

## Star Gate 761

### Chapter 761: Mass Cultivation (II)

His tasks complete, Li Hao ignored the troops. He wouldn't have anyone ascend as a supernatural at this stage—he didn't have any armor suitable for supernaturals. Ascending now would render the Battle Heaven armor useless.

The powerhouses in the crowd sat down cross-legged to absorb the energy. Panther prepared to do the same, but Li Hao sent it flying with a kick. None for you! The dog devoured energy at every opportunity to do so and ate from morning to night. If it joined in, at least thirty percent of the energy present would end up in its stomach.

Li Hao ignored everyone else and simply looked at Hong Yitang. The man raised an eyebrow when he saw the young man look his way. He followed Li Hao to the rear.

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The rear yard.

It was very quiet, no one disturbed them. Hong Yitang looked at Li Hao, the young man looked back at him. "How many supernatural locks did Martial Uncle Hong break that day?"

"Six." Hong Yitang smiled. "You broke six, as did I. You are of the wind and thunder attributes, I am of thunder and fire."

That meant to say that he'd broken one of the five organs. Li Hao nodded. That Hong Yitang had broken the one of the spine meant that he'd saturated it a long time ago and possessed a strong skeleton.

"So Martial Uncle Hong only saturated ten locks before that?"

“Only?” Hong Yitang burst out laughing. “Do you find that weak? I only had nine locks before, one out of the five organs was not fully saturated. I only finished that one when I completed the circulation of the five organs in East Shore province.”

His battle strength had been tremendous prior to that because he possessed ten saturated locks. Nine put one on par with an Arcanus, ten made one stronger than a regular Arcanus. It was the level of a stabilized Arcanus.

But in that last battle, just a stabilized Arcanus was not enough. Therefore, he chose to break six supernatural locks. Combined with his formidable strength to begin with, that was how he killed the Steppe Prince with one blow.

“Has your blood qi of the zifu not been saturated?”

“No, I’m almost there.” Hong Yitang didn’t mind his less than perfect scorecard. “I don’t focus on blood qi to begin with.”

Li Hao nodded and thought for a bit. “Martial Uncle Hong, I completed the deployment of my fire and water abilities a few days ago. You saw some hints of it that day...”

Hong Yitang raised an eyebrow. He had indeed seen a fire ability, but it vanished at the end. It’d also been a very unique flame. Li Hao didn’t explain himself further and simply manifested the two characters.

“The ultimate art of Tranquil Star?” Hong Yitang’s eyes widened.

“Something similar!”

The fire character flew toward Hong Yitang and exploded with a roar. The man shook and responded with thunder and lightning, but was swiftly overcome...

An odd look appeared in his eyes; Li Hao put the characters away. Hong Yitang was silent for a moment before taking a deep breath. "I know why Yao Si agreed." He understood!

"I'm not at liberty to tell others for the moment." Li Hao looked at him. "But since Martial Uncle Hong has chosen to ascend to the supernatural... Although our paths are slightly different, martial uncle once told me that all the auras beneath the heavens are in the heart. The aura is determined by the heart. Therefore, it does not matter if a martial master lacks five auras. Just one sword is enough!

"Martial uncle... are you willing to try? You can meld your supernatural locks and abilities into one character, forming a unique word. I'd also like to see if this method is more universal..."

"Are you using me as a lab rat?" Hong Yitang laughed.

"A bit," Li Hao laughed as well. "I'm wondering if this result can be accomplished through making a sword aura the core. That might be the Refiner of Spirit that I wish for!"

His teacher's theories were to ultimately combine the auras as one. In that case, was melding them into the characters accomplishing the same deed? Hence, he did wish to continue the experiment in seeking out Hong Yitang, as the man only had one aura. If he succeeded and could combine more abilities into his word, then Li Hao's worry about those with fewer auras would not need to be entertained.

"You still haven't understood what I mean by auras springing from the heart!" Hong Yitang smiled. Li Hao blinked.

"Who says the sword aura is the only aura?" chuckled the man. "If I say it is fire, then it is fire. If I say it is earth, then it is earth. Forget it, you haven't fully understood this yet. Just give me a brief overview. I'll demonstrate the concept for you if I find it doable."

Surprised, Li Hao nodded and quickly described everything he'd attempted.

“I see... so it’s the same concept,” Hong Yitang murmured. “The ancients’ concept of the three cavities and core origin dao to the modern day notions of supernatural locks, aura, and now melding supernatural abilities with characters...”

“The ancient records speak of core origin dao ultimately being discarded as the people could reach grand perfection through cultivating through themselves. The ultimate conclusion to draw from all this is that all paths lead to the same outcome in the end—they are all daos of grand perfection!”

The methods may be different, but he vaguely felt that the final result would be the same.

“Right.” Li Hao also nodded. “All daos come together as one at the ultimate end. Whether it is supernatural or martial master, everything is reshaped for our own use!”

“This is what it means for all daos to return to one!” Hong Yitang understood the theory behind Li Hao’s knowledge. His blood qi frothed and expanded as rivulets of blood, instantly being refined into essence. Sword intent wafted out of the man as thunder and lightning manifested inside his body.

After some thought, a character slowly materialized in front of Hong Yitang.

Sword!

Li Hao was indifferent—it was only to be expected that Hong Yitang coalesce a sword character. But the unexpected occurred next. The word abruptly sizzled with electricity and roared with thunder! The elemental power within Hong Yitang’s body surged into the character, much to the young man’s surprise!

Sword... thunder and lightning...

Hong Yitang continued to quietly infuse his character with energy, tracing it to full completion. Li Hao swiftly took out drops of Water of Life and crushed them to release life energy. Hong Yitang

ignored everything and continued to direct energy into the word. There was no answering peal of thunder this time, a development that he also ignored as he steadily refined the word.

After a while, the 'sword' character sparkled in the void like a living bolt of lightning. The man heaved a long breath, noticeably tired. "The thunder attribute has been incorporated into the character..." He grinned happily. "Look, Li Hao. This is what it means for the aura to spring from the heart!"

His character suddenly morphed into a gout of flame!

Li Hao jerked with shock.

"I told you the first time we entered Battle Heaven that auras are without attributes. Attributes come from the thoughts of you and I. If I think it is fire, then it is fire! Your thinking is a bit too simplistic!" Hong Yitang pointed out. The energy of fire within his body spontaneously melded into the character. Bolts of lightning danced around as flames erupted with a roar!

The sword character was changing colors!

"Your master's Breathing Method of the Five Styles incorporates five kinds of aura. Overlaying the auras on top of each other makes them stronger, but it's also just comprehending the same aura five times over. That is why your master is a genius and why ordinary people like us can only grow stronger through one aura.

"However, that doesn't mean that one aura is limited to one attribute! Li Hao, your wind and thunder attributes are unable to be incorporated within because you have too many predefined notions about them! Of course, our paths are different, so naturally our thoughts are different!"

Li Hao was quite very surprised. Hong Yitang had indeed instructed him during their first visit to Battle Heaven and told him that there were no inherent attributes within auras. It was all determined by the mind. The young man remembered that teaching well. But today, he saw that they could be freely switched between! How was this possible?

Li Hao stared dumbly at Hong Yitang. Since he understood the theory, he'd comprehended them according to whatever concept he had in mind. But he didn't know that auras could still be converted between different attributes once they took shape!

Earthturner Sword was known for his earth aura! But what the heck was this?

"Stop staring, it's not like you'll understand more the longer you stare. Since you have already formed a certain line of thinking and understanding of the world, then you should proceed according to your understanding. You don't have to imitate me, it may not be effective to do so.

"My aura isn't as strong as the type that is layered on itself multiple times! That is the truth as well. Mine just has a bit more variations—or as your master puts it, more bells and whistles. He'd say it's completely impractical!"

Hong Yitang laughed, finding Yuan Shuo's words to be true in a certain way. His aura did indeed possess many permutations and looked quite impressive, but one type of aura was one type of aura in the end. Yuan Shuo had comprehended it five times over and overlaid it five times over. Those were two different notions.

Li Hao had accomplished the same, but to the young man's eyes, it was Hong Yitang who blew his mind! That one aura could become a myriad of possibilities, didn't that mean that one character could encompass everything then? So wouldn't that indicate that Hong Yitang wasn't subject to any restrictions and could meld anything he wished to?

The young man's mouth dropped. This wasn't fair! I haven't even finished refining my wind and thunder attributes, I'm wondering how to comprehend their auras! He can just use one character to contain them all. What the hell am I doing then??

"Don't think too much, I'm just employing a kind of shortcut. I should still be weaker than you in the end!" Hong Yitang tried to speak some words of comfort as he could read certain thoughts from the young man's face.

“You’re... different from other people,” Li Hao said in a daze. “They also have one singular aura, but they don’t possess the all-inclusive properties that you do!”

Other people couldn’t change their auras at will, could they?

Hong Yitang seemed to have some stamina left and continued to incorporate his fire attributes into the character. “Why must we be concerned about the attributes of a singular aura?” he asked in an unhurried pace.

“What?”

“The unattributed can accommodate everything!” he explained. “The difficulty level is just a bit higher, that’s all. Don’t you have an independent sword aura of your own? Consider it as a catch-all for everything and throw at it everything you have that can’t be formed into a character for now. Make it a huge melting pot!

“That may turn it into a motley array of attributes, but it won’t be weaker than regular supernatural abilities either. That’s all it needs to be! You must realize, Li Hao, that not everyone has to be special. When only a select few are geniuses, that makes them special. It’s enough for everyone else to be mainstream!”

He felt that the young man’s thinking was starting to deviate onto a tangent. Li Hao seemed to think that everyone was a genius and all should walk this path. But who said that only geniuses could cultivate?

Hong Yitang wanted to say that he, too, was a genius. He wasn’t ordinary either. Somehow, the young man felt that if Hong Yitang could manage this feat and others couldn’t, then that meant his method couldn’t be universally applied to all.

Bullshit! I’m a genius, so of course I can do some things that other people can’t! Hong Yitang inwardly grouched. I can utilize your method because I’m a genius. You little bastard think that

everyone has to be able to use it for that method to be a viable way forward. Do you think you're the only genius in the world? Who isn't a genius at our step of cultivation? Do you expect everyone to be the same as you?

#### Chapter 762: Mass Cultivation (III)

"Then... how do you stabilize the character and prevent it from collapsing if you don't use an aura?" asked Li Hao, mystified. The character broke apart in the absence of an aura because it lacked spirit! Some premier supernaturals did not possess an aura.

"If they have not comprehended the aura, then they can use immense mental strength to fortify it!" Hong Yitang smiled.

"What if they lack that as well?"

"....." Hong Yitang was truly feeling weary. "Then they have yet to qualify for this level of strength. Why are you in such a hurry? Do you expect Sunflares and Solars to accomplish what you have? Are they to soar to the heavens with one step? Don't we see the way ahead? It's just that the issue that eventually crops up with the five organs is thwarting many people for the moment.

"Breaking new ground doesn't mean abandoning everything that brought you to this step. Only when people successfully make it to metamorphosis are they qualified to continue further..." The man looked at Li Hao. "Just what are you worrying about?"

Li Hao blinked.

"There is a path for martial masters as well, all the way to Refiner of Spirit. Does it fall upon only you to dwell on what comes after? The same goes for supernaturals. Only at Arcanus do hiccups occur, but everything is fine up to metamorphosis. Why must you discard all prior knowledge and theory?"

Hong Yitang felt that the young man was starting to sidetracked into strange territory.



“But in this case... the issue of weak organs hasn’t been resolved!” Li Hao frowned. “My thinking is that if we utilize this method from the very beginning and incorporate all of the supernatural locks into the character and strengthen it, we’ll avoid the issues having to do with the organs...”

“The organs aren’t weak from the very beginning!” Hong Yitang rolled his eyes. “Did you think that your organs were weak when you were a Dominator? Do you think Novas find their organs weak?”

That... was true!

“Right...” Li Hao nodded after some thought. “But... when one reaches the state that you and I are in and need to switch to the supernatural system, they’ll require Water of Life to fortify their organs. Isn’t that... not very good?”

They would have to rely on external forces in the end! Although the resources consumed would be less than what was needed to directly reinforce the organs, Li Hao still felt that something was missing from the picture.

Hong Yitang nodded in agreement this time. The young man had finally touched upon the crux of the issue. He mulled over the problem.

“Correct, you’ve come to the main point. I do have some thoughts after our conversation... These characters can nurture the body in return, can they not?”

“Yep!”

“Then you can try creating a character when the cultivator is weak so that they can fortify their organs from the very beginning...”

“That’s not possible!” Li Hao burst out laughing.

“Why not?” Hong Yitang asked seriously. “There are countless great daos beneath the heavens—none of them is the one and only. If you wish to complete this system, you’ll naturally need to work extremely hard and make certain sacrifices. You don’t know enough about the human body and don’t truly understand everything there is to know about martial dao yet.

“Since you’ve discovered that supernatural locks can be melded and assimilated into other things, as well as nurture the body, then you tell me if there’s a lock or anything else inside us that can fortify the entire body. Strengthening one area at a time doesn’t need to be the focus!”

Li Hao’s eyes widened with the new thought.

“If there are the paths of fire, wood, and all sorts of attributes out there, can there not be one of the body?” Hong Yitang smiled. “Of course, this is just a theory. I’m just following your line of thinking. I don’t have the ability to actually test my hypothesis.

“Since you’ve taken the first step, you can try to experiment and uncover the possibilities! Perhaps, in the end, you will find that such a character does exist to strengthen the entire body. It would plug in the hole in your current system.”

Li Hao was quite moved by the proposition—did such a dao exist? The dao of purely the body... and then incorporating it into the character system. All the cultivator would need to do after that was just train in one system and ignore everything else...

Hong Yitang didn’t say anything when he saw that Li Hao was contemplating what he’d said. He rapidly consolidated his fire attribute instead, marveling at what he was creating. It wasn’t hard, but if no one had tried it first and appraised the possibility, then no one might have tried it, ever. Li Hao was certainly someone brave enough to act on his thoughts.

At the moment, the young man was caught in a daze.

“There is a dao of the five elements, of wind and thunder, of light and dark. The body and five organs are related to these, but can also be viewed separately... Then is there an independent dao of

the body and just the body? The rest would be supernatural abilities! I would train the body on the inside and the supernatural on the outside, training both at the same time..." Li Hao's thoughts flitted from one to another in a disconnected haze. He didn't have a proper outline tying them together, but he was taking in Hong Yitang's words.

Perhaps he could treat the wind and thunder attributes as part of the random assortment to be shoved into the sword aura. In this regard, he could utilize the sword aura as a character to encompass all of the supernatural locks that didn't host auras. He could organize them at a later stage, categorize them, then assimilate them...

A massive boom startled him out of his thoughts; he gaped at Hong Yitang. Earth energy surged out as the man had broken the lock of the spleen. He grabbed Panther with a smile. "Devour the earth energy leaking out... I'm going to try and assimilate three elements as one!"

The dog wasn't angry about being handled roughly; it opened its mouth and swallowed a large surge of energy. It then directed its attention to Hong Yitang and also sucked out the strength that he'd yet to make use of!

Hong Yitang stared ominously at the dog. Li Hao was likewise resigned. "Panth!"

You're just supposed to take care of the extra energy, not drain Hong Yitang dry! He hasn't even tried using his power yet, but you drained it out of him. Is this appropriate in your eyes??

Panther looked innocently at Li Hao. He said it, he wanted me to do that! I didn't do it on purpose! He said to devour any energy leaking out, so I thought the part coming from his body was part of that too!

A wordless Hong Yitang didn't want to bother saying anything. He decisively snapped his supernatural lock and turned his 'sword' character yellowish-brown. It was an exceedingly smooth process!

He was known for his earth sword aura to begin with, so the yellow-brown character seemed to easily suppress the rampaging thunder and fire attributes within. Li Hao watched the change quite enviously. So this was possible as well?? Using one character for everything seemed to be a much simpler prospect. If he could change the colors of his character like Hong Yitang... how nice would that be!

Sighing, the man sensed Li Hao's jealousy and envy. "There's no need to stare, you're certain to be stronger than me in the end. However much effort we put in is how much we gain. I'm taking a shortcut..."

"I want to take it too!"

"....." Hong Yitang didn't know what to say anymore. Why is this your reaction when I've said all that I've said?

There was nothing he could respond with other than, "Let's put it this way. You can take my path, just discard your five auras first and focus on the sword aura. You might reach my heights then and be able to manipulate one aura as many!"

Fine then, Li Hao gave up the idea. That wouldn't do!

Hong Yitang was finally spared from having to speak sense into the young man. See, you won't do what it takes, but you want to take a shortcut. How will that do?

"Does martial uncle intend to fully integrate three elements together? Will your body hold up?"

"That's not a problem since I have ten saturated locks. Do you think my body is weaker than yours? You can endure four elements, so it's not much of an issue for me to withstand three. If the lock of my zifu was saturated, I should be able to persevere against four or even five..."

The strongest martial master of their age had likely saturated eleven locks. No one dared try the one of the head. As far as Li Hao was aware of, only Yao Si had completed that risky undertaking. He

wasn't clear on Hou Xiaochen and the rest. Perhaps they were at eleven, perhaps they weren't. It was hard for him to determine if they didn't say anything.

Li Hao spoke no further since Hong Yitang said he could tolerate more. He simply crushed some more Water of Life and directed the energy into the man's body. The assimilation of three elements would require more resources, and Hong Yitang consumed a lot to begin with. He seemed to need more than Li Hao!

Arcanus might require one hundred drops of Water of Life to progress from two elements to three. Hong Yitang needed less, but Li Hao consistently pulled out more Water of Life. He reached twenty drops in the blink of an eye—this might not be enough.

Hong Yitang's presence fully faded after a moment. The 'sword' character was more resplendent than before. Li Hao had expanded thirty drops. When combined with the amount that he'd utilized at the very beginning, it amounted to almost fifty drops for Hong Yitang to advance to a three element 'sword' character.

That was a rather significant amount!

He'd also spent some outside, leaving him approximately only three hundred drops left. Damn he was really ripping through his stores! Granted, he could trade ten thousand mysterious power stones for one drop, so he hadn't really consumed that much.

Hong Yitang swallowed the character without saying anything, recovering some of his mental strength. His presence grew more contained compared to before. However, he frowned despite his success.

"It... really is a bit hard to bear if there's no character written specifically for strengthening the body. This thing consumes too much blood qi and mental strength—it even absorbs a lot of life force. I'd probably die of old age in the process if there wasn't Water of Life reinforcing me."

At the same time, there was a sparkle in his eyes. “But it really does nurture the body when stored inside. I have to say, Li Hao, this really was a great idea!”

“I have an even better idea.” Li Hao grinned. “The characters can operate breathing methods by themselves!”

Hong Yitang blinked. Li Hao hadn’t mentioned this before. He quickly put it to the test!

“This... is a stroke of brilliance, kid!” He breathed with astonishment. “This idea didn’t occur to me at all! This is the equivalent of dual cultivation, the characters can cultivate by themselves! This will accelerate cultivation and save a lot of time!”

“Martial uncle’s single character is quite impressive.” Li Hao grinned. “But I was thinking that if I imbue each character with one breathing method, that is the equivalent of a single person cultivating. If I coalesce endless characters, that is the combined effect of innumerable people cultivating.

“No matter what martial uncle comes up with, you can only train one breathing method. That’s only two people cultivating. So... hmm... I think my condition is pretty good too!”

Hong Yitang blinked, then didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. Yes indeed, the lad possessed a great advantage!

#### Chapter 763: Mass Cultivation (IV)

“Are you... not going to tell your master about this?” asked Hong Yitang.

“I’ll tell him next time we meet,” Li Hao replied. “The main thing is, my master isn’t ready yet. Neither are Director Yao and the rest. The director actually saw my change with his own eyes, but he still didn’t choose to snap his supernatural locks. This means he still has certain reservations and hesitations. In that case, I will not force him. I’m unsure myself how far this path can be taken.”

After some thought, Li Hao asked with a frown, “How should we grow stronger after we integrate all of the locks in our bodies?” There would no longer be the distinction of three, four, or five element Arcanus. What would the road ahead look like?

Hong Yitang nodded; it was a valid question.

“We’ll have to move forward from the characters themselves then. But that is a question for the future. See well the present. Who knows what will come in the future?”

Li Hao nodded, that was true. The future was very far away!

“The integration of three elements doesn’t necessarily guarantee our victory...” Hong Yitang offered upon further musing. “I’ll try saturating my eleventh lock over the next two days. If I succeed, I’ll incorporate a fourth element!”

“Alright! I’ll try fusing the wind and thunder attributes into the sword aura as well!” Li Hao nodded. It may indeed be more safe to have four elements at the ready. If they wanted to be completely sure of themselves, they might even go for five or six elements. Director General Wang had said that Apex might be the equivalent of supernaturals with eight or nine broken locks. Li Hao might give it a try, but in a slow and steady manner.

A three element Arcanus was the equivalent of seven broken locks. These seven might be very different compared to what the director general spoke of. What if he didn’t include the four of the limbs?

If that was the case, then the Apex cultivation level was formidable indeed. It meant that the strongest martial master of the modern age would have to snap all eleven supernatural locks to barely reach that equivalence.

Who in their world could accomplish that feat?

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While Li Hao, Hong Yitang, and the rest cultivated, a storm brewed in the outside world. There was no sign of action from the nine ministries as they were plotting and strategizing. At the same time, they wondered if there would be any Silver Moon martial masters joining Li Hao in his madness this time?

One time wasn't enough, they came a second and a third time...

Did these Silver Moon martial masters really not fear death?

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The massive Skystar City fully quieted down. Whether it was nobles or superhumans, everyone was astoundingly quiet over these few days. They no longer pranced around with their nose in the air. All were deeply afraid of offending the completely maniac Li Hao and being hauled off to be beheaded.

Time passed day by day. One day, two days, three days...

Li Hao deactivated the mirror fragment after three days.

In the outside world.

Various powerhouses covertly or openly assessed the changes in Li Hao's people. They didn't dare scan the heavyweights, but the thousands of soldiers were weak martial masters. Even though they wore armor, it was still hard for them to conceal their status. Unstable blood qi and weak strength meant that they couldn't keep their secrets.

"What an investment!" someone gasped lowly. It was indeed an enormous investment. Almost everyone out of two thousand had set foot into the Sunderer level.



The soldiers from the Silver Moon provincial army had been mundanes and wouldn't consume too many resources. More than one thousand at the same time, however, was a tremendous expenditure.

The Silver Moon Guards had almost all been Sunderers to begin with. They didn't have many Dominators, but that was changed after some of their half step Dominators absorbed vast sums of energy and Water of Life. There were now almost sixty Dominators among the old Silver Moon Guards.

Multiple Dominators had appeared in Li Hao's Demon Hunters. When summed up, it meant that Li Hao had nearly one hundred Dominators under his command. This feat didn't appear as much to supernaturals since Dominators could not defeat Solars. It was such a hefty price to pay for an unimportant improvement.

But for martial masters, it was an entirely different concept to set foot past the Sunderer threshold and enter the Dominator level.

"There's even a Nova..." Some recognized the new Nova on the scene—Hao Lianchuan. The new metamorphosis Qin Lian was an unfamiliar face to the crowd. They only knew that she'd acted before and was a dark supernatural. Her husband, Yang Shan, was another metamorphosis.

Two metamorphosis made for a force that was neither strong nor weak. The newly ascended Solars were ignored. Hu Hao, Yun Yao, and a few others were Solars now, Wang Ming had become a late Solar. But for the crowd, even Dominators were more worthy of note.

"Mass cultivation for thousands of people is quite the outlay!"

Such investment was very rare in this day and age. Modern supernaturals either improved by themselves or made use of fortuitous opportunities. Swearing allegiance to a faction didn't mean that one's new liege lord would automatically provide resources for no reason at all, not even if there was a surplus.

Thus surprised, the observers turned their attention to the heavyweights that they hadn't considered before. They couldn't read anything from Yao Si or Hou Xiaochen. The Heaven's Eye hidden within the crowd only found these people to be painfully bright. Looking at them for too long even resulted in the feeling that these Heaven's Eye might go blind! Many of them suddenly vomited blood, a sign that backlash from what they were observing was recoiling onto them.

Inside the complex, Hou Xiaochen suddenly looked outside. Those gazing upon him felt their minds threaten to rip apart. As more people vomited blood, they fled the scene.

Too strong!

Hou Xiaochen was so strong that no one could see through him. He'd easily killed an Arcanus in the previous battle, making it impossible for one to estimate what level his cultivation was at.

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The Nine Dragons Pavilion.

The ninth floor.

A stately powerhouse gazed upon an image hovering in front of him—the scene of the complex in the northern city quadrant.

“Hou Xiaochen is at least between a two or three element Arcanus,” he said coldly after a while. “He's very strong!”

Someone nodded beside him, while yet others remained silent. The man turned to address a fatty next to him. “Mu Hai, is Liu Yunqing still going to play dead?”

Liu Yunqing of the Ministry of Finance had stayed out of the subsequent operations after his first injury. It was like he'd died!

Apart from collecting taxes, the behemoth that was the Ministry of Finance ignored all other matters. It was as if Li Hao's disturbance had nothing to do with them. Mu Hai was the minister of Internal Affairs. The stately man speaking was Hu Mingfa of the Ministry of the Judiciary. After his father, old minister Hu Xiao's death, it was Hu Mingfa who agitated to kill Li Hao. They needed to prevent further trouble from occurring.

Mu Hai had been quietly sipping from his tea; he responded slowly when addressed, "I don't know, I haven't heard from him."

"Is Chen Yao not coming?" The look in Hu Mingfa's eyes turned chilly. "How long will he continue to hide and cower?"

Chen Yao was the minister of the Inspectorate.

"He said that he'll contribute funds, but that his cultivation level isn't stable enough," Mu Hai said ponderously. "The plant spirit in the ruins that the Inspectorate holds requires too much energy to supply him with sufficient Water of Life. As such, his cultivation level is still unstable..."

"Bullshit!" snorted Hu Mingfa. Excuses, just excuses!

It was one thing for someone else to say that their cultivation wasn't stable, but people at the minister level sat on a mountain of resources. Swiftly ascending to three, four element Arcanus was more than feasible, not to mention two elements. The only question it came down to was a matter of price. Granted, the price to be paid was a tough pill to swallow.

Even if the nine ministries were as wealthy as nations, they couldn't really concentrate all of their resources on one person. Who would work for them if there was nothing in it for them? A ministry of one person would not make them the modern day nine ministries.

All powerhouses required the effects of Water of Life if they were to become an Arcanus. There wasn't that much Water of Life to go around. This also meant that the current path of Arcanus was restricted by plant spirits. This was a very big disadvantage that current supernaturals struggled with. Those who saw more clearly understood the inherent problems, but it wasn't something that could be quickly resolved.

Hu Mingfa shouted with fury a few times before settling back down. "So this means that the Ministry of the Inspectorate and Finance are unwilling to participate?"

People drank either wine or tea around him, no one said a word. Whether they participated or not didn't matter. It was just one more or one less participant.

"It's not a key factor and not important," someone finally said slowly after a while. "The crucial question now is whether Li Hao is willing to enter the ruins?"

That was what the focus should be.

"If Li Hao isn't willing to set foot inside, we'll have to kill him out here," the speaker chuckled. "In the current state of things, is there anyone fully confident of not letting him get away? We'd have to ignore the cost and propel someone to become a five element Arcanus to achieve that.

"He is on high alert and has those like Yao Si, Hou Xiaochen, and Hong Yitang around him. It's too hard to outright kill him! He's expended a lot of his resources the past three days and may be scraping the bottom of the barrel—apparently he's even used Water of Life on those martial masters. Although we can create a massive mine in the ruins, to be honest, it's not normal for a mine to appear in a ruin."

It would come across as a blatant plot. Here I am, throwing one hundred million stones into the ruins. Dare you take a gamble, Li Hao? Anyone would be able to tell that something was wrong with the picture.

“He’s always been bold.” Hu Mingfa frowned. “He even went to the Xus for the Windchaser Boots. He was only a Nova then, while the Xus already had an Arcanus. He went all the same, taking a gamble. In that case, why wouldn’t he be willing if the potential payoff is great enough?”

“It’s not the same!” The speaker thought for a bit, then suddenly smiled. “It’s not a difficult problem to resolve either. We only have mysterious power stones for now, but what if another one of the weapons of the eight families appears? Do you think he’d be tempted then?”

Several people glanced sharply at him when he offered that suggestion.

#### Chapter 764: Simple and Crude (I)

Three out of the eight family weapons were already present in the world. They were all with Li Hao—the Windchaser Boots, Stellaris, and stone blade. The Wangs’ Black Tortoise Seal was in Battle Heaven, leaving four weapons at most in the outside world.

The ministers looked at the speaker, none of them possessed any of the eight heritage weapons. Ying Hongyue was the first to gather intelligence regarding the eight families. Was he willing to provide one weapon for bait?

“Don’t look at me,” the middle-aged man said slowly. “I fully believe that Ying Hongyue wishes to kill Li Hao as well. He’s the one under the greatest threat if Li Hao continues to grow and develop like this. Paying the price of one heritage weapon in order to lure Li Hao to his demise... Would he refuse that?”

The others furrowed their brows, it was hard to say. No one could speculate what Ying Hongyue was thinking.

“It’s been three days. If we continue to fail to lure out Li Hao, are we to wait for him to trample our dignity again on the seventh day? Is there really no hope of taking the fight to him and killing him outright?” asked another person.

“Killing him outright? There may be some hope of doing so. We stand a chance if we all bring our trump cards to bear. We wouldn’t have to rely on the plant spirits either. But... how much of a price

would we have to pay? How many present would have to die for it? Are all of you willing to pay that price?”

No one had any answers. The danger was much less in the ruins with the plant spirits marshaling the offensive. But outside, they would truly have to risk their own necks against the young man.

“For the Ministry of Administration... is the old minister willing to lend a hand?”

“It’s not a matter of willingness, but that we must curtail the royal family as well. Otherwise, it’d be expelling the wolf to make room for the tiger. Li Hao is the wolf and the royal family the tiger. If the old minister takes action, that would be letting this ferocious tiger out of the cage!”

The discussion continued for a while before Hu Mingfa from the Judiciary announced, “I’ve reached an agreement with the plant spirits, they’ve agreed on one condition—that all of the mysterious power stones being used for bait will be left behind for them!”

The group had been prepared for the possibility; they wouldn’t have prepared so many stones otherwise. There was a price involved in asking the plant spirits for help. The cost for this operation was the riches being used for the lure.

“That’s one hundred million... they are certainly greedy!” someone sneered. These plant spirits wanted nothing more than to devour all of the stones that the nine ministries owned. If it wasn’t to encourage the ministries to keep collecting for them, they likely wouldn’t part with a single drop of Water of Life.

“They can have it. We can’t expect them to work for us with no payoff.” The discussion continued.

“Li Hao is now a superhuman cultivator and can no longer conceal his presence as thoroughly as before. Hong Yitang is the same as well. I’ve gathered everyone here today to propose that we bring forth our fragments of Sky Gander and temporarily join them together to peer into the void. We can use the treasure to investigate Li Hao’s strength, to ensure that there are no surprises waiting for us!”

The mirror fragments were key. The group considered the proposal and didn't immediately turn him down.

"We can do that, but the mirror fragments probably can't become one since the treasure has been shattered, can they?"

"A temporary joint use is possible..."

"Very well then!" The group came to a decision. To know the enemy as well as one knew themselves was to ensure victory in every battle. Although Li Hao seemed to have failed grasping three elements, no one was certain if he was hiding more of his presence with immense concealment abilities.

The young man might also have a fragment of the mirror—no, he certainly did have one. Hadn't he employed it in the northern city quadrant when he obscured the complex during his people's training?

.....

The northern city quadrant.

Two thousand soldiers began running drills, practicing the Ten Rings Mountain Seal Formation. Li Hao and the others walked back to the great hall, chatting with high spirits.

"There's a bit of time left, but not much for the nine ministries!" Li Hao sighed with emotion.

Hong Yitang flicked a glance at him. Are you this cocky after grasping four elements? Be careful of upsets! He couldn't be bothered to voice the words out loud, instead saying, "Are you sure about establishing the Skystar Martial Academy?"

“Of course!” Li Hao nodded. “Those who dare enroll at this time are either out of options, bolder than the heavens themselves, or have deep grudges with the nine ministries. Why shouldn’t I open a school for them?”

“Although it’s called the Skystar Martial Academy, it’s not one strictly of martial dao. We’re selling horse meat as beef steak! Martial dao isn’t a matter to be plumbed in a day or two, I hope martial uncle can pursue your own inspiration and raise a crop of unique talents!”

“I know what you have in mind,” Hong Yitang frowned. “But I lack the proper teachers for it. There would be more than ample personnel if you wanted to focus on martial dao. If it comes to other subjects, however, ample personnel will be a big problem.”

“I know.” Li Hao nodded. “So I’ve sent people to look for the teachers and students from the Skystar Ancient Academy, including those being held at the Nine Dragons Pavilion. They’ve refused to relinquish their grasp on those people, so I went to them directly today! The royal family will show me face at a time like this. They want nothing more than a fight between me and the nine ministries.”

The royal family had dragged their feet, likely because they were waiting for the final results. But from Li Hao’s perspective, he hardly had the generosity to let them sit back and watch.

Hong Yitang inclined his head; the young man looked at Deputy Zhou, wondering how the man had completed his arrangements. You talked a good talk last time and I paid the price of two hundred drops of Water of Life. Have you done anything the past couple of days?

Deputy Zhou smiled to see Li Hao’s attention on him. “I will most certainly see great gains on my side if you can win the upcoming clash! If you head to the ruins and I visit the east, I will absolutely quell all problems in the east. The caveat is that you emerge the victor!”

Everything was off the table if the young man lost, and all sides were his for the taking if he won.

Li Hao nodded, this was just as well.



“What do you mean?” Yao Si frowned. “Li Hao’s going to the ruins, but you’re not going?”

“What’s the point of so many people going?” smiled the deputy.

Yao Si furrowed his brows and sharpened his look at Deputy Zhou. Is he that confident? Li Hao was quite strong as a four element Arcanus, but to put him down as invincible... particularly in the ruins... The young man wasn’t to that level. There was great danger within and the nine ministries wouldn’t be careless in their desire to kill him. Was the deputy really at ease not accompanying Li Hao? Or did he not care?

The young man’s eyes darted around as they conversed and he took out a mirror fragment—it was vibrating. Li Hao frowned. What did this mean?

Yao Si’s eyes widened and he quickly transmitted, “Be careful, it might be that the nine ministries are utilizing the other fragments to probe your capabilities...”

Li Hao furrowed his brows and thought about what course of action to take. He exuded his wind and thunder attributes, enveloping his body with them. Off to the side, Hong Yitang did so as well with his energy.

“Can this item peer into people at will?” Hong Yitang asked via transmission.

“I’m not sure.” Li Hao shook his head. “Mine can, but it has a short range and a very small field of vision. How can the nine ministries spy upon us when they’re so far away from the northern city quadrant?”

It was very perplexing.

“Perhaps they’re combining their fragments,” Yao Si clarified. “It’s said that there were a lot of fragments when this mirror was first discovered. Those who found it didn’t think much of it, treating it as the ordinary fragments of a weapon. The pieces were thus divided up, and their secrets revealed only after the supernatural awoke.”

Li Hao could already vaguely sense a prying sensation as they talked. It truly was the same familiar sensation as being probed by the mirror. Highly discomfiting, this was the nine ministries investigating him. They were even being blatant about it, as if saying, “I’m going to spy on you, what are you going to do about it?”

The young man frowned deeply without a word, looking to the east. He needed to be careful of the nine ministries. Despite already demonstrating two elements, they still want to make sure of the situation. Would they be able to detect the characters?

Li Hao wasn’t sure.

His own mirror fragment wouldn’t be able to, but since they could peer at him from so far away, they had either put their fragments together or theirs was too big to be imagined. Li Hao wasn’t certain if it would reveal the characters in his body or not.

He sent the characters into his organs when his thoughts traveled here. The ‘exterminate’ character formed by the sword aura was also concealed. It was a melting pot of all the elements that he did not have auras for. It wasn’t too useful—serving to prevent elements from conflicting with each other at most.

.....

Inside the Nine Dragons Pavilion.

Several powerhouses had gone back to their seats of power and returned with a mirror fragment. The pieces were connected to each other and quickly formed a massive screen in the center of the hall. Li Hao and his companions were pictured on it.

Motes of light shimmered over them. That of wind and thunder sparkled over Li Hao, while thunder and fire shifted over Hong Yitang. Nothing could be read from Yao Si—just a few hints of supernatural looks. Their exact number couldn't be identified, which was one of the reasons why martial masters were so hard to gauge.

However, that was enough to confirm that he was a martial master. As strong as they might be, martial masters were limited in this day and age.

The group turned their attention to Hou Xiaochen, he was mostly the same as Yao Si. And finally, they assessed Light Sword and the rest. Some hints of supernatural looks could be seen on all of them.

“This is what's troublesome about martial masters.” Hu Mingfa frowned. “But it also has to do with the fact that we're using fragments. Otherwise, we'd be able to fully reflect the truth about them and thoroughly investigate their capabilities!”

No one responded to him. What they had were pieces of the mirror, and their pieces may not be complete fragments. What was the point of saying all that?

#### Chapter 765: Simple and Crude (II)

“So this guy is also a martial master?” Mu Hai looked sternly at Deputy Zhou. “He's worked with Zhao in Silver Moon for decades and always been as immovable as a mountain. He kept such a low profile that I thought he ascended as a supernatural long ago and set foot into the Arcanus realm. To think that he's still a martial master!”

The rest assessed Deputy Zhou as well, seeing supernatural looks that briefly materialized and then faded away. That was indeed a sign of a martial master. As for how strong he was, exactly, that was hard to determine. At the very least, he'd started saturating his supernatural looks. Otherwise, weak martial masters would be directly exposed by the mirror fragments. There wouldn't be anything they could do about it.

“This is good!” Hu Mingfa heaved a sigh of relief. “Li Hao and Hong Yitang are both still two element Arcanus. Li Hao really hasn't broken any other locks! Even if he does so in the middle of a

fight, three elements will be the most he can grasp. Trying to directly wield four elements will burden him beyond the limits of what he can endure.”

This was still within their scope of expectations.

“Release the word and contact Ying Hongyue. We’ll use mysterious power stones as bait first. If that doesn’t work, ask Ying Hongyue to supply one of the weapons and place it in the most obvious part of the ruins. Make it so that the kid can see and sense it as soon as he enters the place!”

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Li Hao’s expression was ugly as he stood in the complex. It was a very uncomfortable feeling to be completely exposed to another. He looked toward the city center, drawing his brows together in a deep frown.

“The nine ministries won’t always keep their fragments combined together,” Yao Si comforted upon seeing the young man’s reaction. “They also know that nothing can remain secret in that condition. Hence, there’s a tacit agreement between all parties that have kept the fragments away from each other.

“You’re the primary reason why they’ve done so this time, and they probably won’t do so again unless they encounter another mutual enemy. Otherwise, there will be no secrets left between them if someone manages to turn the combined effect on one of them.”

“Is this a fragment of the legendary Sky Gander?” Li Hao had heard the little tree mention it before—it was the most famous mirror treasure from the ancient civilization. It was said to have been broken at one point.

“I’m not sure... I know it’s mentioned in the ancient records, but it’s hard to say if this is it or not. They describe it in such magical terms, that Sky Gander is omnipotent and can pry into everything beneath the heavens. The fragments we have now do not possess that ability.”

Li Hao said nothing further; they turned to He Yong when he walked in moments later.

“The royal family just sent word that the ruins relinquished by the Ministry of Finance will officially open tomorrow! They’ve invited me to explore it together...” He looked at Li Hao. “The deal with this set of ruins is that they automatically close once the number of people inside exceeds one hundred. The expedition team won’t be able to leave until five days later. On the other hand, people can freely come and go if there are less than one hundred inside.”

“So there are rules like that for certain ruins?” Li Hao blinked.

“Yes!” He Yong nodded. “Many ruins have rules like that, particularly martial universities. They’ve been closed off, so those who enter must stay for five days before receiving a vacation day.”

“They can only hold one hundred?”

“It’s not that they can only hold one hundred, but that the ruins will close when occupancy exceeds one hundred! That means to say it doesn’t matter if there’s one thousand or ten thousand inside. The ruins close as soon as there are more than one hundred within its grounds. Once this occurs, exit is unobtainable under normal circumstances.”

Li Hao frowned. A ruin that could close itself was the most troublesome kind of ruin there was. This one sealed itself for five days when the conditions were met! Anything could happen in five days.

“When you say close off, do you mean only entry is permitted, and not egress?” asked Li Hao. “For example, can more people head in if there’s already one hundred people inside? It’s just that people can’t leave, right?”

“That’s right, you can still go inside!” He Yong nodded. “So it’s not fully sealed away, just partially. However, no one is allowed to leave during this time period.

“The first expedition will certainly be less than one hundred to ensure that the ruins stay open. But if you enter, occupancy will probably instantly balloon over one hundred!”

The ruins would probably be sealed away the second that Li Hao set foot inside. One had to say, the royal family had picked well to invite He Yong to join the expedition.

“What’s your plan?” He Yong looked at the young man. “I’ll take a look inside if you’re determined to give it a try. They’ll probably have to set out a lot of treasures as bait, I might be able to pick something up...”

How else would they lure Li Hao inside otherwise?

The young man looked at Southern Fist. He Yong was an opportunistic fellow, but this time...

“You might not have a chance to leave after you go inside. Well, you might be able to retreat ahead of time before I go in...”

“Have you made up your mind to go inside?” He Yong frowned.

“I’m not sure, but I want to see what kind of treasure they have put up to tempt me so that I’ll ignore the dangers. What have they bought out that will make me willingly set foot in a trap? The nine ministries must be completely guaranteed of the success of their plot!” Li Hao laughed. “In that case, I’d like to satisfy my curiosity!”

“So I’ll agree to them?” He Yong looked at him with solemnity. “Also, don’t think of relying on your bloodline as part of the eight families. That’s useful only in Silver Moon. It might be completely useless here!”

“I understand.”

“Alright then!” He Yong was just as curious as the young man. What could the nine ministries have possibly put on the table? This was an exploration in which both sides knew what to expect. It

wasn't a quest to uncover the treasures within the martial university, but one to see what the nine ministries could supply. It was a ludicrous situation in some ways, but such was what was taking place.

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Yao Si breathed out heavily after He Yong left. "I'll go in with you!"

Since Li Hao's mind was made up and they were on the same boat now, it was better that he follow Li Hao inside.

"We need people on the outside too." Li Hao shook his head. "If we all head in, what should we do if someone seeks to eradicate us here?"

The Night Watchers were a force to be reckoned with. It wasn't ideal for Yao Si to be absent as well.

"Let's wait and see!" Li Hao smiled. "However much they're willing to offer demonstrates the strength of their desire to kill me. I'm quite looking forward to it and hope that the nine ministries have brought out treasures that will make me lose my mind!"

No one said a word as they didn't know if this development was good or bad.

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He Yong entered the ruins on the second day—the fourth day according to Li Hao's ultimatum toward the nine ministries. There were six days until the Skystar Commander Office was officially established.

If Li Hao was to enter the ruins, he had only one day left to consider his decision. Otherwise, with the five days that the ruins would be sealed off for, that wouldn't leave him enough time to participate in the commencement ceremony.

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In a small mountain on the western outskirts of Skystar City.

He Yong traveled with approximately eighty people. Some were from the nine ministries, some from the royal family. There were also a few mysterious people. Their numbers were controlled to less than one hundred.

A grave expression on his face, He Yong remained silent. There was a tunnel ahead and a door shrouded with energy standing at the end.

"Master He, this ruin is called Evenround Martial University," whispered a royal prince. "It's not that big, just a small university. Not that many treasures were found on previous expeditions. It's been quite fully preserved, however, and the structures inside are quite intact. This must not have been an important school back in the day, just mid to lower ranking."

He Yong inclined his head.

"The ninth prince has said that Master He should just take a look around inside," the young man continued softly. "It's better to not be involved in certain matters. Once you've assessed the situation, Master He can decide whether or not you'd like to stay."

"I see!" He Yong walked straight inside when the door was opened via an item that looked like a stone. There was no danger here!

A simple Nova had led previous expeditions and the casualty rate had been very low. There were no plant spirits inside, just some guards. The guards were puppets, not the bodies of soldiers like those



found in Battle Heaven. They were a bit of a threat to Solars and Novas, but entirely negligible to powerhouses like He Yong.

Massive school gates stood in front of him when he entered the ruins. They were gigantic! At least one hundred meters wide.

It seemed that all ancient buildings were thus magnificent—this wasn't the important detail. There were barely any records of this university in the ancient books. Plainly, it was just a humble school. It would rock the modern world if they discovered the ruins of Demonic Martial or Capital Martial.

He Yong found several buildings that looked like puppets when he looked toward the gates. He couldn't help an urge to laugh. Why did this place look like a toy for children? As they said, this university was truly the bottom of the barrel. No wonder the Ministry of Finance had given it up.

The gates were open, so they walked straight on in. The others followed him, all looking at him like he was the leader. He Yong knew what they had in mind, so he didn't say anything. He simply continued walking...

The university was very small! It might be the smallest he'd ever visited out of all of his explorations. There was a rather imbalanced contrast to the massive school gates that he'd come through. One could scan the entire school with a single glance.

There were four small buildings total—the classrooms, training rooms, residences, and offices. The entire school amounted to less than one hundred acres. How was this a university?

He Yong inwardly looked down on it. A martial elementary, more like! However, he sensed energy ripples in the distance. After a moment of hesitation, he swiftly walked over. A glittering expanse came into view once he passed the buildings—his jaw dropped and he stared, dumbfounded!

"Um... does this need more investigation?" He Yong turned back to look at the people behind him. "We can just say that we found an energy mine..."

These people were being too blatant! So very incredibly blatant! Perhaps due to the small size of the school making for limited space, the nine ministries had dumped all of the mysterious power stones into the small pond in the back. Even the rest of the expedition was open-mouthed with astonishment, to say nothing of He Yong.

He snorted and wanted to draw closer for a look, but two powerhouses materialized in the air and stared quietly at him.

“I want to verify if this is real or not!” He glared at them.

No one responded, but the two powerhouses gave way after some thought. He Yong picked up a random stone and sucked in a sharp breath after further scrutiny. It was real! How many were there here? There was no end to this mountain of mysterious power stones!

So many stones in such a tiny ruin... The hell man, the nine ministries might as well just come straight out and ask me if this amount is sufficient to tempt Li Hao!

Chapter 766: A Grade Two Ruin (I)

“How many... are there here?” He Yong swallowed hard.

“More than you can imagine,” someone responded faintly. “One hundred million mysterious power stones!”

He Yong’s heart spasmed with shock!

“You guys... really have a death wish!” He looked at the speaker.

“You can tell Commander Li that!” the other replied calmly. “He doesn’t need to come if he doesn’t have the guts to!”

He Yong's face flickered through a variety of expressions—crazy, they were all crazy!

The nine ministries had thrown down one hundred million stones in this locale to lure Li Hao into the ruins. This martial university was as small as a kindergarten... Alright, he was exaggerating, but it truly was not up to the standards of a typical martial university.

There was nothing worth investigating here apart from these mysterious power stones. Puppets could be supposedly found within the buildings; there was no treasure. He Yong couldn't be bothered with them. All that filled his mind right now were the one hundred million stones.

"Brother He, aren't you going to deliver this message to the outside world?" Another person looked at him with a meaningful smile. "There's an energy mine here, are you going to take it for yourself?"

He Yong stared back at him.

"Don't worry," the person laughed. "So long as Commander Li comes fast enough, Brother He can keep a watch at the gates. Everyone is only coming in, no one is leaving and certainly no one will be stealing the treasure. All of it will remain right here!"

He Yong sighed dismissively. These guys really were something!

"You guys... might not even have bone dust left of you after everything is said and done!" He Yong crammed a few stones in his pockets and left. Those watching him felt their eyelids twitch, but no one stopped him. The man had only taken a dozen pieces, and it was only to be expected since he was such a shameless sort.

He Yong swiftly walked out of the school gates and stepped out of a ring of light. After returning to the outside world, he swiftly sent a message to Li Hao, then took up a spot at the entrance to wait for the young man. It was up to him now whether he came or not.

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“One hundred million!”

The northern city quadrant.

Li Hao’s eyes lit up with shock and glee. Holy fuck! They really were willing to pay a hefty price for this operation! One hundred million... Even though a lot of parties are participating in this, each faction has to front at least several hundred! Are none of them thinking of life after this?

Granted, these factions had stood for decades and started excavating ruins before the rise of the supernatural. However, there weren’t many mines in the world. One hundred million was the equivalent of ten million stones used by the Battle Heaven Army. If converted to the equivalent of the ones that Hong Yitang had found on the ground, three of his massive pieces was equal to ten thousand regular stones. The biggest ones were thirty thousand pieces at most.

Sources of energy had all withered away in this day and age, so where did all this energy come from?

Li Hao’s face rapidly shifted through numerous emotions. He Yong had said that the stones were all piled away there without many precautions taken. The nine ministries’ meaning was clear. Here they were—dare you take them, Li Hao?

Of course he dared!

“Martial Uncle Hong, you should go with me.” Li Hao looked over those gathered.

“Just you two?” Hou Xiaochen frowned. Are you looking to die? Or do you just want to flirt with death? He rose with a dispassionate look. “I’m going in this time as well! I don’t care about core origin talismans, four or five element Arcanus, replicas of plant spirits or anything else, I just want to expand my horizons!”

Yao Si opened his mouth, but didn't say anything. Li Hao wanted him to stay here and oversee the Night Watchers. They did indeed require someone to hold down the fort as well.

"Count me in!" Light Sword stood up.

"Then me as well!" A small smile appeared on Manager Yu's aloof face.

"You guys are too weak!" barked the young man.

"....." Manager Yu's expression shifted slightly, as did Light Sword furrow her brows. Hou Xiaochen remained unmoved. The young man was obviously talking to the ladies, not him.

"Director Hou should also stay."

"....." Hou Xiaochen stared at Li Hao, not saying a word or expressing anything through his eyes. So... you were including me when you said that we're too weak?

He looked steadily at the young man. Since when did he, Hou Xiaochen, count as a weakling? Did you see it when I killed those Arcanus a few days ago? Who has ever dared call me a weakling in my entire life? The Steppe Prince didn't dare do so when he was alive, neither did Ying Hongyue dare underestimate me when he rushed to Silver Moon!

But in the end, he was dismissed by a kid wet behind the ears! What an utter humiliation! The look in Hou Xiaochen's eyes shifted as he looked at Li Hao, then at Hong Yitang. Had Hong Yitang taught him this?

"One hundred million mysterious power stones... that's quite a hefty investment," Deputy Zhou mulled over slowly. "It looks like the nine ministries have truly made up their minds this time. If you make it out alive, Li Hao... then you have truly found your footing in the world. No matter what you want to do until the second awakening, there will be no one who dares run afoul of you."

If he won this time, the nine ministries would have to shrink in on themselves and quietly lick their wounds.

“Of course!” Li Hao laughed. “I’m going to accomplish the entire goal in one campaign. Why else would I be so brazen for? I’m going to use my success to break their bones and make them cower at home! I’d like to see if the nine ministries will be sending out their old geezers this time!”

“They might not,” Deputy Zhou joined in the laughter. “These people won’t rashly enter the ruins, they still need to keep the royal family under control. They should be actively restraining a royal powerhouse—it might be the old Skystar King. There would be no need for this otherwise.

“The old Skystar King fought the nine ministries back in the day and ultimately lost, giving the nine ministries a chance to rise up. But a few decades ago, the old ministers quickly withdrew behind the curtain as well. It likely had something to do with a counterattack from that one...”

Li Hao was hardly surprised by the new information. Was it strange that these people were still alive?

Not at all!

But he was rather curious now, how many of the old guard martial masters were still alive in Silver Moon? They couldn’t have all died out. The nine ministries and royal family still had people alive who were older than one hundred years old! As much as Silver Moon martial masters like to fight, the oldest martial master out in the public right now was Yuan Shuo. At seventy years old, he counted as an extreme veteran.

Were those older than him all dead?

It wasn’t a good time to ask this question. Li Hao looked at Hou Xiaochen. “Director Hou, it might be inconvenient if you... go inside. If large amounts of powerhouses appear, well, Martial Uncle Hong and I have broken our locks. But you...”

Hou Xiaochen simply continued looking coolly at him. Are you thinking too little of me?

“Very well then, we’ll add the director to the mix!” Li Hao smiled.

Someone broke through the air, blotting out the sun with his muscular body and lofty bearing. Clad in long robes, Sky Sword descended like an immortal gracing the world with his presence. A broadsword on his back broke the otherworldly image that he projected.

“Let’s go!” he said faintly with a look at Li Hao.

“.....”

He said nothing else or asked any questions. He simply said, “Let’s go!”. It was as if he’d seen through to the true essence of everything and was simply here to kill people.

Li Hao looked back at Sky Sword. This was his third time seeing this august personage. The first time had been at the East Sea—Sky Sword had beat back the old duke with a single sword sword.

The second time had been at the Skystar Sea—he’d killed an Arcanus with one stroke. Three Red Moon elders had surrounded him after that, but he still killed one. It was plain to see just how incomparably strong he was.

And today, he was here again without extraneous words. Let’s go!

Li Hao broke out laughing. Sky Sword! The powerhouse who dominated the central region was here again.

“Senior Sky Sword...”

“Are you not going?” Sky Sword looked at him with confusion. “You stand a chance for survival in the ruins. Outside of them... While the situation may look more simple, it will actually be filled with more danger! Once you grow too strong, you might draw attention from both the royal family and the old farts at the nine ministries. It’s rather the ruins that appear to be risky, but offer a fighting chance since the enemy hasn’t plumbed its depths!”

Sky Sword was normally a man of few words, but he immediately touched upon the crux of the issue when he spoke. The outside world only appeared to be softer than the ruins, but the slightest misstep would result in being attacked on all sides like last time.

While there may be great hassle inside the ruins, they could kill everyone with no one the wiser. It would be very difficult for reinforcements to show after they killed the initial expedition team.

“Then Senior Sky Sword will be part of the expedition as well!” Li Hao smiled. “It’s us four!”

Light Sword wanted to volunteer, but Li Hao interrupted her. “Let’s just settle on us four. Senior Light Sword and Manager Yu should stay, I’ll also have Senior Southern Fist stay. You guys should coordinate with the Demon Hunters in the outside world to prevent the unexpected from developing. Added to that Director Yao and Deputy Zhou... that should be enough!”

He took out a small flask. “Here are one hundred drops of Water of Life. Use these if you need to unseal yourself at some point. I probably won’t be back for another five days after making this trip.”

The young man then brought out another flask and gave it to Deputy Zhou. “Here’s another one hundred drops of Water of Life. When it really comes down to it, and Yang Shan and Qin Lian are willing to put their lives on the line, then help them break through to Arcanus. This will be enough for them to stabilize their cultivation level!”

Two hundred drops!



Everyone took a sharp breath. Li Hao was being seriously generous!

Even Deputy Zhou was surprised and looked sharply at the lad. How many stones does one drop of your Water of Life cost? You gave me two hundred drops before, and here's another two hundred. You must've spent at least one hundred drops on the Demon Hunter Army earlier. That makes for a total of five hundred drops in short order.

Just how rich are you?

Li Hao wanted to protest that he truly didn't have much Water of Life left, that he only had one hundred drops or so in his storage rings. He really was almost out! Although one hundred drops sounded like a lot, he needed to save some for Director Hou and Sky Sword on this expedition, to say nothing of Hong Yitang and himself. If he didn't claim that one hundred million stones, this expedition would be an enormous loss!

#### Chapter 767: A Grade Two Ruin (II)

You guys need to know that my Water of Life can be sold for one hundred thousand stones a drop! Well, I probably won't have any buyers at that price, but there will definitely be some at forty or fifty thousand stones per drop.

It appeared that Li Hao would have to wait a while longer before he could bathe in Water of Life.

Light Sword frowned slightly, as was Manager Yu disgruntled. What, do you think of us as too weak? Light Sword, in particular, was discontent. She'd absorbed a great deal of energy by Li Hao's side and a lot of dark energy. She'd saturated eight out of the nine typical locks, and the ninth was almost complete.

Strength such as this was hard to combat Arcanus without being unsealed, but the difference wasn't great. If she unsealed herself, she would be another Arcanus. Do you think nothing of even Arcanus? Light Sword looked away after some internal grumbling.

"Then... let's go, everyone!" Li Hao smiled at the other three.

“Let’s go!” The four vanished like gusts of wind. A big dog behind them also vanished without a sound. Panther was getting ever lazier these days, but always found incredible courage at times like this. No matter how dangerous the situation was, it always followed. That was also how it always came in for a share of the spoils.

Ever since departing Battle Heaven, the dog was present for every instance of Li Hao’s closed door cultivation sessions. However, its strength seemed frozen at the level it’d reached when it left the ancient city. It showed not a single hint of improvement since then.

Four humans and one dog promptly vanished.

.....

The western outskirts, the small mountain.

The void shattered as four humans and one dog appeared. There were people in the mountain valley—He Yong as well. They were startled by the sudden appearance, so strong! The key was, was it just these couple of people?

The newcomers could sense a presence enveloping the vicinity—the presence of a mirror fragment. Someone was keeping this area under surveillance!

.....

Inside the palace.

The Skystar King leaned back in a chair, watching a projection in front of him. It depicted the city’s western outskirts. He smiled as he watched the proceedings. “Sky Sword, Earthturner Sword, Demon Sword, and Sickly...”

Just these four? Who would've thought that Li Hao wouldn't even bring Yao Si and the others? Was he that confident or felt that it wouldn't make a difference if they were part of the expedition?

Some royal children were standing beneath him, including the seventh princess of the Nine Dragons Pavilion. She watched for a while before saying softly, "Royal father, will the nine ministries send out their old ministers?"

"They will... but not that many. It could be just one or two people. Perhaps only one—to oversee everything," the outwardly youthful Skystar King laughed softly. "Those from Armed Forces and Administration probably won't go. They won't easily leave their posts."

"Then... should we intervene?"

"We don't need to send any powerhouses, just in case they get surrounded," responded the Skystar King after some thought. "Send some of the Black Armaturas to observe and take notes. It'd be best if they can safely exit the ruins."

It wouldn't matter if they couldn't.

The group nodded while the king continued chuckling. "Keep watching. See who sends who after they go in. I'm thinking that there will be more representatives than from the nine ministries this time!"

No one made a sound as they silently watched the screen. Li Hao smiled dashing in the image. "Martial Uncle He, you shouldn't stay here for long. Head back to Skystar City, to the Demon Hunter Army. Help the others hold down the fort and await my triumphant return!"

"Are you sure?" He Yong raised an eyebrow.

"Yes!"

He Yong thought for a bit and nodded before breaking through the void.

Inside the palace.

“Ole Nine.” Someone looked at the ninth prince. “He Yong is an ingrate who will never give us his loyalty. He’s received so much from the royal family, but still doesn’t recognize us as his masters!”

This ingrate had been working on Li Hao’s behalf lately, drawing ire from many in the royal family. He Yong had been given a lot of royal benefits during his tenure. The ninth prince even brought him on expeditions into ruins because he possessed great strength. Those were places reserved strictly for the royal family.

In the crowd, the ninth prince was genteel and polite. He gently bowed from the waist. “Third brother is right, but Master He started teaching me martial dao when I was very young and is from Silver Moon. Now that his homeland is in danger, the enormously loyal Master He must take action. That’s not to say that he’s an ingrate... at the very least, he hasn’t attacked anyone of the royal family.”

“He hasn’t created any value for us either!”

“Enough!” cut off the Skystar King. “Stop fighting about this, there’s no point to it! All of you are brothers and sisters and should be of one mind. The world is in such chaos that it is a question of whether or not we Jiangs are still the royal family of the dynasty.”

The group fell silent and continued to watch the screen. They saw He Yong leave and Li Hao’s group land elegantly on the ground. The group sprinted for the ball of light at the end of the tunnel. Four humans and one dog immediately vanished without a trace. That instantly sent off a chain reaction of dozens of people outside surging in!

The ball of light immediately shifted to something like a black hole, permitting only entrance and no exit. Another person appeared at this time, snorting as he looked at a particular point in the sky.

The Skystar King ignored his reaction, but didn't withdraw the mirror fragment either. He waited, as did those outside the cave. Various figures rushed over from all sides... Some wore masks, others were shrouded in black robes. Some had an indistinct haze around them, and there were even monster spirits as well.

The royal children inside the palace sucked in sharp breaths.

"The ministers of Examination, the Judiciary, and Foreign Affairs..." One of them identified the newcomers. These ministers were all here in their true appearances, and what was surprising was that the one from Internal Affairs wasn't here.

Neither had the Ministry of Finance sent their minister. The other eight ministries had sent representatives of varying strength, with their weakest being metamorphosis. They watched the premises gravely, waiting for something.

A prince gasped in the palace hall, "Is that the lord of Buddha Mountain? Is that him?"

A figure materialized in the air, his features impossible to make out as he was wreathed with golden light. The crowd quickly identified him as the lord of Buddha Mountain. He'd been forced to become a supernatural in the previous great battle. Yet when such a premier martial master became a supernatural and was the lord of a divine mountain, it made it very possible that he was a three element Arcanus now.

Another premier powerhouse appeared among the seven divine mountains. A blindingly fast existence arrived with a gust of wind—the Sky Roc mountain lord!

"The lord of Sky Roc Mountain is here too!"

"And... that's... people from the City of Supernaturals!"

Three figures swiftly landed—one woman and two men. Their true features were unconcealed and they looked very young.

“There are approximately twelve ancient aristocracies of varying sizes in the City of Supernaturals. They sent three Arcanus in one go! It looks like Li Hao killing one of them last time raised their general ire.”

“Have the three great organizations sent anyone?”

“That’s the Fortune King!” someone called out. [1]

A figure strode through the air like he was a demon god. Expressionless and dignified, he looked at a certain spot in the air. “Have you never seen me before?”

In the ten court masters, the Fortune King was second to only Yama. There were even rumors that he was stronger than Yama. Who would’ve thought that one of these great personages would arrive this time!

The various royal descendants were shocked. This was... quite a stunning array of people! And they were still waiting for more! Who were they waiting for? Those from Red Moon and Celestial?

A few more figures appeared as speculation buzzed among the crowd. Like the rest, the new arrivals didn’t conceal their features. Surprised, frowns crossed faces when they recognized who’d come from Red Moon.

Why was it this one? She was captivating and beguiling, but they knew her to be part of Ying Hongyue’s harem—Orange Moon, the Black Widow. She was only a metamorphosis, what was she here for? to die?

“Ying Hongyue has made an interesting move!” the Skystar King suddenly spoke up.

“Royal father... Red Moon has only sent Orange Moon... They’re... being careless, aren’t they?”

“No!” The king looked at Black Widow in the projection and raised an eyebrow. “Ying Hongyue is placing great importance on this operation!”

“Eh?” No one understood, and the Skystar King wasn’t forthcoming with more.

“It’s rather Celestial who doesn’t think much of this venture!” The king shook his head after another look. “They are indeed an organization of assassins—they won’t exert themselves to much effort if the payment is not great enough. They’ve sent only a vice pavilion master, one that’s barely made it into Arcanus. It looks like he’s just here to watch the proceedings.”

Out of the three great organizations, Celestial was the most materialistic. They’d only sent a vice pavilion master as their leader didn’t seem to think much of the expedition. Perhaps she’d only sent someone to see if there was any cut of the profits to be had. If not, her representative could just leave.

The group still did not move out after the three great organizations arrived. There were a lot of powerhouses on the scene—three ministers, the Fortune King, and the lords of Buddha and Sky Roc Mountain. Such strength was incomparable, but the assembly did not seem to find it enough.

The Skystar King suddenly sat bolt upright as a person drifted down from the sky. The princes didn’t recognize him at first, until one person’s eyes widened. “Is he the one overseeing this operation?”

Seeing that the ninth prince didn’t recognize the newcomer, the seventh princess transmitted quietly, “Ole Nine, this is the old minister of the Ministry of Commerce. He rarely shows himself in public these years and wasn’t present at the previous battle...”

The ninth prince suddenly understood. No wonder he didn’t recognize the man. All trade beneath the heavens fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Commerce, and its first minister had been a

renowned merchant before helping the ministry! The Four Seas Company of the Ministry of Finance was nothing compared to him.

These days, the Ministry of Commerce controlled nearly fifty percent of the major consortiums in the world. They held a monopoly on food, drink, housing, and transportation. The cars on the streets and houses that people lived in were overseen by this ministry. They were so much richer than the Four Seas Company and less flamboyant, so they attracted less hate.

#### Chapter 768: A Grade Two Ruin (III)

“Does the Ministry of Commerce have such a feud with Li Hao that it brings forth that one...?”

“No, it’s probably that the others aren’t willing to take the field. The Ministries of Finance and the Inspectorate don’t care. Administration and Armed Forces are the main parties confining us,” replied the Skystar King. “The ministers of Examination, Foreign Relations, and the Judiciary are here. The only one missing is Internal Affairs—I don’t know what’s happened with Mu Hai...”

The king furrowed his brow with thought after the old minister of Commerce arrived.

“So Qian Wanhao has come. I thought it’d be the old fart from Finance this time.”

The Liu father and son of the Ministry of Finance had been invisible lately. It was surprising that they were nowhere to be found at this moment either. This was even harder to understand than the Inspectorate.

As for Internal Affairs, the Skystar King absolutely understood the situation there. Fatty Mu Hai was extremely frustrated after his daughter was taken. He felt that the nine ministries and royal family had abandoned him, so he refused to be involved now. There was nothing he wanted more than for the nine ministries to suffer an enormous loss!

“All parties should be present and accounted for now!!” However, the king suddenly shot to his feet with a frosty look in his eyes.



A presence flared through the surroundings! All of the royal descendants blinked, looking at astonishment with someone who'd appeared in the image. They weren't the only ones—those assembled were equally surprised!

.....

The western outskirts.

Someone came striding through the air with an aloof expression. He wore yellow robes, a crown on his head, and inclined his head at Qian Wanhao. "You don't mind, do you, Old Minister Qian?"

"Ah, the Stable Mountain Prince, this..." the slightly rotund old minister flicked a startled glance at the newcomer.

After the death of the Steppe Prince, there were only eight princes left in the royal family. And today, the Stable Mountain Prince was present.

His features were clear-cut and marked with a grave expression. "I am here today because Hong Yitang killed my younger brother. Out of the nine princes, only the Steppe Prince and I shared the same mother. Our other royal brothers likely don't wish to make a showing, so I am the one who comes!"

While the assembly was surprised, no one said a word. The nine princes of the royal family were from the same generation as the Skystar King. They were blood brothers, the sons of the previous king. As for their royal uncles... they were all gone. No one knew who'd killed them.

The previous Skystar King had given his sons their respective titles. Only the Steppe Prince and this one shared the same mother. At the same time, there were many talented members of the reigning royal generation. The current king was a brave talent and a brilliant strategist. The nine princes were premier powerhouses who'd led the Black Armaturas in battles across the land back in the day.

The Steppe Prince had established the Skystar Guards, while the Stable Mountain Prince had once led troops in victorious skirmishes throughout the world.

“Very well then, this makes all of us with the Stable Mountain Prince in attendance too,” laughed Qian Wanhao. With him included, there were four ministers of previous and present. There was one prince, representatives from three great organizations, three Arcanus from the City of Supernaturals, and a few other powerhouses from the other ministries...

There were almost more Arcanus alone in this expedition compared to the last battle. They weren’t even the key—that lay in the plant spirit replicas that they carried with them. Would there be an issue in killing Li Hao’s quartet with the show of this force?

Qian Wanhao, in particular, looked to the Stable Mountain Prince and Orange Moon. Although many felt that Ying Hongyue wasn’t placing the proper importance on this expedition, Qian Wanhao inclined his head after taking a few more glances. He was rather stunned at how heavily Ying Hongyue had invested in this operation. So it seemed that he could no longer contain himself!

“Since we’re all here, let’s go inside!” Qian Wanhao smiled at the vortex in front of him. “Demon Sword might be so excited by the sight of all of those mysterious power stones that he’ll dive right into the pile. It might be hard to find him in it.”

The group of thirty roared with laughter and walked inside together. Quiet immediately descended upon the western outskirts. More powerhouses appeared before long, but they waited inside instead of entering the ruins. If all went well, Li Hao would be dead after this. It wouldn’t take long, but no one would be emerging for five days. They had to be wary of the royal family during this time. However, a prince had gone inside. What did the Skystar King have in mind?

.....

The royal palace.

The Skystar King remained ominously quiet until someone cursed lowly, “Royal Uncle Stable Mountain... is truly... unruly!”

The royal family had said that they wouldn't participate, but that prince had gone anyway. It was clear to see that he didn't think much of the Skystar King's authority.

The king simply swept a look over the speaker, cowing the royal descendant into silence. It was a long moment before the king spoke.

"It's fine, he could not understand the death of our younger brother. That is only to be expected! But some sacrifice is inevitable if the royal family is to rise again! He will understand sooner or later!"

The Skystar King wasn't willing to speak further on this topic and changed the subject. "Make the preparations and be ready in five days. If Li Hao does not emerge, the nine ministries are sure to act against Yao Si and the others. Let's see if Silver Moon will send more people this time..."

No matter what the result was, it was to his benefit either way. When dog ate dog, there was no difference as to who died. It was best if they all ended up on the brink of death!

"Royal father, Li Hao has taken a few people of the Ancient Academy from the Nine Dragons Pavilion..." said the seventh princess.

"Kill them in secret if Li Hao doesn't come out!"

These people could not be left for the nine ministries! The Skystar King left without another word. They couldn't see anything anymore, nor was there a need to see anything.

The assembly slowly dispersed after he left. A small tree extended mental ripples toward the king when he entered a rear garden. "Have they all gone inside?"

"Yes." The Skystar King nodded. "I wonder how many plant spirits are present on the expedition."

“Since that Li Hao dares make a move, he must have his confidence in doing so...” the little tree seemed to be laughing. “No matter what, let’s wait and see first. This martial university... may not be as simple as it seems. I hope nothing else develops.”

“Not as simple?” The Skystar King furrowed his brows. “It’s just a very small university that’s a university in name only. The Ministry of Finance didn’t obtain any treasures from it in all their years of excavation...”

“It’s called the Evenround Martial University, is it not?”

“Correct.”

“I’m not certain either... There wasn’t anything special about this university when it was established, but the Skystar Army commander-in-chief went in person to congratulate them during their commence ceremony. Ordinarily speaking, having a division leader in attendance was honor enough. But they had a commander-in-chief!

“Not only that, but if I recall correctly, powerhouses from the eight main cities visited the university on that day as well. There were many martial universities across the land, with some branches of premier universities in Silver Moon. The most famous on Skystar Island should’ve been Skystar Martial University. The rest were small-scale institutions of learning.

“Representatives from the eight main cities came when Skystar Martial was founded, but they sent only some weaklings...” The little tree swayed. “You must know that Skystar Island was just a mine back in the day. All of Silver Moon Territory was just one of the human domains. I’m not certain of certain things either. Perhaps... they came from the main world?”

“You’ve mentioned the main world a few times.” The Skystar King raised an eyebrow. “What do you mean by that? Isn’t the entire dynasty, four seas, and eight wildernesses the entirety of the ancient civilization territory?”

The little tree seemed to both be laughing, jeering, and recollecting. “You must know that this... was only Silver Moon Territory!”

The Skystar King frowned.

“You still don’t understand. Here, even the greatest of the eight families, the Lis, were but one of the emperor’s families. Battle Heaven was just an auxiliary branch. Back in the day, the Human King was unparalleled in the battlefield and had countless powerhouses following his banner. Once he conquered the world, he spent one thousand years in quiet and marched on deeper expanses when he emerged...”

Here, the little tree seemed apprehensive and didn’t speak further. “Just remember that everything is just a beginning. Only after opening the Star Gate will you witness the true ancient civilization! The eight families safeguarded the Star Gate and the Ying Hongyue you speak of likely wishes to collect the eight bloodlines for this goal...”

The king listened quietly before suddenly declaring, “One day, We will sweep through the four corners and revitalize the glories of the ancient civilization!”

“.....” The little tree didn’t respond, but viewed the words contemptuously.

The glories of the ancient civilization? You? You will never know how wondrous the ancient civilization was at its peak! Silver Moon Territory alone was staffed with an army of tens of millions. Just their general alone numbered one thousand Apex! What splendor it was, what an age of magnificence! Are people like you supposed to restore it?

What a joke!

It didn’t say anything as, being the royal family’s plant spirit, it was in a favorable position for special advantages. It’d absorbed many mysterious power stones from the royal family over the years and thus had awakened a bit more compared to other plant spirits. That was how it barely managed to cross beyond the ruin and extend its mental strength here.

It didn't care about the others, it was just slightly curious about Evenround Martial University. Its memories showed that this university was a very mysterious institution. Very few students graduated from it and most didn't stay in Silver Moon. The tiny school was said to have fewer than one thousand students in its heyday.

Are there... secrets there? It wondered, but didn't didn't further converse with the king. It retracted its mental strength and returned to its ruins. There was a preeminent palace underground with a beguiling rose blooming in it.

An old man sat in the center, cross-legged and wearing yellow robes. There seemed to be nine locks crisscrossing over him, locking him in place. He opened his eyes when the little tree's mental strength returned.

"Can you break it?"

"Not for now, those two have not left!"

The old man frowned and closed his eyes again.

Chapter 769: Incredible (I)

At the same time, inside the ruins.

Li Hao strode in and scanned the tiny martial university with surprise. "He Yong said that it was very small... but it really is very, very small!"

There were just a few buildings scattered around the place, as well as a wall surrounding the entire institution. The skies were dark and there were a few puppet-like sculptures standing at the school gates. Li Hao didn't find them the slightest bit imposing or stately. It was like he'd come to a kindergarten.

There were people inside, but they were in hiding and unable to be seen. The young man didn't mind. He walked inside; the little tree's voice sounded inside his ear. Its mental strength extended outward and it sounded slightly frightened. "Li Hao... this is not a place to linger!"

The young man raised an eyebrow, why?

"There is... a great terror here!" The little tree seemed to be shaking. "I can already sense a horrifying presence. This place... doesn't necessarily lack a master! You must be careful to not touch a single blade of grass or tree here. You might be able to protect yourself since you have the bloodline of the Sword Sovereign... so you might survive if you don't touch anything here!"

Li Hao's heart quailed. A great terror?

This tiny university had become a place of great terror in the little tree's words. It hadn't been this afraid when it was in Battle Heaven!

"Is this... not a martial university?"

"It is..." The little tree gently probed the vicinity and continued in quavering tones, "I don't know where the danger comes from, my father might... He might have had certain experiences here... I just have a deep seated fear from the depths of my memories... You must be careful... The danger this time may not come from the outside world this time..."

Li Hao instantly grew solemn. This was a plant spirit at the Apex cultivation level, but it was full of terror at its surroundings. The little tree's father had been a plant spirit guard of the imperial palace, one who'd seen premier existences in its time!

The young man looked into the school grounds again—they were quiet and peaceful. The four buildings stood firmly in the ground. Upon closer look, their arrangement rather resembled a person's eyes, nose, and lips...

He said nothing as he swiftly walked inside. “Be careful and don’t touch anything here,” he transmitted to others. There might be great trouble here! It may not be a good thing that the Ministry of Finance has relinquished this ruin...”

Sky Sword and the others jerked with surprise. No one said a word as they swiftly followed Li Hao inside.

.....

At the same time, the Ministry of Finance.

Liu Yunqing leaned back against a chair and looked toward the western outskirts.

“Did powerhouses die in those ruins before?” came his father’s voice.

“Why do you ask that?”

“I remember that you entered with Liu Yang last time, but he didn’t come out. Did he die in there?”

“Yes.”

“As I thought!” the old minister said after prolonged silence. “It looks like you still weren’t willing to let it go... Forget it, let’s just pretend we didn’t know about it. It’s just a grade two ruin, so kill whoever knows about Liu Yang!”

“I know.” Liu Yunqing smiled. Li Hao, the nine ministries, royal family, three great organizations... Li Hao was the culprit for the demise of the Four Seas Company, but none of the rest were anything good! They could all go to hell this time! It would be best if they all died!



A grade two ruin? It was a junkyard from the layout, but they would know soon enough how horrifying it was!

He stood up with a chuckle and looked at the Inspectorate, then in the direction of Military Affairs and Administration. What a pity that these three hadn't sent representatives, especially the Inspectorate. Not a single person from that ministry had gone. What a damned pity!

.....

Evenround University.

Li Hao gingerly picked his way through the campus grounds. The ignorant were fearless and the more one knew, the more cautious one became. It was a sensible reaction.

In the past, he would've thought that there was nothing to be afraid of for the ancient civilization since it was long dead. But with living ancient plant spirits in the world and Director General Wang saying that Apex could tear through the void to travel thousands of kilometers, Li Hao knew that he was nothing compared to the ancient civilization. He was just a minion strong enough to be a Silver Armor troop leader. In the ancient civilization, he was just fit to oversee one thousand people.

Of course, he wouldn't unduly belittle himself. His path had just started and there was no rush. At the same time, he well knew the concept of reverence. It was better to be more prudent when it came to the ancient civilization.

Li Hao quickly threaded past the four buildings and arrived at the rear garden. Or was it better to call it a playground? Whatever it was, it was filled with mysterious power stones. No one had touched them and there was no need to. To the victor went all the spoils. It wasn't as if these stones would grow legs and run away. If he took them and lost, his corpse would ultimately belong to someone else too.

A dense current of energy wafted out of the packed pile of stones. Li Hao's heart shook. So many! The little tree sensed it as well and trembled.

"So many..." Its mental ripples exclaimed. It almost wanted to emerge and fall into the pile! But it was hesitant as it was a very weak descendant of the plant spirits. Although it'd paid a great price to sever half of its core origin, an action that most plant spirits wouldn't dare do, this place gave it a great sense of fear.

As the group considered whether or not to leave with the riches, various presences rose from behind them. The powerhouses in the outside world had entered the ruins. Others concealed in the surroundings ran out of their hiding places and quickly convened with the new arrivals. At the same time, various mental ripples extended through the surroundings.

"You're still alive, big one?"

"You're alive as well, Redwood, why would I be dead?" The plant spirits that could barely see each other in regular times greeted each other. They weren't located in the same ruins as there were many such places on Skystar Island. But since they were all part of the island, they were familiar with each other. Although it wasn't their primary bodies meeting each other again after countless eons, and there wasn't much core origin powering their replica, it was still an emotional reunion.

New Martial... had passed!

Who would've thought that an era as powerful as New Martial would come to pass as well? Who would've thought that the domineering Human King, conqueror of all he saw and eventually one who marched on the universe, would disappear? It was unfathomable!

It was so hard to believe that it felt more like one's faith collapsing. When Silver Moon Territory was fully sealed away and those who stayed behind either died or scattered, the plant spirits suffered untold blows to their psyche to watch everything around them enter the end times.

New Martial was no more!

The eight guardian families were no more in this vast territory and the magnificent armies that once filled it were dispersed as well. Countless powerhouses had disappeared, and New Martial became Ancient Martial. Just like in the days of the celestial emperor, the ancient times that the Human King spoke of had become part of the past. The heavyweights that crafted the world were lost in the river of time.

History repeated itself now, and New Martial was no more.

The plant spirits were emotional over the changes, but also felt some estrangement between them. They were all in the same camp during New Martial, yet that no longer held true after the end of New Martial. They had been quiet for countless years; today was different.

Time was the greatest enemy.

“Alright, let’s not speak of the past. The past is in the past. The one they want to kill this time is the heir of the Sword Sovereign...”

The plant spirits fell silent when they heard this. The heir of the Sword Sovereign! Who would dare do anything to him if this was in times past? But the river of time had flowed onward and New Martial didn’t even exist anymore, they weren’t afraid of this course of action!

Who knew how many generations of heirs the Sword Sovereign had cycled through? How many of them had died? There was no sign of the Sword Sovereign to be seen. Perhaps his name evoked fear in the beginning, but that reverence was no longer there.

“I can smell energy stones...”

“Do not fight me for this abundance, everyone. Once I recover my strength and the outside world is stabilized, I will help you all recover. We must know that our enemy is not each other, but those guys in the central region!”

The central region in their eyes was not the current territory of the dynasty, but Silver Moon. The province was the central region of the Silver Moon Territory.

As the plant spirits perceived the dense energy, one of them suddenly transmitted, “Is there... something wrong... with this place?”

The other plant spirit replicas were puzzled by its question and quickly probed the surroundings. They didn’t find anything majorly wrong.

“Have we... heard of this place before?” another plant spirit asked with puzzlement.

“I think so... Apparently a powerhouse visited Skystar Island back in the day and established Evenround University. They didn’t interact much with the residents or defending troops of the island. That was in the past, however. How many years has it been since?”

They were antiques, every single one of them. Everyone knew who everyone else was. There were no living plant spirits or monster spirits in this place. The humans that once staffed it were all dead. Even if there were some formations or others left, what was there to fear? Not to mention, it was the plant spirits’ replicas that were present. They wouldn’t truly die here.

“I can forgo the energy stones, but I want that heir’s sword...” a plant spirit transmitted.

“You’ve got quite the appetite!”

“Aren’t you afraid you’ll choke on it!”

“The heir’s sword may not be the Sword Sovereign’s personal sword. It may just be an imitation. Do you think this person could use the real sword? Can any of us use it, to say nothing of anyone else?”

“That’s hard to say as the Sword Sovereign goes through swords very rapidly. He might have used this one before or discarded it. No matter what, it is not a mundane item.”

Everyone knew that the Sword Sovereign used swords. It was mentioned in some legends that each stroke led to the death of an enemy and the shattering of a sword. This occurrence happened more than once!

The young man’s sword might be from the Sword Sovereign, it might be an imitation. No matter what, the eight heritage weapons were all highly sought after. To the plant spirits, the eight families were invincible existences.

Mental strength filled the air as the plant spirits conversed among themselves. The other powerhouses could sense an undercurrent of conversation, but didn’t say anything.

#### Chapter 770: Incredible (II)

Qian Wanhao could vaguely see Li Hao and the others when he looked inside the campus grounds. “Be careful,” he transmitted. “Although we are highly assured of success, we also need to be on guard against their counterattacks. Li Hao must have some aces up his sleeves if he dared come inside!”

He took out a mirror fragment and flung it into the air. A barrier manifested around the group. The ministers of Examinations, Foreign Relations, and the Judiciary also flung out mirror fragments. The fragments hovered in the four directions, raising four barriers. Just one alone at the Steadfast Duke’s manor had held off a metamorphosis attack. There were four this time!

Even an Arcanus would have to pay a steep price to break the barriers, not to mention there were so many powerhouses present to prevent that possibility.

The old minister of the Ministry of Commerce was a highly cautious individual.

“When we see them in a moment, don’t say anything,” he transmitted. “Throw out all of the core origin talismans, supernatural talismans, and energy bombs we have. Kill one or two of them first before anything else!”

There was no need to converse with Li Hao and the rest. There was only one goal—kill them!

“If they don’t die, the three great organizations will take care of Hong Yitang, the lords of Buddha and Sky Roc Mountain will face Hou Xiaochen. The Stable Mountain Prince and other ministers, as well as the City of Supernaturals will handle Sky Sword and Panther. Us four ministries will take care of Li Hao!”

No one had a differing opinion. Of the four, Li Hao may be the most difficult target. The others were fine. Everyone present on the expedition was a powerhouse. Apart from the Inspectorate not sending a single person, even the Ministry of Finance had sent a vice minister. His main purpose was to witness the death of Li Hao and his comrades.

“Don’t split up, they might ambush us one by one. Don’t give them any opening to do so...” Despite their clear guarantee of success, the old minister continued to issue words of caution, hoping that everyone would place more importance on their upcoming operation. He did all he could to prevent them from unexpectedly suffering a loss.

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Up ahead.

Sky Sword furrowed his brows and looked around sternly. He could see the group of people approaching them. “Three element Arcanus... there’s at least four of them. Qian Wanhao... might even be a four element Arcanus!”

And they hadn’t even seen the plant spirits yet.

Sky Sword looked at Li Hao with a brewing headache. He’d been... a little careless in following the young man in. Li Hao didn’t look like he’d prepared anything!

I thought you'd arranged for a massive group of people inside the ruins. But... there's really nothing here!

Li Hao said nothing. He looked into the distance with eyes blazing like torches. The world spun in them. He could see something even through the four mirror shards. There were balls of piercing light within them, but nothing he could see about core origin power. He turned his attention to the first ball of light.

The first one—Qian Wanhao. Li Hao saw straight through the person, through his blazing hot light. “Incredible, he’s a heavyweight of the metal, wood, water, and earth elements!”

It was also clear to see that this wasn’t the minister’s natural state; he’d probably forcefully ascended through paying a great price recently. His water and earth elements were noticeably unstable. Qian Wanhao had likely been a two element Arcanus prior. Who knew how much he’d expended to pull himself up to four elements?

Continued ascension was possible if these people had fortified organs. They would just need a lot of Water of Life. The plant spirits were undoubtedly making a killing off them.

Li Hao looked at the lord of Buddha Mountain next. “Three elements—metal, earth, and fire!” He then looked at the massive bird from Sky Roc Mountain before turning his glance to Panther. “That one seems a lot stronger than you...”

Panther ignored him and stared at the bird. Li Hao scanned all of the powerhouses, but did a double take and looked back at Orange Moon. He hadn’t paid much attention to her because he knew she was weak. But now... he frowned faintly.

Orange Moon’s strength was mediocre. Her ball of light placed her as a new Arcanus. Who knew how much good stuff she’d eaten as it still didn’t seem very stable. At the same time, there was something that pierced the eye on her. What was it?

Li Hao could also sense some threat from it. One had to know that he wasn't threatened even when he looked at Qian Wanhao. It represented that those four Arcanus were no match for him.

Is it something from Ying Hongyue? The young man viewed Orange Moon with more wariness. What an investment!

Li Hao then looked at Hong Yitang, finding the man to be as calm as ever. He happened to be looking across the way, confused by who he saw. Li Hao followed his gaze to find that he was looking at people from the City of Supernaturals. The young man didn't know any of them, but Sky Sword seemed to be familiar with their style.

Befuddled, Hong Yitang transmitted to Sky Sword, "Are those from the City of Supernaturals?"

"Mmhmm."

"Do you find them somewhat familiar?"

It was Sky Sword's turn to be puzzled. Familiar? He looked at them closely for a while and didn't find them so, but he stretched his senses toward them before glancing sharply at Hong Yitang. What a sharp perception!

"They're a bit familiar... that feeling... Is it the group that appeared in the Silver Moon martial world back in the day? They're the same people?"

"That's right!"

"Who?" Li Hao was curious.

"You wouldn't know them if I told you," Sky Sword responded.



“It’s just some gossip,” Hou Xiaochen transmitted with a smile. “And not major gossip. Some outsiders appeared in the Silver Moon martial world one day, calling themselves ancient martial families. They wanted to take back some of Silver Moon’s martial secrets, saying that it was their heritage. After that, many of them were beaten to death and quite a few crippled as well. It was a very long time ago.”

I see!

Li Hao promptly lost interest. He thought there was something important involved.

“Silver Spear of Silver Moon’s Three Spears—Liu Long’s father—died to them. The Nine Forged Force was one of the secret arts they wanted to take back. Silver Spear suffered seven challenges in one day and used the Nine Forged Force each time. He harmed his foundations then and eventually succumbed to his injuries.

“But it was above board sparring, despite the suspicion that they were wearing him down through sheer attrition. It was Silver Spear himself who wished to take the battles, and no one said anything after he won them.”

Hou Xiaochen’s supplemental explanation pointed out that these people had something to do with Silver Gun’s death. But they didn’t break the rules, so Silver Moon’s martial world didn’t see vengeance on the outsiders after Silver Spear died. They’d played by the rules, which was all that was important.

“Then this time... it’s against the rules to mob us. I’ll beat a few of them to death straight off the bat in a bit!”

Hou Xiaochen laughed, the boy was truly too arrogant. Indeed, arrogant. To posture like this even now confused Hou Xiaochen. Where did Li Hao get his confidence from?

The young man looked around them and backed away to a clearing behind them to put more space between him and the buildings. What if they accidentally summoned a great terror because of the ruckus they kicked up in breaking things throughout the school?

“Let’s not wait for them... Director Hou should open with the Broken Will Spear when they arrive and break the defenses of the mirror fragments! Senior Sky Sword can suppress them with your broadsword. You guys can attack them together! Martial Uncle Hong, you and I should choose one person each. Who are you choosing?”

Hong Yitang laughed and transmitted, “I choose the Stable Mountain Prince! He seems to have just become an Arcanus and should be at least three elements. I’m more confident when it comes to martial masters.”

The Stable Mountain Prince was likely a martial master too, one who’d thrown everything out the window by his decision to become an Arcanus.

Hong Yitang did not choose the lord of Buddha Mountain. The latter’s offensive strength was average, but his defensive abilities were domineering enough.

Li Hao swept a gaze over the incoming opponents. “I’ll choose the guy from the Ministry of the Judiciary. He really hates me, so I’ll send him on his way first!”

They had to ensure that they would kill with one strike! Otherwise, their first blow wouldn’t be that impressive.

Hou Xiaochen frowned at the two choosing targets like they were dividing looted treasure. On what basis did these two have to be so... cocky! Hu Mingfa of the Judiciary was also a three element Arcanus. The Stable Mountain Prince was also a three element Arcanus.

To be honest, Hou Xiaochen felt that he wouldn’t be able to fight them if he didn’t unseal himself. The kid’s just outright discussing killing them with one blow! It’s one thing for Li Hao to be this cocky, but Earthturner Sword is as well?

Sky Sword simply looked at them without a word. Since Li Hao had proposed such a plan... then let them proceed according to his words. No one would be getting away if anything went wrong.

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Qian Wanhao and the rest were on high alert and finding the situation odd. Across the way, Li Hao's group was neither evading or hiding from them. They were simply just standing there. Was this... direct frontal combat?

The more their targets were thus, the more wary he was. He was old and no longer possessed the brave ferocity of his youth. In contrast, he was much more reliable and dependable now.

"Be careful!" he reminded. Everyone nodded solemnly. These guys... were crazy, were they not?

The two sides continuously drew near each other. Five hundred meters, four hundred meters... This kind of distance could be closed in the blink of an eye to powerhouses, yet Qian Wanhao and the others moved even slower. Meanwhile, the Sky Roc King from the monster spirits grew impatient.

It wasn't just here to kill Li Hao—it was here more to secure certain resources. It didn't have much contact with plant spirits and was hoping to reach an agreement with a plant spirit or a ministry. The hemming and hawing from these humans were getting on its nerves. Their side was so powerful! Was there a need to be thus?

This Qian Wanhao was losing all his nerve in his old age!

"Minister Qian, this king possesses a strong body. If you are worried about something unexpected happening, then this king will strike first. All of you can attack after me. This king will easily take down a mere Li Hao, even if he's set foot into three element Arcanus!"

Qian Wanhao was taken aback. You... um... so monster spirits are really not afraid of death, huh? Are you really not concerned that Li Hao may have something up his sleeves with how he's reacting? But... where else will I find such a good proposal?

He'd wanted to just outright lob spirit origin talismans, but it was best if there was a distraction preoccupying the group. There was one now—a major monster spirit was willing to take the lead. Why should he refuse?