

Star Gate 841

Chapter 841: Intelligence Reports (I)

At the same time.

The emergence of the ranking caused some changes all the same. The City of Supernaturals abruptly announced that it was willing to work with the Jade Flute and Sunset Mountains of the seven divine mountains.

Of the divine mountains, the lords of Buddha and Sky Roc Mountain were dead. The rest of the mountains still stood, but they kept a much lower profile than before and no longer appeared in the public eye.

The lord of Yonder Mountain was very strong and on good terms with the three great organizations. Sky Sword Mountain was Sky Sword's faction and he'd been working on Li Hao's behalf before the young man rose to prominence. Phoenix Mountain belonged to monster spirits. The remaining two mountains stayed under the radar in comparison—the key reason was that they didn't pit themselves against Li Hao, so he wasn't very familiar with them.

It wasn't until the City of Supernaturals announced a partnership that Li Hao learned a bit more about them. Plainly, the appearance of three seven element Arcanus exerted some pressure on these premier powerhouses. They chose to band together at this time.

The members of this latest alliance all had their own powerhouses; their leaders were listed on the Arcanus Ranking. The one from the City of Supernaturals was quite strong, and while the other two mountain lords hadn't been included in the ranking before, Li Hao did so in his version. His guess was that even though they were weaker, they would improve at a rapid clip now that they knew the layout of the world.

Perhaps they'd reach five or six elements soon.

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The factions of Skystar Dynasty changed as unpredictably as the wind and clouds. Someone rose and another fell in the blink of an eye, while others chose to ally with each other. Li Hao's appearance had set everything in motion. If it wasn't for this, they would all choose to stretch their muscles after the second awakening—not now.

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Inside Skystar City.

Li Hao kept himself busy as he waited for news of the Wind and Cloud Pavilion. He ignored all of the minutiae around him—Deputy Zhou and the rest could take care of those tasks for him. He bent his mind to studying the supernatural locks. Resolving the issue of the physical body was a vital undertaking at hand.

His second priority was to comprehend the auras of the wind, thunder, light, and dark. He postulated that such methods like the Wind Thunder Sword, Light Sword, and Ghost Shadow Sword would lead him straight to their associated secret arts. To him, comprehending an aura was just a matter of time. The key was how long it might take him.

When would the second awakening take place? If it spontaneously erupted throughout the land and gave rise to a myriad of heavyweights, then everyone's strength in the modern world would just make them the equivalent of ants compared to the truly powerful.

There's also Battle Heaven to consider...

Should he seek out General Pagoda and revive the tree? He hesitated as a variety of thoughts ran through his mind.

Someone came back before long—the constantly squabbling Southern Fist and Northern Fist. They came back with the director of the Sagittarius province Night Watchers.

Inside the great hall.

The two threw the middle-aged man to the ground like a sack of potatoes.

“Cough cough cough.” He spat blood and despaired when he saw Li Hao standing over him.
“Commander, I...”

Li Hao didn’t say a word; Yao Si arrived before long and sighed when he saw the man on the ground.

“Out with it, what have you done with the Wind and Cloud Pavilion? Tell us everything you know. You will die, but your family will be taken care of.” Yao Si turned to Li Hao. “This man joined the Night Watchers ten years ago and once served by my side.”

Despair deepened in the Night Watcher director on the ground. Could not even Yao Si save himself?

Li Hao didn’t say a word. This one had been given up by Deputy Wu of South Peak. The deputy had gone on the run to somewhere—the Wind and Cloud Pavilion would naturally take revenge on him. There was no need for the young man to do anything and truth be told, he’d left the deputy alive on purpose.

Deputy Wu was an Arcanus and wouldn’t die so easily if he ran off ahead of time. The pavilion might have to utilize their treasure to lock on to the man’s position. Perhaps Li Hao could use him as bait to further his own investigation.

It didn’t matter that Li Hao didn’t know where he’d run off to. When the fighting broke out, the young man would quickly receive word since he now spearheaded the Night Watchers of the central region. The difficulty level would be further lowered with the Inspectorate’s coordination.

Ashen-faced, the Night Watcher director on the ground said with resignation, “I only collaborated with the Wind and Cloud Pavilion, I haven’t defected to them...”

“There’s no need to explain,” Yao Si said calmly. “I know your personality and how you are a prudent person. You wouldn’t brashly coordinate with another faction, not unless you thought they were stronger than me and the Night Watchers! They must’ve sent one of their powerhouses to you or even brought you to their headquarters. Otherwise, with your level of knowledge in all these years of experience, you wouldn’t seek help from them that easily.”

“...the director knows me well,” the man agreed helplessly. Yao Si knew him so well that the man would be able to tell if he was lying. “Is there really no hope of making it out of this alive, Commander Li, Director Yao?”

“You are of the Night Watchers. There would be hope if it was anyone else,” Yao Si said coolly. “Did you forget about the vow you took when you joined the Night Watchers?”

“I didn’t, but... director... In this age of ancient powerhouses dominating the world, what is the point in us fighting and putting our best efforts forward?”

“Commander Li is strong now and the Skystar Commander Office is supported on all sides, with Silver Moon and the Night Watchers leaning toward him as well, but what do we do once the ancient powerhouses can set foot in our world?” The man looked at them, greatly depressed. “How are we to fight in an age where we do not see hope?”

There was no hope!

Hope might be sparked in ordinary people when they saw how strong the Skystar Commander Office was, but it would not flourish in heavyweights. They knew that this time period was overshadowed by the ancient civilization.

“I would think so too in an earlier time, that our age is a hopeless one,” Yao Si answered calmly. “But now, I understand that man is the maker of his own fate! So what of the ancient civilization? Additionally, they’re just a bunch of existences lingering from the ancient civilization, they’re not from the peak of that time either!”

“It’s easy for the director to say so...” The man snorted with laughter, fully letting loose with some contempt. “Man is the maker of his own fate?”

What kind of joke was that?

“If it’s that simple, why has the director cloistered himself during these five years? It’s because you were afraid! How can the rest of us not be afraid when you are?” The man looked at Yao Si. “The director stayed on the sidelines when Yellow Dragon ran the Night Watchers like his personal gang. What were we supposed to do? We could only throw ourselves under the banner of a major faction. The three great organizations didn’t dare take me in because I might be a spy due to being a Night Watcher. It was the Wind and Cloud Pavilion that extended an olive branch to me. I could only choose to accept it.”

“...perhaps you are right,” Yao Si replied after momentary silence. “I have indeed disappointed many people over these five years. Li Hao once lectured me on that. Although I was the faith of the Night Watchers, even I chose to concede. What would that do to others? I extinguished the last trace of passion in the agency...”

It drove the point home even further when one of his vaunted subordinates said that his seclusion disappointed them. Perhaps my compromises throughout these five years have been a mistake.

At least he was awake now.

“If you’ve only given information to the Wind and Cloud Pavilion these years and have not done anything else, I can ask for mercy on your behalf after I look into it. The pavilion has not wreaked great havoc yet, so you...”

“Forget it, I don’t need the director to worry on my behalf!” snorted the man. “Done anything? What counts as a crime? Colluding with the three great organizations? Killing civilians? Stealing and looting? If they count, then there is no mercy to be had for me.

“Commander Li hates evil and wrongdoers, but do you know how many like me are out there? Too many! Can you kill them all? If I should die, then half of the supernaturals in the world should die as well!

“Why don’t you go and pacify the City of Supernaturals?! They chose a prime location with good feng shui and threw out the local residents so their people could move in. Those who didn’t leave were slaughtered and those who did so had to wander around the wilderness in the dead of winter. The corpses of the original inhabitants could be found all throughout the land that year.

“The nine ministries watched from the sidelines, as did the royal family. Should they all be killed? The commander has killed a lot of people, but can you kill them all?” jeered the man. “Such are the times, what would you have us do in them? All of these factions have plant spirits and animals supporting them. You should kill them if you want to end them all, but can you?”

Li Hao didn’t say a word, whereas Yao Si sighed. “There is nothing you cannot do so long as you are willing to!”

“What a joke!”

Li Hao coughed, interrupting their conversation. “That’s enough, this squabbling isn’t useful. Do you know enough about the Wind and Cloud Pavilion? If you do, I can consider showing you a few things. If not, I’ll send you on your way. Those you speak of won’t meet with good ends either!”

The man fell silent and looked at Li Hao for a long moment. He smiled. “I know enough, at least I know more than Wu from South Peak. I know that he sent people to follow the pavilion’s representatives, but his people’s methods were too crude. Don’t forget, the Night Watchers are experts in this field!”

Li Hao smiled and nodded. “Very well, take him to the ruins then, Director Yao!”

Yao Si was surprised, but quickly led the man to the rear yard with a nod. The death of a plant spirit would be incredibly stunning for modern supernaturals.

“Does that guy know anything?” He Yong asked with bafflement after they left. The man wasn’t strong and had just barely made it to Arcanus, which made him similar to that Deputy Wu. The deputy hadn’t known much. While the pavilion had selected their people, they didn’t seem ready to make use of their investments yet. Therefore, these people knew very little about the Wind and Cloud Pavilion.

“I don’t know and it doesn’t matter. We’ll just keep investigating if he doesn’t. It’s also good that we’ve eliminated two of their Arcanus.”

The group chatted idly; Yao Si returned with the man after almost half an hour. The branch director was stunned speechless and had trouble collecting his thoughts. So plant spirits could die! The one that supported the Ministry of the Judiciary was dead! He stared at Li Hao upon his return and said slowly after a while, “Commander... I see another plant spirit there... I would like to ask you a question.”

“Speak.”

“Are you... going to build a new dynasty... or one of the ancient civilization?”

Chapter 842: Intelligence Reports (II)

Li Hao furrowed his brows.

“The commander has killed an incredible existence.” The director of the Sagittarius Night Watchers set his jaw. “But the ancient civilization is still a participating factor in your affairs. The commander is the heir of the eight families and as such, bears the heritage of ancient civilization! This wouldn’t mean much as all of humanity stems from the ancient civilization in this age. But I would like to know what the commander’s final pursuit is. Do you seek to build a new dynasty of this era or continue to depend on the power of ancient existences in Silver Moon?”

“That’s an interesting question!” Li Hao laughed and didn’t need to think it over. “I will build a new nation wholly of this era, of course! My dealings with the ancient civilization are just that of partnership and mutual benefit. I admire their mentality, but they will not be permitted to exercise further control over this age!

“Much of the chaos rocking our world has to do with them. I will distill the essence and discard the dross. We happily welcome those who are willing to help us and eliminate all those who are here to cause trouble!

“The ancient civilization cannot be lumped together either,” Li Hao said solemnly. “But one thing I am certain of, and it is that this era belongs to us! I can help them if they need help—we can work together in reciprocal relationships. But I will handle matters myself as soon as anything else is involved!”

The man sank into deep thought. “Is the commander building the Skystar Martial Academy to facilitate supernatural access for civilians? Are you creating a venue through which we can cross social classes?”

“Yes.” Li Hao inclined his head. “But that is only the start. There will be changes made to the basic necessities of life later on and the propagation of new technologies. Education will also be reformed. I may not announce anything for the moment, but I’ll commence all of this after I eliminate a certain portion of people!”

“Then factions such as the City of Supernaturals...” raised the man after some more thought.

“I’ll take care of them one by one in a few days!”

“I believe you!” smiled the man. There was no way to not believe Li Hao. While people of this age worked toward finding a backer, Li Hao and his companions had already killed someone’s backer. This was an immense display of determination!

The Sagittarius Night Watcher director breathed out, feeling much more at ease. “I’m not afraid of death, I’m afraid of an undeserved death! A begrudging death! You can ask Director Yao how many of the three great organizations I killed as a Night Watcher! I say this not to demand praise, but to say that I will not go willingly to my death if those more evil than me do not die!

“Since all of them are on the commander’s hit list, then I rest reassured.”

Death was not frightening, what was most terrifying to the director was if the evildoers did not die. He would not rest in peace if that occurred.

“Does the commander have pen and paper?”

Li Hao produced both with a quick grab in the air. The man quickly wrote name after name and notes behind them. “The Wind and Cloud Pavilion came to me because of my identity as a Night Watcher. I could supply large quantities of intelligence to them. Their networks are not well developed in the outside world—they’ve relied solely on me these years.”

As a Night Watcher director of a province situated in the central region, the man was very capable.

“I even developed some agents for them, while some came through their own efforts. I had my people follow them all along, however. This is what I know. I don’t know if there are others, but these ones have been working for the pavilion all this time.

“Additionally, I once visited their headquarters. I don’t know where it is exactly, but it should be between South Peak and Sagittarius. I entered their ruin in a sealed state.” He quickly drew the outline of a city on another piece of paper. “This is what their ruin looks like—it’s a city. There are a lot of people inside. I met at least five hundred, and they were all alive!”

He delineated a manor at the center of the city. “This is where their city lord lives and... it’s possible that the city lord is an ancient human!”

“An ancient human??” Li Hao jerked with shock. How was that possible?! Even the Saints of ancient humanity had decomposed. Was the master of the Wind and Cloud Pavilion stronger than the Saint level?

“I’m not sure, I’ve only met them once, and from a distance at that. I came to that conclusion through some of his mannerisms, behavior, and a few words. Even if he isn’t, there must be an

ancient human alive. The commander must be careful of this. I say this because I suspect the pavilion master has been instructed by an ancient human.

“He did not know much about current events. His knowledge of our age seems to come from others. His grasp of ancient occurrences, however, was thorough. That was apparent even without extended conversation...”

Although the man wasn’t certain, Li Hao inclined his head. “Were there plant spirits?”

“Yes!” The man nodded. “There was a massive tree in the rear yard of the manor. I happened to witness an interaction between the two and saw that the tree was very polite toward the pavilion master. It wasn’t the same imperative attitude that we typically see from plant spirits.

“Hence, that’s another reason why I assumed their leader is an ancient human. I spent three days in the city, watching them demonstrate their might. They have many heavyweights and it’s been a few years since I visited. They should be stronger now...”

“If the commander wishes to exterminate them, entering their ruins might not be a good choice.” That was the man’s opinion despite Li Hao’s track record of already killing an ancient plant spirit. The Wind and Cloud Pavilion had their own and possibly an ancient human powerhouse.

“Right, there’s another point. They wanted me to keep an eye on Red Moon and for me to investigate the organization. They seemed to be wary of it, so the plant spirit or ancient force behind Red Moon ought to be very strong as well!”

Li Hao nodded again. The man had drawn the entire city and written down a list of names.

“This is all I know,” he concluded. “I’ve drawn the rough location of their ruin. Another key detail is that they send people out of the ruins to purchase necessities once every month, but they do not buy from us...”

“My own investigations show that they should be purchasing from somewhere in South Peak or Sagittarius, but my authorization is insufficient to tell me where and I don’t dare raise a fuss looking into it. The commander can start from this angle as they need to supply approximately five hundred people for an entire month. That’s a large transaction that ought to be easily filtered for.

“It’s not just them, but all factions that have a department like this. But whether it’s the three great organizations or City of Supernaturals, their transactions are recorded in open books. Hence, there’s no need to look into them. The Wind and Cloud Pavilion keeps theirs under wraps, but there should still be clues.

“They don’t settle their accounts with star coins, but mysterious power stones. Therefore, there must be a large merchant company servicing them. Ordinary people don’t dare accept transactions conducted in mysterious power stones, so you should be able to narrow down the search field!”

Li Hao’s eyes darted around rapidly in quick thought. As expected of someone who was a Night Watcher director! Anyone who reached his position didn’t do so on the basis of strength alone, but through true ability. If the man had wanted to pursue the Wind and Cloud Pavilion, he might’ve plumbed their depths long ago.

“And another thing is that they have a unique quirk of loving vegetables. They don’t really care about meat, but they have high standards when it comes to vegetables. That will make it easier to identify their partner!

“This organization has existed for more than ten years, so their traces ought to be very apparent.”

Li Hao agreed. It would be easy to locate the other with this information, particularly as it was the dead of winter. There were few vegetable merchants around, it was easy to target which merchant companies had a ready supply. He was beginning to treasure this talent in front of him.

“Director Yao, I’ve followed you for many years.” The man looked at Yao Si. “There is nothing more to say now, but I have a few words for you...”

“Go ahead.”

“You shouldn’t be a leader, Director Yao.” The man smiled. “You aren’t qualified as you’re too indecisive. It’s better for you to be a martial blockhead. You broke a lot of hearts over these years!”

Yao Si’s expression shifted; blood welled up in the man’s mouth. He laughed as his organs crumbled away. “I will end myself, there is no need for the rest of you to take action! I placed myself under the Wind and Cloud Pavilion’s banner only because... I could see no hope! There was no light! If this had been a peaceful era... I think... I could’ve been an upright official.

“What a pity that there is no chance for that... Today... perhaps... there is a wisp of hope. Commander Li, this era... is too dark. The darkness does not come from the nine ministries or the royal family... but the remnants of the ancient civilization that wish to start anew... Setting Silver Moon aside, the commander... should kill all of the plant spirits and beasts in Skystar City!”

Bam!

Li Hao reached out as the man’s body exploded and quickly stitched it back together. The young man was silent, immensely touched by the late director’s words. He’d been thinking of killing the nine ministries and royal family, but someone told him now that his thinking was incorrect. The source was not here. It lay with the ancient plant spirits and beasts, even the ancient humans.

Those were the chief offenders manipulating the nine ministries and royal family. They deserved death.

Li Hao closed his eyes. Yao Si was feeling equally conflicted and remained quiet. His old subordinate had committed suicide, saying that he wasn’t afraid of death, but of a wrongful death. He would only rest in peace if Li Hao killed an even more wicked existence.

Was the man a good person?

No.

According to his testimony, he'd killed civilians, raided and looted others, killed those of the three great organizations, but also colluded with him. And yet, he also said that it wasn't that he wanted to do so, but that the times had required him to be so.

Li Hao took a deep breath. "What was his name?"

"Chen Hai."

"Bury him and announce that he died during a mission!"

Yao Si nodded.

"And then arrest everyone on the list!" Li Hao ordered coolly. "Locate the Wind and Cloud Pavilion according to the information he provided. We'll seal off their ruin if we can't get at them and pen them inside!"

It would've been a difficult task to track down the Wind and Cloud Pavilion, but the scope of the task was much smaller with Chen Hai's information. It would be quite easy to find the organization now. However, they remained thorny opponents.

Li Hao furrowed his brows. He might actually have to make a trip to Battle Heaven. He might need more than the little tree. If General Pagoda was willing to offer a replica, that would add an Immortal or even Saint reinforcement to his side.

But... would the general agree to it?

A myriad of thoughts ran through the young man's head, he decided to just give it a try. Those outside swiftly departed, as did Yao Si to commence his investigation.

Chapter 843: Domain (I)

Yuan Shuo entered Skystar City at the same time. He did so openly on this visit; various factions received word as soon as he walked through the city gates. There wasn't much wariness against the old man these days. People's only concern was that his disciple was quite unusual. For once, Yuan Shuo enjoyed the treatment of being able to saunter into a city without anyone daring to cause trouble for him. The only regret he felt was that he hadn't accomplished this through his own merits, but through his disciple. Damn if that wasn't embarrassing!

.....

The Skystar Commander Office.

Li Hao wordlessly greeted his master and Jadelight Sword's arrival. His master had the habit of picking the best timing! He arrived as soon as they finished divvying up the spoils. There would've been a share for you if you'd come just three days earlier!

Indeed, it was three days since the group had defeated the coconut tree. It was only now that Yuan Shuo showed himself.

"Teacher!"

Yuan Shuo looked at Li Hao and inclined his head. "Not bad!"

Li Hao also sized up the old man with a twinkle in his eye. His teacher seemed to be stronger than before. That was some nice improvement for these two weeks!

Yuan Shuo didn't respond and treated the complex like his home. He headed for the main hall.

“Have you opened all of your supernatural locks?” he asked as he walked.

“Yep.”

“You were in too much of a rush!” sighed Yuan Shuo.

“The enemy was too strong.”

“That too.” Yuan Shuo nodded. The enemy was very strong, but it also had to do with Li Hao being too hasty. This disciple of his was always in a rush. “I might’ve been able to help you return to martial dao in another few days.” He still found the young man’s situation slightly regretful.

“Is that important, teacher?” Li Hao smiled.

When they last communicated through the pendants, Yuan Shuo had a hunch that Li Hao might snap his supernatural locks. He hadn’t thought it would take place so quickly. The locks might still be intact if he’d emerged from the ruins earlier.

Yuan Shuo walked into the main hall and sat down, grabbing a tea cup for refreshment.

“That’s Martial Uncle Southern Fist’s.”

“Is this his house?” Yuan Shuo flicked a glance at Li Hao.

“.....” The young man smiled and didn’t say anything else.

Yuan Shuo didn’t mind the cup’s former user and continued drinking. He spat with disgust after a while, “Does He Yong not brush his teeth?”

“.....” Li Hao grinned.

“You mentioned last time that you wanted to resolve the issue of making mysterious power become part of the body,” Yuan Shuo cut straight to the chase. “I see there’s only a faint sheen of mysterious power coming from your body now. Have you solved the problem?”

“More or less.” Li Hao nodded. “I’ve been wanting to tell teacher, but I haven’t been able to get in touch with you.”

“You said before that the aura and mysterious power can coexist at the same time,” Yuan Shuo asked slowly after some thought. “Have you accomplished that? I don’t sense any aura coming from you. Whether it’s internal force or mysterious power, neither of the two matter. The key for martial masters of our age lies in the aura!

“I’m not saying that we must have internal force to be a martial master. Martial masters do not care about that. Let’s put it this way, there is a thousand years of history behind martial dao by our current age. It existed at the start of the Star Era.

“Generation upon generation of humans improved on martial dao until we ultimately created the aura. One could say that it is the collective wisdom of a thousand years of Silver Moon denizens. They determined the most suitable way of cultivation for current humans.” Yuan Shuo began a lecture of martial dao origins for his student. “After the ancient civilization fell silent, several rounds of obstacles rolled through Silver Moon and there was even a period of great stillness. It wasn’t until the start of the Star Era calendar that we truly built a new civilization.

“Humanity did so to adapt to the adverse environment. Keep in mind that when there was no energy throughout the land, it was very difficult to become a powerhouse in Late Martial. Later on, humans discovered the aura—it did not require energy!

“This is a unique system that evolved out of necessity in the end times, a period in which there was no energy!”

Li Hao's eyes widened. The aura did not require energy. Martial masters needed energy, but they could also replenish their bodies through eating food.

"You are still a martial master so long as your aura exists..."

"It exists!" Li Hao nodded, drawing a raised eyebrow from his teacher. "I combined all of my energy into a special force. My aura is still there..."

"Show me!"

Li Hao promptly summoned the fire aura. A 'fire' character floated in front of Yuan Shuo. The old man's eyes narrowed as he grabbed it.

Boom!

The fire aura erupted with a tiger roar. Yuan Shuo frowned slightly and manifested a giant ape with a wave of his hand.

Bam!

Tiger and ape collided into each other. Yuan Shuo was plainly weaker, but the giant ape abruptly ballooned to twice its size. A black bear and a small deer also manifested, creating a creature that didn't resemble any particular animal.

The strange amalgamation burst forth with incredible strength. The five auras became one and crashed down on the tiger with a loud rumble!

Yuan Shuo exhaled heavily and laughed when he saw the tiger give up the struggle. "Interesting!" He looked at Li Hao. "This is the Tranquil Star art from the ancient civilization, right?"

Intrigued, he grabbed the character for a closer look. Li Hao kept a strong grip on the tiger to make sure that it wouldn't struggle. Yuan Shuo employed both mind intent and his own aura to investigate this new contraption.

"This is indeed interesting. Mysterious power, internal force, blood qi, mind intent, and the aura have nothing to do together and cannot coexist. But they're fused as one in this thing. The aura is the key, it is the medium for everything. The aura is as if a great dao, there is nothing without it..." Yuan Shuo keenly observed the supernatural character.

Li Hao let him do as he wished. That this was Yuan Shuo's first priority after arriving was in line with Yuan Shuo's style. The young man turned his attention to greeting Jadelight Sword. "Martial Aunt Jadelight, did you obtain the second half of the Jadelight method?"

He'd noted that Jadelight's strength also showed marked improvement. But strictly speaking, she'd just barely managed to set foot into the stage of saturating her supernatural locks. That meant to say she'd just reached the peak of being a martial master. She wasn't too strong yet and would just barely make it to Arcanus if she snapped her supernatural locks now. It would be a very far reach that might not succeed.

Of course, it was still a vast improvement compared to a few months ago.

Jadelight was an aloof person, but she was polite to Li Hao. "I did, but it's not that suited for my current style. Your master said he'll modify it and is still working on it."

Modify... and you believed him??

Granted, it made sense that she would believe him. Yuan Shuo was very skilled in this area. At the very least, it was better than Jadelight modifying it herself.

"You should have a few more supernatural characters up your sleeves, show them all to me..." Yuan Shuo brought up.

“Teacher, you won’t be able to keep them under control if I bring them all out.”

“.....”

Yuan Shuo directed the full force of his gaze on the young man, as did Li Hao look at his teacher. Three seconds later, he summoned the rest of his characters. A Yuan Shuo with clenched teeth erupted with fury and vented his annoyance via a thorough beating on supernatural characters that Li Hao had purposefully weakened.

The young man smiled and ignored his teacher, opting to drink tea with Jadelight. The two chatted idly as Yuan Shuo began his investigation anew. The supernatural characters were a simple contract, so someone like Yuan Shuo should’ve instantly grasped them. For some reason, he kept studying them.

Li Hao was knowledgeable enough after recent events, he just lacked experience and tempering in the ways of the world. But he let Yuan Shuo be—perhaps his teacher was trying to decide if he wanted to do the same for himself?

The old man poked at the characters and even shoved his own aura into them. It was... highly uncomfortable. The characters were a projection of the body, so with Yuan Shuo shoving his aura inside... It was... eh... slightly shameful. Li Hao regarded his teacher with resignation, what was Yuan Shuo doing?

The pigeon that was Yuan Shuo occupied the sparrow’s nest and utilized his five auras to thrash the ferocious tiger. He beat the tiger so badly that Li Hao’s fire aura wanted to rage with fury.

“This development of yours doesn’t work!” Yuan Shuo frowned. “You’ve got one character corresponding to one aura. How many auras will you need to comprehend before you succeed?”

The man thought for a bit. “If you want to rapidly improve, I recommend you abandon the other auras and keep only one, using one to transform into a myriad of others...”

“That’s what Martial Uncle Hong does!”

“It’s an awful idea!” Yuan Shuo immediately changed his tune. “I was just saying that earlier, you cannot do so at any cost!”

“.....” Li Hao nearly burst out laughing. You were just saying that I should abandon all of my other auras. But his teacher’s thoughts happened to coincide with Hong Yitang’s. The young man did want to smile at that. What a coincidence!

Yuan Shuo had finished his study of the characters and turned over his thoughts. “Although the method is simple and even a little crude, I have to say that it’s innovative to fashion them into words and have the aura be the medium. You even took pointers from the Incantation of the Blade of Blood and ultimate art Tranquil Star. That’s very good!”

The old man rarely praised people, but he voiced a few compliments for his student’s work. He sat in thought for a bit.

“This undoes some of the barriers between martial masters and supernaturals, combining the two roads as one.” Yuan Shuo sank back into contemplation and said nothing for a long time.

Li Hao and Jadelight Sword waited quietly by the side—they waited for half an hour.

“Have you tried connecting to the heavenly aura?”

Li Hao blinked. What heavenly aura?

Yuan Shuo frowned to see his student at a loss. “When I told you about the Breathing Method of the Five Styles, I also mentioned the modified Five Styles. Have you not studied them?”

Li Hao remained silent.

“Or perhaps you think that my Five Styles does not measure up to the secret arts of the ancient civilization, that a modern human cannot create a secret art more powerful. Is that so?”

“Not at all...” Li Hao hastily said.

“Of course you do!” Yuan Shuo laughed. “There’s nothing wrong with thinking that either. The limit of my Five Styles is Refiner of Spirit, whereas the sky was the limit for the ancient arts. One is in the heavens and the other on the ground, why would you think much of my methods?”

Chapter 844: Domain (II)

“Teacher, I really didn’t mean it like that,” Li Hao said with resignation. Yuan Shuo didn’t care either way.

“Just keep in mind that while my Five Styles is less than ancient knowledge, it is most suited for the world today and modern humans!” Yuan Shuo said calmly.

There was nothing to argue about the fact that his secret art was not as impressive as that of ancient techniques. His, however, was more suited for modern humans.

“I told you last time that the aura does not exist in a vacuum.” Yuan Shuo frowned. “It melds with heaven and earth, summoning the winds and rain like it is an esoteric, arcane ability. Everything in the world is attached to the aura!”

“Dao is not of the person. You need to know that you have not reached the step of defining dao by yourself!” Yuan Shuo looked at his student. “I am gratified that you modified a method and created the supernatural characters. That means you have your own thoughts, which is wonderful. As your teacher, I also have your best interests in mind. The key to the Five Styles method lies with incorporating the aura into heaven and earth!”

“As they say, a just cause enjoys abundant support while an unjust cause finds little support. This saying is also related to the cultivation of martial masters and the aura. Do not keep the aura hidden away all the time. There are advantages to that, but also drawbacks...”

“You should know that being of this world, you will ultimately return to it. When martial masters die, their aura scatters through the world for later descendants to comprehend...”

“So you mean...” Li Hao suddenly grasped some of what his teacher was saying.

“Heaven and earth is nature, as is dao!” Yuan Shuo intoned. “You have some reflections, but you have not yet reached that stage. Keep in mind that this world is much stronger and much more natural than you!

“It’s not good for your auras to remain in hiding forever. You’ve only refined the auras into your body. I wanted you to refine them into your supernatural locks before, but your locks have been devoured. Some changes need to be made, you can no longer walk the path of refining the spirit. You need to change to a new medium for the Refiner of Spirit level...”

“Wait, teacher, it’s more that my auras have discovered the secondary dimension that the supernatural locks reside in. I’ve recently assimilated them into that area...”

Yuan Shuo blinked; Li Hao quickly explained his latest discovery. The old man sank into deep thought once more. So the secondary dimension was where the supernatural locks resided. He’d rather underestimated his disciple.

“Concealing the intent within the keys... that makes sense,” he said after a while. “But that is not a suitable course of action for the current you. I recommend that you nurture your auras outside your body in your current state.”

“Outside my body?”

Yuan Shuo summoned a gout of flame with a grasp of his hand, then raindrops a second later.

“Nurture them outside, within the world! Meld them into heaven and earth! I’ll study the secondary

dimension that you mentioned. I don't have experience in this area, but I have experience in nurturing auras.

"There is wind, fire, and water in the world. All of this is where the aura stems from. The auras of heaven and earth are the strongest auras. Your auras are just a tiny portion of this vast expanse. You must conscientiously comprehend it all and incorporate it into yourself so that you can become part of this world!

"Your current state is an even better proposition!" Yuan Shuo smiled. "Since you've created the supernatural characters, it will be much easier for you to nurture your auras and others. Your auras aren't strong enough, after all."

"How do I do that?" Li Hao didn't quite understand.

"Did you sense the ripples of the earth when you comprehended the earth aura, a certain kind of rhythm...?"

Li Hao nodded.

"That's it then," Yuan Shuo chuckled. "You can enter that state once more and incorporate your earth aura into the rhythm. You will be part of the earth from then on."

The old man reached out and flared a killing intent. "Look, this is the metal aura! I've incorporated all of my auras into the world lately. I mentioned this to you when I taught you the Breathing Method of the Five Styles, but I didn't explain the concept that clearly. You yourself also didn't view it with much importance..."

Li Hao looked around sheepishly. How was I supposed to know I should research it?

"Also, I sense that your auras are somehow melding together," Yuan Shuo said in a strange tone. "Have you learned something else that is forcing them together?"

Li Hao knew that this had to do with events of Evenround Martial. He had indeed tried fusing his auras together, but he'd yet to fully succeed.

Yuan Shuo knew he'd guessed correctly when he read the expression on the young man's face. However, Li Hao couldn't confirm it for his teacher since there was a restriction on sharing that knowledge. The old man didn't mind.

"Your assimilation is a bit forced, but it's a good sign. You'll be able to easily complete the process once you incorporate them into the world. Try comprehending the auras again once you have that foundation. Why do wind, fire, water, and electricity coexist in the world? They are auras of nature, how do they live in tandem? Put yourself in the shoes of heaven and earth and use your imagination. If you were the world, how would you integrate them into your body?"

Li Hao bobbed his head up and down, which drew an eye roll from Yuan Shuo. "What are you just nodding for? Try it!!"

The young man jerked with awkwardness. His teacher's temper was poor lately, there was no sign of the charitable man that he once was. But... should he give it a try? After some consideration, he assessed his five supernatural characters. The one of 'earth' might be more suitable. So was he supposed to become part of the world and sense the ripples of the earth?

He recalled his mental journey when he first grasped the earth aura and immersed himself back in it. Ripples started undulating over the 'earth' character; they called out to the earth. The ground beneath the Skystar Commander Office seemed to tremble—mundanes would not feel it, only martial masters with the aura would be able to sense a nebulous something.

The ground was shaking in rhythmic fashion. Meanwhile, a peculiar scene played out in Li Hao's mind's eye. Was the shaking of the earth... its breathing? And where was his supernatural character supposed to be nurtured?

"Follow the ripples of the earth, your character is part of it," came Yuan Shuo's voice in his ear. "It exudes its own ripples. Utilize the ripples to incorporate the character via a natural fashion..."

The supernatural character undulated with ripples as Li Hao took in his teacher's instructions. The ripples between the character and the earth gradually melded as one. He opened his eyes when the ripples disappeared and the character within his body also vanished.

However, he could sense it beneath his feet. He wasn't sure as to exactly where it was; it might be inside the ground. It might just be going for a ride as it followed the ripples. How interesting! He'd never tried this before. In this moment, he truly felt that he'd become one with the earth.

Li Hao vanished when his feet shifted. He reappeared in front of the great hall—earth bending!

The young man blinked. This was a supernatural skill that he hadn't known before. He didn't mind that he couldn't employ it as this wasn't learned supernatural knowledge. It was an innate talent. He felt that his lack of fanfare into entering the supernatural domain might've been because he went straight to Arcanus from being a martial master.

However, now he understood that it was because he hadn't understood the supernatural enough. He could now bend the earth!

"This is the true supernatural character, the true Arcanus level!" Yuan Shuo smiled. "Your auras were limited by yourself before, so how were you an Arcanus? Is the Arcanus level simply an explosion of strength?"

"Your thinking was too narrow!" Yuan Shuo shook his head. "Earth bending is just the most basic skill. Do you know how long it took for me to travel here from Silver Moon? One day! If it wasn't for Jadelight slowing me down, it would only take me half a day to traverse five thousand kilometers! This is what it means to be an Arcanus!"

He was rather displeased and contemptuous at the modern iteration of Arcanus. "This is a good name for the cultivator level and the rightful name since this is a level of the esoteric and obscure, but these supernaturals erroneously shift their focus to an eruption of strength at this point. They forget the core nature of being supernatural!

“A flare in strength is the basic, the myriad of changes is the core of being an Arcanus! How are you to be one without becoming part of nature? They can do so when they’re weak, but not when they’re strong. Do you know why?”

“That’s... right... I’ve noticed that the Arcanus powerhouses lack the earth or wood bending skills they possess at the lower levels. Why is that?”

“Because their self consciousness has grown stronger!” Yuan Shuo explained. “Their potential wasn’t under control before, but they manage to bring some of it to heel at this level. But they turn their back on nature when they do so!

“Supernaturals may not have an aura, but that doesn’t mean they lack a dao! They have their own dao, but when they seek to control more of their body, the further they travel from dao!”

Li Hao nodded, then suddenly smiled. “Teacher, do you mean that if I incorporate all of my auras into nature, I’ll be able to transform into anything and do everything?”

“The caveat is that you have to comprehend endless auras first!” Yuan Shuo pinned as well. “Try the other characters and then try fusing them once they’re all part of the world. Follow the natural order of things. See how the earth and water interact, how earth and plants work together, then how light and darkness supersede each other...”

Li Hao continued to nod. His teacher brought new inspiration each time he appeared. The young man tried incorporating all of his characters into the world and slowly discovered something new. When his five characters were part of nature, he suddenly discovered an enclosed space around him of the five elements. Metal, wood, water, fire, and earth existed in his surroundings.

It took the work of a thought to feel that he’d been isolated, then the work of another thought to vanish on the spot. The earth’s rhythm was apparent in front of him. He vanished on the spot with a flash, then reappeared at the entrance to the Inspectorate.

Chen Zhongtian immediately appeared when he sensed a visitor; he was surprised to see Li Hao pop out. The young man looked at him and vanished when the old man thought of offering a greeting.

“What the?” blinked Chen Zhongtian. “Space?”

The old man frowned and extended his senses with confusion. Earth bending? He didn’t get it. Was Li Hao improving again?

.....

Li Hao returned to the Skystar Commander Office; Yuan Shuo was drinking tea again.

“Teacher, it’s strange, there seems to be... something... after the five elements are incorporated into the world...” mentioned the puzzled young man.

“It’s your domain!” laughed Yuan Shuo. “Have you sensed that you’re trapped in a small world? Don’t think too much about it, that’s the domain of your perspective! It is your unique world!”

“An inner world?” Li Hao murmured to himself.

Chapter 845: Domain (III)

“It’s not an inner world.” Yuan Shuo shook his head. “I’ve heard about that concept, that’s the path of the ancient Human King. Ours... counts as an outer world at most! You’re so weak, how can you have an inner world? You wouldn’t be a weakling then, you’d be the ancient Human King!”

“You can call this an outer world or a domain, it doesn’t matter. Melding your aura into the world and building your domain... then gradually enlarging it is the process of strengthening your aura. When your aura occupies the entire world and turns the world into your own, hmm, that would be an inner world!”

“.....” Li Hao gaped. “Occupy the entire world?”

“What?” laughed Yuan Shuo. “Can you not do it? That’s your goal, I’m not saying you have to do it right away. Just work toward that goal!”

He was only setting a target, he wasn’t saying that his student really had to take over the entire world. Li Hao, on the other hand, was in a daze about what he’d heard. Inner world, outer world, domain, the secondary dimension of the human body...

A variety of complicated thoughts rose in his mind.

“Go for that target,” Yuan Shuo continued. “For example, your character of light can absolutely become the sun of the world in the future. Your character of darkness can become the moon. Your character of fire will be the spark of heaven and earth, your character of wood will populate all forests beneath the heavens. Earth will become the ground...”

Li Hao’s heart shook. Was this... possible? An inner world... The Human King was said to have created his inner world; his teacher’s words painted a similar picture.

“Your dao of supernatural characters is very interesting and innovative. You should continue developing it and not just think that you are stronger because you collect more characters. You don’t even know how to use them at present, how are you to continue developing them? Your base must be stable! Don’t be in a rush to create new characters...”

“The five elements is already a tiny circulation system. Solidify that foundation first! You’ll find that although you’re a five element Arcanus, you’ll be able to trounce seven, eight, or nine elements...”

“Teacher, what... level can you fight at right now?” Li Hao couldn’t help his curiosity.

“I’ve only completed a small circulation of the five elements.” Yuan Shuo delivered his response without boasting. “But I’m still confined to the supernatural locks and fusion of the five elements. Based on the world’s current hierarchy of power, I’ve just saturated nine locks. It puts me on the

same level as Light Sword and the others, back when they hadn't broken their locks. However, I won't be afraid of any regular Arcanus!"

He could just manage to withstand Arcanus powerhouses during their last encounter, so the improvement in his abilities didn't feel that pronounced. However, Li Hao was surprised to hear his teacher say that he had only reached saturation of nine locks. Yao Si and the others could barely manage Arcanus when they attained saturation of eleven locks.

"You've given me some inspiration, though," Yuan Shuo continued. "Such is martial dao. You improve, I improve, everyone improves together. We integrate each other's virtues to make for greater room for improvement.

"I'll give it a try myself," the old man said after some thought. "But I may not have the same results. We'll know after I try it out!"

Li Hao nodded, his emotions frothing with excitement. The domain! He didn't care whether or not his teacher would make the attempt. No one would touch his teacher while he was around. He was more interested in experimenting whether he could trap a powerhouse if he formed a small domain with the five elements.

As for melding his auras together, his teacher had said that he only needed to study the auras in more detail and determine precisely how he would combine them. He might accomplish the task very quickly.

"Then my sword aura..."

"Are you finding it less than useful?" laughed Yuan Shuo. "Don't think too much, you're a far cry from the exalted emperors of the ancient civilization. Your sword aura is still very useful. The sword aura focuses on offense—one blow for one world, one blow for one domain. It can trap, it can kill, it can defend. It focuses on holistic development, which I think suits you quite well!"

Li Hao continued to nod.

“So the key lies with the issue of the body...”

“Mmhhh!” Yuan Shuo nodded this time as well. “My breathing method can strengthen the entire body, but it works too slowly at present. The secondary dimension that you speak of may be the key. I’ll need some time to test and verify this...”

“Then I’ll be staying here for a while! Give me five hundred drops of Water of Life, I’ll try some experiments.”

“.....” Li Hao smiled ruefully. “Teacher really has a...”

Large appetite!

“Research is costly!” Yuan Shuo smiled. “It’d be one thing in other times, but thinking of how much you’ve expended on He Yong and the others recently... it’s a waste! You might have better effect if you let me look into things.”

“Then I’ll get five hundred drops as soon as possible.” Li Hao could only acquiesce.

The kid is so rich now! Yuan Shuo inwardly clucked his tongue. Damn he’s really come up in the world! He was damned poor before, but this rich now?

“I hear that you’re in a rush to move against the Wind and Cloud Pavilion, set that aside for now...” Yuan Shuo said. “Focus on your little domain first. You’ll stand a greater chance of success if you succeed. And another thing, wait for me to succeed first. Bring me along when you attack them. I’d like to give it a try too.”

Li Hao laughed with surprise and nodded.

That was all that master and disciple talked about after finally seeing each other. Yuan Shuo found his mouth a bit dry after the conversation and finally recalled someone else nearby.

“Have Li Hao saturate your supernatural locks over the next couple of days.” He looked at Jadelight. “Don’t be in a rush to convert them to supernatural characters. There’s not much meaning in doing the conversion when you’re weak.

“The key still lies with the aura. Nothing is strong when the aura isn’t strong! You should try incorporating the sword aura into the world. Once that is strong, the rest of your strength will soon follow. Although He Yong and them look strong now, they don’t know the heart of the issue and just blindly cultivate.”

Jadelight smiled and inclined her head. Li Hao looked at his teacher, then at Jadelight Sword. His teacher cared quite a great deal about Jadelight. When it comes to me... he just checks in on me every time he emerges from seclusion. He ignores me otherwise and definitely ignores my messages.

Liu Long walked through the doors as Li Hao compared the difference in treatment. “Commander, Professor Yuan, there is a visitor at the door.”

Yuan Shuo blinked. What did it have to do with him?

“It’s Yuan Xingwu!”

A frown crossed Yuan Shuo’s forehead and he fell silent. Li Hao didn’t say anything either. Yuan Xingwu!

“Have him leave!” Yuan Shuo said calmly. “He chose his own path back in the day and he’s walked it well enough. The Ministry of Armed Forces continues to stand strong and that Qi Pingjiang is a peak six element Arcanus. Since he’s made his choice, he should continue to follow it! There’s no

need to consider us and it would just be awkward if we are to meet. Those who betray their masters do not meet with good ends in the martial world.”

“Teacher...” Li Hao looked at Yuan Shuo.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Yuan Shuo sighed and shook his head. “The Ministry of Armed Forces cannot coexist with the Skystar Commander Office! He reaches beyond his ability and wants to be a middleman—there’s no need to give him any attention! We all walk our own paths, I only offer some advice and reminders. Even you don’t have to pay heed to me when you start down your own path in the future.

“I am only your teacher, not your parent. Even if I were your father, I would not interfere in your choices!” He laughed, “Now take me to the ruins. I’m going to cultivate there.”

Li Hao had brought up the matter of killing the plant spirit earlier, Yuan Shuo wouldn’t have demanded five hundred drops otherwise. He wasn’t surprised by the feat; perhaps Yuan Shuo felt that this was only to be expected since Li Hao had created the supernatural characters.

The young man nodded. Liu Long didn’t ask further before leaving to convey their words.

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The front doors of the Skystar Commander Office.

Yuan Xingwu sighed when he heard the response, inclined his body, and left. His master was unwilling to see him. Armed Forces hoped that he could confer with his master and junior brother. It looked like that was out of the question.

He turned to look back at the Skystar Commander Office with a complicated look in his eyes. Armed Forces was one of the more fair and impartial ministries among the nine. He felt that it would be more appropriate for his junior brother to join forces with the ministry to eliminate the

royal family first. There were also large quantities of powerhouses in Armed Forces that'd risen from humble beginnings.

But plainly, his master and junior brother didn't think so.

.....

Li Hao sent Yuan Shuo into the ruins and didn't bother considering how Yuan Shuo would get along with the little tree. His teacher was skilled in this area. As for Jadelight, he simply offered her some cultivation resources. Jadelight seemed more willing to follow in his teacher's footsteps and didn't want to experiment with the supernatural characters. The young man didn't have any thoughts otherwise.

Meanwhile, he started researching the personal domain. This was an interesting topic! His teacher always brought some surprises with him. After Li Hao melded his five auras into the world, he seemed to be able to control the five elements beneath the heavens. Granted, he was limited to a very small range at the moment.

He further discovered that the domain formed by the supernatural characters of the five elements gave him the same feeling as the... ruins did when he drew near it. It was the sensation of being isolated from everything and that he could let loose with even greater strength.

Li Hao quickly found Deputy Zhou. The deputy was very busy lately and also spent his days in discomfort. Due to the weakness of the void, he had to continuously defend against the cutting effect of space.

"Deputy Zhou, come close to me for a second!"

Although mystified, the deputy walked closer to Li Hao. He was immediately perplexed by what he sensed and looked around with astonishment. The world was the same around him, but he seemed to have entered a ruin. What was going on here?

The void no longer cut into him, an effect likewise noticed by Li Hao. He found it strange, but it confirmed his speculation. A similar environment could be found in the ruins, one seemed isolated from the world when within home. Of course, that was a result of the ruins or their powerhouses being very strong.

Chapter 846: Grown Too Bold (I)

Li Hao's tiny domain began to shrink, trapping the frowning deputy.

"Try breaking it, Deputy Zhou!"

Zhou Chuan struck without hesitation, blasting the air with a punch. There was nothing around them, but his fist collided with the sound of metal breaking.

The force of the five elements rushed out as Deputy Zhou breathed out heavily, once more feeling the air press in around him and wanting to cut him to pieces. Li Hao frowned when he sensed the change. Since he'd yet to combine his five auras into one, there were gaps in them, which resulted in the domain being easily shattered.

That was fine, once he succeeded, he felt that just this tiny domain would be able to entrap Deputy Zhou. It was like he'd gained a new toy. He swiftly vanished to spend more time with it.

Deputy Zhou watched him leave, then looked at the direction of the rear yard. Yuan Shuo must have said something to Li Hao. The deputy found the master and disciple duo to be quite the characters. One dared to think of the moon and the other dared reach for it. Li Hao had come up with something new again.

It was a terrifying proposition to be enemies with them.

"The physical body is weak, but if whatever that was can be used as a defensive shield, that will temporarily resolve the issue of a weak body. If that's accomplished, then Li Hao will be nearly invincible in the outside world!"

It wasn't just a simple defensive treasure, but a natural defensive shield formed by the power of heaven and earth. It could prevent the reaction of the void. That meant that Li Hao could bring his full force to bear in any occasion, whereas everyone else had to split their attention with protecting themselves from the void. Even seven element Arcanus would be suppressed!

The young man would trounce almost everyone he fought in the outside world. How long had it taken for Li Hao to improve so much? Deputy Zhou looked emotionally in the young man's direction again. The only beings who posed a threat to him now would be those ancient existences.

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At the same time, the western outskirts. Evenround Martial University.

The Black Armor tilted his head back, seeing through this world to view the one outside.

"Has he grown stronger again?" he asked slowly after a while. Li Hao seemed to have completed another portion of this new dao. Although it was still too weak to the Black Armor, there were minuscule changes in the world outside again.

Everything was becoming ever more interesting!

The Black Armor laughed soundlessly. It was a new age and, as such, a new state of the world. What heights would this age reach?

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In these days, so long as Li Hao didn't raise a fuss, no one would dare cause trouble before the second awakening. No one dared make trouble for the top three of the Arcanus Ranking either. There might have been consequences to the Wind and Cloud Pavilion's original ranking—who wouldn't be afraid if Li Hao was listed as number one and nearly half of the top twenty being Silver Moon martial masters?

But now, a peak six elements Li Hao didn't seem to be a concern. After all, the top three were seven elements. Therefore, when Li Hao no longer stirred up trouble and devoted himself to coalescing his personal domain, all was quiet and at peace beneath the heavens.

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That was only relatively speaking. In reality, Skystar Dynasty was growing ever more chaotic. It was November. Apart from the temperatures being slightly milder in the south, everywhere else was long frozen over. The results of supernatural agitation were on full display.

Food prices soared to new heights in the marketplace. The number of refugees from war increased throughout the land. Although Skystar City was as prosperous and opulent as ever, its denizens could feel the pressures of day to day living. No one was interested in the struggles of the strong or what new conflict had developed. They only wanted to survive.

The outskirts of Skystar City.

Hong Yitang walked down broken streets. So much had happened lately that he was kept busy from day to night. He didn't have any effort to spare for the Skystar Martial Academy, and he wasn't here for the academy either.

He walked down what might be the slums of Skystar City. The surroundings were rundown and ramshackle, at odds with the bustling shine of the thriving city. Children ran through the streets. Although it was close to the end of the year, there was no atmosphere of cheer or celebration. It was just cold. Thin clothing hung on the children's bodies. This was the vibrant capital of the dynasty, but their faces were sallow and sunken from hunger.

Hong Yitang quietly observed them. He'd been too busy killing or fighting lately to carry out some of his ideas. Today, he made time to walk through the city. He paused when he reached a grain storefront and listened to people ask about food prices. Half a kilogram of rice was now going for five star coins!

The man furrowed his brows. What kind of notion was five star coins?

When Li Hao was an official member of the Silver City Inspectorate, his monthly salary was only one thousand coins. That would buy less than two hundred kilograms of rice! While salaries in the capital were slightly higher, doubling the rate would only fetch approximately two hundred and fifty kilograms of rice.

Food wasn't the only necessity when one lived in the capital city. Could such a modest salary really feed a family? Just monthly food expenses alone were startling enough. Under these circumstances, being able to fill one's stomach made one immensely lucky.

Hong Yitang frowned. So food was this costly now? He hadn't paid attention for a while and now found that prices had suddenly reached five star coins per half kilogram. The rest of his colleagues didn't eat or drink, so they were unaware of the significance of this detail. They utilized mysterious power stones and Water of Life. Death would not come for them even if they didn't eat or drink. Li Hao himself hadn't eaten food in a very long time.

The same did not apply to ordinary people.

Li Hao's been focused on supernaturals and forgotten to consider the rest of the people... And Hong Yitang was in the capital. What was the situation like in other areas? Most likely even worse off!

We must increase our speed of reforms. Li Hao can't go around killing anymore...

Hong Yitang felt that they should take advantage of the lull before the second awakening. Otherwise, too many would die during this winter.

We need technology, supernaturals, plant spirits... They needed supernaturals to build sturdy homes, as well as technology and revolution to ensure that everyone had food on the table. Plant spirits were required to swiftly develop crops and produce high quality seeds. Supernaturals were also needed to induce them to sprout and grow. The Judgment Guard might be of some use in this area, but the thousands of supernaturals they had weren't enough.

Perhaps... Li Hao could take down the City of Supernaturals! There were one million supernaturals in that city! It was the largest gathering spot of supernaturals in Skystar Dynasty. Anything was feasible once they were brought under Li Hao's banner. That one million supernaturals was up to no good from day to night—they would be better off working the fields!

If the light, life, and five element attributes worked together, crops could be harvested three times a month! What was the point of keeping such a group of supernaturals around? Some matters could not be easily accomplished, but these affairs could be.

Skystar Dynasty needs to be reformed, but full bellies and warm clothes, as well as general literacy needs to come first. Education needs to be reformed and standardized. Li Hao possesses sufficient strength now and has found his footing. The world might be thrown into chaos after the second awakening, so the second awakening needs to be delayed!

Various thoughts appeared in Hong Yitang's mind. He'd come to Skystar City for this.

I need to discuss this with Li Hao. Skystar Martial Academy needs to be open to all geniuses throughout the lands as soon as possible...

A ten-year-old child in ragged clothing approached Hong Yitang. The man ignored the child at first, but looked over curiously when it became apparent that he wanted to talk to Hong Yitang.

The child was as sallow and thin as the rest, but he wasn't apprehensive. "Are you Headmaster Hong?"

A stern look crossed Hong Yitang's face, but he quickly nodded with a smile. The child was highly alert. "They say that Headmaster Hong is willing to take in refugees in Silver Moon and train them to be independent members of society. They say you have built the greatest refugee center in the dynasty. Your visit to this neighborhood today must be to observe how people live their lives..."

Hong Yitang looked calmly at the child.

“I am Yun Yuqi’s little brother, Yun Yuming,” the boy said frankly. He was completely unafraid. “The headmaster commiserates with the people of the world. I can sense a saintly light from the headmaster, so I hope that you can tell Commander Li...”

“What?”

“To please open a research center!” Yun Yuming said seriously. “There is certain to be great disaster this year—avalanches, droughts, and even the beginning of an ice age! Our harvests will be completely barren! I thought that the commander would open a research center sooner or later, but am growing worried upon seeing him focus only on the Wind and Cloud Pavilion without thought of anything else.

“Only in opening a research center can we obtain more skill,” Yuming said despondently. “That is how we can swiftly complete the development and popularization of technology! It will be able to withstand natural disasters. Please keep in mind that there are more than supernaturals and martial masters in this world, there are hundreds of millions of people...”

“Who are you?” Hong Yitang asked after levying an extended stare at the boy. Yuming had already introduced himself, but Hong Yitang repeated the question again.

“Yun Yuming!”

“Who are you?” Hong Yitang asked again.

“I really am Yun Yuming...” the boy pulled a long face. “It’s just... I’m more mature and random stuff appears in my memories sometimes. But I’m certain that I’m Yun Yuming. Maybe... maybe my grandpa left something that affects me, but I’m definitely still me.

“If we really want to get down to it, maybe I have the bloodline heritage of the monster spirits?” The boy looked at Hong Yitang. “I came to you because I heard of what you’ve done in Silver Moon. I’m worried that I’m so insignificant that Commander Li won’t even want to see me...”

“Your sister and aunt are both working with him. Why don’t you go to them?”

“Like I said, insignificant.” Yun Yuming smiled ruefully. “My aunt is just a centurion of the Demon Hunter Army and my sister runs errands. It’s difficult to catch a glimpse of the commander...”

“That’s not right!” Hong Yitang shook his head. “Li Hao brought your aunt with him from Silver City, she’s one of his staunchest subordinates. Since you can find me, you should know that your aunt can absolutely gain an audience with him. Even if she can’t, she can ask Liu Long to pass on a message for her.

“And how did you know I would be here? I came on a whim, the spur of a moment. Were you waiting here for me, or did you anticipate that I would come? You’ve got quite the skill to do that. What is Lu Zhen’s relationship with you?”

Chapter 847: Grown Too Bold (II)

“No relationship, really.” Yun Fuming was rather resigned. “If we must identify one, some of my memory fragments indicate that Director Lu was the martial forefather of the owner of these memory fragments.”

Lu Zhen’s granddisciple? Hong Yitang didn’t actually know who Lu Zhen was, just that Li Hao had mentioned the name to them before. Lu Zhen’s daughter had apparently been the Human King’s teacher in the ancient civilization. That made him the Human King’s martial grandfather.

If the child in front of him had absorbed some of the lingering mental fragments, then when it came to seniority, it might put him in the same generation as the Human King. That was a high status and identity.

The owner of the memory fragments was an entity resurrected from mental strength lingering in the Lu Zhen Research Center. Did that make this child the one from the ancient civilization, or the modern Yun Yuming? It was hard to say, and the boy made sense. Perhaps... this was a sort of bloodline heritage from monster spirits? All the same, Yun Yuming had certainly obtained some of the other’s memories and possibly even abilities!

“What is your goal in having Li Hao start a research center?”

“No other reason,” Yuming answered seriously. “Please trust the nature of a researcher, Headmaster Hong. Please also trust that, so long as they weren’t traitors, everyone in New Martial possessed a heart that loved the people. I really have determined that disasters will rock Skystar Dynasty in the days to come. Great trouble will develop if we aren’t ready ahead of time!

“Who will have a mind to spare for the ordinary people once the supernaturals rise up? We would be committing grave sins then with countless dead or injured, the people will struggle in abject misery!

“I know this is exactly the scene that some of the local tyrants wish to see. Perhaps even Commander Li and Headmaster Hong lean in that direction as well. How is new life supposed to spring forth from desperation and all neglected tasks be undertaken if the world is not thrown into chaos?

“But that is not the case!” Yuming shook his head. “Even if no one knows what you’ve done because crisis is averted from your actions, the heavens will know!” He pointed at the sky. “It’s true, the heavens really will know! They see everything!

“Those who seek to become the Human King now are all jokes! All they have in their hearts is petty comparison, consideration of benefits, and schemes. How can people like that become the Human King?!

“Only those with a sincere heart can do so!” rang Yun Yuming’s young voice. “This is a type of cultivation as well. It’s fine if Commander Li doesn’t wish to be the Human King. Once he is, the heavens will be aware, even if the people remain oblivious. Even if the heart of the world sinks into oblivion, it will know that you were saving lives!

“A world possesses its own will and has a soul—not the will and soul that we know conventionally, but that if you can obtain the support of the heavens, you will truly become the son and father of the world!”

Hong Yitang slowly turned over the meaning behind these words. “It’s not that Li Hao is ignoring all this,” he said softly. “He’s been trying to do something about it and takes risk after risk not for fame or fortune, but because of his heroic heart. However, you are just as aware of the current state of the world. There are too many restrictions that hem us in!

“What help can you bring to Li Hao?” Hong Yitang looked at the boy.

“I may not be able to bring much help,” Yuming admitted after some thought. “I am weak when it comes to martial strength and possibly less than your side when it comes to wisdom. I can accomplish one thing for Commander Li—the construction of the communication system. I am skilled at that. The owner of my memories was the communications expert of the research center.

“I hear my sister say that Commander Li took some people from the Nine Dragons Pavilion, but has sidelined them ever since. I think maybe that’s because the commander is too busy and the rest of his people don’t really understand the task. I’d like to recommend myself to join the Skystar Commander Office and be his communications manager!

“What are we most afraid of in this day and age?” the boy analyzed solemnly. “That it takes many days for a message to reach its goal, that it might not even make it there...

“With supernaturals, martial masters, and technology, I’ll be able to quickly build a special communication system for the dynasty—the sky canopy system!”

“Sky canopy?” Hong Yitang looked quizzically at the young man.

“That was a special system in New Martial, the combination of technology and martial dao,” Yuming introduced. “It utilizes projection technology to reach the four corners of the dynasty at any time. Anything can be projected throughout the land with just one command!

“You can immediately broadcast anything you want to any part of the dynasty. Where there are people, there is the sky canopy.

“Communication between the military’s armored warriors actually made use of the sky canopy back in the day. But the military used an internal version, not the one publicly accessible...

“I came to Headmaster Hong because I know that the headmaster is preparing to establish the Skystar Martial Academy and recruit some of the teachers and students from the Ancient Academy. Therefore, I know that the headmaster might want to restart the technological revolution, so I want in!”

Hong Yitang furrowed his brows. He wasn’t that reassured when it came to this one. Apparently, the kid’s grandfather treated him as a test subject and modified him, inducing some of the mental strength lingering inside the ruins into him. It was difficult to say whether he was Yun Yuming or the ancient existence’s consciousness.

And now he wanted to join the Skystar Commander Office. Did he have other motives in mind, or did he really just want to better everyone’s lives? That he could predict Hong Yitang would visit this street must mean that he had special abilities. Perhaps his mental strength was so strong that he had some precognitive abilities.

That would be quite normal. Hong Yitang’s mental strength was likewise strong; although he couldn’t foretell the future, he could predict what his opponent would do in the next second. That meant the boy’s mental strength might be even stronger than his.

The Lu Zhen Research Center...

Li Hao hadn’t visited that ruin because he knew it might give rise to certain troubles. It was even more thorny considering that the research material involved the resurrection of mental strength. He might unwittingly release some terrifying existences.

Not to mention, accessing those ruins might result in outright hostility with the nine ministries and royal family. They would quickly turn their weapons on Li Hao.

Hong Yitang ran throughout numerous possibilities in his mind. “Then I’ll take you to Li Hao,” he exhaled. “You talk to him about this yourself. Perhaps this is precisely the result you wanted. Additionally... liven up a bit. Be more cheerful. You don’t seem like a child at all at your age!”

Yuming smiled and nodded. Like a child? Do I not seem like one? I’ve always been one. He felt that Hong Yitang had misunderstood something, but this wasn’t a good time to speak further.

.....

Li Hao was working on his personal domain in the Skystar Commander Office when his eyes snapped open. He seemed to see a ball of light!

Light flickered through his eyes as he saw two people. He ignored Hong Yitang and looked at the child. Something appeared in his eyes—the ball of light was rather mottled and murky. It was his first time witnessing such a unique situation. Red light appeared in Li Hao’s eyes and he looked at the child again.

“We are graced by a senior’s presence, Li Hao has failed to show proper hospitality!” he smiled after a long moment.

“I am Yun Yuming, greetings to the commander!” Yuming said with resignation.

“I know you.” Li Hao inclined his head. “Your mental strength is intermingled and one might even say that you’ve occupied another’s place. But... this child was touched in the head to begin with, you’ve bestowed him intelligence. But do you count as an ancient being or a modern human?”

“A modern human!” grumped Yuming. “Really, the commander must believe me.”

He looked curiously at Li Hao, impressed by the young man’s powers of observation. Not only that, but the boy sensed a peculiarity in the void around him. It seemed to be an independent space. Yuming quietly probed it, finding it both curious and strange.

What a powerful guy! Not in terms of strength, but that some of his methods were very special. Li Hao would be nothing in the ancient civilization—any division leader of ten thousand would be stronger than him.

Yuming repeated what he'd just told Hong Yitang.

“The sky canopy?” murmured Li Hao. This guy wanted to build the sky canopy system for him? As for the people he'd grabbed from the Nine Dragons Pavilion, he had indeed left them sitting around. The main thing was that he'd been preoccupied with all the previous fighting and had been concerned that he wouldn't be back after every engagement.

This fellow was an interesting one to approach him and say that he hoped to access the Lu Zhen Research Center. Was that good or bad?

Li Hao sank into deep thought. The late Chen Hai had asked him if he wanted to start a dynasty that inherited the ancient civilization or a brand new one?

He'd responded then that he wanted to start a new one. No matter how strong or good New Martial had been, those were people and events of yesteryear. Man should look forward and only learn from the past, not relive it. Therefore, Li Hao was equal parts wary and respectful of ancient people, items, and monster spirits.

Were the ancient people and monster spirits of Silver Moon good entities?

Not necessarily!

Were the good people of that age still good people in this age?

Not necessarily either!

The little tree said that gods had once existed in Silver Moon Territory, that they were the original inhabitants. They'd been exterminated by New Martial all the same. So did Li Hao and the rest count as original inhabitants or foreigners?

New Martial didn't give a definitive label to them, but for Li Hao, he felt a distance between himself and the ancient civilization. He looked at Yuming again with a smile. "I welcome your help, but what do you need?"

"Mysterious power stones, some machines, and some equipment. Those can be found in the research center, but I can also create them from scratch. However, I'll need a lot of time to do so. There's a sky canopy generator in the research center that can mass produce endless canopies. There's also a lot in storage. It will take at least ten years for the same level to be reached in the outside world."

So at the end of the day, he still wanted Li Hao to open the ruins. The young man fell silent and said after a long while, "You should go discuss this with your aunt. I'll consider it if she thinks there's a need to open them."

"I... already discussed it with her," Yuming said with resignation after a while. "She ignored me and said it's best if that place is sealed away forever!"

Li Hao grinned. Yun Yao had not mentioned this to him, so Yun Yao should've already met Yun Yuming and felt that it was a bad idea.

Chapter 848: Grown Too Bold (III)

"Then tell me, what do you want to do?" asked Li Hao. "Tell me the truth, I'll consider it."

"I have been speaking the truth," Yuming said with resignation. "Of course, I've left some things out. I hadn't thought of this before, but recently, I'm of the mind to borrow some of the equipment in the research center to see if I can resurrect someone..."

Li Hao smiled—a very dangerous smile.

“Who?”

“You should know him as well,” Yuming sighed. “Someone in Evenround Martial University. My memories show that they’ve either all left or died, but to think that someone is still alive in it...”

The Black Armor? Li Hao frowned. “How do you know?”

“I can sense it!” Yuming explained. “I sensed a few things the last time the commander emerged from the ruins. It seemed familiar—some memories awoke out of my fragments after that. I know that that person is still alive, just that his physical body has decomposed.”

“Why do you want to resurrect him?”

“He is one of the Human King’s most loyal guards and has an important identity.” Yuming scratched his head, seeming more like a child in this moment. “He’s even more important than Commander Li. If he is revived, then he might be able to unite the eight main cities. That would prevent any grumblings among the eight after they are active again and any clashes from mutual dissatisfaction.

“His strength might not be the strongest among the survivors, but he is the spokesperson for the Human King. He represents a lot of things and can save the commander a lot of trouble if he’s present.”

“He’s... the spokesperson for the Human King?” Li Hao blinked.

“He counts as it,” Yuming explained. “He is still alive if his mental strength still exists, it’s just his physical body that is no more. This would be an easy problem to fix in our time with powerhouses around. We would simply need a vast quantity of indestructible matter and a large quantity of life essence to help them return to their former selves. However, the quantity required is so great that it’s almost impossible to find now.

“Therefore, we need to utilize special methods to decrease their strength and weaken their physical bodies. We can then create a weaker physical body to hold their mental strength. In this regard, while they’ll come back to life, much of their previous strength will scatter and disappear.

“Granted, that’s a good thing in this age because core origin dao has disappeared. Having too much strength might cause a backlash for their core origin. There are many treasures inside the research center, but not ones in the conventional sense. Many of them are items that are critical to this new era, including transportation passages!”

“And what’s that?” Li Hao frowned.

“In the ancient times, Apexes could tear through the void and instantly cover five hundred kilometers. After the Human King conquered the world, the research center found that these passages through space could be stabilized through certain treasures. The treasures anchored the passages. That saved a lot of time!

“A unique transportation system formed in the latter days of New Martial. Ordinary people used planes or cars, the strong and military used transportation passages. This technology exists in the research center.

“Like now, if the commander wishes to go to Silver Moon, it will take you at least a day no matter how strong you are. Much can change in a day. Once the transportation passages are constructed, you can be there in the blink of an eye. All it’ll take is a lot of mysterious power stones.”

This was blatant temptation. Li Hao looked at him and didn’t say a word. It was difficult to say whether this guy was a modern or ancient human. He had the memories of an ancient human and the body of a modern human. However, his memories might not be intact and his life mark belonged to this age. Li Hao could tell that the other’s mess of mental strength did not fully overwrite a young soul.

So this guy wanted to resurrect the Black Armor. How interesting! The Black Armor himself didn’t wish to revive, or he would’ve asked Li Hao for help long ago. According to Yuming, the Black Armor could even issue emergency commands to the leaders of the eight main cities. Was that true?

Could the dean of education for a university command the Battle Heaven city lord and commander-in-chief?

Of course, Li Hao was aware that Evenround Martial University did not come from an ordinary background. It was certainly impressive that they had the second and third generations of the truly powerful as students.

The young man actually vaguely knew the reason for this. The author behind The Accounts of Evenround had mentioned that she had an older brother, that everyone liked her later on because they adored her brother. Who could accomplish that in the ancient age?

Personally edited by the Human King...

Li Hao wasn't an idiot, he'd long guessed at the truth. The principal of Evenround Martial was probably the Human King's younger sister. It wouldn't be hyperbole to say that her background was the greatest there was. However, it'd been so many years since the fall of New Martial. Would any of its technology still be operating?

"Do those of the New Martial era have any goals?" Li Hao asked as various thoughts appeared in his mind.

"Um... yes!" Yuming blinked. "True New Martial citizens only have one goal, and that is to go back!"

"Go back?"

"Yes!"

Li Hao suddenly understood. That had been the case at Evenround Martial. A puppet sought him out saying that they wanted to go home and hoped that he could help.

“I mean true New Martial citizens,” Yuming further elaborated. “But many plant spirits, beast spirits, and even some powerhouses might’ve had their original intentions eroded by the passage of time. Perhaps they want to become the masters of the world, perhaps they wish to set themselves up as kings and emperors, perhaps they’re afraid of everything behind the Star Gate...”

“Real New Martial denizens will not bow their heads! They wish to go back, to take to the battlefield once more. Therefore, Commander Li does not need to fear these people or these monster spirits. What you need to fear are the faux New Martial citizens who have lost their honor!”

The true ancients only wanted to go back. Li Hao turned over these words. That was probably true. When the leader of the tenth troop in Battle Heaven pierced through the firmament with his sword, his only thought was to march on the heavens again...

They wanted to return to their home. Silver Moon Territory was just a vassal world.

“Make your preparations for the sky canopy first,” Li Hao said with a deep breath. “I’ll consider these matters and inquire with the dean as to his thoughts. You can’t do what you want just because you want to!”

“You... he’s willing to talk to you?” Yuming blinked.

“And why not?”

“.....” Yuming didn’t say anything. Isn’t it very normal for him not to be willing? My memories paint him as a proud and aloof individual. So Li Hao can talk to him! That’s a good thing.

“Is there anything you wish for me to pass on to him?” asked Li Hao.

Yuming thought it over and shook his head. “No. The owner of my memories isn’t... actually that close to him. The two weren’t part of the same system, so there’s nothing they can discuss. Everything he’s doing is just to go home.”

Alright then! Li Hao had nothing to say about that. He did have a new decision in mind, however. He’d wanted to drag his heels a little before, but now decided to make a trip back to Silver Moon.

But before that, he would visit Evenround Martial first.

“Go on then, do whatever you should do!” Li Hao waved off the boy. “Additionally, this will be the only exception. There will not be a second. If the resurrection you speak of involves taking possession of a body from a modern human, I’ll let you know that death is the only outcome in store even after revival!”

Yuming nodded and said after some hesitation, “Um... Commander Li truly overestimates the modern human body. No real New Martial powerhouse will be willing to take possession of a weakling’s body. Even forging one out of life force is better than using the body of a modern human. Not to mention, our cultivation systems are different. It would be difficult for them to return to their previous strength.

“Hence, there’s really no need for the commander to worry about this. Especially... especially as Skystar citizens are really ridiculously weak. Even the commander is incredibly weak and less than the body of an eighth class golden body...”

Li Hao glowered. That was a slap right to the face!

“These aren’t my thoughts, but the ones from the memories buried deep in my mind...” Yuming said with embarrassment.

“That’s enough, you may go. Go find your sister and aunt!” Li Hao dismissed impatiently.

“My apologies for making a spectacle!” Yuming promptly left. Li Hao was irritated and he didn’t want to spend a long period of time with the commander either. Li Hao still naturally exuded a certain pressure.

Once he left, Hong Yitang said softly, “You don’t need to pay too much attention to him. I rather hope you subdue the City of Supernaturals as soon as possible. I need the one million supernaturals to work the fields.”

“.....” Li Hao rolled his eyes. Old Hong was getting too full of himself! “Too much is happening recently, I need to deal with them one at a time. I’ll take care of the Wind and Cloud Pavilion first, then kill a few plant spirits for sufficient Water of Life. Once I can dominate the plant spirits, I’ll swiftly finish my conquests on land!

“I’ll try to finish it all before the end of the year and will be making a visit back in hopes that the strong plant spirit in Battle Heaven can till the fields for me. I need sufficient grain to make it through this winter...”

Hong Yitang felt that the young man was getting too full of himself. I just want one million supernaturals to be farmers, but you want General Pagoda to play that role for you? You’re nuts!

The two looked at each other and smiled. All of it was fine! These people and plant spirits could all be sent to the fields. What was this constant nonsense about conquest and dominion?

“What new knowledge has your master taught you?” Hong Yitang smiled as he looked at Li Hao.

“Mm, Martial Uncle Hong can visit my master in the Hu ruins if you’re interested.” Li Hao wouldn’t teach anyone else when his master was around.

“Forget it, I don’t get along with him.” Hong Yitang shook his head. “Biting off too big a mouthful leads to indigestion, I don’t have your potential and level of energy...”

“My potential is ordinary...”

Hong Yitang couldn't be bothered with a response. That was ordinary? Li Hao's potential was frighteningly strong. Just the speed with which he comprehended the five auras was shockingly fast. Only Li Hao thought he was too slow and less than his teacher. He'd forgotten that Yuan Shuo took decades to grasp his!

The young man was taught by the ancients and the most talented group of martial masters in the modern world. His breadth of knowledge was absolutely astounding. How many were more knowledgeable than him in this world?

He was just a bit young and hadn't personally experienced everything he'd heard of.

Hong Yitang didn't want to listen to more of this foolishness and left. He needed to prepare for the start of the school year.

Chapter 849: Grown Too Bold (IV)

Li Hao didn't return to his study of the personal domain. He was so busy these days that he wanted nothing more than a double of himself. A double to cultivate, a double to do work, a double to travel, and a double to be in a relationship for him... What a pity that such a thing wasn't possible.

.....

Evenround Martial University.

“What are you doing here again?” grumbled the Black Armor when he sensed his visitor. Again and again, this was so annoying! He wanted to spend some time contemplating life, but the little bastard kept interrupting his thoughts! It'd only been a few days since the last visit!

“I'm a student. Is the dean not letting a student return to campus?”

“.....” The Black Armor wanted to dunk himself in a vat of regret. Why had he made the little bastard a student?? Damn it! The august personage wanted to break out in curses!

“What do you want?” he asked brusquely.

“There seems to be a lingering trace of mental strength from the Lu Zhen Research Center that’s awoken in a modern human. Is this good or bad?”

“Are you thinking of possession?” rumbled the Black Armor. “It shouldn’t come down to that. Normal New Martial citizens wouldn’t find your bodies appealing. They would rather take possession of a weapon and become a weapon spirit than one of you.”

...damn if that wasn’t a vicious tongue! Li Hao wanted to erupt in outright insults!

“Has someone gone about it in a haphazard manner and broken this person’s mental strength to force it into another person’s body? If that’s the case, then there might be no helping it. The mental strength and memories might be mixed together to the point where they can’t be separated...”

Li Hao nodded. That was what had happened. Those were precisely Yun Haoran’s actions.

“Whoever did so... was diabolical!” sighed the Black Armor. “Living in a strictly mental form is better than having memories shattered and being forced into another person’s body. What a shame, I wonder which of Lu Zhen’s research members was that unlucky.”

“.....” Li Hao couldn’t find the words to respond. He’d just wanted to know if this was a good or bad development, but the Black Armor’s response was to the level of—don’t even think about it. I wouldn’t take possession of a body even if you presented it to me for free. I’d rather live in pure mental form!

“So this means to say that ancient powerhouses won’t possess modern people?”

“Ai!” sighed the Black Armor again. “It’s not impossible. If that person wasn’t right in the head, in a confused state, or about to explode... then they might randomly take possession of whoever’s nearby. Otherwise, isn’t it better to be obliterated?”

You... I’d never realized before that you can be so cutting with your words. But you seem more alive this way. You were like a machine before!

“He wants to resurrect you...” Li Hao set his reactions aside.

“There’s no need!” The Black Armor shook his head. “I know a bit of what the research center was looking into, but it’s all trash. My mental strength will decline and my body will be incomparably weak after I am revived. I would soon turn into an eighth or ninth rank existence compared to what I am now. The only way I can accept that is if I’m dead!”

“.....”

Very well then! And Yuming wanted to resurrect him... but his target didn’t desire that course of action.

“Eighth or ninth rank... is that the equivalent of five or six element Arcanus?”

“Pretty much. They can live for one thousand years if their body is strong enough. Thus, it’s a completely different notion.”

“.....” Li Hao didn’t even want to continue the conversation anymore. He changed the subject in a muffled voice, “That’s fine, we can drop the topic. I have another question, senior, I’d like to revive General Pagoda. Is there any problem with that?”

“It should be fine so long as Battle Heaven still stands,” the Black Armor said after some thought. “Do not revive the plant spirits if the city has fully fallen silent! Those not of our race are certain to have turned traitor! But if Battle Heaven still exists, then that means the core ideals are still present. Faith is still present, and if faith is present, then all is well!”

Although he felt that this fellow’s tongue was too sharp, Li Hao was more at ease with his answer.

“I’ll slap you to death if you keep insulting me in your heart!” the Black Armor chose to say at this moment.

“...cough cough cough!” Li Hao broke into a coughing fit and plastered a wide smile on his face. “You misunderstand me, senior!”

“I don’t want to sense your thoughts either,” the Black Armor said faintly. “But I am only mental strength now and as such, it is even easier for me to sense mental processes. Shroud your mind with the aura if you don’t wish for me or other powerhouses to hear you. Wrap it around your mind...”

“Like this?” Li Hao was suddenly enveloped by a personal domain.

The Black Armor quieted down and seemed to be looking upon the scene with great emotion. “Go on, I don’t have what you want. Don’t disturb me so easily next time, I want to spend some time in peace and quiet!”

Li Hao laughed. You walking hunk of metal wants some quiet? Guess what? I’m coming back! He was delighted to see a complete lack of reaction from a litany of disrespect. The Black Armor really couldn’t read his thoughts anymore!

With that, the young man walked off. He patted the robotic cat at the school gates when he left. “So cute, I’ll come back to see you guys again...” He was gone.

“Teacher, he touched me!” the robotic cat gasped after he left.

“He touched a puppet, not you. Don’t think too much!” The Black Armor said after a while.

“But... he touched me!”

“Settle down. So he touched you, you don’t have a physical body anymore...”

“But...”

“That’s enough. Remember that you’re seventy... eighty thousand... who knows how old you are! He’s only twenty. So he touched you, go back to resting!”

“I’m not that old...” The cat instantly disappeared with a sob.

The Black Armor ignored her. It was useless to deny it. Time passed even as they slept. Li Hao was growing ever more interesting and bold. Was he ready to revive General Pagoda?

Battle Heaven... That rather reminded him of a young junior at Demonic Martial that was a division leader at Battle Heaven. I wonder if he’s still alive? I forgot to ask Li Hao to look into it.

.....

Li Hao didn’t even bring Panther with him on his next outing. He sent the dog to keep watch. Panth was first rate at concealing its presence and finding people. It would only waste food if it stayed at home. Hence, it was better for it to go out and stay busy.

The young man didn’t bother telling anyone about his plans. After truly setting foot into Arcanus, he quite liked traveling alone to test his new abilities.

.....

Earthbending.

The technique felt like taking a bath in a hot spring. It was very comforting to Li Hao as he shot through the ground. The terrain ahead of him formed in his mind's eye as he traveled at an extremely fast speed. He climbed every mountain and swam through every body of water he encountered. When he came across the isolated desert, he manifested to shoot through the void as a ball of fiery light.

This was what it truly meant to be an Arcanus!

He also experimented with the wind and thunder secret arts, trying to become a gale wind or both of lightning. Each trip was a cultivation opportunity for him, a chance to relax.

He flew to his heart's desire and thoroughly enjoyed the joy of cultivation each time he was in an uninhabited area. His inner child came out to play when he was in a place where no one would see him.

Cultivation was fun, but being forced into it and cultivating for the sake of killing wasn't what he wanted. That wasn't the meaning of cultivation. Whether it was martial masters or superhumans, they were all meant to explore the mysteries of the human body in Li Hao's eyes. He didn't understand those who fixated on conquest and being the Human King. Wasn't cultivation meant to strengthen the self and surpass the limits of life?

He wandered unhurriedly through the world, exulting in his freedom. However, that sensation soon disappeared. Another figure was rushing through the void and stopped when it sensed Li Hao. Its extremely fast figure paused and looked back at the young man.

Li Hao also looked into the distance, seeing that the other had very delicate features. They seemed quite young—a woman. He more or less recognized her the second he saw her face. There were

very few powerful women beneath the heavens these days. It was usually either city lord Lin Hongyu or the Celestial Sword Immortal of the Celestial organization.

The person in front of him was not the Celestial Sword Immortal that he'd seen last time. Since she wasn't, it had to be Lin Hongyu of the City of Supernaturals. She was said to be the heir of an ancient aristocracy and had become city lord at a young age.

Lin Hongyu looked very young—an appearance that reflected her actual age. Li Hao wasn't very familiar with her, only hearing from others that she was roughly thirty or so. All the same, she was able to dominate the other families of the city to become the city lord. One had to say, that was very indicative of strength and skill.

She wore a long green skirt and didn't seem like a martial master. Li Hao hadn't thought they would cross paths here; killing intent gradually built in his eyes. What a coincidence! The City of Supernaturals had just announced that they would ally with Jade Flute and Sunset Mountain. This was the northern direction, so that meant she was likely headed to Jade Flute Mountain.

It was said that that mountain lord was also female. These two mountains kept such a low profile that Li Hao wasn't familiar with them.

So the city lord headed to Jade Flute Mountain, was she? Li Hao promptly vanished from sight with a clap of thunder and lightning.

Though Lin Hongyu's expression shifted slightly in the distance, she remained without fear. She hadn't thought that she'd run into the renowned Li Hao in the middle of this bleak landscape. She'd yet to come in contact with the young man, whereas Li Hao had killed a few Arcanus from her city.

The City of Supernaturals had decided to quietly let things lie and didn't demonstrate hostility toward the Skystar Commander Office for it. Of course, it was a given that the Skystar Commander Office would want to bring the City of Supernaturals to heel.

She knew the situation was bad when Li Hao disappeared. The young man was highly arrogant, alright! As a fellow peak six elements, her placement on the real ranking should be in the top ten. Li Hao chose to attack without further word—a sign of how cocky he was. The two met in battle!

Chapter 850: An Eye for an Eye (I)

A curved blade appeared in Lin Hongyu's hand. The void seemed to break when she thrust it forward and immense blood qi rushed to the clouds. It was apparent from that move alone that she was also a martial master like Chen Zhongtian, using origin weapons to protect her meridians.

Wind and thunder roared as the advent of a storm! An incredible downpour covered the land in a misty haze.

Blade light pierced through the vicinity. The peak six elements Lin Hongyu was formidable beyond belief. She slashed through wind and thunder, broke through the deafening rain, and split apart the waves.

Meanwhile, flames rose from the ground as Li Hao reached out with his hand! Golden sword qi swept through the land. Sand dunes undulated over the desert, forming a towering giant that punched at Lin Hongyu.

The two hadn't said a single word since encountering each other. To meet was to go for the other's throat. Both were surprised by the sudden battle, but neither of the two showed the slightest desire to pull their blows or fire only warning shots.

Li Hao had been experimenting with the abilities of his five elements recently. It was a stroke of luck that he happened to run into a powerful opponent that fulfilled his testing needs. The giant of sand shook the world when it punched out. Lin Hongyu grunted and slashed through the sky with her blade. The giant collapsed!

Incredible!

The woman was domineering indeed. No wonder she ranked above Qi Pingjiang. Her true ranking had been number five, behind Li Hao, Ying Hongyue, the old Skystar King, and the old minister of Administration.

Her curved blade scored the void, showing that it could break through the void as a possibility. Li Hao didn't mind. He closed his eyes and sent the wind howling around him. Thunder and lightning danced with glee!

The five elements converged from all sides. Metal, wood, water, fire, and earth flared through the hazy mist across the ground and formed five elemental powerhouses. A fire tiger, willow tree, waves...

The five heavyweights rushed Lin Hongyu. The woman's expression changed drastically. What is this??

Li Hao directed his elements elsewhere instead of drawing closer to his opponent, turning them into mind-boggling displays of skill as appropriate of the Arcanus level. Lin Hongyu rose into the air, breaking through the void again with her curved blade. Her hair fanned out like thousands of sharp daggers, piercing through the sky.

The five elemental heavyweights could not stop her!

RUMBLE!!

A massive impact broke through the enormous wave. Lin Hongyu whirled around to flee. She knew she was in grave trouble when the five elements appeared. Li Hao also had wind and thunder to draw on, which meant he'd set foot into seven elements. The only reason why he couldn't bring all of his strength to bear was because the world did not tolerate seven element Arcanus.

Regardless, she needed to depart the scene. Otherwise, she might soon die to Li Hao's hands. Never did Lin Hongyu fathom that she'd be attacked halfway on a casual trip to Jade Flute Mountain!

“Trying to leave?” Li Hao looked coolly at his opponent. Lin Hongyu’s expression changed drastically as the world snapped into place around her as a cage!

The domain of the five elements sealed off the four corners. Li Hao approached her through the air. “Since we’ve bumped into each other, stay!”

“Commander Li!” Lin Hongyu demanded solemnly. “Do we have a grudge with each other?”

“Yes.” Li Hao smiled. “Three Arcanus from the City of Supernaturals tried to kill me at Evenround Martial! The Heaven’s Eye threatened my master at Skystar Sea to force him to hand over the secret arts of the Five Styles! You tell me if there is a grudge between us!”

Sword light shot through the air before Lin Hongyu had a chance to respond. A sword slashed out, the firmament split open!

Lin Hongyu’s jaw dropped with dismay. “This is impossible!” Seven elements!

She roared and broke through the void with a swing of her blade. A redwood manifested in the void, its presence formidable. It jerked with dismay as soon as it appeared!

“Apex level??” Mental ripples roiled violently.

“Break the blockade!” Lin Hongyu shouted.

BOOM!

The tree’s branches shook and shattered the void. It brought unimaginable battle strength to bear, piercing through Li Hao’s domain of the five elements. The void shattered, but sliced the big tree to pieces at the same time.

The young man grunted and withdrew his power of the five elements. Lin Hongyu broke through the air and vanished. The big tree was immediately sliced to smithereens. A cold look on his face, Li Hao summoned thousands of rays of sword intent with one hand and swung Stellaris, detonating the tree!

A surge of core origin agitated—the precursor to self detonation. Li Hao’s cage of the five elements descended once more and confined all of the core origin. It still churned ferociously!

Li Hao frowned at it. That big tree should’ve been the replica of a powerful plant spirit. It possessed the battle strength of an Apex, but was unable to bring its full strength to bear once it left the protective zone of his personal domain. The void would swoop in then to cut it to pieces.

Breaking the domain of the five elements was a suicidal move for the big tree. And yet, it’d done so without hesitation for Lin Hongyu. Didn’t it know the consequences of its actions?

Li Hao looked at the streak of green fast disappearing in the distance. His voice shook heaven and earth as it pursued the figure.

“Lin Hongyu, you will lead the one million inhabitants of the City of Supernaturals and offer your complete surrender within ten days. Otherwise, you can escape today, but you cannot escape forever. I’d like to see how many core origin replicas are willing to sacrifice themselves for you—or even the primary body itself!” Li Hao denounced coldly. If it hadn’t been for the Apex-level replica buying time for Lin Hongyu, she would already be dead.

Although the redwood’s replica had shattered, it was still struggling. It looked at the young man with disbelief and incredulity. “Who... are you?”

“Li Hao.” Li Hao frowned at the violently shaking ripples. He wasn’t willing to absorb core origin power, but wouldn’t it be a waste to not absorb it? Forget it, he would save it and gift it to the little tree’s primary body as a greeting gift.

I'm such a polite person!

Although he was irritated at Lin Hongyu running off, he didn't mind it that much. So what if word got out about his strength? Seven elements? There were three more seven element Arcanus on the ranking. Did it matter if he became the fourth?

"Heh, this is rather interesting though..." Li Hao looked at the tattered redwood replica. "You are willing to sacrifice your own replica in order to protect her. You would've retained your strength if you continued to fight me inside the domain. Why did you break it?"

The replica didn't respond.

"It doesn't matter if you don't say anything." Li Hao raised an eyebrow. "It's my lucky day to pick up an Apex core origin replica for free. I need a greeting gift for my return to Silver Moon, so this is perfect!"

The big tree wanted to speak on, but intent of the Lifeless Sword erupted!

Boom!

Core origin shattered as the replica was eradicated from the world. Core origin power began to drift away on the wind, but Li Hao enclosed the pieces with a domain of the five elements. The young man was powerful beyond belief in this moment!

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In the distance, Lin Hongyu fled with an ashen face. When had she ever thought that she would end up in such dismal straits with an Apex replica protecting her? Not only was the replica no more, but she'd almost died on the spot. She would've died without the replica.

“That’s impossible... seven elements... and being able to fully deploy the strength of seven elements...” Lin Hongyu was white as a sheet. How could Li Hao have reached these heights?? It was unbelievable!

She was to lead the City of Supernaturals in surrendering within ten days...

Lin Hongyu had originally thought that even if three seven element Arcanus appeared, she would be fine if she allied with Jade Flute and Sunset Mountains. After all, those of seven elements could not fully exert themselves. Their strength would be much diminished even if they could avoid being severed by the void.

What happened today was particularly hard to accept. She was beside herself; Lin Hongyu had always thought that she was the martial master with the strongest potential beneath the heavens. Making it to peak six elements at thirty years old with origin weapons protection her meridians made her the strongest martial master.

There was nothing to Arcanus! She hadn’t thought much of seven element Arcanus, but today, she discovered that this level was incredibly strong.

This encounter was a surprise to both sides, but the results made Lin Hongyu despair. Why was Li Hao so strong?? The redwood’s replica was gone!

A variety of thoughts ran through her mind and she gave up her trip to Jade Flute Mountain. She ran as fast as she could, back to the City of Supernaturals! Perhaps... only there could she find peace of mind.

Not even the City of Supernaturals was safe. Only the Lin secret base nearby could shelter be found. The primary body of the redwood could also be found there as well.

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The desert.

Li Hao laughed. Not bad! This was a nice pickup for a casual walk outside. The fight hadn't been intense as the tree's replica had shown a suicidal tendency. Otherwise, if they fought inside the domain of the five elements, it would be very difficult for Li Hao to kill the replica as he didn't have the little tree with him.

Of course, he was invincible in the outside world and could withdraw the domain to achieve that, but that might facilitate the big tree's escape.

"Presents come to me when I set foot outside... I wonder if the woman will bring her one million citizens to surrender in ten days time?" Li Hao had simply issued a threat. It was fine if they didn't surrender, he would eradicate them all the same!

The big tree had lost an Apex level replica. He was even considering whether he should rush over to kill the primary body. He laughed softly and left through the air.

Someone raced to the scene long after his departure. The void fragments had returned to a complete whole. The newcomer observed carefully with some disbelief. "The void is broken... who did it?" he asked softly. Had they gone down together with their opponent?

This was a demonstration of strength beyond the limits of the world. That was why the void had broken. Was it the replica of a plant spirit, monster beast, or something else? It couldn't be a modern human... right? The three seven elements on the ranking all seemed to be at home.