twenty thousand stones that Panther's fur grew out again. This was when Hong Yitang and Light Sword finally stopped.

"That's enough cultivation for now!" Yuan Shuo opened his eyes with slight reluctance. The mysterious power stone shards in the living room were as tall as a mountain.

Li Hao whisked the shards away with a wave of his hand and placed them in a storage ring. He had so many of them that he couldn't count them all.

"Are you completely recovered, teacher?" asked the young man. "If not, I have a few drops of Water of Life."

He'd brought fifteen drops on this drip, but already spent eight. There were only seven now. Water of Life was very useful as sometimes, he didn't have enough time to replenish sword energy in the middle of battle or address his wounds. Water of Life was quickly effective, though it wasn't as long-lasting as sword energy. Li Hao couldn't bear to use the remaining seven drops.

“No!” Yuan Shuo shook his head. You fool. Save it for just the two of us, what are you talking about now for? Those two are still here! It’s one thing for them to partake in sword energy, but what are you boasting about Water of Life from an unknown source??

Hong Yitang and Light Sword knew what the old man was thinking. Hong Yitang grinned and didn’t say anything. It didn’t matter if they used Water of Life or not, they didn’t have external wounds. What was most useful about this resource was when one lost a limb. It facilitated flesh and blood to grow again. Sword energy could take care of other wounds.

The group recovered some when they stabilized their wounds. Everyone was more at ease now. If another Xu Qing popped up, they were confident of being able to fight the man—that was how at ease they were.

“What about Xu Qing’s storage ring? You’ve got quite thick skin to claim it all for yourself...” Yuan Shuo flicked a glance at Hong Yitang. The latter ignored him. He was the one to chop Xu Qing’s head off, so picking up the storage ring was just a casual response.

“Li Hao and I fought Xu Qing for most of the battle, it took Sky Sword’s arrival for you guys to kill him,” Yuan Shuo snorted at Hong Yitang’s silence. “My disciple will owe you a favor, but are you taking the spoils with you?”

“Teacher, Martial Uncle Hong should keep it,” chuckled Li Hao, as did Hong Yitang. “We’re not the ones who killed Xu Qing...”

As I thought! This kid was so miserly before, but now he doesn’t even want the Steadfast Duke’s storage ring! Hong Yitang’s got his talons in my disciple!

Li Hao simply felt that it would make its way back to his hands sooner or later—ahem, that Hong Yitang would trade it for sword energy. What was the point of taking it now? You don’t understand my plans, teacher. It’s not nice to directly request it from someone. We want to gently, quietly, unnoticeably squeeze them dry, then take it back.

## Chapter 614: Focusing on Cultivation (II)

Hong Yitang laughed and threw out a storage ring. He glanced at Yuan Shuo. “After so many years, Big Brother Yuan is still so straightforward, so direct, so...”

He almost said shameless, but it was clearly implied.

Yuan Shuo didn’t bother with a response. He stopped grumbling only after Hong Yitang relinquished the storage ring.

“Let’s not argue about this,” Li Hao chuckled. “I want to take an inventory of all of my gains. There is too much as I made off with the entire Xu treasury. There’s a lot of good things here and I can’t catalog it all myself. Please give me a hand.”

He fished out a long string of storage rings from his armor, raising wide-eyed looks and tsk’ing! The Xus had truly suffered greatly and Li Hao had gained so much! He’d robbed the Xus clean, killed Red Beard and other pirate Novas, killed Xu Xing, the Yellow General, and second steward, and the rest had killed Xu Qing together.

If Red Beard was counted among the Xu camp, they’d lost eight Novas during the memorial and another nine before that. A double-digit figure of Novas were dead in such a short amount of time! Their losses were too heavy to estimate.

Of course, this also obliquely confirmed that the overlord of the East had extremely deep foundations. There were so many powerhouses among the family—the Heaven and Earth Generals were still alive, as were some of their resident experts, as well as the old duke of the sixth cultivation level that’d just appeared...

If they had more powerhouses in the ruins and some Novas in the army, then the family remained a formidable faction yet. It took a family of such caliber to keep the east under control.

The group was at a loss for words when they saw Li Hao take out the long necklace. Each of them quickly grabbed a handful of rings to help with the inventory count. There were so many that the young man couldn't handle it all himself.

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Meanwhile, Li Hao ignored treasure that was the like of mysterious power stones and others. He focused on the good stuff from the second and third floors. There'd been more than twenty origin weapons on the second floor and three earth level origin weapons on the third floor, as well as the Goldensky Lotus. There was also a mysterious medallion and a fragment of another weapon, as well as a piece of mirror on the fourth floor. Such were the full contents of the treasury.

The young man sifted through the contents of Xu Xing's storage ring. The man had two origin weapons and three drops of Water of Life! So the second master had some fortune to his name as well. How unfortunate for him that he'd died too quickly to make use of it.

The Yellow General had been worse off since he had just set foot into metamorphosis. He had a lot of mysterious power stones, but not that many treasures. There was only one drop of Water of Life that was carefully hoarded in his ring.

An expert raised by a noble family wasn't as strong as those who developed in the wild. Whatever treasure they seized was first handed over to their liege. All the same, it was rare to see such a poor metamorphosis expert.

Lastly, Li Hao examined Red Beard and Xu Qing's storage rings. Being the leader of the East Sea pirates, Red Beard would have plenty of treasure. Pirates always kept their belongings on them instead of hiding them somewhere. They were the only ones most worthy of trust.

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Li Hao kept taking deep breaths as he tallied his gains. The others were soon finished as well, each astonished by the final count.

“There are about 950,000 mysterious power stones,” Yuan Shuo began. “Six origin weapons, one thousand sets of ancient armor, and a lot of energy rings, which makes for too many cubes to bother counting. There are also more than one hundred blood pearls, but they don’t look too strong at typically less than Solar.”

950,000 stones!

Hong Yitang and Light Sword sucked in sharp breaths. They’d never heard of such a number in their entire lives!

“And I have another 200,000 pieces of mysterious power stones...” Li Hao grinned widely from ear to ear.

“Hmm?” The others blinked. You were only counting a few storage rings, how do you have so many?

“Xu Qing didn’t have that many low quality ones and has a few big ones like Martial Uncle Hong. I didn’t count those. It was Red Beard who unexpectedly brought a ton with him.” The young man was utterly delighted. “I count a total of twenty-nine origin weapons and nine drops of Water of Life! What a pity that Xu Qing seemed to have used up all of his. Red Beard had a few drops too.”

These were commonly seen treasures. The less common ones, such as weapon fragments, medallions, or mirrors were also present. Red Beard seemed to possess a few similar weapons in his storage ring too.

“1.15 million mysterious power stones, thirty-five origin weapons, nine drops of Water of Life...” General shock rippled through the group.

“You were seriously ridiculously bold to raid the Steadfast Duke’s manor!” Yuan Shuo couldn’t help but exclaim. “A family like that with hundreds of years of history and being the eastern overlord... No wonder you made off with such riches. But you have to keep in mind that you

wouldn't have gotten away if not for reinforcement from large numbers of Silver Moon martial masters!"

"I wasn't planning on raiding them," Li Hao responded innocently. "I was only going for the other Windchaser Boot. That's an heirloom of the eight families, it's not like they can use it..."

The group couldn't be bothered with him. You were ready to go toe-to-toe with the Xus when you decided to go for the Windchaser Boots, weren't you? Otherwise, it was theirs for hundreds of years. Why would they just give it to you? In your dreams!

Li Hao now grasped three weapons of the eight families in his hands. If there was one in Battle Heaven, that meant Red Moon would have four at most. He'd originally thought that organization had all of the rest apart from his own sword and the blade in teacher's hand. But now, the most they could possibly have was four.

The sword of the Lis, blade of the Zhangs, fists of the Zhaos, footwork of the Lius, big turtle kept by the Wangs, mallet of the Hongs, spear of the Zhou, and the trouble that is the Zheng young master...

He understood that there should be a spear, potentially boxing gloves, and a mallet left, but he had no idea what the Zhengs possessed. They were the most unique family in the folk song and the only one that there was a lack of clues for.

Red Moon might have the spear, boxing gloves, and mallet. Li Hao suddenly recalled that Director General Wang of Battle Heaven had said to go find him when the young man collected all eight weapons. The head of city security wanted to borrow them for a bit. Li Hao had three now, but he probably wouldn't be obtaining the rest without killing Ying Hongyue first.

He put this matter out of his mind and chortled nonstop. "I'm really rich now! But items like mysterious power stones are only useful when they're turned into personal strength. Stacking them in storage rings turns them into trash!"

However, the group couldn't possibly absorb more than one million pieces. There was a limit to how much one could take in, no matter the method. It was why the Xus had dumped the stones in their vaults as reserves.

Such low quality stones weren't very effective for premier powerhouses. It would have much of a result for them unless the stones could be converted to sword energy for absorption.

"You're going to be in a lot of trouble after this, kid." Yuan Shuo inclined his head. "We've also been thoroughly assessed by others. If more opponents of similar caliber move against us next, we might be met with our doom. Even Tyrant Blade and Sky Sword might be included in the schemes."

Bringing their full force to bear each time was a gesture that revealed one's trump cards. Once the aces up their sleeves were more or less known, that would permit their enemies to make ample preparations. This knowledge had to be protected, therefore, major factions rarely clashed with each other. Even if there was a fight, the premier powerhouses rarely made a move.

They mostly threatened or intimidated others!

For example, part of Sky Sword's strength had been assessed with this fight. Some trouble might descend upon Sky Sword Mountain next. He didn't possess any baseline security just through being one of the seven divine mountains.

Li Hao nodded in agreement with his teacher's words and smiled. "Thus, our most pressing need is to strengthen ourselves. We can't let the enemy know us inside and out. When they think they can handle us, we'll be able to catch them by surprise and strike back. We'll wear them down through attrition!"

It was an easy sentiment to voice, but execution-wise...

Li Hao put this worry out of his mind and quickly asked, "Have you made new breakthroughs with the Five Styles, teacher?"



“Yes.” Yuan Shuo freely shared his knowledge. He’d always possessed a flamboyant bearing, it’d just been crushed during those many years of suppression. Now that he’d broken through, he naturally won’t continue to keep such a low profile. “I’ve pretty much walked Summoner of Spirit to the very end. What comes next is Refiner of Spirit!”

Both Hong Yitang and Light Sword couldn’t help but look at him.

“Curious, are you?” Yuan Shuo chuckled. They didn’t respond. “Hahaha, it’s normal to be curious. Despite how strong you are, your road forward is broken, isn’t it?”

“It’s not completely broken,” Hong Yitang exhaled. “We have some thoughts, but they’re hard to manifest at this current stage.”

“I know them!” Yuan Shuo chuckled. “You guys still can’t resolve the matter of the organs, can you? And you’re struggling with whether or not to break your locks?”

The two nodded. Correct, and it wasn’t just their worries, but that of all premier martial masters.

Yuan Shuo threw his head back with laughter. “I’ve thought through certain things and studied the many ancient books that I possess. I’ve discovered that some of the daos in the ancient civilization are different from how modern day humans walk their paths. The three cavities, indestructible golden body, and core origin that the ancient records speak of are all different now!

“Ancient powerhouses ultimately trod down the path of core origin. It could look different now and be no longer applicable. Perhaps our supernatural locks have replaced these.

“In your current state, your organs suffer the most when you unseal yourself. But according to the ancient records, our organs should be able to support such an eruption. They cannot do so now because our locks are too strong. When they break, the eruption that results is far stronger than what was present in the ancient civilization...”

Chapter 615: Focusing on Cultivation (III)

“Do you know why the next martial master cultivation realm is called Refiner of Spirit?” asked Yuan Shuo.

“You’re the one calling it that.” Hong Yitang raised a brow. “Who says it has to be Refiner of Spirit?”

“All daos lead to the same goal, what do you know?” Yuan Shuo rolled his eyes. “There is no unified path for martial masters at the moment, so I’ve unified them. Proceeding down my way makes for the true, legitimate path. Following your reflections might bring you to a unique path, but your way will not integrate all of the paths suited for martial masters!”

Hong Yitang said nothing further, while Li Hao looked curiously at his teacher. Had his teacher made further progress recently? He quite needed his teacher’s help at the moment as well.

“Teacher, Refiner of Spirit should have something to do with the supernatural locks, doesn’t it?” He had to pick up the line of conversation since his teacher insisted on being mysterious. “Is it a function of melding the aura into the locks, using the locks to nurture the aura, and further using them to replace the core origin dao of the ancient civilization?”

Yuan Shuo blinked and looked at his disciple.

“Only the two of us walk teacher’s Summoner of Spirit cultivation realm at the moment. It requires a fusion of five auras, but not everyone can manage to comprehend five auras. Not even I have fully fused mine together. In that case, can one proceed with only one aura?”

“Have you read an ancient book called Building Five Bridges, teacher? It’s a method from the ancient civilization that applies to the five organs and creates bridges of heaven and earth between them...” The more Li Hao spoke about this, the more confused he was. “I’m thinking if the five organs can form a circulatory loop, then just one aura is enough! We wouldn’t need five since the five organs have become one.

“Does this mean that the Building Five Bridges method is something that all martial masters should study? That it’s an option that all martial masters should try? But how does one build bridges between the five organs?”

Yuan Shuo raised a brow and looked at Li Hao. It’d only been a few months since they parted ways, but his disciple was starting to deliberate over his future path. And one had to know, Li Hao improved at a very rapid clip and was a great troublemaker. It also meant that he’d seen more of the world to be able to voice these thoughts.

“The supernatural locks have replaced the bridges of the old and the locks can become a loop,” Hong Yitang added. “But the locks themselves are independent and actually repel each other. Can we use the aura to mitigate the conflict between them?”

Yuan Shuo slouched with dejection and flicked a glance at the two of them. “It seems you two know more than I do.” Regardless, he nodded. “So it looks like people have a general idea of the road to come. It doesn’t matter how many auras we have, whether it is one or five, one can become five and five can become one. There is only a difference in level of strength.

“So whether it is one aura or five, there isn’t a big disparity. The only variance is in strength, not cultivation level. Supernatural locks are indeed the key, but breaking them is not the proper path!

“Hong Yitang, you and others are technically in the Refiner of Spirit level. It’s just not that obvious.” Yuan Shuo looked at Hong Yitang, then at Light Sword. “Summoner of Spirit is a stage in which we strengthen our auras and utilize them to nurture the supernatural locks. The locks fortify the organs, which in turn enhance the body...

“According to my hierarchy, the two of you are in a period of change between Summoner of Spirit to Refiner of Spirit—the lock saturation process that you speak of. That you’re close to success means that you have some skill to your name.”

Hong Yitang grinned. This guy just had to toot his own horn for a bit and pretend to be much more knowing than them.

“At this stage, all martial masters possess an aura!” Yuan Shuo continued. “Just as Li Hao said, whether it is one or five, it is all the same. If you are able to break through the bottleneck and connect the five organs together, then one aura can nurture five organs! The key lies in connecting the supernatural locks. It’s a bit of a thorny issue that I was musing over before, but made some discoveries later on.

“All paths lead to one.” Yuan Shuo looked at Hong Yitang. “You’re a step ahead at your current level. The bridge of the five organs requires saturated supernatural locks!”

The group’s eyes widened and Li Hao brightened.

“Only when the five locks are saturated can they be connected and build this so-called bridge...”

“But then, how are Dominators with only one aura supposed to cross this threshold?” Li Hao asked with a frown. “Do they bypass Summoner of Spirit and begin directly with Refiner of Spirit?”

His teacher’s thoughts were suitable only for the premier martial masters of their day. Those who weren’t as talented would be stuck on the other side of this chasm. There weren’t many who could make it to the level of Hong Yitang and the rest.

“Don’t rush!” Yuan Shuo laughed. “Just as the strong have their cultivation methods, so do the weak have theirs. There are two ways to build bridges between the organs. One of them is with the supernatural locks—that is the kind of completion in a single step that is suitable for the strong. As for the weak, they can make their way slowly through the cultivation level.

“A martial master’s foundational strength is internal force. The weak need to make use of internal force, not supernatural locks, to build these bridges. When they succeed at Summoner of Spirit, they can consider replacing the bridges with their supernatural locks as they move onward.”

“Internal force can be used as bridges?” Li Hao was confused. “But internal force is easily absorbed by the supernatural when it enters the five organs. They are unable to solidify into bridges.”

“That’s easy.” Yuan Shuo was unconcerned. “Just solidify it with your mind intent. Supernatural locks do not absorb aura and mind intent. They can be used to solidify internal force!”

Li Hao mused over his words and Hong Yitang also sank into deep contemplation. Finally, the latter said, “Then... according to your theories... there are multiple steps to take after Dominator. The first is to build the bridge between the five organs, then to summon the spirits, then replace the bridges with supernatural locks, then to refine the spirits...”

“That is the required path for a regular martial master.” Yuan Shuo nodded. “It’s not impossible to leap straight to Summoner of Spirit, but that’s too great of a burden for them. Their organs can’t endure the strain! We can, but that doesn’t mean everyone else can.”

Li Hao and the others could summon the spirits all the same without the bridges because their organs were very strong. Regular Dominators possessed much weaker organs.

“Teacher, then why do the others have to saturate the locks of their four limbs first before working on the ones of the organs? And only then can they unseal themselves...”

“I don’t know either.” Yuan Shuo shook his head. “I’ve never tried it before myself, but my guess is that it has something to do with the connections between the locks themselves.”

“Saturating the locks of the four limbs is to strengthen the body and use that as feedback for the organs,” Hong Yitang explained. “Otherwise, if the organs are strengthened first, both they and the body won’t be able to endure the strain.”

“But I...” Li Hao wanted to say that he’d strengthened the locks of his organs first, but then recalled that he’d also fortified his body and bones at the same time. Perhaps he might have failed if he’d focused only on his organs.

The group continued to discuss their theories. At their stage of cultivation, everyone needed to clarify what the next steps were. That was the key. Martial masters who could unseal themselves

were premier martial masters. Unsealing resulted in battle strength greater than Nova, but a little less than the sixth cultivation level—unless one fully snapped a lock.

If they waited to the sixth level to solidify their cultivation, then these martial masters might fall behind. Yuan Shuo and the rest had reached this point. While Li Hao lagged behind, he was almost there. Progress would be difficult without a further path ahead.

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The group conversed for several hours before Yuan Shuo summarized, “Summoner of Spirit can be divided into two stages. The first is to establish the bridges of the organs. The second is to nurture the aura.

“Refiner of Spirit can also be divided into two stages. The first is to saturate the supernatural locks, the second is to combine the auras with the locks.

“From the perspective of a martial master with a single aura, you guys are in the first stage of Refiner of Spirit. However, you’re already stronger than Novas. Therefore, Refiners can rival Novas and those two levels above Nova. If you can enter the second stage... perhaps you can match those who are even stronger.”

“Don’t shove me into your system!” Hong Yitang laughed.

“Letting you into my system is your honor!” Yuan Shuo rolled his eyes. “Only I can create a complete path of martial dao in this era. Your deviated shortcuts and other nonsense will have to return to the proper path sooner or later!”

Li Hao couldn’t be bothered with their squabbling and asked solemnly, “Then if I’ve skipped the step of building the five bridges and don’t use my internal force for them, can I only use my saturated supernatural locks for the bridges?”

“Why are you skipping that step?” Yuan Shuo countered impatiently. “Is it that hard for you to use your internal force for them now? Why must you create additional trouble for yourself? Or do you think you have so much potential that you can reach the skies with one step? Connect your organs as one first, the rest can wait. Do you think cultivation is so easy that you must create some difficulties by skipping steps in order to showcase how great your abilities are?”

“.....” Li Hao was speechless. I just thought I was already past that level... but after your words... Fine, they make sense. “So I should build the five bridges with my internal force next, connect the organs, then saturate my locks...”

“Wrong!” Yuan Shuo snapped. “Are you a Summoner of Spirit?”

Li Hao blinked. I am! How am I not??

“Your auras were forcefully raised to their level, what kind of bullshit Summoner are you??” Yuan Shuo rolled his eyes once more. “You’ve completely relied on external resources, this is a completely incorrect way of doing things! Summoner of Spirit is the process of strengthening an aura. The stronger an aura is, the stronger the organ! You relied on outside forces to raise them to their level. When it comes down to it, you’re not even a Summoner! Your battle strength depends on everything but yourself! I’ve only been gone a few months, but you’ve completely gone down the wrong path!”

#### Chapter 616: Focusing on Cultivation (IV)

“Nurturing the spirits to lock the auras, locking the auras to nurture the spirits... You’re randomly scrabbling around the realm,” Yuan Shuo began his lecture. “Summoner of Spirit doesn’t look like what you’re doing. You’re making it too hard to improve your auras. Something will go wrong sooner or later! You haven’t comprehended the true meaning of Summoner of Spirit at all. Why have you incorporated your auras into the organs? For fun?”

“Yes, that’s exactly what you’re doing! It doesn’t matter if you’ve incorporated them or not. If your auras are separated, you’ll still be at the same level of strength you are now. Therefore, you’re just taking off your pants to fart. You’re Summoner of Spirit in name, but this is all just amusement.”

Li Hao was tongue-tied! Surely not? He’d thought about this problem before, but he’d always thought that perhaps he could improve his auras when he reached Refiner of Spirit.

“Then teacher means...”

“Have them take root in the five organs!” Yuan Shuo furrowed his brows. “There’s no required connection between your auras and organs. The key to Summoner of Spirit lies with locking the auras into the organs, and not just for fun, but to strengthen the organs. When they are strong, so are the auras! When the auras are strong, so are the organs!

“The aura cannot be without root or origin. You must trace them to their beginnings and locate their foundations. Rooting them in the supernatural locks is also in preparation for Refiner of Spirit. You can’t just fuse them willy-nilly! You must connect aura to lock before enhancing them together. At that point, the increased strength of your lock means an increased strength of your aura...”

Yuan Shuo flicked a slightly dissatisfied glance at Hong Yitang. “You can’t be completely oblivious about this at your cultivation level. My disciple spent his days with you in my absence, why didn’t anyone warn him?”

“How am I supposed to know what your Summoner of Spirit level is like?” Hong Yitang protested innocently. “How was I supposed to know if it’s the same as our path? The only thing that Li Hao said publicly is to meld our auras into the five organs. I thought your Five Styles discipline has a special way to enhance the aura!”

“I know about what the kid announced. I thought he was just pulling the wool over everyone’s eyes. So... this is what he really thinks?” Yuan Shuo rolled his eyes.

Li Hao looked around sheepishly. Yeah, other than not talking about locking the aura, everything else was truly what I was thinking. So all of you thought I was playing a long con? Why do you think such things about me? I’d just entered White Moon City then and was very weak, very timid. How would I dare run my mouth in everything?

“Didn’t I tell you about locking the auras and nurturing them before I left?” Yuan Shuo’s head ached. “Even the name of the cultivation realm is Summoner of Spirit, how did you go off on a tangent? And here I thought you understood, so you don’t understand anything?”



“Teacher, I was just a Sunderer when you left,” Li Hao chuckled ruefully. “I didn’t know much about auras and happened to comprehend one through luck. How would I know anything of what you spoke of?”

“.....” Yuan Shuo sighed. Fine, I overestimated you. “You need to clean up your path! You’ll still grow stronger if you continue down this road, but it’s all forcefully piled upward. You will meet with a limit as you won’t always secure treasures to help you advance. The might of an aura is the foundation of a martial master’s strength!

“Aura isn’t just mental strength, do you understand? Strictly speaking, the aura may have replaced the core origin dao of the ancient martial dao. Without ways to improve it, it’s only a matter of time before you fall behind...

“The dao of core origin vanished in the later years of ancient martial dao. There were very few who walked it in the first place. If it wasn’t for the existence of the ancient civilization and the descendants of those who trained in core origin... However, walking this path meant that one could not exceed one’s ancestors. There is a complete lack of possibility at the end.

“Some changes must have happened in the world during the ancient civilization to change the rules of heaven and earth.” Yuan Shuo looked at Li Hao. “If you continue this way, you might be able to find your way to the dao of core origin. However, that locks you into ancient martial dao for the rest of your life. You might reach your ancestor’s level at the end, but there’s not much hope to that. There is almost no possibility of you replicating your ancestor’s dao and exceeding it.”

“I, uh, haven’t thought that far yet.” Li Hao scratched his head.

“You fool!” Yuan Shuo frowned. “Your aspirations must be high even if you can’t make it to that step. If you lack even those, then what is the point of cultivation?! You might as well split up the origin weapons between the three of us and we’ll think of a way to kill Ying Hongyue for you. You can just find a woman to retire with!”

The old man seemed to be building up his rage; Li Hao smiled ruefully in response.

“I... didn’t mean it that way, teacher. Alright, alright, I’ll change!” He seemed to turn back into the clueless, naive boy that he’d once been when he was in front of Yuan Shuo. All of his previous arrogance and confidence was struck down.

But this was just as well. Li Hao did not possess a deep understanding of martial dao and lacked quite a few things. Yuan Shuo was helping him correct his deficiencies. Born of the so-called savage wilderness, the young man might be able to proceed with double the results at half the effort after this.

“So long as you correct your mistakes!” Yuan Shuo inclined his head. “Li Hao, you must understand that it’s only been twenty years since the development of the supernatural domain, but they already have powerhouses of the sixth level. Development of the supernatural path is quite clear cut. All they need to do is resolve the issue of conflict between the five organs and they’ll quickly enter the seventh, eight, and ninth levels!

“There are at least three locks to break in the five organs, which means their way to the ninth level is very apparent! There is smooth sailing ahead for them so long as they resolve the clash between their five organs. We may deride them as trash, but we can’t really think so. This is called tactical contempt, but strategic importance!

“Someone as strong as Xu Qing may not have measured up to the sixth level existences. People like you and I have even less right to disdain supernaturals! If the supernaturals can then resolve the problem of their outside energy and bring it into the body... Then our paths might be the same despite our systems being different!

“And if they can make external energy part of themselves, then you must understand that the path of martial masters... is actually not as clear and definite as the supernatural way!”

Li Hao nodded continuously. He’d killed countless supernaturals during this period of time. That, combined with their lack of an ability to unseal themselves meant that he really had developed some scorn for these types of superhumans. But after his teacher’s lecture, he felt that he’d been too careless.

There had been premier powerhouses even among the path of energy in the ancient civilization. Some were even mentioned by name in books. In the early years of the ancient civilization, energy practitioners had been the biggest enemy. They were still grave threats in the late years and never fully declined out of existence.

In the modern world, martial masters grappled with a murky path while their supernatural counterparts could see clearly how to proceed.

“Alright, that was an overall organization of theory.” Yuan Shuo smiled radiantly after a round of weighty admonishment. “You can do as you see fit with the details. And now... pick up the pace and continue cultivating. Produce some more sword energy, it’s been so long since I’ve absorbed it! I’ll take whatever shortcuts there are to save a lot of time.”

Li Hao had nothing to say in response. Off to the side, Hong Yitang and Light Sword also wordlessly remained in place. You’re so rich now, so hurry up and don’t drag things out. We want a cut of the good stuff too!

Although Yuan Shuo hadn’t spoken of specific cultivation methods, they didn’t need those at their level. Organizing things from a general perspective was enough. They had their own goals after that. Perhaps they would all end up at the same destination, but they didn’t need to completely follow Yuan Shuo’s ideas for the moment.

Li Hao didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. But since he had a lot of mysterious power stones at the moment, he didn’t care about this expenditure. Shards of broken stones soon piled up at his feet.

His most pressing need was to build the five bridges and then have the auras take root in his organs according to his teacher’s words. After that, he would saturate his supernatural looks and meld his auras into the locks. There was a long way ahead of him.

This time, Li Hao didn’t absorb sword energy. He left it for the other three while he began attempting to craft temporary bridges.

Panther was trying as well. The dog felt that its rate of progress wasn't fast enough through simply relying on its bloodline. It might be able to grow stronger through learning with humans.

Vast sums of mysterious power stones continued to break. The quartet vanished from the outside world. Whatever theatrics rose outside had nothing to do with them.

Yuan Shuo improved the fastest. He'd previously enhanced his organs at a slower rate. Now that there was a shortcut, he didn't mind taking it since his path ahead was clear. He swiftly took in sword energy to strengthen his locks. He wanted to enter Refiner of Spirit as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Hong Yitang was also attempting to break through to Refiner of Spirit. He wanted to fuse his sword aura into his locks and build true bridges between his organs. For that to occur, nine of his supernatural locks needed to be saturated.

Yuan Shuo sensed something in the middle of his cultivation and opened his eyes for a glance. Hong Yitang happened to look back at him, which made the old man's eyes sharpen with battle intent. This guy had hidden himself well over the years! Based on his categorization, the guy was almost at the second step of Refiner of Spirit!

Yuan Shuo was outclassed by Hong Yitang in his current stage, but that might not continue to hold true.

Hong Yitang grinned and closed his eyes again, ignoring the other. Yuan Shuo was the fount of inspiration that goaded everyone to greater heights. The old man had felt no pressure before, but he did a little bit now. If he quickly entered Refiner of Spirit, he might soon overtake Hong Yitang again since he had five auras.

Light Sword's goals were much simpler—absorb sword energy and saturate her supernatural locks. She'd only filled two to capacity, there was a very long way to go.

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While they cultivated. Near East Shore.

He Yong looked with a tragic expression. Where was everyone? I got here as soon as I could, but I didn't get here in time! No!! Li Hao grabbed so many treasures and he's got to be holed up somewhere to cultivate. I've lost out on so much!!

He Yong's grief was indescribable. He knew that these bastards must be cultivating; he'd made his way to the east as soon as he received word. But he was still a step too late and failed to find Li Hao and the others. He knew that he'd missed out on a massive opportunity!

"They must be within five hundred kilometers of me, but they're not responding!" His bronze armor could contact his compatriots, but they were ignoring him. How pitiful was this!

#### Chapter 617: Going Their Own Ways (I)

The group had received He Yong's communications, but Li Hao was too busy to respond. Hong Yitang outright ignored the man. Stop harassing me, you didn't make it to the fight. Too bad you're Southern Fist instead of Southern Leg. You ran so slowly that you missed everything, so you can just wait for next time.

Skystar City was too far away, but it was He Yong who'd wanted to return to the capital. Hong Yitang had no sympathy for him. Not to mention, the guy had run so quickly back to the royal family probably because there were benefits waiting for him. Would he have gone off so quickly if he'd known there were similar ones to be found with Li Hao?

The young man was focused on building the five bridges—connecting them with internal force and solidifying them with mind intent. The Building Five Bridges manual was a good reference, giving him some clues as to how to proceed.

Li Hao ignored the fact that the others weren't building their bridges. Just as his teacher had said, they'd already laid their foundations. Li Hao's foundations were poor, so he had to methodically proceed step by step. His sudden eruptions of power were too insubstantial, despite bestowing him strength. He was yet to grasp many rudimentary concepts.

It'd also only been three months since he'd entered Slayer of Tens. His rapid progress during this time had led to numerous errors. It was three short years since he first started practicing the Five Styles.

As Li Hao built his bridges, he mused over these notions and the books that he'd borrowed from Battle Heaven. He'd committed them to memory, but didn't understand all of the concepts. Since there were two premier sword users and a grand master of martial dao in front of him, the young man made sure to ask questions as he cultivated.

.....

Time passed in the blink of an eye. Three days went by in a quick blur. Many mysterious power stones were consumed and Hong Yitang opened his eyes to say, "I'm going back first. There are more people at the Sword Sect these days and I need to look in on them."

Light Sword was astonished. You're leaving? You're not staying to take further advantage of this wonderful opportunity? The past couple of days had been an utter delight for her. She'd filled a third lock of her five organs. This was an incredible speed that demonstrated more effectiveness than a year or two of individual cultivation in the past. She wanted to stay here until she died, why was he leaving?

Li Hao had spent the last three days putting his cultivation system in order. He'd almost succeeded crafting his five bridges. The young man frowned to hear that Hong Yitang wanted to leave. "Will you be alright if you go back now? Most of Silver Moon's strength is concentrated in White Moon City. The Sword Sect is decently far from the capital..."

"It's of no matter!" Hong Yitang laughed. "They won't do anything to me as it would be more of a loss than a gain. Killing me doesn't result in any benefits. It means one less sixth realm expert for the province and my death would not be the guaranteed outcome. None of the sixth realm experts are in an entirely stable state at the moment."

"The Breathing Method of the Five Styles may be very useful to the sixth realm. I can sense some, the supernaturals might be able to sense some. You and your master are possibly in a great deal of trouble." Hong Yitang paused and added hesitantly, "And not just you, but Yuan Xingwu and Chen Yuhua as well!"

“Even if they didn’t learn the final version of the breathing method, other people will be tempted to move against them when the world learns more about the breathing method’s uses. You guys should consider the implications yourselves. I will not involve myself in the Five Styles discipline.”

Thus far, most hadn’t considered the breathing method; they weren’t aware of its true mysteries. Xu Qing, however, had seen many things in his last fight. Unfortunately, he was dead. Otherwise, he would surely grasp the crux of the Breathing Method of the Five Styles, whereas those who trained in it might not understand the significance of their knowledge.

Li Hao hadn’t known before either, thinking that this was what was meant to be a breathing method. He understood a little more now—the connection between mind and blood qi when he fought by his teacher’s side had been truly profound, to speak of nothing else. That it enabled them to utilize the ancient weapons was even more marvelous!

“You’ve revised some of the breathing method, but its origin is prodigious, isn’t it?” Hong Yitang looked at Yuan Shuo.

“What does it have to do with you?” Yuan Shuo flicked a glance at him.

“.....”

Hong Yitang cursed to himself. The old man was just asking to be beaten up! He would be on the receiving end of a harsh lesson if he kept mouthing off. Granted, it’d been a few decades, so Hong Yitang was used to this.

“Its origins are definitely uncommon.” Yuan Shuo stroked his chin. “The Five Styles is not a secret art, it’s the combination of knowledge that I summarized from many outstanding ancient texts. The breathing method is further modified from a secret method left by an ancient emperor...”

“The breathing method didn’t originally contain such marvelous properties. It’s become special after the rise of the supernatural. Perhaps it has to do with sword energy—it wouldn’t be that effective without the combination of sword energy.”

He looked at Li Hao. “The interplay between sword energy and the breathing method is extraordinary. Perhaps the secret arts that I studied contained ones from your ancestors. The effects are excellent if the breathing method is used alone, but it would never reach this level.”

The young man contemplated his teacher’s words.

“Therefore, even if the breathing method really is seized by others, the effects won’t be as magical unless they are also equipped with sword energy.” Yuan Shuo continued proudly, “What good does the breathing method do for run-of-the-mill martial masters? They just gain an additional secret art. It takes proper usage to turn it into a premier secret art. The effects are mediocre if they do not use it properly. Do you think just anyone can comprehend the Five Styles?”

“So long as you’re aware of the dangers out there!” Hong Yitang didn’t bother with further warnings. “Then I’ll be going back now.”

“As you wish.” Being in no hurry to go, Yuan Shuo ignored him.

Hong Yitang looked at Light Sword; she pretended not to see him.

“Let’s go,” he laughed. “There will be more opportunities later on. Absorbing too much in one go isn’t necessarily a good thing. It’s better to follow the proper order and proceed gradually when it comes to strength.”

Light Sword was quite resigned! Leave if you want, don’t bother me! But as a veteran martial master, she knew the truth behind his words. “Then I’ll…”



She wanted to curse again when she gave her words more thought. Why should I go back to Silver Moon for? I have no sect there. This guy's crazy to take me with him!

However, she wasn't that thick-skinned, so she had to say, "Let's go together, we'll be safer on the road this way, just in case we run into heavyweights of the sixth realm."

"I have some more Water of Life." Li Hao rose when he saw that the two were about to leave. "It's typically a bit of a hassle to unseal yourself and I may not be around, so take a few drops with you."

He originally had seven drops left and gained nine more from the battle, making for sixteen drops total. The young man took out two flasks containing three drops each. That should be enough for the two to heal themselves after a simple unsealing, so long as their wounds weren't too severe.

Hong Yitang flicked a glance at him, then looked at Yuan Shuo. He accepted the flask with a laugh. "Come find me if anything crops up for you again!"

Light Sword promptly accepted the gift as well. Silver Moon martial masters usually didn't stand on ceremony. Owning these resources was better than not owning it. If it came down to it, she'd just fight for Li Hao again next time he was caught in something.

After putting their flasks away, the two left under the cover of darkness and didn't bid Yuan Shuo farewell.

"At least they can read the room," Yuan Shuo snorted when the two were gone. "They looked like they were going to stay until the new year! It's good that they've left. Some stuff can't be talked about when they were still here."

Li Hao started. Huh? Martial masters were generous sorts, unless it had to do with their secret arts.

"I've made some changes to the Breathing Method of the Five Styles," Yuan Shuo began. "Previously, it focused on enhancing internal force and blood qi. I modified it when I set foot into

Dominator and wanted to incorporate the aura into it, but haven't had time to think about it. I did have that time when I was in the central region...

"I made a final adjustment when I was in some ruins a few days ago, then updated it again when I fused my five auras together over these past three days..." Yuan Shuo first gave an overview of his situation before turning to the topic at hand. "The breathing method is the foundation to growing stronger. I talked about a path to Hong Yitang and Light Sword, a general direction. It is up to them as to how they can walk it.

"What I'm going to tell you now is the core essence of the breathing method, the core essence of martial masters. It is why strength can be incorporated into the body and why it blooms from the body. All of this has to do with the breathing method.

"Remember, the breathing method is the foundation. Everything else is the technique! Supernatural abilities, martial arts, fighting styles, battle strategies... Those are all techniques and the method is the root!

"If an analogy is struck between martial masters and trees, then the breathing method is the sun, water, and dirt. The tree will still be a tree without them, but it will eventually wither. Only when the method is present can the tree continue to grow!"

"I understand, teacher." Li Hao nodded. "Then the Breathing Method of the Five Styles can strengthen the aura?"

"That's right!" Yuan Shuo smiled. "So when Hong Yitang said that people might be after your useless senior brother and sister... It doesn't matter! The version they know is much older from a few years ago. It doesn't even possess as many profound mysteries as the version you know.

"The times advance with progress. The old versions should be discarded. What good are they for? Having read ancient texts, you and I should both know that hoarding every scrap of knowledge for ourselves is not to the benefit of martial dao. But in these times..." Yuan Shuo sneered. "Not hoarding everything is to court death!

“Even if I am to teach others, now is not the time. I will certainly not teach others before those guys start to stabilize their cultivation realm. That’d just be creating trouble for myself. Even now, I rather regret that I didn’t think too much of some things that I was researching and let them be disseminated throughout the world...”

Li Hao nodded.

## Chapter 618: Going Their Own Ways (II)

“Will my five auras strengthen exponentially once I learn teacher’s new version of the Breathing Method of Five Styles?” Li Hao asked with some excitement.

“What are you talking about?!” Yuan Shuo thundered. “It will only help you fuse the five auras more easily. The method is the root, alright, but it’s not a treasure to help you suddenly leap forward. This is the foundation for your methodical rise! Heavenly and earthly treasures are eventually exhausted as well. The method is the only foundational system that persists!”

Li Hao nodded—a new thought had struck him.

Yuan Shuo made use of transmission to impart the new breathing method. Not only that, but he also applied the secret encryption of the Five Styles discipline. He clearly placed a great importance on this knowledge and didn’t want the latest version of the breathing method to leak to anyone else.

Panther’s ears were sticking straight up, but it couldn’t hear a thing. The dog grew frantic!

Yuan Shuo saw its reaction, but didn’t bother interacting with it. The dog could have the sword energy, but the breathing method could not be taught to outsiders. Besides, the dog was a monster spirit. Trouble would easily develop if it ran off one day. All treasures were external belongings. Only a martial method was the source of one’s strength.

Li Hao listened silently, quietly perceiving and comprehending. The new breathing method seemed much more complicated and involved many more concepts than before. The previous method only touched upon internal force, breathing frequency, flow of blood qi, and some other simple factors.

This iteration included the operation of the aura, which greatly increased its difficulty. One had to say, his teacher was truly a brilliant academic who advanced with the times. He didn't rest on his laurels after creating one method, but continued to improve on it and enhance his skills as his strength increased.

Being more than seventy years old, Yuan Shuo counted among the more senior of the Silver Moon martial masters. Many martial masters were in their early fifties. His age was higher and his potential quite good, but his circumstances were the worst among his peers. This was also partially due to him expending a large amount of time on various interests—his knowledge was too scattered.

Just fusing five auras together had taken him many years to complete. Prior to him dominating the martial world, some of those in his generation had already set foot into Dominator of Thousands. When it came down to it, he could only count as invincible among his peers in that age.

But it was due to his stubborn persistence from those years that he improved so rapidly after setting foot into Dominator and breaking through his bottlenecks. Someone like Li Hao who consumed sword energy like drinking water could not catch up to him. Such were the benefits of melding five auras as one.

Master and disciple discussed the new breathing method before Li Hao sat down to practice it. The different sensations were apparent after a short while as sword energy surged in faster than before. This was just the rudimentary effect. The crux was that his organs seemed to be enclosed by a peculiar energy as he operated the breathing method. It directed the auras in his organs and seemed to connect his entire body, consolidating all of the strength inside him.

"Teacher," Li Hao asked with surprise. "Why does it feel like there's the Incantation of the Blade of Blood in this?"

"Have you sensed it?" Yuan Shuo threw his head back with laughter. "That's right, the new version does indeed draw inspiration from the Incantation! The Incantation of the Blade of Blood combines blood qi and mental strength, but extracts all of it in a momentary eruption that harms the self!

"I modified it to include it in the breathing method. The effects are diminished, but they don't harm the self anymore. In fact, they further nurture the body."

Li Hao was highly impressed. His teacher was incredible to incorporate these ancient arts however he would! The Incantation of the Blade of Blood was definitely too much of a strain on the body. He wouldn't dare use it if not for sword energy at the ready. No wonder the Breathing Method of the Five Styles could now call upon all of the force within a body—the Incantation had been incorporated! It was a very impressive characteristic that even the aura could be directed.

The young man committed these details to memory and continued trying out the new breathing method.

“I’ve offended too many people and so am not at liberty to say too much sometimes,” Yuan Shuo said after some thought. “You’re on good terms with those old guys, you can observe their secret arts if you have the opportunity to. The secret arts of Silver Moon are all amazing. If you have sufficient patience, you can also try incorporating them into the breathing method.

“You know the Nine Forged Force, at the very least. You can try including that into the Breathing Method of Five Styles. You know, any accidents are possible in life,” Yuan Shuo suddenly sighed. “I’ve spent all this time modifying the breathing method and might not render another version within a short period of time. While you... you might walk further down your path.

“However, ancient martial dao is not a good fit for us, so you have to walk this path yourself. Learn some more, accumulate some more. After that, try revising cultivation methods by yourself.

“Supernatural locks, auras, blood qi, and the physical body are the general directions that you should look at. The explosive force and strength of the Nine Forged Force does not come out of thin air. It is contained within as that method is a way to stimulate the potential. It is a way to draw on strength. I’ve always felt that it’s very suitable to be incorporated into the Five Styles.”

Li Hao started to say something, then stopped. He nodded moments later, suddenly feeling the pressure. I’m just an amateur martial master. How am I supposed to combine a new method into what I know?

It felt so very difficult. This required a large accumulation of knowledge and experience. He lacked all of that. However, he understood what his teacher meant. He was improving at a good pace, at a rapid clip even faster than his teacher.

If this rate continued, then Yuan Shuo would not be able to perceive the same understandings as his disciple since he would not be at the same level. Creating a method out of nothing would not result in one suitable for Li Hao. At that point in time, the young man would have to rely on himself.

“Don’t stress over this.” Yuan Shuo clapped his student’s shoulder. “Some things look to be hard, but sometimes they’re as easy as going with the flow. The more you know, the easier it is to understand, comprehend, and blend harmoniously. You might not have to enter seclusion and commit reams of information to memory. Reading ten thousand books and walking ten thousand kilometers is also dao.”

“I understand!” Li Hao nodded with a smile. “Don’t worry, teacher. I know what to do. I’ll imitate first, then catch up, and finally surpass my studies. Therefore, I’ll copy teacher first, catch up to your level of accomplishment, and then set forth on my own!”

“Well said!” Yuan Shuo nodded, despite his frozen smile. Impossible! I’m never giving you that opportunity! I’ll always be one step ahead of you! As thrilling as Li Hao’s conclusion was, he would never permit it to actually come to pass since he was the teacher!”

“Additionally, I’m leaving after I absorb some more sword energy...” Yuan Shuo changed the topic.

“Eh?” Li Hao blinked. “You’re leaving, teacher?”

Why?

“Of course!” Yuan Shuo laughed. “All good things come to an end and powerhouses work alone as lone wolves. Do you see Sky Sword and the rest spending time together? Huang Yu and his crowd do gather together, but they won’t always do so. Those who wish to break through or walk further should have their own worlds!

“This world is a fascinating one!” the old man chuckled. “You can vie against the heavens, earth, people, or ancients. These are all fascinating propositions! Would you have made it to your current heights if you’d followed me all this time? In the same vein, I might have lost my soul if I stayed with you.

“As good as sword energy is, it is not the be all and end all!” He looked at Li Hao. “Remember that well! Sword energy is wonderful, but you can’t keep relying on it. Will your cultivation stop one day if you have no more sword energy?”

“I will remember everything that teacher says!” Li Hao breathed out, then hesitated. “Teacher, Martial Uncle Hong says that this age is deformed. He says he wants to change it, but he doesn’t have enough strength to. Although he wants to do something, he’s hemmed in on all sides. Does teacher think... he makes sense?”

Yuan Shuo furrowed his brows for a while. “He does, but remember that everyone’s path is different! Whether it is that of a tyrant or king, that of slaughter or demonic, you don’t have to copy everything entirely.

“Hong Yitang walks the flow of the earth, a path that is eminently suited to him. It would be inappropriate for me as I am matched to my own. And you? What is your dao? You are young, so you should walk around more and see more. Don’t be affected by them. They want to instill their comprehensions into you, which is inappropriate!

“After you travel the world and observe life in its various forms, after you experience rises and falls, glories and slumps, then you might be able to determine what you are most suited for.” Yuan Shuo clapped him on the shoulder again. “You must stick to your own thoughts and at present, they are that of revenge!

“They think you’ll be blinded by revenge, but I think not! Revenge is the faith of your current state. You do not need to shatter this faith. When you left Silver Moon and traveled to the east, I already knew then that you were considering certain things. You did not wish to cause trouble for others by staying in Silver Moon. That is the proper way of thinking.

“We need to resolve our own matters! Just as I could’ve escaped from Silver City, but that would’ve caused overwhelming trouble and disturbance for certain people had I done so—Hou Xiaochen, for example. I could not leave, but you had to leave!”

Yuan Shuo laughed when he spoke of his past and shook his head. “I could’ve run away all those years ago, but do you know why I chose to stay?”

Li Hao shook his head.

“The price for me running away would’ve been enormous—and not for me, but for Silver Moon. Having been around for so many years, do you think I really didn’t have some contingencies?” he sighed. “I could’ve unearthed some old fossils and incited a battle to overturn the heavens! But that would create unbelievable trouble. We shouldn’t think too much sometimes, but at others we must consider certain things and consequences.”

“Teacher, do you mean...” Li Hao’s eyes widened.

#### Chapter 619: Going Their Own Ways (III)

“Haven’t you encountered one already?” Yuan Shuo smiled. “You’ve unearthed an ancient plant spirit—can it be the only one that still exists in this vast world? However, you need to keep in mind that the world has changed in the river of time. It is a different age. Be careful of releasing the tiger from the cage. There are good and bad people in any era!”

The old man didn’t go into details; he just continued to issue reminders. “Whether it is Battle Heaven or the plant spirit that you found, you can converse with them and partner with them, but you cannot lose your sense of self! You are Li Hao! As for the identity of the eight families... discard that!

“The responsibilities, glories, and everything about the eight families has nothing to do with you!”

Li Hao continuously took in deep breaths before nodding. “Understood!”



Yuan Shuo grinned. It was good that he did! He needed to live his own life! He didn't wish for his disciple to constantly live under someone else's shadow. Would he still be Li Hao in the end?

Whether weak or strong, it was always better to be oneself.

.....

Master and disciple didn't talk much after Yuan Shuo imparted the newly revised Breathing Method of the Five Styles. They returned to absorbing sword energy.

Yuan Shuo wasn't of a mind to overly interfere with his disciple or correct his notions. This was his teaching style. He would go over the concepts a few times and if the student understood, that was good. If not, then forget it. He would not expect his student to be the same as him.

It took Li Hao five whole days to craft five simple bridges. He felt something different the moment he succeeded. The five bridges formed a circulatory loop. He should be able to strengthen the five organs in an easier fashion from now on.

There was one more task for him to do after this—root the auras in his organs. In this way, he would have completed the rudimentary training of Summoner of Spirit. Only then could he refine his five auras.

These five days might have been the longest span of cultivation he'd ever undergone. He'd completely forgotten everything about the outside world. Yuan Shuo also tirelessly absorbed sword energy. He needed to take advantage of his disciple being nearby to fortify himself. It would be such a shame if he didn't enjoy this feast!

Master, disciple, and a dog consumed a lot of resources. And with Hong Yitang and Light Sword present a few days ago, the group depleted nearly fifty thousand pieces of mysterious power stones in a very short period of time. This level of consumption would bankrupt a moderate-sized faction and force them to close down.

But as high the level of depletion was, so was the amount of gains. On the sixth day, Li Hao sought to incorporate the wood sword aura into the five organs. It corresponded to the liver. According to his teacher's tutelage. Summoner of Spirit was to nurture the auras and not just lock them away.

As instructed, the young man carefully inserted the aura into the liver's supernatural lock. The lock that'd wrapped around the willow tree unleashed a strong recoil when the tree roots slowly sank in. It felt like it didn't permit the aura to take root in it.

Multiple attempts ended in failure. Li Hao opened his eyes, frowning deeply. He'd thought it would be easy, but it turned out to be... very hard. After some thought, he came to a ruthless decision. Why not shatter some of the supernatural locks first, such as the one of his heart? The other four organs couldn't undergo the same, but that was fine.

Supernatural locks couldn't be touched under ordinary circumstances, but Li Hao could disturb his, and in a very simple fashion. He would combine the five auras under the overview of the sword aura, dig a hole out of the lock, then shove the tree's roots in. That would do it!

Having made up his mind, Li Hao immediately funneled his five auras into the sword aura and erupted with force, stabbing at the lock that was wrapped around the little tree!

Clang!

A metallic collision sounded on the mental level. Yuan Shuo's eyes snapped open and he stared askance at his disciple. What was the kid doing? Destroying his supernatural locks? He opened his mouth to speak, then decided to shut it.

Whatever, it's not like he'll die from this. Sword energy is his greatest protection.

The kid was using brute force again, wasn't he? Yuan Shuo kept up a litany of internal exhortations. He wasn't thinking of forcefully destroying the supernatural locks to incorporate the auras, was he? Yuan Shuo had told the kid to nurture the auras, but this wasn't how it was done.

The locks needed to be coaxed into accepting the aura, much like one would coax a wife. If one day wasn't sufficient, then two, if not two, then three...

So long as sufficient time and effort was spent, occasionally feeding the lock some sword energy or blood qi intermixed with the aura, success would be at hand sooner or later. Li Hao had absolutely no patience at all!

Yuan Shuo was quite irked. The kid was sometimes like a bull in a china shop! Granted, he had his confidence in doing so, so there was nothing that could be criticized about his course of action. It hadn't been hard for Yuan Shuo to incorporate his auras into his locks, but he'd taken a little more than a month to do so. He'd rooted one aura at a time, each one needing around a month.

As for Li Hao...

The young man opened his eyes after roughly half an hour and spat out a mouthful of dark blood. "Teacher, I've completed one aura!" he chuckled. "My wood sword aura has been implanted into the supernatural lock. I've officially set foot into Summoner of Spirit now, haven't I?"

"....." Yuan Shuo couldn't stop rolling his eyes!

"Teacher, the supernatural lock doesn't seem to be feeding strength to my aura." Li Hao raised an eyebrow.

"Is it supposed to be nurturing your aura after you forcefully shoved it in?" Yuan Shuo asked with a headache. "It's good enough that it doesn't shatter your aura in protest! You'll have to wait for your aura and lock to slowly become one. Once lock and aura are a complete whole, there will be feedback then."

His disciple was beginning to irritate him. As much as he lectured or berated the kid, Li Hao had completed rooting one of his auras in half an hour. How was that not annoying??

Yuan Shuo decided to put this vexing matter out of sight and blocked off his ears to continue absorbing sword energy. Meanwhile, Li Hao continued his violent cultivation.

This manner of cultivation could save him at least a month's worth of time. However he could expedite his advancement was all for the best. As for other people... they would have to proceed methodically as they lacked sword energy.

The young man attacked his supernatural locks one after another. If you don't let an aura take root in you, I'll beat it into you! After multiple attempts, each of his locks was beaten into quiet submission and permitted his auras to take up residence in them. However, the five locks were still independent of each other. If there came a day in which they were one, then he would be a Refiner of Spirit.

However, Li Hao wanted more. When he was finished with his supernatural locks of the organs, he asked, "Teacher, I have another question. If I comprehend more sword auras, do you think I can root them in the locks of my limbs, spine, and zifu?" [1]

"Your spine and zifu?" Yuan Shuo raised a brow.

"Yes, one is a supernatural lock of the body and the other a supernatural lock of the bones. Have you not discovered them, teacher?"

"You absorb sword energy from day to night and take in too much energy to digest!" Yuan Shuo couldn't restrain himself and cursed loudly. "It's all gone to your supernatural locks, so of course they've manifested! For the rest of us, we don't have enough for the organs and limbs, so how do we have additional energy to explore other locks..."

"There shouldn't be much of a problem with what you're proposing," he ultimately returned to the question. "The five organs are a minor circulatory loop while the human body is a major circulatory loop! They're all the same, just on a different scale. Are you planning to go with quality over quantity?"

“The five auras won’t fully meld together that quickly even with instruction from you, teacher.” Li Hao nodded. “Who knows how much time it will take? If I can comprehend more auras through certain cultivation methods, it’ll be easier to strengthen them and have the overview of the sword aura lead them together. This is another possibility.”

“It’s a good idea!” Yuan Shuo nodded.

“Martial Uncle Hong told me about it.

“Shut up!” Yuan Shuo snapped back weakly. He’d just complimented the lad, but it turned out that the idea came from Hong Yitang. “It’s a good idea, but... is your sword overview strong enough? Can it lead everything? Your ancestor’s stroke is mighty, but you were too weak when you comprehended it. Perhaps you should return to Silver City and observe that stroke one more time!”

Li Hao nodded with surprise, then quickly frowned. “I may not be able to see it again, teacher. Seeing it requires activated bloodline power—only blood pearls were able to manage it before, and ones stronger than me. At my current level of strength, even peak Nova blood pearls may be ineffective. I’ll require metamorphosis level at least...”

“Then go to Red Moon!” Yuan Shuo said matter-of-factly. “Red Moon will have them.”

Alright then. Li Hao laughed. Perhaps it was time to settle old debts with Red Moon powerhouses. His teacher was right, perhaps he needed to go back and observe that stroke one more time. He’d been very weak when he saw it the first time. What he saw then might not have been the full picture.

Now with five auras rooted in his locks, Li Hao began pulling from mysterious power stones to strengthen his organs, body, and bones. His next task was to continue saturating his locks. He was going to paint a picture with two brushes at the same time!

There was no rule that said he couldn't fill his locks while he nurtured his auras. Those with sufficient wealth could afford to splash it around. He had so many mysterious power stones that he could do whatever he want.

Yuan Shuo rose on the eighth day, interrupting Li Hao's cultivation. The young man opened his eyes and glanced at the old man. His teacher seemed ready to leave. Sometimes, he didn't quite understand his teacher. Staying with him at present and cultivating with sword energy might result in greater benefits for the old man.

When you head out to dig up old graves or kill people, aren't you doing so for the sake of what the sword energy does for you?

Yuan Shuo heaved a long sigh, his mental state greatly restored.

"The effects have been good!" He glanced at Li Hao with a smile. "But I've been here long enough, I'm going to have fun with some old friends. Take it easy if you head to the central region. Other people are improving while you're improving. There will be plenty with their eyes on you since you've got your family's sword and the Windchaser Boots. They won't give up so long as you don't set foot into the sixth realm."

Li Hao nodded, slightly saddened.

"Then I'll be off now," Yuan Shuo chuckled, not the least bit perturbed. "Travel the world a bit more kid, see more of it. And don't always keep the dog by your side. It's a lazy glutton and is too big of a target!"

Panther whined a complaint. The old man was awful!

Chapter 620: I Am About To Arrive (I)

"Dumb dog!" Yuan Shuo patted Panther's head with a laugh. "As a major monster spirit, you can't continue this way! Monster spirits should have their own aspirations. I know of a place—Sky Roc Mountain. There's a major monster spirit there, the Sky Roc. If you kill it, you'll have a bright future ahead of you!

“Don’t think of yourself as invincible just because you’ve learned some things from humans. Monster spirits hail from ancient origins. Some things are available to you, but not to humans. There are no weaklings among the descendants of ancient monster spirits. The current stage of martial master secret arts may not be as strong as your kind’s ancient heritage.”

Yuan Shuo didn’t care whether the dog would accept what he said or not. He was just offering a few tips. He turned and left, quite dashing in his decisiveness and without any sentimental concern.

Li Hao rose to send off his teacher and sighed softly when the man was out of sight. “He should just say that he’s gone off to find Jadelight Sword. Was there a need to say all that other stuff?”

Being of a mind to look for women at his age... It looked like a disciple wasn’t as interesting as a woman to his teacher!

Off in the distance, Yuan Shuo turned around with a hint of killing intent just before he was about to vanish. This traitor! Damned if he didn’t want to clean house! The brat created rumors from day to night! Who was going to go look for a woman?

I’m just going to see if Jadelight Sword’s been beaten to death. What is this traitor thinking about?!

The old man was slightly saddened about leaving Li Hao because it meant he would have to stand on his own two feet. That was just as well! Those of his generation were not suited to sit idle and enjoy the fruits of other people’s labor. They didn’t like doing so either, other than the shameless He Yong who loved to scrounge off others. Yuan Shuo and the others weren’t interested in doing the same.

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Li Hao spent a few more days absorbing sword energy after his teacher left. When his seclusion reached ten days, he departed as well. It was his longest stint of closed door cultivation ever—a full ten days.

It was the end of October and almost the beginning of November by the time he emerged. If he continued cultivating in this vein, he might be able to saturate his locks, but it wouldn't result in the great improvement that he wanted. The auras were the key. He needed his to grow stronger and he also wanted to go back to observe his ancestor's move again.

All of that depended on one thing—the blood pearls that would activate his bloodline. He needed ones of high level for his purpose.

If his auras were too strong, his sword overview wouldn't be able to lead them. And if the auras weren't fully fused at that time, they would be a pile of loose sand. Li Hao would actually become weaker as his auras grew stronger.

It was because of these considerations that he decided to continue on his journey with Panther by his side. The dog completely ignored what Yuan Shuo said. There was no way that it was going to leave! What a comfortable life it was to follow Li Hao around. It might be beaten to death at any second if it left, that would be horrible!

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Li Hao left the villa on the last day of October and headed south. One would reach the central region if traveling south through East Shore. Heading north would take one back to the northern provinces. The young man didn't choose to go back yet, he wanted to visit the central region and witness their powerhouses for himself. He wanted to see more of the world.

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The central region was a vast territory that encompassed twenty-two provinces. There were more than a thousand cities of varying sizes within it—its population was much more dense than the bleak and poor north. There were two billion people residing in the central region, but statistics weren't accurate in this day and age.



Some remote locations and overlooked corners of the land were forgotten in the census and many officials were unreliable in their course of work. There should be much more than two billion in the region as the territory was stunningly large.

He Yong had once told Li Hao that there were cities of supernaturals in the central region. Mysterious power was dense in the area and there were more supernaturals born than could be imagined. There was at least one supernatural per one thousand people, and that was He Yong's estimation. Li Hao felt that this wasn't necessarily accurate as math wasn't the guy's strong suit.

Based on this ratio, there should be two million supernaturals in the central region! Two million! What kind of notion was that??

At the very least, Li Hao had never seen so many supernaturals before. The most he'd seen was when the central and northern supernaturals gathered to explore Battle Heaven. That had been nearly two thousand supernaturals from all nineteen northern provinces. While that wasn't every supernatural from the north, many wandering supernaturals had been among their number. They'd only amounted to two thousand.

For there to be two million supernaturals in the central region and increasing every year... Their numbers would increase explosively if war didn't break out! Wouldn't there be more than one hundred thousand supernaturals in a province?!

And that was just supernaturals, that didn't include martial masters. How many supernaturals were in all of Silver Moon? As impoverished as the province was, surely the gap shouldn't be that great.

Therefore, Li Hao brought a hint of disbelief—or rather, curiosity—as he entered the central region from East Shore.

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East Shore province itself was part of the central region. However, the region itself was further divided into different sections. There was a central belt among the twenty-two central provinces.

With Skystar City as the center, the four provinces around the edge of the belt were known as the Four Peaks: North Peak, South Peak, East Peak, and West Peak.

Only upon entering these four cardinal provinces did that place one among the central belt. The four cardinal provinces were the core of the central region. East Shore was too close to the sea. Li Hao's current target was one of the provinces around Skystar City—East Peak.

In the eyes of locals, only the area within the Four Peaks was their central region. This ran counter to the rest of the dynasty; they viewed the entire area as the central region. There was still a chain of superiority within the dynasty.

Those of Skystar City looked down on everyone outside the city. Those within the Four Peaks held themselves loftier than those outside. The rest of the central region disdained the four continents. And of the four continents, the other three jointly held the northern continent in contempt. The northern continent most despised the northernmost Silver Moon, and within Silver Moon, Silver City was held in poorest regard. It was located the furthest to the north and was old, tiny, and poor.

There was no further target once one reached Silver City. Great Li seemed to have fallen many years ago, or Silver City inhabitants might've been able to look down their noses at the even more northern savages.

Li Hao was quite resigned by this chain of disdain. He was immediately met with sidelong glances when he entered a central city because he wore an outfit made in the northern style. Passersby seemed to be saying—where did this northern savage come from?

Li Hao ignored their reactions. This was his first time visiting a central city and seeing the lives of central mundanes for the first time. It was a moderately sized city that seemed on par with Silver City, but appeared much more prosperous. There were many skyscrapers, some with color. The buildings in Silver City were gray and white.

Li Hao had always felt that his home was good enough since no resident ever froze or starved to death, but this tiny city of the central region resembled Southern Ford in its prosperity! Southern Ford was Silver Moon's biggest port city.

Ole Hong lied to me.

The thought rose in Li Hao's mind. Ole Hong had said that war was present in the central region and that chaos had engulfed the territory. He painted a picture of the people struggling in misery, which made Li Hao think that life was terrible in the region. However, a small city like this bustled with such prosperity that it made the young man pause with confusion.

He'd seen for himself the desolate conditions of Near River's coastline. Officials colluded with bandits and innocent people were killed to obtain military merits. The central region was a far cry from that!

The sympathy he'd felt for the people of the central region immediately evaporated. Not to mention, people viewed him with contempt and pity! Li Hao felt that he'd been massively misdirected and lied to by Hong Yitang.

Who said that the central region was in a sorry state? Silver Moon wouldn't catch up to this singular city with another thirty years of development! All of their people looked plump with smooth skin, how are they suffering??

Li Hao was as if a country bumpkin entering town for the first time. In reality, he was a country bumpkin. Even White Moon City residents would be labeled bumpkins if they came here.

He peered to and fro as he walked down the streets, giving one the impression of a new face in town, here to eke out a living from the north. There was even a dog by his side—a stray from an unknown origin. A savage and his stray were the perfect match!

“Hi!” someone called out to Li Hao from behind. A chubby middle-aged man grinned radiantly and gave Li Hao a good first impression. He came across a bit like Hao Lianchuan as this was how Fatty Hao liked to smile as well.

“Are you from the north, little brother?”

Li Hao didn't know the man, but he didn't know anything about this land or its people either. Walking ten thousand kilometers was part of cultivation, so Li Hao nodded with a smile. "You've got a keen eye, big brother!"

"Hahaha! I can tell with one glance that you're a man from the north. You're brawny and sharp on your toes, it's obvious that you're a skilled hand!" the fatty chuckled with enthusiasm. "Is this your first time in the central continent? Are you here to look for a job? Do you know anyone here?"

"No... I'm just here for a look..."

"You don't know anyone here?" Fatty's grin deepened. "Then life will be a bit difficult for you. The central region isn't that friendly to outsiders and it's hard for northerners to find jobs. It would be easier if you had someone from home to help you out."

"But you seem to me like a forthright, outstanding kind of guy. Do you have the strength to come work for me? You'll get a monthly salary of four thousand coins, as well as room and board!"

Li Hao sucked in a sharp breath. That high??

As a civil servant for Silver City, his monthly salary was one thousand coins as an intern and two thousand when he was an official employee. It took a promotion to first rank inspector for him to earn that much a month. So any random job here paid four thousand coins a month??

"My thanks, but I'm good!" Li Hao's view of the fatty rose. The latter was being so warm-hearted in wanting to find a job for him! Although the job would be under someone else's hand and the pay may not be the highest, the central region suddenly seemed like a good place.

Of course, it would be a joke for him to look for a job. Who was Li Hao? A provincial deputy director of the Night Watchers and a high rank chief commissioner! The highest ranked official in this city would most likely be lower than him.

Get a job?

He wouldn't work a day in his life. Granted, he was working for the dynasty at the moment.