

Star Gate 741

Chapter 741: Rising From the Ashes (II)

Li Hao blinked as he suddenly recalled that the little tree had mentioned something related to core origin dao. He immediately sank his mind into the storage ring. “Senior Tree!”

“I’m here.”

“Senior, when you helped me comprehend core origin, you said that modern humans do not have core origin dao, but have something similar...”

“Yes, when you erupted with the aura and demonstrated domineering momentum, it gave me a similar feeling to the dao of the Initial Martial era. That time period didn’t have core origin dao either, but focused on weapons as their dao...”

“The aura?”

“Yes.”

Li Hao blinked. The aura! He grasped new understanding and didn’t bother bidding the little tree farewell before vanishing. He looked at where the character had broken.

“The word I drew seemed to lack a soul and appeared particularly weak and lifeless... But what if I incorporate the aura into it?” The young man promptly entered his organs with his mind, sensing their condition and the auras within. While their auras were silent, he could still sense a thing or two. The five supernatural locks were still alive—indeed alive!

They were unique to the point where one thought they were alive with a single glance. The aura was a living entity as well.

“Wind, wind aura... Vitality, spirit!” Li Hao instantly comprehended the concept. “We’ll always fall one step short in utilizing ancient martial knowledge because we lack core origin. But what if we can utilize the aura in its place? What if I replace core origin with the aura?”

“The aura is martial dao understanding from the heart, a manifestation of martial dao. The aura is different from mind intent as the latter is just pure strength. Aura is not just strength, but a representation of great dao!”

He suddenly understood why Tyrant Blade had said those words to him before he left. When you understand the difference between aura and mind intent, then you might be able to set foot on a different path. The man seemed to have understood it long ago. Li Hao might have too, but not as clearly. His understanding greatly deepened today.

Battle Heaven, the little tree, Yuan Shuo, and the ultimate arts of Tranquil Star all brought many reflections to him, and yet he failed repeatedly when he followed ancient footsteps. It was a definitive sign that ancient martial dao was different from modern martial dao. The two were no longer one system, they were different!

If he walked the ancient path, he would soon reach some bottlenecks and thresholds.

“The aura is the greatest distinguishing feature of modern cultivators—or rather, martial masters! Supernaturals do not possess it, they’re just the simplistic accumulation of strength. Martial masters do, so their malleability is very high...”

Everyone said that supernaturals were less than martial masters, but no one could give a specific reason why. Today, Li Hao felt that he’d happened upon an important detail. The greatest difference and key to it all lay with the aura!

Countless martial masters were stuck at the threshold of comprehending the aura. One could not set foot into Dominator of Thousands without it. This destined the number of martial masters to be far less than supernaturals from the very beginning.

“So this means to say that if I comprehend the wind aura and incorporate wind energy in it, then use it to draw a character... That will make it different from the Tranquil Star methods. Will the aura

contain the external force? The aura has its own spirit and isn't just pure force..." It was like Li Hao had discovered a new continent!

He thought of something else in the next moment, his teacher, the Breathing Method of the Five Styles, and his teacher's Refiner of Spirit cultivation level.

Yes, Refiner of Spirit!

Incorporating the aura into the supernatural locks and releasing the power bit by bit. Why did it seem so familiar? The ultimate outcome would be a supernatural lock under the martial master's control. Wasn't that the same result as what he wanted?

"That's right! Teacher's melding the five auras into the five organs to control the supernatural locks! I'm so dumb, why am I realizing this only now?" Li Hao smacked his head with self-deprecating laughter. He'd been brainstorming how to control his locks, didn't his teacher have the answer?

He just hadn't understood it when his teacher explained it before. Now that he deduced it from another direction, he came to the same conclusion. He suddenly felt that his teacher was amazing!

Not only that, but Li Hao's overall comprehension had instantly deepened. So it turned out that all roads led to the same end!

"Then if I break the supernatural locks and fuse its power into one character, does that make it the same as a supernatural lock? The supernatural locks cannot be used in combat, but the art of Tranquil Star can..."

It was the same goal again, just through different means! That would make the final methods of supernaturals and martial masters alike all the same!

Li Hao grew agitated and excited. He suddenly wanted to talk to Yuan Shuo. Did a martial master fully control their supernatural lock after reaching Refiner of Spirit? Should he break the

supernatural locks, or should he use the aura to control them and incorporate their energy to strengthen the aura?

Summoner of Spirit, Refiner of Spirit... Was the next step to break free of the locks?

“If the Breathing Method of the Five Styles is compatible with both aura and supernatural lock, then aura and mysterious power should have no problem with each other...” Li Hao suddenly felt the dawn of a new age upon him! His teacher already had the answer!

Of course, it was different from his. He had gone through another process to deduce to the very end and return to the same point. Two vastly different methods had given the same answer. It gave Li Hao many new revelations.

He took out a transmission pendant and furiously input messages into it. Yuan Shuo was so carefree that he didn't give Li Hao a chance to contact him. But the young man was no fool. If he couldn't reach his teacher, he would look for Jadelight Sword!

Li Hao had shoved a transmission pendant at him last time when Jadelight left. It was part of the Silver Moon system, not Li Hao's own communication system. This was why he rarely used transmission pendants.

“Paging Martial Aunt Wu, paging Martial Aunt Wu!” Li Hao finally received a response after several messages.

“What is it?”

“I need to communicate with my teacher.”

After a while, in which a new person took hold of the pendant—well, Li Hao didn't know if someone else was on the other end. Two words floated onto the surface pendant after a while. “Get on with it!”

It was done! That was his teacher, alright!

“When the five auras are melded with the five organs, are they meant to break free or ultimately become one?”

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Within Silver Moon territory.

Yuan Shuo had been irritated that Li Hao somehow had a connection with Jadelight Sword. He blinked at the question. He’d clearly explained Refiner of Spirit to Li Hao. The five locks needed to be completely assimilated into the five auras. The auras would nurture the locks, and the locks would nurture the auras. That was Refiner of Spirit.

But Li Hao now asked about the step after that. Yuan Shuo himself hadn’t set foot on that path, so how would he know what to do? He could only speculate. Both possibilities that his student spoke of were possible.

“It’s hard to say which it should be. Whether it should break out or continue as one depends on the situation. I can’t give you an exact answer either.” Yuan Shuo was loath to hold a conversation when it pertained to martial dao. Their communication might be monitored by others. But since Li Hao asked, he still responded.

“Auras have their own spirit, right?”

Yuan Shuo burst out laughing. Do you know that only now?

“Of course! Take the auras of the Five Styles, for example. The aura springs from the heart and martial dao. The essence of martial dao naturally contains the spirit.”

Li Hao was silent for a moment before sending, “Can the aura control the amount of energy coming in and out, as well as the level of eruption of internal force?”

“No shit!” Yuan Shuo frowned. Did his disciple still not know that at this stage of his cultivation? The old man drooped when he thought of how Li Hao’s auras were silent now. Perhaps... the kid wanted to return to being a martial master. But it wouldn’t be that simple! Was he trying to find a way now?

Yuan Shuo was a bit depressed and regretful. He wanted to curse at Li Hao’s silly questions, but softened his tone. “The aura is a type of overall control. The strength of the aura determines your upper limit, so it naturally contains a modulation function.”

“Can the aura and mysterious power coexist together?”

Yuan Shuo sank into deep thought, taking a long moment to consider before answering, “They should. Mysterious power is a type of energy and the aura is not. Mysterious power clashes with internal force, not the aura! Mysterious power and the aura are the same. The aura is an independent existence, but it needs stimulation from internal force. Internal force can count as a type of fuel for the aura.”

“Then can mysterious power be the energy to stimulate the aura?”

Yuan Shuo sank into deep thought and scrunched his forehead together. “Internal force can stimulate the aura because it is born inside the body. It’s the same origin as the aura. Mysterious power is an external resource that is not from the same origin, so it will prove hard to stimulate the aura.”

“Then can I bring mysterious power inside the body and assimilate it into my flesh and blood to become one with it?”

Yuan Shuo raised an eyebrow. His disciple was asking ever deeper questions. He tugged on his mustache and pondered the question. Could mysterious power be incorporated into the body and used in place of internal force?

The strength within mysterious power partially came from the outside, and partially came from the supernatural locks. Why did mysterious power come to be in the locks?

What would happen to the martial master once their lock fully shattered? Would the energy inside the lock replace internal force? Or could it be made into one?

Off to the side, Jadelight glanced at Yuan Shuo. The old man seemed to be caught in a quandary as he scratched his head. It was rare to see Yuan Shuo in this state. He usually carried himself with an omnipotent ease. Had he encountered a thorny issue today?

Chapter 742: Rising From the Ashes (III)

No reply was forthcoming from Yuan Shuo, but Li Hao knew that it wasn't a refusal to answer. His teacher was contemplating what to say.

"There are two sources of mysterious power in existence." Li Hao continued to input into the transmission pendant. "One from the outside world, the other from our supernatural locks! The energy from the outside world cannot fully become part of the body, but supernatural locks are part of the body to begin with. It's what the supernaturals call origin power!"

"It happens to meld with outside mysterious power at a later stage. So are we able to strip out the external energy and reincorporate the origin power back into the body...?"

The transmission pendant blinked with a response after a while. "I'm not sure, I've never tried it before and can't give you a definitive answer. In your current state, you can give it a try..." Another message came in after a while. "But don't try haphazardly. You've opened your locks of wind and thunder, so the only ones you can try are those of the five organs. Do not try the wind and thunder locks unless you are able to comprehend their auras!"

Yuan Shuo quickly grasped what his disciple was asking. Li Hao's auras were quiet and still now, and he was likely unable to comprehend new auras. Without the auras of wind and thunder, he could only experiment with the auras of his five organs. Yuan Shuo didn't recommend the lad to do so because it was too dangerous. Once he shattered the locks of his five organs, then the hope he had of converting back to a martial master might be fully shattered as well!

"I see, thank you teacher, bye!"

"....." Yuan Shuo didn't respond. He cursed to himself instead. Don't go randomly experimenting, for fuck's sake!

He frowned as he thought back to what Li Hao had asked. His disciple seemed to having many reflections lately. Was he unable to accept becoming a supernatural? He seemed to be delving deep into his studies.

"What is it?" asked Jadelight Sword.

"Nothing!" Yuan Shuo crushed the transmission pendant in a fit of temper. "You won't be carrying this around anymore. This is part of the Silver Moon system and those old farts can definitely track it. They'll know where I've been!"

In fact, they might already know about his conversation with Li Hao. But that didn't matter. Just try it if you have the balls to! Experiment as much as you wish if you don't fear death!

"Li Hao seems to urgently wish to become a martial master again," Yuan Shuo remarked with a deep frown. "I'm worried about him if this continues. Damn those nine ministries! I'll show them what they deserve sooner or later!"

Would his disciple have become a supernatural if it wasn't for them? And now he was proceeding further along the path of the supernatural, heading down a road of no return!

Wu Hongshan didn't say anything. She'd carried it around only because Li Hao had given it to her. Plainly, he felt that those of Silver Moon were trustworthy. She didn't say that to Yuan Shuo as he would then go on a tirade for three days straight.

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Li Hao stared at his five organs, new thoughts running through his mind. His teacher had just admitted to the feasibility of his ideas, so what if he broke one of the locks of his five organs and directed aura into it to absorb the mysterious power inside? If he used that

to write his characters and form a vehicle for the aura, did that mean he could place mysterious power inside his body and use it for his own purposes?

But in that regard, it could be as his teacher said—he might forsake the chance to become a martial master again. He still had a chance at the moment.

“But if I continue to seal myself away like this... I'll turn into a weakling even if I convert back to martial dao... There is a point of similarity between mysterious power and internal force. Manager Yu said that she became a supernatural first and reforged her supernatural locks after purifying her mysterious power. That was how she returned to being a martial master. Therefore, mysterious power can be fashioned into the supernatural locks again so long as the aura still exists!”

Some people could convert to being a martial master from being supernatural, which indicated there were commonalities between the two. They weren't two entirely different systems. Should he give it a try?

Li Hao stared at the five organs. The ferocious tiger in his heart was the aura nearest and dearest to him. How about experimenting with the tiger taking in mysterious power and transforming into a character? Should it be “fire” or “tiger”?

Granted, it didn't really matter since it was just a vehicle. Li Hao hesitated, then laughed. What did it matter, at this stage? If he couldn't be a martial master again... then he would be a powerful supernatural! Director General Wang and the others had said it didn't matter, so what did it matter?

It was simply a difference in the nature of strength, but strength was still strength. There was no major difference to it. There were premier powerhouses of energy in the ancient civilization as well.

“Then let’s give it a try. I’ll break a lock of the five organs and use the ferocious tiger to devour mysterious power... I won’t fully break it, I’ll just crack it open and coalesce blood qi for the tiger to absorb. I might gain something then.” A burden had suddenly been lifted from Li Hao’s shoulders. If this attempt resulted in him being a permanent supernatural, well, then he would always be a supernatural!

He didn’t want his auras to be silent forevermore. Would the ferocious tiger that’d been on the cusp of breaking out of its cage be willing to accept becoming a prisoner again? Of course not!

“Since the ferocious tiger has broken out of the cage, how can it be continuously imprisoned in the heart... I have the inkling of a plan now, so let’s just give it a try!” Li Hao grinned easily and looked at his heart. “Tiger, are you willing to shatter your constraints and come out again?”

A tiger roar reverberated in his mind! The confined tiger struggled with excitement and frustration!

I have an undaunted tiger in my heart that’s already broken free of its cage. How would it be willing to fall silent once more and eventually be a dead thing one day?

“I knew it!” Li Hao smiled. I knew that you wouldn’t be willing to just die like this. In that case, let us try. Perhaps unexpected gains would result from his closed door cultivation.

However, an attempt involving the heart was very dangerous. Li Hao swiftly swallowed ten drops of Water of Life after some thought and enveloped the heart with it. He was going to break the Five Bridges, crack the lock of the heart, and release the tiger aura!

If this didn’t work, then he would be an Arcanus of three elements. As for the light and dark locks, he would set them aside for now. He should be able to endure the shattering of a lock of his five organs no?

Li Hao was a ruthless person. Given how the situation had developed he threw caution to the wind. If worst came to worst, he'd just walk the pure path of the supernatural in the future.

Crack!

He severed the bridge of the five organs, leading to a rush of wind and thunder energy. A gout of flames rose in the next second, expelling the wind and thunder. The five organs resonated, as if they were being consumed by the fire.

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The front hall.

Hong Yitang shot into the sky and looked at where fiery sparks dimly lit up the void. Deputy Zhou also followed suit, glancing at the former.

"What is he doing?" frowned Hong Yitang.

The fiery sparks instantly vanished—Panther's work. All phenomena completely vanished when the dog opened its mouth. However, Hong Yitang and Deputy Zhou were standing extremely close, so they still sensed some details.

"It looks like he's fully abandoning the thought of converting back..." sighed the deputy. Li Hao seemed on the verge of gaining the fire element! He was going to break a lock of the five organs!

Hong Yitang furrowed his brows, then regained his inner peace. "That's just as well!" He was an Arcanus too, and didn't think much about his condition. "That's good! So long as he can think things through. There's nothing bad about being supernatural, it's all strength. Martial masters train the heart, but I fear that his physical body won't be able to endure the shock of a seventh lock breaking."

“He shouldn’t have much issue with it,” Deputy Zhou mused. “His body and organs should be able to endure a seventh lock, but an eighth would be pushing it. It would not be worth the expenditure.”

Hong Yitang said nothing further and simply looked on with slight confusion. He seemed to have heard the roar of a ferocious tiger moments ago. That was Li Hao’s aura, and it didn’t contain much reluctance. On the contrary, it was excited and delighted, giving one the feeling of an attempt to fight to the death!

One had to know that the breaking of the fire lock would extinguish the fire aura. Auras had their own spirits. Li Hao was extinguishing his fire aura, but his aura did not despair. Why was that?

Hong Yitang had no idea.

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The power of fire illuminated the land. Panther continuously swallowed it, erupting with fire itself. Li Hao seemed bathed in flames as a tiger howled a challenge at the heavens. Tiger Roar Through Mountain and Woods! It seemed ready to break out of the cage.

But if it really did so, it would drift aimlessly through the world without a root. Dissipation would be its only fate before long.

The bridge of the five organs broke, permitting the energy of wind, thunder, and fire to consume the organs. Li Hao seemed about to go up in flames! There was an opening in his heart lock and a large quantity of fire energy surged out. His physical body did not seem fully up to the task of supporting three elements. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to break more supernatural locks, but that he could not endure the strain.

His heart was burning!

Such were the dangers of crossing into Arcanus for supernaturals who'd broken their locks of the five organs. The conflict between various elements could easily destroy the five organs.

Li Hao spat out mouthful after mouthful of blood, pain appearing in his eyes, but his expression remained as composed as could be. Blood congealed in the air as he operated the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. He followed the flow of momentum and directed fire energy into the blood so that he could trace the character...

He was particularly fond of writing because he wanted to imitate the ultimate art of Tranquil Star, but also because he had certain thoughts when it came to the modern education system. Its deficiencies had caused a chasm in culture, making it so that the people ignored the legacy of culture. They only cared about martial dao, only about becoming superhuman.

Chapter 743: Supernatural Ability Character (I)

Martial cultivators train the heart. They read thousands of books and walked thousands of kilometers, cultivating a heart of great depth. In the modern age, there were few who focused on the heart among martial masters or supernaturals. The conclusion to be drawn was that they read too few books.

Perhaps when all martial techniques and supernatural abilities were words would people understand that a lack of literacy would mean that one would never reach the peak, regardless of supernatural or martial dao.

Mind intent, blood qi, and fire energy surged into the character. Panther had transformed to a golden color—a sign of activating its bloodline. It furiously swallowed energy that flowed in from all sides, not letting a single drop of Li Hao's energy to seep out or a single drop of outside energy to disturb his cultivation. With the dog present, it prevented a lot of trouble for Li Hao.

A character gradually took form; Li Hao watched it silently. It didn't seem to be a tiger character—it was a fire character. Indeed, a fire character slowly solidified. The power of the flames! However, it was dim and inert, appearing to be dead.

Bathed in flames, the ferocious tiger howled and padded out of Li Hao's heart.

“ROAR!” The tiger howl could no longer be silenced! It roared with a resolute determination and knew that it would not return after setting foot out of the heart. Either it became part of the character and was its soul, or it dissipated upon the four winds and was no longer the aura of the ferocious tiger.

This was Li Hao’s intent as well. It was best if he succeeded. If not, the tiger aura of his five auras would completely melt away to nothing. The young man closed his eyes, suddenly pausing with indecision and hesitation.

That was only natural, given the enormity of what he faced.

He opened his eyes with newfound determination. Why was there a need to be sad when he’d reached this step? I have an daunted tiger in my heart, but right now it dwells inside a cage. A caged tiger aura is not what I seek. If my wish does not lie here, then what good is there in keeping the tiger where it is?

“Go on, then!” Li Hao didn’t know if he was speaking to the tiger or to himself. Go on! Although it might be a bottomless abyss in front of us, let’s go down together since we’ve reached this step!

The tiger padded forward without a look back. He headed toward the hovering character in the void. The character trembled, like it was about to break. Li Hao didn’t say much and directed the shattering lock from his heart to the character. A vast sum of fire energy started flowing into the character.

The word had replaced the supernatural lock and the aura was melded within!

This gesture didn’t seem that useful apart from turning the supernatural lock into a written character, but in actuality, it contained blood qi, mental strength, and life force. It fully combined the mysterious power of the supernatural lock with the rest of the body.

If this succeeded, he would be able to utilize the power within the lock anytime he wished! The two could not be mentioned in the same breath. The ancients did not have supernatural locks, just those of the three cavities. It also looked that modern humans may not need their supernatural locks. They just needed a medium of some sort to hold the excess energy.

Whether it was characters or supernatural locks, it was enough to have such an effect.

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Skystar City.

Countless people looked to the north when they heard a tiger roar. Various powerhouses frowned. What manner of foolhardiness was Li Hao getting up to now?

“Does he want a third element?” someone muttered and promptly curled their lip. It was very possible. Li Hao had only broken the wind and thunder locks. His locks of the five organs were still intact. He could very possibly want a third element today and bring the silent tiger aura back to life. Did Li Hao wish to grasp a third element and dominate the four corners of the land?

Figured hovered over the nine ministries and broke through the air, heading north. One person stood in their way over the Night Watcher headquarters, spear in hand and presence soaring.

“I would request that the various ministers return to the nine ministries!” the figure said indifferently.

“Hou Xiaochen, do you think you’ll be able to conquer the world just because Li Hao commands a third element?” someone sneered.

“I don’t,” Hou Xiaochen responded evenly. “So what of a third element? Astounding existences abound in this world, can even four or five element wielders dare say they’ll reign supreme? If that is the case, why do all of you look to the north of the world?”

“Li Hao has just entered the Arcanus level, brashly setting foot into a third element will result in his body falling apart and his organs burning to ashes. This is a dao of death and we are just cautioning him!”

“Your attention is not needed!” Yao Si broke through the air from the Night Watcher side. The old man brooded. “Do you want another fight? Finding glory in obstructing others from ascending is the shame of the superhuman domain. If you lot are unwilling to accept the circumstances, then you can break through to three elements as well!”

Dao Sword also leisurely took to the air from the Night Watcher side. He didn’t say a word and simply smiled faintly at the various powerhouses.

The inspector general broke through the air from not too far away and frowned at the scene. “Whether it is three elements or two, it doesn’t change much,” he said faintly. “Arcanus spans a wide range—two elements is an Arcanus, five elements is still an Arcanus. It’s just taking another step within the cultivation realm and doesn’t change anything. Please be at peace, everyone.”

There was a large difference between metamorphosis and Arcanus, but not as much of one between an Arcanus of three elements and two. It was just another step forward in the Arcanus realm, not a leap to another level.

The powerhouses hovering in the air sank into contemplation. Moments later, a young man dressed in yellow robes strode through the air from the palace.

“Seniors and ministers,” he said with a smile. “How does everyone have the spare time to hover in the sky and admire the scenery today?”

“Eldest Prince!” Someone nodded smilingly. The newcomer wasn’t the ninth prince, but the eldest prince of nearly fifty years old. He appeared quite young and smiled radiantly, a few more hints of maturity and magnanimity to his bearing compared to the ninth prince.

The prince's smile deepened and he looked at the crowd, then at the northern part of the city. A ferocious tiger's roars shook the skies, as if on the verge of death and despair. A keen light glinted in the prince's eyes before he returned to a picture of serenity. "The Skystar Marquis seems to be cultivating. Interruptions are most frowned upon at a time like this. Let's go to the Nine Dragons Pavilion for some tea and conversation. I will be treating today, so please show me some face, seniors!"

Was Li Hao going to set foot into his third element? That was incredibly fast!

It was both a surprise and not a surprise. After all, the young man's cultivation level had been stable when he ascended as an Arcanus. That he could kill Hu Xiao meant that his body, bones, and organs were tremendously powerful. In that case, further advancing to three elements seemed a reasonable foregone conclusion. Not to mention, the locks of his organs remained intact.

"The Skystar Marquis breaking a lock of the five organs means that he has no hope of converting back to a martial master," the prince added meaningfully. "It would be... very unwise to disrupt the marquis now!"

His words gave the crowd new food for thought. When Li Hao still possessed his locks of the five organs, he stood a chance of returning to martial dao. But now that he'd chosen to break one of them, it represented that the crazed young man had completely given up the martial path. He chose to sacrifice his future in the pursuit of greater strength and to dominate all sides.

Was this a gain or a loss?

It was difficult for the powerhouses to determine as well, but they knew that if they didn't stop him now, there might not be Demon Sword Li Hao in the future!

"Then we shall acquiesce to the eldest prince's wishes and adjourn to the Nine Dragons Pavilion!" someone laughed. The potential brawl was defused by the prince's words.

Very well then! Li Hao was permitted to ascend. There was no hope of him returning as a martial master once he did so. As good as supernaturals were, there were ultimately limits to this path. Li Hao had taken the most critical step of breaking the most important factor of martial masters—the aura. Silencing his aura would mean that the advantages he operated with from the beginning would soon dwindle to nothing.

The group laughed and chatted merrily. While they still paid attention to the disturbance coming from the north, they slowly settled down into ease. It was just an Arcanus commanding three elements! Not to mention, the kid might not succeed. And what did it matter even if he did?

The powerhouses calmed down and flew toward the Nine Dragons Pavilion. Hou Xiaochen was extraordinarily calm and stood in the air, looking at the north. He didn't exhibit the same despair and dejection that he had that day, just some regret.

There was no return from this! Are you certain of your path, Li Hao? You will be very strong in the short run, but after that? What other locks can you break after breaking the ones of your organs and head? You relinquished your most important aura and chose stronger power...

Hou Xiaochen closed his eyes, now knowing if he was happy or sad. He represented the limits of martial masters, so there was no other option available to Li Hao. If he wanted to grow stronger and dominate the lands, this seemed... to be the only possible avenue at the moment.

Isn't it all because that we are too weak? We are ultimately unable to break the limits of martial dao. If we are able to easily kill Arcanus as well, why would there be a need to do so?

Complicated emotions flashed across Yao Si's face as well. He looked to the north, then at Hou Xiaochen. "Being supernatural is equally good," he said slowly. "Dao Sword is a supernatural too..."

Hou Xiaochen opened his eyes and looked calmly at the Night Watcher director. "There is no wrong power, just a wrong heart! I am not morose because of his decision, I just don't find it worth the sacrifice!"

“Not worth the sacrifice?”

“Is it worth the sacrifice?” Hou Xiaochen was very calm. “Is it? What do we gain for it? So what if we suppress the nine ministries or royal family? He was a carefree individual who only needed to focus on revenge and hunting down Ying Hongyue. Why did he need to offend so many powerhouses to the point where he had to cross over as an Arcanus and proceed in the direct opposite direction of martial dao?”

“Is this his duty?” Hou Xiaochen demanded coldly. “I regret my actions!”

He regretted pulling the young man into the Night Watchers and wanting him to shoulder some of the responsibilities. Why did the younger generation need to shoulder what the older generation could not achieve? It wasn’t like there was no one left in the Silver Moon martial world! There were plenty who could break their locks, but why had only Li Hao, Hong Yitang, and a few others chosen to do so?

Hou Xiaochen stared at those from the nine ministries in the distance and suddenly sneered. “I’ll chop a few heads off if they dare show their faces around here today. I’ll let them know the meaning of pain!”

He didn’t keep his voice down—it traveled to the front. Someone turned back for a look, to which Hou Xiaochen snapped, “Just try taking another look!”

The listener shook. What did Hou Xiaochen mean by that?

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Bathed in flames, the ferocious tiger howled and padded out of Li Hao's heart.

“ROAR!” The tiger howl could no longer be silenced! It roared with a resolute determination and knew that it would not return after setting foot out of the heart. Either it became part of the character and was its soul, or it dissipated upon the four winds and was no longer the aura of the ferocious tiger.

This was Li Hao's intent as well. It was best if he succeeded. If not, the tiger aura of his five auras would completely melt away to nothing. The young man closed his eyes, suddenly pausing with indecision and hesitation.

That was only natural, given the enormity of what he faced.

He opened his eyes with newfound determination. Why was there a need to be sad when he'd reached this step? I have an daunted tiger in my heart, but right now it dwells inside a cage. A caged tiger aura is not what I seek. If my wish does not lie here, then what good is there in keeping the tiger where it is?

“Go on, then!” Li Hao didn’t know if he was speaking to the tiger or to himself. Go on! Although it might be a bottomless abyss in front of us, let’s go down together since we’ve reached this step!

The tiger padded forward without a look back. He headed toward the hovering character in the void. The character trembled, like it was about to break. Li Hao didn’t say much and directed the shattering lock from his heart to the character. A vast sum of fire energy started flowing into the character.

The word had replaced the supernatural lock and the aura was melded within!

This gesture didn’t seem that useful apart from turning the supernatural lock into a written character, but in actuality, it contained blood qi, mental strength, and life force. It fully combined the mysterious power of the supernatural lock with the rest of the body.

If this succeeded, he would be able to utilize the power within the lock anytime he wished! The two could not be mentioned in the same breath. The ancients did not have supernatural locks, just those of the three cavities. It also looked that modern humans may not need their supernatural locks. They just needed a medium of some sort to hold the excess energy.

Whether it was characters or supernatural locks, it was enough to have such an effect.

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Skystar City.

Countless people looked to the north when they heard a tiger roar. Various powerhouses frowned. What manner of foolhardiness was Li Hao getting up to now?

“Does he want a third element?” someone muttered and promptly curled their lip. It was very possible. Li Hao had only broken the wind and thunder locks. His locks of the five organs were still intact. He could very possibly want a third element today and bring the silent tiger aura back to life. Did Li Hao wish to grasp a third element and dominate the four corners of the land?

Figured hovered over the nine ministries and broke through the air, heading north. One person stood in their way over the Night Watcher headquarters, spear in hand and presence soaring.

“I would request that the various ministers return to the nine ministries!” the figure said indifferently.

“Hou Xiaochen, do you think you’ll be able to conquer the world just because Li Hao commands a third element?” someone sneered.

“I don’t,” Hou Xiaochen responded evenly. “So what of a third element? Astounding existences abound in this world, can even four or five element wielders dare say they’ll reign supreme? If that is the case, why do all of you look to the north of the world?”

“Li Hao has just entered the Arcanus level, brashly setting foot into a third element will result in his body falling apart and his organs burning to ashes. This is a dao of death and we are just cautioning him!”

“Your attention is not needed!” Yao Si broke through the air from the Night Watcher side. The old man brooded. “Do you want another fight? Finding glory in obstructing others from ascending is the shame of the superhuman domain. If you lot are unwilling to accept the circumstances, then you can break through to three elements as well!”

Dao Sword also leisurely took to the air from the Night Watcher side. He didn’t say a word and simply smiled faintly at the various powerhouses.

The inspector general broke through the air from not too far away and frowned at the scene. “Whether it is three elements or two, it doesn’t change much,” he said faintly. “Arcanus spans a wide range—two elements is an Arcanus, five elements is still an Arcanus. It’s just taking another step within the cultivation realm and doesn’t change anything. Please be at peace, everyone.”

There was a large difference between metamorphosis and Arcanus, but not as much of one between an Arcanus of three elements and two. It was just another step forward in the Arcanus realm, not a leap to another level.

The powerhouses hovering in the air sank into contemplation. Moments later, a young man dressed in yellow robes strode through the air from the palace.

“Seniors and ministers,” he said with a smile. “How does everyone have the spare time to hover in the sky and admire the scenery today?”

“Eldest Prince!” Someone nodded smilingly. The newcomer wasn’t the ninth prince, but the eldest prince of nearly fifty years old. He appeared quite young and smiled radiantly, a few more hints of maturity and magnanimity to his bearing compared to the ninth prince.

The prince’s smile deepened and he looked at the crowd, then at the northern part of the city. A ferocious tiger’s roars shook the skies, as if on the verge of death and despair. A keen light glinted in the prince’s eyes before he returned to a picture of serenity. “The Skystar Marquis seems to be cultivating. Interruptions are most frowned upon at a time like this. Let’s go to the Nine Dragons Pavilion for some tea and conversation. I will be treating today, so please show me some face, seniors!”

Was Li Hao going to set foot into his third element? That was incredibly fast!

It was both a surprise and not a surprise. After all, the young man’s cultivation level had been stable when he ascended as an Arcanus. That he could kill Hu Xiao meant that his body, bones, and organs were tremendously powerful. In that case, further advancing to three elements seemed a reasonable foregone conclusion. Not to mention, the locks of his organs remained intact.

“The Skystar Marquis breaking a lock of the five organs means that he has no hope of converting back to a martial master,” the prince added meaningfully. “It would be... very unwise to disrupt the marquis now!”

His words gave the crowd new food for thought. When Li Hao still possessed his locks of the five organs, he stood a chance of returning to martial dao. But now that he'd chosen to break one of them, it represented that the crazed young man had completely given up the martial path. He chose to sacrifice his future in the pursuit of greater strength and to dominate all sides.

Was this a gain or a loss?

It was difficult for the powerhouses to determine as well, but they knew that if they didn't stop him now, there might not be Demon Sword Li Hao in the future!

"Then we shall acquiesce to the eldest prince's wishes and adjourn to the Nine Dragons Pavilion!" someone laughed. The potential brawl was defused by the prince's words.

Very well then! Li Hao was permitted to ascend. There was no hope of him returning as a martial master once he did so. As good as supernaturals were, there were ultimately limits to this path. Li Hao had taken the most critical step of breaking the most important factor of martial masters—the aura. Silencing his aura would mean that the advantages he operated with from the beginning would soon dwindle to nothing.

The group laughed and chatted merrily. While they still paid attention to the disturbance coming from the north, they slowly settled down into ease. It was just an Arcanus commanding three elements! Not to mention, the kid might not succeed. And what did it matter even if he did?

The powerhouses calmed down and flew toward the Nine Dragons Pavilion. Hou Xiaochen was extraordinarily calm and stood in the air, looking at the north. He didn't exhibit the same despair and dejection that he had that day, just some regret.

There was no return from this! Are you certain of your path, Li Hao? You will be very strong in the short run, but after that? What other locks can you break after breaking the ones of your organs and head? You relinquished your most important aura and chose stronger power...

Hou Xiaochen closed his eyes, now knowing if he was happy or sad. He represented the limits of martial masters, so there was no other option available to Li Hao. If he wanted to grow stronger and dominate the lands, this seemed... to be the only possible avenue at the moment.

Isn't it all because that we are too weak? We are ultimately unable to break the limits of martial dao. If we are able to easily kill Arcanus as well, why would there be a need to do so?

Complicated emotions flashed across Yao Si's face as well. He looked to the north, then at Hou Xiaochen. "Being supernatural is equally good," he said slowly. "Dao Sword is a supernatural too..."

Hou Xiaochen opened his eyes and looked calmly at the Night Watcher director. "There is no wrong power, just a wrong heart! I am not morose because of his decision, I just don't find it worth the sacrifice!"

"Not worth the sacrifice?"

"Is it worth the sacrifice?" Hou Xiaochen was very calm. "Is it? What do we gain for it? So what if we suppress the nine ministries or royal family? He was a carefree individual who only needed to focus on revenge and hunting down Ying Hongyue. Why did he need to offend so many powerhouses to the point where he had to cross over as an Arcanus and proceed in the direct opposite direction of martial dao?"

"Is this his duty?" Hou Xiaochen demanded coldly. "I regret my actions!"

He regretted pulling the young man into the Night Watchers and wanting him to shoulder some of the responsibilities. Why did the younger generation need to shoulder what the older generation could not achieve? It wasn't like there was no one left in the Silver Moon martial world! There were plenty who could break their locks, but why had only Li Hao, Hong Yitang, and a few others chosen to do so?

Hou Xiaochen stared at those from the nine ministries in the distance and suddenly sneered. “I’ll chop a few heads off if they dare show their faces around here today. I’ll let them know the meaning of pain!”

He didn’t keep his voice down—it traveled to the front. Someone turned back for a look, to which Hou Xiaochen snapped, “Just try taking another look!”

The listener shook. What did Hou Xiaochen mean by that?

Chapter 745: Supernatural Ability Character (III)

Li Hao didn’t care about any of that at the moment. The ‘fire’ character reformed back into a tiger, howling a challenge at the four directions and battling the elements. It grew more valiant and blazed with killing intent. Breaking free from its cage gave it the ability to rampage freely and tear through the world!

However, an increasing amount of energy gathered from the outside. In the end, they formed thunderbolts of wind, lightning, and fire that drilled down at the tiger!

The very world was overturning!

“Do you need help?” came Hong Yitang’s transmission.

“No!” Li Hao’s face was pale, but he only looked at the sky. There was no need. There was will in the tiger and heart in the character. The ‘fire’ character condensed the strength of an entire supernatural lock and was interspersed with the strength of the ferocious tiger. It represented a lot of things and he would be gravely injured if it shattered.

But once it fully stabilized, it would be one of his greatest weapons.

RUMBLE!!

The tiger's struggle with the three thunderbolts continued. The character blazed resplendently as sword aura collected and the tiger waved its claws around. It pierced through the sky like a sharp sword!

The five auras themselves were sword auras to begin with! This one was currently the sword of the fire tiger; it swung through the void.

Powerhouses swiftly gathered outside the yard. Deputy Zhou frowned at the sky, but couldn't see the happenings clearly. Li Hao had sealed off the premises with a mirror fragment! All he could make out between shifting shadows was a proud tiger loftily regarding the world.

"Has he converted back to being a martial master?" Deputy Zhou looked curiously at Hong Yitang. That was an aura!

The man didn't know what to say and stared back at the deputy. "You're asking me?" How the heck would I know? This was both energy and aura. He was completely confused! Who in the world knew what was going on and what Li Hao was playing at now?

All Hong Yitang knew was that the disturbance was enormous; he only learned now that the energy produced in the world could possess offensive capabilities as well! This wasn't just an ordinary attack, but an uncommonly fierce offensive force. Those bolts of energy were attacking that tiger!

A rush of overwhelming flame abruptly blazed through heaven and earth, burning straight through the barrier created by the mirror. Fire spread through the opening and Panther followed in hot pursuit, devouring most of the flames in its golden form.

Hong Yitang's eyes widened and he waved a thunderbolt into existence, swallowing the remains of the tongue of fire. A wisp of it escaped extermination and grazed his hand. He shook it out of existence, but it left a burn mark on his arm. The man frowned at it. This was strange, how was it this strong? This wasn't just mysterious power, but a melting pot of a lot of different things.

I'm so confused!

Deputy Zhou took a few steps back. The flames in front of him were doused, but immediately came back to life. They flared with violence and leapt for the old man!

“How odd!” Deputy Zhou raised his hand and brought down a wave of aura around him, suppressing the flames. He approached them with a frown, wanting to take a closer look, when they abruptly morphed into a tiger. The tiger then promptly exploded with a rumble and left no traces behind.

“Eh?” Deputy Zhou blinked.

“What kind of strength was that?” Hong Yitang frowned.

“I’m not sure... has he incorporated mysterious power into the body?”

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As the two discussed outside, Li Hao’s tiger aura grew stronger as the young man infused more blood qi into it.

Boom!

Like a sword unsheathed, it struck with a paw and ripped the lightning to pieces. The tiger swallowed the fragments and challenged the four directions anew. Although Li Hao’s face grew paler, his eyes grew brighter. The character had solidified! An entire supernatural lock was integrated in the ‘fire’ character, as well as his life force, blood qi, mental strength...

It felt like his entire being was part of the character.

Li Hao closed his eyes, finding himself part of the ferocious tiger when he shifted his mind. No, he was the tiger. This character was written from his heart's blood and the manifestation of dao. It was himself!

The young man sensed the surroundings—sword intent erupted. The Lifeless Sword!

The tiger waved its paws around much like Li Hao swung his sword. The weapon swept forward!

Bam!

Thunder and lightning broke in the air, reduced to nothing. Li Hao seemed to be a martial master once more in this moment, but he did find his capabilities slightly lacking. He didn't pay heed to this. Endless fire energy surged into the tiger when it opened its mouth!

Energy congregating from the outside world instantly vanished into the tiger's maw, which meant it was also absorbed by the young man. There was abruptly no energy in the surroundings around them, just a singular character hovering in the air.

The tiger returned to the character and turned into a brand that darted into it. Li Hao summoned the character to him with a thought; it landed in his heart. The heart was still and at peace. It contained no supernatural lock, aura, or anything at all. There was only a character that quietly hovered within it.

Li Hao blinked. Had he... succeeded? He didn't know. The character was exceedingly quiet and showed no signs of activity. Had he obtained a third element or not?

A faint wisp of blood qi rose from the heart and slowly melded with the character. Li Hao had expended so much just now that his face was still pale. Confusion swirled in his eyes as he couldn't determine if he was an Arcanus of three elements or not.

"Come out!"

BOOM!

A sky full of fire threatened to immolate the world!

The character moved in accordance with his thoughts and suppressed the void. A ghastly whine echoed after a loud impact and flames erupted over Panther's body. Li Hao blinked and quickly withdrew the character.

It vanished!

Panther was burnt to a crisp after that encounter. It howled and whined with anguish, settling down to glare at Li Hao only after the young man infused it with large sums of sword energy.

"I was just giving it a try and seeing if I can use it," Li Hao explained himself awkwardly. "Sorry, sorry!"

But he was overjoyed at the same time! He could! And he could use it very smoothly! The fire character itself was a supernatural ability and it imposed no strain on the five organs. What... was this?

He'd simply followed his thoughts and the ultimate art of Tranquil Star to conduct an experiment. The results were startlingly good!

"If this really is the case, then I can create supernatural abilities out of my other four organs. I already command the abilities of wind and thunder, and if I can somehow comprehend the auras of light and dark... Wouldn't that make me... invincible?"

But Li Hao then promptly became depressed. I only know the auras of the five elements, I don't know the auras of wind, thunder, light, and dark! In that case... it will be very difficult for me to collect their characters.

"But... I can do it... for the five elements..." His eyes lit up as he became agitated. The strength in these characters did not seem to come from outside, but from his own body. He could manipulate it at will, like he did internal force. Or rather, it'd be more accurate to say that it was a closer fit for himself than internal force.

Wouldn't that mean that he'd turned mysterious power into his own use?

"Fire!" Flames appeared in his palm and brewed into a sea of flames when he pushed his palm out. This was so much better than the unstable wind and thunder abilities.

What a pity...

Twinges of pain assailed Li Hao when he took stock of his resources. He'd consumed a great deal of sword energy and at least twenty drops of Water of Life for his experiment. What a costly attempt!

Of course, that wasn't much compared to gaining a stabilized 'fire' character.

He stretched his senses toward his newfound acquisition, finding himself to be the same as before. He only perceived the wind and thunder abilities; his newfound ability of fire seemed to have entirely disappeared.

Had it completely retracted inside himself? That would be... incredible!

Li Hao grinned. He knew what path to walk in the future. Although he himself didn't know if he counted as a martial master, he could at least utilize sword intent again. Then can I continue the path

I was on before and continue to comprehend the aura, combining it into my supernatural abilities, and then turning it into a character...

One word per supernatural ability?

One word per aura?

Can all these characters be combined into one in the end?

A multitude of inspiration flooded his mind as the young man inwardly jumped for joy, exulting in the sensation of spontaneous comprehension! My dao... lies ahead of me!

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The way forward was clear to Li Hao now, so he was very excited! Not only was this an improvement of strength, but he seemed to have shone a light into the darkness after this experiment. He knew how to proceed forward. The road ahead was long!

One character, one aura. One character, one legacy. One character, one supernatural ability! The unending path stretched out in front of him!

“The disturbance from my refinement attempt was too great!” He wanted to experiment with the other four abilities as well, but that would cause a further uproar. After the fire character returned to his body, everything was contained within and he no longer had the previous sensation of being unable to endure his abilities. He could absolutely complete the same actions for the other four elements. They might not be able to erupt altogether at the same time, but it would resolve an enormous issue for him.

Aura!

If all five could be turned into supernatural abilities and their locks integrated within, his auras would no longer battle interference from the locks. The locks wouldn't need to be sealed away again, like the martial masters did, and he wouldn't have to fear their breakage like other Arcanus did.

The increase in strength was less important. What was more critical was that he could perfect himself and incorporate all of his knowledge into his next step.

Chapter 746: Li Hao's Childishness (I)

"Whether it's a secret art or breathing method..."

Breathing method!

The young man's heart quailed. Breathing method... One character for one legacy. Could a breathing method be incorporated into each character?

He didn't know that many secret arts, but what he knew ran the gamut in terms of knowledge. The Breathing Method of the Five Styles, Weeping Willow Sword, Ghost Shadow Sword, Nine Forged Force, and the variety of secret arts that he'd obtained from the Steppe Prince... Would the characters be able to breathe themselves if he incorporated that as well?

"The water aura, for example, is an aura with the Nine Forged Force as the foundation. The auras have their own spirit and I needed to switch between different breathing methods before. Then... can I dedicate a breathing method to each character then?"

Breathing methods were a unique hallmark of this era. They hadn't existed in the ancient civilization as all martial dao was universal. Breathing methods were actually a limitation. But now they resulted in their own special effects and had targeted uses. Perhaps modern martial dao wasn't as compatible with everything as ancient martial dao, but it contained more of its own unique capabilities.

At the same time, there were too many breathing methods of varied uses in the world. As strong as Yuan Shuo was, he'd only consolidated the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. But what if... one

character corresponded to one method and each method enhanced one aura? Auras possessed their own spirit. Now that they were sealed in a character, could a character breathe?

Li Hao was abruptly thinking out of the box. He'd broken through a shackle, like his mind had been opened to new frontiers. Or rather, everything he'd encountered, emulated, and learned from in recent times had accumulated in his mind until they erupted today. He'd seen too much and experienced too much. The clash between ancient and modern martial dao gave him much food for thought.

The fire tiger... operating the breathing method of the fire aura...

The character manifested again in accordance with his thoughts. Since the Breathing Method of the Five Styles was an amalgamation of five styles, then what had been the original standalone fire aura breathing method?

His teacher definitely knew, but hadn't taught it to him. He'd only taught the Breathing Method of the Five Styles.

Li Hao rifled through the secret arts in his storage ring. The Steppe Prince knew a lot, so the young man wanted to see if there were any books on the fire aura alone. If there were, he could teach the tiger how to breathe. Wouldn't that bestow each character the ability to cultivate?

Li Hao's eyes danced around as he could barely contain himself after that thought. He quickly paged through all of the secret arts, looking for one that might give rise to a fire aura. He furrowed his brows after a while and thought of something else.

"Martial Uncle He!" The young man activated the communication system of the gold armor.

"What have you been mucking around with now? Did you succeed with your third element? You really won't have a chance to set foot back into the martial master domain after this then. Don't do anything brash, Li Hao!" He Yong seemed to have been waiting to communicate with Li Hao all this time, but he didn't have the authorization to do so. He could only speak when Li Hao contacted him.

“Two elements is enough for use,” he said with some regret and reproach. “Why pursue a third? No one’s done so in our society, but you insist on being a trailblazer...”

“Martial uncle!” Li Hao interrupted him. “I remember your secret art is very tyrannical and bloodthirsty, and that it erupts with an explosive aura...”

“Eh? What about it? What’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing, I’m just asking what the martial uncle’s boxing method is called?”

“The Skyshaker Fist,” He Yong replied despite his confusion. “It’s an ancient inheritance that was gradually modified with each generation, making it different from before. I’ve been wanting to trade for a copy of the Fists of the Bloody Lion King from Battle Heaven. I think that’ll help me some...”

“I’ll find a way to get it for you, Martial Uncle He. Teach me the Skyshaker Fist first, including the breathing method. If I remember correctly, your boxing method is domineering without compare and has a fiery aura...”

The fuck?? He Yong cursed loudly. In the martial world, wanting someone’s secret art was the equivalent of killing someone’s parents. Killing someone for their legacy would make one an enemy of the world!

The little bastard wants my secret art! Pah! How could I ever possibly pass it onto you! What are you even thinking of?

“Ten drops of Water of Life, martial uncle!”

“You’ve gone too far in insulting me, Li Hao! Don’t be thinking that I’ll teach you my secret art just because I’m helping you now. This is the ultimate ace up my sleeve...”

“Twenty drops, and forget it if you don’t want to. If I remember correctly, there are a lot of fire aura secret arts out there. I’ll just look for someone else...”

“Don’t!” He Yong quickly responded. “Deal! Twenty drops and not one less! I’ll send it to you straight away!”

Li Hao was unmoved. I knew it. There’s no deal that you won’t make. It’s just a secret art. He Yong’s secret art wasn’t a particularly powerful one. He was strong because the man was strong, not because of his secret art.

He Yong sent over a string of words moments later, including the breathing method.

“You have to be a man of your word, Li Hao. I’ve turned my back on my ancestors to share the family’s secret art with you. You can’t...”

“Come to me and collect the Water of life when you have a moment!”

“Alright!”

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inside the palace, He Yong pumped his fists in the air. Twenty drops! He’d already stashed away a great deal last time as Li Hao had handed out quite a few drops, now the young man paid out another twenty drops! As for He Yong’s secret art, there was nothing to it! It wasn’t worth mentioning compared to the Five Styles. He was strong because of his individual strength. Since Li Hao wanted it, he could have it.

Amid his excitement, He Yong was also puzzled. What did Li Hao want with his secret art? The kid's own Five Styles was much better than his secret art and more comprehensive. It contained five auras and was a complete amalgamation of five secret arts. Yuan Shuo was a celestial sage with how he'd accomplished that task.

Why was the kid setting his own Five Styles aside in favor of He Yong's boxing method? It would be worth it if his method was of any other attribute, such as light, dark, or life. Those weren't part of the Five Styles. But the fire aura...? What was there to covet about that?

Although He Yong didn't understand it, he couldn't be bothered with it. He'd made out like a bandit today!

...or was Li Hao having issues controlling his new fire ability and wanted to borrow the secret art to help him bring it under control?

He Yong set his musing aside after thinking it over for a while.

.....

At the same time.

Li Hao studied the breathing method of the Skyslayer Fist that he'd just received. As for whether or not the method actually produced the fire aura, it was enough if it proceeded in the appropriate general direction. The aura was a matter that followed the heart

Take the Nine Forged Force, for example. Liu Long's father had comprehended it as a fire aura, whereas Liu Long thought of it as a water aura. That was a very unique example.

The tiger appeared over the character again. Li Hao operated the breathing method that he'd just learned and radiated the tiger with his mental ripples. The tiger crouched in the air, as if taking in the new knowledge. In actuality, the tiger was the manifestation of Li Hao's mind.

Moments later, the tiger started operating the secret art and summoned leaping flames in the sky! It formed a fist and punched out—fire seared the air!

Li Hao's eyes widened. This course of action was feasible! He was truly shaken by what he saw. That meant that all of his speculations and thoughts could be put into practice! Each character would be a replica for him!

"This is incredible!" he gasped. It truly was—could the aura be used like his? Once more, it'd been proven that his peculiar inspiration could be materialized. In that case, could he transform the water aura into the water character and have it operate the breathing method of the Nine Forged Force?

If he could, then each character would be a replica, an independently walking martial master. And then if he had the sword overview lead them all, would that result in greater strength? One had to know that his thinking was impossible before his experimentation, that a martial master could only operate one breathing method at a time.

"The five styles can independently operate five different breathing methods, while the sword overview can operate the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. Or... no, I'll operate the breathing method and direct the sword overview. So that means one of my blows can deliver the effects of six breathing methods?" A crazed light glinted in Li Hao's eyes. Was it possible? Perhaps... it could be done!

He wanted to try, but the disturbance was too great in the city. His previous experimentation had attracted a lot of attention. After just displaying the fire aura, he would draw a lot of wariness if he presented another aura now. Those on the outside might think that he'd broken many locks.

Li Hao hadn't anticipated such an enormous disturbance before he started. He'd wanted to quietly cultivate while Panther swallowed everything. It now looked like that Panther was too weak. It was useless and couldn't fully erase all of the fuss he'd raised.

Panther, you're trash!

“I need to find an uninhabited area to continue trying. Once I incorporate the other four supernatural locks into characters, the only part of me that will continue to remain weak is my physical body. Even if I can’t utilize my full strength, the only part of me that will be weak will be my physical body. I’ll be able to utilize seven supernatural abilities once I strengthen my organs and body!”

Li Hao’s heart shook from the implication. Who in the world would rival him then unless ancient powerhouses appeared? Would even Ying Hongyue triumph over him?

The young man was both in a hurry and uneasy when his thoughts traveled here. He no longer wanted to just think about it, he wanted to put his thoughts into action. Although his experimentation didn’t appear that stable for the moment... So what?

It’s not like anyone would die from what he was thinking! How much worse could it get? Supernaturals also haphazardly opened their locks; it wasn’t like they were all dead either!

“Where can I go to conceal such a massive disturbance?”

Battle Heaven was a good selection, but it was too far away. Any place close by would be hard pressed to contain the level of disturbances that he raised. Everyone also knew that he was attempting to open another supernatural lock. They, too, would be worried the more locks he opened.

Chapter 747: Li Hao’s Childishness (II)

It’s quieter in the Four Seas... Li Hao pondered, that would be particularly true when the water aura was established. It might have a better effect in the sea.

The young man couldn’t wait to put his ideas into motion and studied the fire character again. The tiger seemed to be breathing in and out. Strength moved in circles inside the young man’s heart, forming a circulation.

The character really was breathing!

The thunder and lightning attributes within his body no longer rampaged. But if he only had these two attributes alone, he probably wouldn't be able to complete the set of characters anytime soon. He hadn't comprehended their auras yet.

"I'm going out real quick, Martial Uncle Hong. I'll be back soon!" Li Hao transmitted—he was already gone.

Hong Yitang furrowed his brows. Out? Where are you going at a time like this? And, did you complete your third element or not? To be honest, he couldn't tell. But since Li Hao had already said so, there was nothing else he could say.

"Be careful, everyone has their eye on you right now. Hou Xiaochen scared them all a bit so the nine ministries won't easily probe you. But you should still come back soon if you head out!"

"I understand!" Li Hao swiftly retracted his fire aura, suppressed his wind and thunder energies, manifested his gold armor, shrouded himself with the mirror fragment, and withdrew all of his energy into himself. He vanished in the blink of an eye.

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The young man didn't tarry over the Skystar Sea. He plunged straight in and swam for its end, heading for the boundary of the Four Seas. The Skystar Sea wasn't big, but it was very, very long. It stretched outward, running from east to west. In fact, one could directly enter either the East or West Sea from it.

After some thought, Li Hao set course for the east. He was going to head for the East Sea! He'd killed its tyrant Big Beard and there weren't many powerhouses there. If he underwent his attempt in the West Sea, he might arouse the attention of the western provinces. These days, no one among the Xus of the east dared run around, so they wouldn't investigate the East Sea even if anything unusual developed.

Li Hao traveled extremely swiftly and shot through the Skystar Sea. He was going to complete the water character in the East Sea!

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The young man sped through the waters, reaching the East Sea when night fell. He continued onward to the center of the sea. He ought to be able to complete the character before he exhausted his resources. At the very least, he would have sufficient Water of Life to support his efforts.

.....

At the same time, Skystar City.

The royal city was once more at peace. The disturbance from the northern city quadrant was gone. No one knew if Li Hao had successfully grasped a third element or not.

Inside the Nine Dragons Pavilion.

Several ministers sat inside a private room, quaffing wine by the cupful and not saying a word. None of the old ministers were present, it was all the present ministers.

The minister of the Judiciary looked around sternly as he drank and said after a while, “Are we going to just let him continue to improve like this? If he’s grasped the third element today, will he be far off from his fourth and fifth? Must we permit a snake to rest easily by our side?”

No one answered him. What could they do about it? Fight with Li Hao to the death? The young man wasn’t alone—he had the backing of the Silver Moon martial masters, as well as Hou Xiaochen and Hong Yitang being physically located in Skystar City. Not to mention that the royal family had been sitting back and watching their struggle all along. Who would it really benefit in the end if they truly fought each other?

Although they'd lost a batch of Arcanus to date, they hadn't really suffered any losses. Well, the Ministry of the Judiciary had truly suffered a loss. Its minister was consumed with thoughts of revenge after Hu Xiao had been killed.

The minister of Internal Affairs was a slightly chubby fellow with beady eyes. He placated softly, "Don't be hasty, Ole Hu. What's in it for us if we duel Li Hao to the death right now? Let's wait a bit longer. Once the second awakening begins, we'll be able to use some of what we control to great effect! What can Li Hao bring against us then?"

"Don't forget that he has Battle Heaven behind him!" the minister of the Judiciary denounced coldly.

"I know, I know!" The minister of Internal Affairs bobbed his head. "But will Battle Heaven really have a chance to revive and emerge in the world then? How many people are just waiting to march on Silver Moon? That province will be the first to fall then. It's not just us, but the royal family, three great organizations, seven divine mountains, and some fellows who've remained in hiding all this time..."

"The ancient civilization has fallen and their armies have become thorns in the sides of many factions, as well as a great resource..."

Essentially, he meant that they could not touch Li Hao. At least, not right now. It wouldn't be a worthwhile trade.

"The most pressing task at hand is not this, but that we need to strengthen ourselves as well." The minister of Examinations joined in. "We were hesitant and cautious before, but that state cannot continue! I'm sure that everyone senses the pressure as well. We cannot continue to be miserly or tentative! We need to expend mysterious power stones and trade them for Water of Life so we can strengthen the five organs. Yuan Shuo is not willing to teach anyone his breathing method..."

No one had conducted mass trades of Water of Life before, for no reason other than a lurking worry! They were worried that the plant spirits would grow too strong and awaken by too much. They would break free of human control and in fact, turn the tables instead.

Li Hao was bold and had the benefit of Battle Heaven backing. Not to mention, the little tree was young and naive. For the nine ministries, trading for too much Water of Life meant that the plant spirits would awaken to a greater degree. This meant that risk and opportunity went hand in hand.

But with Li Hao having grasped a third element, they could no longer sit back and watch.

The group exchanged glances, everyone uncertain.

“But... if the plant spirits regain too much strength...”

“At the very least, they’re unable to emerge into the present world!” rumbled the minister of Examinations. “We should not quit eating for fear of choking. Otherwise, it’s just a matter of either dying to the plant spirits or to Li Hao! Also, the royal family are starting to act brazenly as well. They’ve probably traded a great deal of mysterious power stones to their plant spirits! If they’re acting like that, what should we be wary of?”

In that case, everyone should trade for Water of Life en masse!

“Let’s not keep secrets from each other anymore,” the minister of Internal Affairs said softly. “Shall we be frank? How much is our plant spirits demanding for payment? The royal family is selling theirs for one hundred thousand stones per drop. The plant spirit that they have must be pricing their drops at a minimum of fifty thousand stones per drop. And you guys?”

Plainly, each of the nine ministries had their own individual ruins and plant spirits. No one knew whether each ministry had one ruin or multiple.

No one replied as they all dwelled within their own thoughts. What price? Knowledge like this shouldn't be easily revealed at times. It was a classified secret.

No one purchased from the royal family as they knew it was too pricey. But for those powerhouses without access to a plant spirit, they might make an occasional purchase.

"I think we're all in the same boat..." someone murmured after a while. "Mine is pricing each drop at sixty thousand, so slightly more expensive than the royal family..."

"Is that so?" the group laughed, able to roughly estimate that their prices were all approximately the same—fifty thousand stones per drop.

"We'll need at least one hundred drops to stabilize the five organs and body enough for a third element. That alone will cost five million or so mysterious power stones. Does everyone think that is worth it?"

This was no small sum! It was an astronomical figure! As for whether or not it was worth it, that depended on the person. It took less than fifty drops to stabilize two elements and far more to stabilize three. Five million mysterious power stones was a large sum for any faction.

The group exchanged glances again, this time collectively staying silent. It was difficult to say if they would execute this plan after they returned to their institutions. They most likely would, but who could say for certain?

"Plant spirits don't need that much to coalesce one drop of Water of Life," someone muttered. "I suspect that they've exaggerated their needs at least five times over. Perhaps just ten thousand is enough for one drop..."

No one picked up that tone of conversation. What could they do about it? Water of Life was in those plant spirits' bodies. If they didn't pay up, the plant spirits wouldn't produce the resource. What could they do about it?

“They’ve embezzled too much in preparation for recovering their strength and emerging back in the world. The more they recover today, the more they can immediately walk around after space stabilizes upon the second awakening. Perhaps we’re all just working for them?”

The plant spirits had to be kept in check, but no one spoke of it. They just continued to nourish their own thoughts.

“Right, do you guys think that Li Hao has stabilized his three elements through Water of Life or the sword of the Lis? No matter what, he should’ve exhausted all of his previous battle gains. I just don’t know what he may have obtained in Battle Heaven. But according to what I know, the plant spirit in Battle Heaven is particularly strong and hard to revitalize. What has he given to it to help it recover?”

This was what the ministers didn’t understand. What was the young man making use of?

“Can it be another plant spirit?”

“Li Hao is so young and hasn’t explored that many ruins. Where can he go to find a second plant spirit...”

That was true! The more they thought about this, the more of a headache they had. All they could do now was just watch Li Hao grow stronger. Although, he would end up depleting all of his previous gains if he continued to improve.

“The martial university that the Ministry of Finance relinquished...” someone raised in a low voice. “Whether it’s their plant spirits or ancient monster spirits, none are able to leave the ruins. But there is a secret inside the ruins and it is stable. If Li Hao consumes everything he has, he may wish to enter the ruins and search for treasure. It’s hard to kill him outside, but what about inside? What do you guys think?”

The group shifted, but no reply was immediately forthcoming.

“Will he undertake an expedition?” Someone asked softly. “This isn’t a dangerous ruin and there aren’t many treasures. Will he risk an excavation?”

“What if there’s treasure? He’s a Silver Moon martial master without many mysterious power stones. Silver Moon only has one massive mine that was depleted by its various ruins in the first awakening. Only the central region has an enormous mine in the entire dynasty. Would a martial master of Silver Moon take the risk if there are enough treasures inside?”

“That’s true... we can give it a try!” The conversation halted as everyone briefly grappled with their own thoughts. The price would be too high to pay for one ministry to undertake on their own. But if they joined hands and buried Li Hao in the ruins... that would be for the best. If not, depleting the plant spirits would also be nice.

“The plant spirits are strong and are even willing to part with their core origin if you pay them enough, or even a replica! It’d be best if we can end Li Hao there, but if not... it will be interesting if Li Hao kills the plant spirits instead!” The minister of the Judiciary left after these words. The rest of the group didn’t say anything and switched to tea, each minister contemplating certain matters.

Chapter 748: Li Hao’s Childishness (III)

At the moment, Li Hao was hardly concerned about potential schemes from anyone. All he was focused on was tracing the second character.

Waves reared in his kidneys as a supernatural lock shattered. Answering waves roiled on the surface of the East Sea with loud rumbles, inciting tidal waves and shaking distant pirate ships to the point where they steered their vessels elsewhere. Turbulence was frequent in the East Sea waters these days after Yuan Shuo bombed the East Sea bridge out of existence. The repercussions were felt even now, so no one thought much of huge waves rearing in the sea again on this day.

“Gather!” Blood qi rushed out and mind intent erupted. A character gradually formed, yet Li Hao felt that his life force was about to be sucked dry. He found it difficult to continue for a second.

A steady stream of Water of Life entered his organs, nourishing his body and internals. Sword energy also rushed into his body to help him repair his body. Breaking another supernatural lock placed great strain on his body and the young man could sense that his mind intent wasn’t strong enough!

He might be able to continue breaking other supernatural locks and refining characters in this vein, but it could be difficult to control them.

“The second character... is pretty much my limit. I’ll need to fortify my body, mind intent, and blood qi after that before I’m confident enough to shatter more locks...”

Boom!

A furious storm ragged in the air as thunder and lightning rended the scene. There were even leaping tongues of flame. It was like an underwater volcano had erupted! The vibrations traveled to the depths of the sea into various secret locales. They even extended to other bodies of water. A major monster spirit in the North Sea opened its eyes with bafflement.

It’d opened its eyes last time it sensed core origin power. Perceiving that ahead of time was an abnormal occurrence. It represented brashness and courting death. But this time, the world seemed to have shifted. What was happening?

Some secret locales in the East Sea also shook, prompting some haggard beasts to open their eyes and look to the outside world while struggling for breath. Was the second awakening upon them?

.....

The seven divine mountains, Sky Roc Mountain.

An enormous roc bird opened its eyes on the mountain and immediately vanished. It entered a secret locale that was littered with countless skeletons. In the distance, a mammoth bird-like creature that was skin and bones transmitted feebly, “Is the second awakening... beginning? I can sense the ripples of the world... space seems to be solidifying!”

“In response to the Revered One... There is no sign of a second awakening for now. It might stem from the ancient Skystar mine. The second awakening might require the breakage of those mines.

The royal family and nine ministries are in control of the mines and are most likely suppressing the arrival of the second awakening...”

“Is that so?” There were no further ripples from the skeletal bird. Then why had faint ripples of change appeared in the world?

“Revered One, there seems to be Arcanus of three elements in the world now,” said the leader of Sky Roc Mountain. “Then there will be four and five. I...”

“Do you think that you are no longer strong enough?”

“Yes,” answered the roc bird. “All sides are swiftly growing stronger these days and it’s said that there have been changes at Phoenix Mountain as well. Their revered phoenix might have started revitalizing...”

The skeletal bird was silent for a while. “I am not a plant spirit and of course, plant spirits don’t necessarily need Water of Life to strengthen themselves. Our life force is strong enough and our bodies strong enough. The key lies in the strength of our bloodlines. If you can supply me with ten million mysterious power stones, then I will bestow upon you one drop of blood essence.”

The roc bird flapped its wings, remaining silent. Blood essence from an ancient monster spirit! That was indeed what it dreamed of, but the revered one’s price was too high. Ten million stones was an even higher price than some of those plant spirits!

Water of Life was of limited use when it came to advancing monster spirit cultivation. It was blood essence from the same bloodline that resulted in a noticeable effect.

“Revered one, that is such a high figure that I am afraid I will have difficulties gathering it,” the roc bird said after momentary silence. “The weaker I am, the less competitive I am, and the harder it will be for me to obtain more mysterious power stones and Water of Life...”

You and I share similar interests. How am I supposed to get more benefits for you if I don't grow stronger first? The bird was quite dissatisfied with this being that could very well be its ancestor. It was too greedy! That was not a good trait. Cooperation was based on the outcome of mutual benefit. How am I supposed to obtain more resources for you if you don't supply me with sufficient benefits first?

The skeletal bird was also pondering and transmitted after a long while, "It is not that I am miserly, but that I am different from plant spirits. I am too gravely injured and need more energy to recover. You know as well that plant spirits enjoy prolonged longevity to begin with, but that monster spirits fall short in this regard. If you find the figure inappropriate... I will also supply you with a drop of essence blood if you can collect one hundred drops of Water of Life."

The roc bird flapped its wings again.

Water of Life... Only the royal family sold it these days and it would almost cost ten million stones for that sum. However, the royal family's price was because it wanted to make money. If the roc bird could find a plant spirit to partner with, then it might not require such a high payment. It could indeed save some stones in this regard.

It looked like the recovery of monster spirits was more difficult than plant spirits. Otherwise, this one wouldn't have it look for Water of Life as a second option. It could just outright reduce the amount of stones it wanted.

"I will try my best... Revered One, once the second awakening occurs and space stabilizes, won't the plant spirits revitalize ahead of time and recover their strength ahead of monster spirits? Won't that be a great advantage that they will hold over us?" This was what it worried about the most.

"No no no," the skeletal bird said slowly. "Their disadvantages will be greater than ours when they reemerge in the world. It is harder for them to take other forms and movement is difficult for them. Even if they can move around, they won't be as mobile as beasts. Perhaps they will be stronger after awakening, but monster spirits have always suppressed them since the ancient times. There is no need to worry!"

In that case, the roc bird could relax more. Then it could very well procure a batch of Water of Life. However, the royal family's price was too high. One hundred thousand stones per drop... it might as well directly trade for blood essence then.

Where could it find a plant spirit to partner with? Were there any ruins open lately that might contain plant spirits?

"The martial university of Skystar City? But that's only a grade two ruin, will there be a plant spirit inside?" The roc bird only came up with this ruin after some thought. While Battle Heaven was open year round, did it dare go?

Anyone who went did so with a dead wish. Silver Moon was no kind and benevolent place.

.....

Boom!

The sky split open as a written character swept through the world like a wave. It flattened everything in its path. Sparkling with radiance, the character descended into Li Hao's body and entered the kidneys. With that, he had completed forming his second character.

However, the young man also felt certain pressure. It wasn't from forming the two characters, but from an imbalance between his organs.

"Let's wait a while for the third, fourth, and fifth characters... I should strengthen the organs and body first." Li Hao smiled at the two characters inside his body. Would he be able to suppress those Arcanus now if he exerted himself to full strength? Would he easily suppress them?

He wasn't sure as he'd never tried before.

“I’m almost there, next comes the patient work of gradually strengthening my own organs, blood qi, and body.”

The ‘water’ character started breathing in and out, following the manner of the Nine Forged Force. The water aura started nurturing the kidneys and the fire aura was already nourishing the heart. Li Hao felt that his two successes proved the same point, that this path was feasible!

“It just expends a lot of resources!” He’d depleted nearly two hundred thousand stones in terms of sword energy to condense the two characters. He’d only had one million left before, and also expended nearly forty drops of Water of Life. Considering the twenty that he’d promised to He Yong... He only had four hundred drops on hand.

“This is just my own expenditure. If I tell the others about this path, such as Ole Hong, won’t the cost be even greater?” Li Hao scratched his head. Hong Yitang was a supernatural now too, and he’d done so for Li Hao’s behalf. Therefore, the young man couldn’t just ignore Earthturner Sword’s plight and have fun by his lonesome.

But if he directed Hong Yitang on the way forward... he’d have to lose another large part of his wealth. Why was it that the stronger he was, the poorer he felt? General Pagoda wanted to revive in Battle Heaven, but his needs were calculated in terms of hundreds of millions. Li Hao had thought that he was incomparably rich, but now that didn’t seem to be the case.

“I wonder how many stones the nine ministries and royal family have... If they don’t have that many, where am I supposed to get all of them from?” He knew that there was a large mine in Skystar City, though.

Various thoughts ran through his mind as he shot through the water. With the ‘water’ character enveloping him, he raced through the sea so quickly that his speed couldn’t be imagined. He was even faster than some sea monster spirits!

The young man was highly excited. The ‘water’ character was domineering enough by itself and so much stronger than the simple ability to travel through water. He raced through the water like an arrow, traveling much faster than when he arrived.

.....

Li Hao was back at Skystar City the next day before dawn broke. When he appeared before Hong Yitang and Deputy Zhou, both men were confused.

Had the young man failed to grasp the third element? There was no sign of fire to be found within Li Hao. And yet, how was that possible? They could clearly sense wind and thunder, but where was fire? That had been such a ferocious explosion of fire energy, how could he have failed?

“Did your fire supernatural lock break or not?” Hong Yitang frowned. “Or did you fix it again with sword energy after you broke it?”

Li Hao could fix a lock so long as it wasn’t fully broken. Of that, everyone was well aware of. Did he repair it again because he felt the course of action unwise?

“Guess!” Li Hao beamed merrily.

A pox on your ancestors! Hong Yitang cursed loudly. Deputy Zhou looked closely at Li Hao, but couldn’t determine anything. Had the lad really fixed his lock afterward? So was he toying with everyone yesterday?

The deputy didn’t know whether to laugh or cry! Do you have too much time on your hands? Hou Xiaochen was so enraged yesterday he nearly exploded, but you were just having fun and feeling that you have too much sword energy! You just had to pay a heavy price to have fun with everyone and scare the nine ministries!

How... how do you have this much spare time on your hands??

Chapter 749: Persuading With Fist and Reason (I)

Li Hao was incredibly excited. That both Hong Yitang and Deputy Zhou didn't see anything meant that his fire and water energy were truly completely obscured. This was fantastic!! Plainly, outsiders could only tell that he possessed the wind and thunder elements—he was still the Arcanus of two elements from yesterday.

How about... I go for a spin outside and let the nine ministries take a look at me? He smiled at the idea and also thought about visiting the Night Watchers to chat with Yao Si.

The young man didn't know how strong he'd be with the dual deployment of wind and fire, as well as the wind and thunder abilities, but he was certain that he was much stronger than before. The only unknown was that he wasn't sure if he could withstand the eruption of all four elements at the same time. But no matter what, this was his trump card!

He didn't need to depend on others, and with the little tree's replica... Li Hao was thinking that he might be able to kill Ying Hongyue!

I've got to surprise a few before revealing the full extent of my capabilities, or it'd be such a massive loss!

"Then I'm going to the Night Watchers to look in on Director Hou so that he doesn't worry about me!" Li Hao grinned and left, leaving Hong Yitang staring at Deputy Zhou.

"Do you think he'd waste effort just to have fun by himself?" asked Hong Yitang.

How would I know! The deputy protested. But he could tell that Li Hao hadn't grasped any other elements. The emanation of energy from three elements would be a different sight—unless he'd perfectly retracted the fire element inside of him.

But how was that possible?

Li Hao was sauntering down the road toward the Avenue of the Nine Ministries. He didn't conceal his presence and even put away the gold armor. When he set foot on the avenue, people observed him in private and were baffled by what they found.

The news spread before long and powerhouses of the nine ministries broke out in filthy curses. Due to the wariness of Li Hao becoming a three element Arcanus yesterday, they'd agreed on paying high prices for Water of Life so that they could grasp three elements as well. But now they saw that the little bastard was still a wielder of two elements!

So you were screwing around with us and forcing us to waste our resources!

Several million pieces of stones was still an astronomical figure for them! Now they were advancing, but Li Hao was not. Were they supposed to bully the brat after advancing?

This was.... a shitfest! Various heavyweights cursed with everything they had in the privacy of their territory. Could that little bastard take a second to consider what he'd done?!

.....

The Night Watcher headquarters.

Yao Si burst out laughing helplessly when he received word. "He really has too much time on his hands, doesn't he, and just wanted to create some excitement in Skystar City? The nine ministries really expended a large sum to advance supernaturals who can grasp three elements. Isn't he just creating more difficult circumstances for himself?"

I'm really learning something new today, that there are people like him in the world! Although the nine ministries have paid a very high price, they truly have improved their strength. What are you after here?

Perhaps everyone would be able to naturally make the leap after a period of time, or at the very least, pay a smaller price. Those who were in a rush would certainly pay a greater price. At the same time, Li Hao hadn't gained anything at all!

“Commander Li must be hiding his strength!” Little Ye declared with firm belief. Yao Si wanted to roll his eyes at that.

What are you thinking of? Any of us is much stronger than you, are we all blind? Do you think we can’t tell the difference between two elements and three? Not to mention, Li Hao’s not bothering to hide his tracks. He’s so blatant that it seems like he’s telling everyone, I fooled you! How damned childish!

Yao Si shook his head. The kid was too young and too naive. He would be the death of himself sooner or later!

.....

The Night Watcher headquarters.

Li Hao’s arrival raised a few ripples. The Night Watcher on duty at the door snapped to solemn attention when he saw Li Hao and barked out, “Greetings to the commander!”

The other guards on duty drew themselves ramrod straight and the Night Watchers loitering around inside the doors backed away to the two sides. More greetings echoed when Li Hao walked in.

“Greetings to the commander!”

Li Hao inclined his head and didn’t say anything. He simply felt that the Night Watchers walked with more pep in their footsteps now. No one had cared about an unfamiliar face on his first visit and they hadn’t even verified his identity.

Well, they didn’t do so either this time, but they knew him.

Greetings rose and fell through the courtyard, the atmosphere bubbling like the greatest of senior leadership had come to inspect the rank and file. After the death of Yellow Dragon and a few more deputy directors, there weren't many among the Night Watcher executive officers. It was Yao Si, Hou Xiaochen, Li Hao, and a few deputy directors who didn't care about much.

Of the commanders of the five directions, Hou Xiaochen was outright ignored by everyone. Apart from Li Hao, only the southern commander was still alive.

.....

The rear yard.

Dao Sword was conversing with a few people and exchanging cultivation insights when he suddenly looked into the distance. The people he was with did the same.

"Do you see that? So awesome!" Big Eyes winked. Now this was an awe-inspiring sight! Li Hao didn't need to say anything to announce his presence at headquarters. No matter if the Night Watchers accepted him or not, they were afraid of him!

Yellow Dragon had been arrogant, had he not? He was now a pile of dust!

Dao Sword smiled and rose to his feet.

"Are you going to cause trouble for him?" Big Eyes asked excitedly.

"Why would I?" Dao Sword burst out laughing. "I'm just going to take a look. I've yet to meet him. Since he's come, I should of course make his acquaintance."

The three excitedly followed their comrade, wanting to know how Li Hao would react when he saw Dao Sword. Would it be disregard? Contempt? Or something else?

Dao Sword might not be an Arcanus, but he was a premier existence within the metamorphosis level. He was very young. The Divine Masters Ranking was said to be reorganized lately; he stood a chance of entering the top three.

Of course, that bastard might become number one. There was no helping it since he was an Arcanus and had killed many of that level. His battle accomplishments were too formidable.

.....

Li Hao continuously nodded as he walked in, not responding to anyone. He saw a familiar face when he almost reached Hou Xiaochen's building. The acquaintance's expression shifted rapidly and he hastily beamed, "Commander!"

Li Hao looked at him with a smile. "Hu Qingfeng?"

"That's me, it's me!" Hu Qingfeng no longer displayed the cocky impudence he had in Silver Moon. "How does Commander Li have the time today to inspect headquarters? Do you need this humble one to do something?"

He was a Nova at the end of the day, and a mid Nova at that now, but he was all the more shameless for it.

"I thought you died with Yellow Dragon in that battle!"

"How would I ever!" Hu Qingfeng grinned from ear to ear. "It's all thanks to Director Hou's care and Commander Li's mercy in not taking this minor one to account for my deeds. Yellow Dragon well deserved his death, how could I ever mutiny by his side?"

“.....” Li Hao grinned as well. Just listen to the man! One was certainly different when their skin was thick enough! Here was a two-faced character who spoke of himself like he was an envoy of justice!

Whatever. Li Hao couldn't be bothered with him. He didn't really have a grudge with Hu Qingfeng. As overbearing as the man had been, he hadn't been heavy-handed with Li Hao. Hu Qingfeng had only wanted to kill Hou Xiaochen, but his target didn't mind that at all. In that case, Li Hao wouldn't overstep and exceed his duties.

The young man couldn't be bothered with too much conversation and headed off. Hu Qingfeng hastily caught up to Li Hao. “Sir, this humble one has something to report.”

“Speak of it.”

“Yellow Dragon may be dead, but the remnants of his forces have not been fully exterminated! His people are still scattered through local agencies and headquarters! I've been following his side to collect evidence of his crimes. He and his people even trafficked supernaturals, they're complete animals! I have proof of it all!”

A righteous Hu Qingfeng carried on in ringing tones, “Their leader may have received his just punishment under the law, but we cannot only condemn the leader and not pursue his followers! There are many in the central region who collaborate with him...

“The situation now is that Director Hou is in charge of vital Skystar matters and Director Yao has just stepped forth again. Director Yao might not have a full understanding of everything and some of those involved are his old subordinates. He might not be willing to do what is necessary against them. That leaves only Commander Li capable of handling this matter!

“There are twenty-two provinces in the central region and thousands of cities. There are twenty-two managing directors of Night Watchers in those provinces and thousands of deputy directors. I see that some among the Silver Moon Guards are certainly qualified for this task. We can take into

account some of the Demon Hunters as well. There will be plenty of positions available once the remnants of Yellow Dragon's faction are cleansed!"

Li Hao halted, looking at Hu Qingfeng with some surprise. "What are you trying to do here?"

"....." Hu Qingfeng jerked with solemnity. "Nothing at all! This humble one simply feels that milord should exterminate all evil and eradicate them once and for all! Otherwise, they might bite back at you one day..."

"You're worried about yourself, aren't you?"

Hu Qingfeng laughed drily. Of course, that was one of the reasons. He'd been Yellow Dragon's confidante and betrayed him in a split second. Wouldn't revenge be headed his way if he didn't stamp out all of those people?

Seeing that Li Hao was unmoved by his speech, he had to offer up another reason. "Also, you might not know, sir, that Yellow Dragon had his backers. It wasn't the nine ministries. If it was, he would've been an Arcanus that day. He is actually supported by the royal family..."

Li Hao blinked and tilted his head at the man.

"That's right, Yellow Dragon worked for the royal family!" Hu Qingfeng was overjoyed at having drawn a reaction. "A lot of people know it, so when he denounced you that day, it was with the royal family's endorsement. Also, he's ruined the Night Watcher reputation these years with all the trouble caused by his men to create the misconception that the nine ministries and Night Watchers are the source of problems. That is also at the royal family's behest!"

"He's with the royal family?" Li Hao raised an eyebrow.

“Yes!” Hu Qingfeng hastily said. “I wouldn’t dare lie to you, sir. I... happen to have a bit of strength myself and Yellow Dragon trusted me a lot at first. I even ran some errands for him at the palace...”

Chapter 750: Persuading With Fist and Reason (II)

After thinking it over, Li Hao was first surprised, then not so surprised. The royal family was not a benevolent party either. He’d thought that it was Hou Xiaochen and the others behind the death of the governor general overseeing the three northern provinces, but later found out that that wasn’t the case. The Steppe Prince himself had gone to kill the man.

His goal was simple—throw the world into chaos to pave the way for the royal family’s return. The nine ministries were still suffering as the scapegoat for that act.

Yellow Dragon’s goal had been similar when he was at the head of the Night Watchers. The world was to be thrown into chaos and the people suffer in abject misery. He’d succeeded as well—that was evident from the state of the dynasty. That the nine ministries hadn’t taken a stand and permitted him to do so... likely because they were of the same mind as the royal family.

Let it all burn!

Yellow Dragon was doing the deed and the Night Watchers were taking the fall. So long as Yao Si could be kept under control, then the nine ministries and royal family didn’t care about anything. It was all the Night Watchers’ fault if the world went to hell in a hand basket.

Then what of Dao Sword and the others? wondered Li Hao. Those youngsters were the fuse to the chaos in the central region. Dao Sword killing Yama’s grandson had resulted in all-out warfare between the Night Watchers and Yama. Li Hao hadn’t thought much of it before and even found the central region Night Watchers to be real men!

But once he reached the central region, he realized that that wasn’t the case at all. Not that many had died among the three great organizations; it was the regular people who died in large droves. This was no war with the three great organizations to be seen anywhere! It was the final straw that broke the back of peace—a blatant attempt to create an era of chaos!

Was Dao Sword's murder of Yama's grandson part of the plan?

And it was said that Heavens Dictate had the function of determining potential, that it could help mundanes instantly recognize what elemental attribute they were most suited for. That would make ascending them as supernaturals an exceedingly easy task and would be tremendously helpful in popularizing the supernatural domain.

But to this day, Heavens Dictate was apparently in Dao Sword's hand. It wasn't really put to general use!

Then what good was that stupid ruler? It only brought disaster to the Night Watchers and people of the central region.

Li Hao wouldn't have realized all this if Hu Qingfeng hadn't said anything. So Yellow Dragon was part of the royal family's faction! Li Hao had truly thought that the fellow was the greatest idiot and a candidate that the nine ministries had put forth to suppress Yao Si. It rather looked like he was the one who hadn't thought enough instead. Yellow Dragon had died too quickly for Li Hao to pay attention to those details.

"So Dao Sword and the others are also part of the royal family?" Li Hao asked as they walked.

Hu Qingfeng's expression shifted slightly and he wanted to say something, but he snuck a look at Li Hao's face. "Um... I don't really know," he offered awkwardly after a while.

He wanted to say yes, but he didn't have any evidence. The one he was speaking to wasn't Yellow Dragon. If he offered a casual yes, but it turned out that those youngsters weren't, Li Hao would beat the literal shit out of him. And that would be getting off lightly. It would be normal and expected if Li Hao killed him.

Hu Qingfeng had always known that Li Hao was a vicious individual. The young man had acted as bait back in Silver Moon to kill two of Hu Qingfeng's subordinates. It was apparent then that Li Hao was clearly not a n innocent soul, and he'd only just arrived in White Moon City. A country bumpkin in the big city for the very first time had dared cast a net to kill Solars!

Therefore, Hu Qingfeng didn't dare speak of anything he wasn't completely sure of.

"You don't know?" Li Hao tilted his head at the man.

"I really don't!" Hu Qingfeng answered carefully. "I don't have any evidence, but it's true that Dao Sword and the others are a bit undisciplined and don't really listen to instruction. They don't think much of Night Watcher rules."

Li Hao laughed and ignored him. Some people approached him at this time. The young man swept a look at them and inclined his head without saying a word. He set course for Hou Xiaochen's office building.

"Did you see that?" Big Eyes transmitted to her comrades. "He was so arrogant! Dao Sword, go kick his ass!"

Dao Sword ignored the goading and looked at Li Hao for a bit. He slowly frowned and transmitted back, "He's really strong!"

"We know that!" Big Eyes was at a loss.

Dao Sword looked at Big Eyes and thought over his next words. "Don't provoke him. I can tell from how he appears like the wind that he is certain to be ruthless and cruel!"

Li Hao had ignored them, but not entirely. At the very least, he'd inclined his head. Regardless, he was truly cocky from the very depths of his bones and plainly thought nothing of the youngsters. Dao Sword didn't mind, but he could sense how Li Hao dismissed them.

If they truly offended him... this one was no elder who treasured young talent. Li Hao was younger than them and wouldn't give them any face.

“I don’t want to provoke him,” Big Eyes drooped. “He’s just too haughty! I’ve never seen such a guy with his nose in the air. We’ve met some big fellows before, and princes too! None of them are as conceited as him.”

She simply felt a bit dejected. Everyone called them geniuses of the age, but when it came to Li Hao, he would incline his head if he was in a good mood or outright ignore them if he wasn’t. He would curse at them to get out of his way if he was in a bad mood. Who could suffer this kind of treatment?

They’d helped him in that grand battle of Skystar City, but he still treated them in this way... It further irked Big Eyes! We helped you before!

Of course, Li Hao didn’t think of it that way. Of the four, he only thought of the spear wielder with a touch more friendliness. The others might as well not exist to him. He’d observed their actions that day and saw that the spear wielder had been the first to charge out. The other two had hesitated, so Li Hao thought of them as saving themselves. After all, Hou Xiaochen and the rest had fully erupted by then and Yao Si was in the field.

His new sidekick Hu Qingfeng carefully looked backward and kept his voice down. “Sir, these guys have always refused to accept your authority...”

“Shut up!”

“Yes, sir!” Hu Qingfeng didn’t dare say anything else. Seriously, what’s going through your mind? Unfortunately, he didn’t dare say too much.

Li Hao didn’t care what he thought and wanted to head upstairs, but his sidekick was still there. “Enough, go about your business,” he said impatiently. “If you don’t know what to do, find out some things for me.”

“Please give me your orders, sir!”

“Get me a list of the nobles who ran off last time and figure out where they are now. Don’t create too much of a fuss and don’t alarm anyone!”

“Understood, sir!” Hu Qingfeng was delighted. This was an important mission! Hadn’t he been fawning over Li Hao because he wanted to join the young man’s camp?

As for Hou Xiaochen... the man was too clear-cut in his style. It made it hard to feel close to him. Any dealings with him were transactions of equal value. He would give you benefits if you did a good job, and nothing at all if you didn’t.

That was good and all, but felt too distant and removed for Hu Qingfeng. It was hard to digest! Someone like Li Hao might be a bit different. Their styles were different, at the very least. They were on the same side, anyhow. Hou Xiaochen shouldn’t mind that Hu Qingfeng was jumping to Li Hao’s team. How nice!

.....

Upstairs.

Li Hao entered after knocking on the door.

“I haven’t had time to welcome Commander Li’s return, my apologies for the oversight!” Hou Xiaochen smiled faintly.

“Director Hou is mocking me with these words!” Li Hao grinned. “Director Hou is the principal commander of the Skystar Commander Office, I’m just a deputy!” The young man laughed as Hou Xiaochen continued staring at him. “Director Hou, you’re not annoyed because people call me commander, are you?”

“.....” Hou Xiaochen continued smiling without a word. Manager Yu was equally silent, but she pulled up a chair for Li Hao and indicated for him to sit down.

Hou Xiaochen flicked a glance at his manager. Are Little Yu’s brains not too useful lately? Can’t she see that I’m having a face-off with Li Hao? What do you mean in giving him a seat?

Manager Yu truly hadn’t thought that much. She’d simply felt that it wasn’t good for Li Hao to be standing when both of them were sitting.

Li Hao plopped down without another word and began merrily, “Director Hou, I’m here on some business...”

“Of course you are, why else would you be here?”

Li Hao was promptly jeered into silence. Did you get up on the wrong side of bed this morning? I haven’t done anything to you. Are you mad about the whole commander issue? If you are... you’ve got a small mind! I never used to think that about you and, in fact, used to think that you were a magnanimous sort of guy. What’s gotten into you lately?

“Ah, I have two matters,” Li Hao coughed. “First, I’d like to take the Silver Moon Guards!”

“As you wish, so long as they are willing,” Hou Xiaochen replied indifferently.

“Mmhmm, that’s good.” Li Hao relaxed. “The second is for you to give me the position of commander for a while. I’m going to establish the Skystar Commander Office on the Avenue of the Nine Ministries, but I need to be the head...”

So the shoe drops, huh! You just said that I’m the principal and you’re the deputy, but you want me to abdicate in the blink of an eye! You’re full of shit, kid!

Manager Yu could also tell that the conversation had taken a wrong turn. She wanted to laugh, but held herself in with effort.

“Li Hao, is this how you speak and conduct your affairs?” Hou Xiaochen asked dejectedly.

“I’m frank and direct when it comes to my own,” Li Hao laughed. “Not to mention, it’s just a position of commander. I can trade the position of Inspectorate vice minister for it if Director Hou wants it!”

“.....”

Okay, fuck you kid! Do you think you own the Inspectorate? Have you asked them for their opinion?

Indeed, Li Hao was a vice minister at the Inspectorate and Hou Xiaochen was not. He was just a deputy director of the Night Watchers, which put him half a rank lower than Inspectorate vice minister. As for Skystar commander, that was even lower.

Someone wanted to trade a vice minister position for Skystar commander... and he better show appreciation for the favor! That was how the situation appeared to Hou Xiaochen and it was a completely humiliating sensation!

“So long as Director Yao agrees.” He flicked a glance at Li Hao. Go to Yao Si! “Did you grasp a third element yesterday or not?”

“Heh,” Li Hao cackled. “Yes and no... No and yes...”

Hou Xiaochen really wanted to beat the kid’s face in! Instead, he stared quietly at Li Hao without saying a word.