

Star Gate 971

Chapter 971: The Way Forward Is Beneath Your Feet (I)

The ruins of Skystar Town.

The human model neared perfection. Chains belonging to supernatural locks snaked through the body, each carrying a label from Li Hao. They didn't move around as they should since there were no supernatural characters within them.

The four limbs and five organs held the most commonly referred to nine locks. Those of dark, light, wind, and thunder were the next four most commonly seen. After that came a lock emanating light in the head. These fourteen were regarded as the standard set of fourteen locks.

But as the model of the human body continued to be finalized, Li Hao found far more than one lock in the head. There were also many more in the body.

“Dao meridians...” murmured the Black Armor as he stared at the enlarged model. Were these supernatural locks or dao meridians?

He'd thought that supernatural locks would be similar to the three cavities, but now they gave him a different feeling. The two were completely different; there was almost nothing in common between them. The only commonality that could barely be pointed out between them was that both stored energy.

This time, Li Hao took the stance of a bystander to observe the locks. It was his first time looking at them from this vantage point. They were as numerous as stars in the sky. It reminded him of the Hao Cosmos, another place that was filled with stars.

“It's too messy.” He frowned after a while.

“I agree, it’s very messy.” Yuan Shuo nodded. “There must be a large number of supernatural locks that have yet to be identified. Look at the ones of the five organs and four limbs—they present a beautiful sight, like they’re nine dragons soaring through the void.

“There are two types of supernatural locks—ones without aura appear dim and dark. Ones with aura are bright with light. They are as if dark stars and blazing suns... And do you see? The ones without attributes or auras are concentrated in tangible parts of the body. Ones with elemental attributes and auras are a bit more abstract and mostly focused in an illusory space such as the five organs.”

The five organs possessed their own elemental attributes, but their locks weren’t found on the organs proper. Their locks were in the space within them. Meanwhile, the ones of the four limbs seem to be connected directly to flesh and blood.

Li Hao nodded. Next to him, Sky Sword also craned his neck for a look. “There are two sides to the human body, the real and tangible, as well as the unreal and intangible...”

“Simply put,” Yuan Shuo interrupted him. “There are two different kinds of locks. We can organize them in that manner and temporarily group them as part of the same system.”

Li Hao nodded and waved his hand, organizing the locks accordingly. There were more people fleshing out this model for him; more and more supernatural locks were constantly being discovered.

Since the young man had filled in the model with the locks he knew, he looked away and walked out. A large number of supernaturals were waiting for him, lining up so he could assess them.

Li Hao wouldn’t examine their bodies one by one. A mirror hovered in the air—the copy of the Mirror of Wind and Cloud. Each person walked beneath it to be reflected on its surface. Different pinpricks of light appeared according to the strength of their life force. When only one subject was reflected from its surface, areas of varying energy density could also be scanned. In this regard, one could easily investigate where supernatural locks resided in the body.

Each supernatural had to take a walk beneath the mirror. There were only a few here. Li Hao was prepared to scan the entire royal city and even the dynasty. This was a ponderous project of massive

undertaking! Of course, with the City of Supernaturals present, all he needed to do was to focus on the City of Supernaturals.

The more people there were, the more the locks would be repeated and the less supplemental information there would be required.

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As Li Hao continued to work on his model, the outside world entered the last day of the year 1730.

Dazzling fireworks erupted in the sky. Although this was a year of grave unrest, particularly in the four continents, everyone was still happy that a new year had come.

The atmosphere was quite nice in the central region. The war between supernaturals had raged for many years, resulting in numerous cities and towns becoming decimated rubble. But these days, the lofty supernaturals had ceased their struggles. There were still many supernaturals in the central region, but those who hadn't been arrested kept a low profile.

Many of those taken away by the authorities now worked for a living. Although some resistance and escape attempts occurred, they were few and far in between. Those captured again for such actions were executed, but those who strove to pay off their crimes through labor did not have to worry about being put to death.

Not only were their lives assured, but they could earn cultivation resources. Although their current circumstances were a blow to their dignity, this kind of lifestyle was good for the weaker supernaturals. They didn't have to spend their days in fear anymore!

As the three great organizations withdrew from the central region, it became Li Hao's world. Although the nine ministries and royal family had their supernatural armies, all of them had been pressed into service through societal reforms. No one dared step forward to rebel. In the absence of premier powerhouses that could stand against the Silver Moon martial masters, any sort of resistance was futile.

And so, countless supernaturals spent their new year in construction sites. It was very unusual, but many of them felt that this was fine as well.

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Outside of the central region, some places were still struggling to quell uprisings.

The eastern continent.

Although the Xus had lost many people, most of the family still existed. Xu Qing's younger brother had taken over the Steadfast Duke's household and was leading its armies against some of the overlords of the eastern continent.

Apart from the Xus, there was also the East Pole province under the command of the East Pole Duke, the biggest eastern supernatural organization Helios, and the Firebright province as led by Inspector General Yu Qiao.

After Li Hao killed many Xu powerhouses, the four biggest factions of the eastern continent vied for supremacy. It was a fertile and rich land; war erupted as soon as Li Hao left. When it came down to it, the young man was a major contributing factor to war breaking out.

He knew that as well, but there was nothing he could do about it. The Xus had broken all ties with him, so he couldn't just let them be.

The various provinces of the eastern continent were much quieter compared to the rest of the world on this new year eve. All powerhouses converged on the Calm Borders province that the Xus resided in. The three invading factions had encircled the province with their troops.

The twenty-one provinces of the east all had their own allegiances. While the Xus possessed deep foundations, they were yet to produce a premier heavyweight. Meanwhile, powerhouses continued to appear in the other three factions, putting the Xus in an even more precarious position.

New year eve, the Xu Manor.

After Xu Qing and the family experts died, Li Hao further burned most of it down. Although it'd been rebuilt, it was in much more dismal straits than before. The current Su patriarch was Xu Qing's younger brother, Xu Huan.

He was a muscular man nearing forty years of age. At the moment, he appeared rather old. Dark circles appeared beneath his eyes and his expression was solemn. Apart from Xu Huan, there were a few other heavyweights in the main hall.

Two of them were the Heaven and Earth Generals. Both of them were Arcanus now. Light Sword had killed most of the eight generals and Li Hao killed one, leaving only these two left. They'd fought with the army when the duke went against Li Hao, which was how they'd survived disaster.

Xu Huan rubbed his temples; the celebrations outside were not what they used to be. Calm Borders were a bleak and desolate place now.

"There is word from the central region that the nine ministries and royal family are all done," he said after a while of silence. "Lin Hongyu at the City of Supernaturals has surrendered. Eleven out of the twelve aristocracies are dead. Only a few of the Lin Arcanus live. Lin Hongyu even killed her own family in order to gain Li Hao's trust! This venomous harpy is truly ruthless!"

"The east sways with uncertainty as Yu Qiao and the East Pole Duke are using Li Hao's banner to threaten us..."

Xu Huan had been handed authority in a time of great danger. The family already teetered on the precipice when he became the patriarch. With menaces coming at them from three different directions and unending disorder, he was extremely weary.

“The ruins that the family owns have never been deeply excavated,” he said slowly as he looked at the family’s strongest. “Our ruins are no ordinary locale. Tranquil Star was said to be the sacred land of the ancient civilization...”

“Your Grace, it’s said that Silver Moon Territory was just a vassal world of the ancient civilization,” the Heaven General couldn’t help but speak up from below. “Can this world really have a sacred land?”

“Even if it’s not, it is bound to be extraordinary since it is known by this reputation,” Xu Huan responded slowly. “The other ruins cannot measure up to them. Therefore, I’ve decided to explore them in depth.

“Based on what I know, the ruins have been less than quiet lately as well. There seems to be a powerful presence in its depths. I will bring people in to investigate it. This might be the family’s last chance!”

The group exchanged glances. Ruins were sometimes very dangerous. The family had only dared to poke around the outside over the years. Xu Qing had wanted to invite Li Hao on a joint expedition, but the young man had turned him down.

Xu Huan could not be deterred by caution any longer. Tranquil Star was said to be the ancient civilization’s sacred land and possessed a bevy of exalted emperors. Of course, no one was familiar with its actual state or whether or not that was a true sacred land. Even though everyone felt that the likelihood wasn’t great, any city that was built here, however, could not be ordinary.

The Xus owned such a formidable set of ruins, but were facing the extinction of the family. Xu Huan was loath to accept his circumstances.

He’d truly made up his mind this time. No matter how dangerous the situation was, who cared about that at this stage? Once he was able to obtain great benefits from the ruins, that was the family’s second chance.

Otherwise, they were all done for!

“I’m going to take some of the army heavyweights with me,” Xu Huan explained. “The family stands a chance if I succeed. If not and we do not emerge, then the eastern continent has a new master!”

“Will you generals come with me or...”

“We will naturally move as one with Your Grace!” came the stern response. Everyone knew that there was no path behind them.

“Very well, then we will make use of this time while Li Hao is still preoccupied with the central region and the three great organizations have entered the north. It is the new year today, those factions will not easily attack us on this day. We head for the ruins!”

“Yes, sir!” The solemn group prepared to enter the ruins with the family patriarch.

Tranquil Star was the sacred land of the ancient times. It might really hold the chance of salvation for the Xus!

Chapter 972: The Way Forward Is Beneath Your Feet (II)

On new year’s eve, whether it was the four continents or the central region, all skirmishes paused for this day.

Inside the ruins.

Li Hao smiled at the massive model of a human body in front of him. A week’s effort had finally produced some noticeable results. This was a model that was almost identical to him. There seemed to be a universe inside its body, an illusory cosmos with twinkling stars.

There were a lot more people inside the ruins now, all of them studying the model. A few female martial masters looked at a certain part of the model, then at Li Hao. The young man kept a relaxed expression on his face, pretending not to see their expressions.

“Senior Dean, does this count as finished?” he smiled.

“Not quite, but it’ll pass muster for use.” The Black Armor walked out and smiled at the massive model as well. “Give it a try!”

Li Hao sent a supernatural character into the model’s heart. A supernatural lock manifested over it and sank into the character, somehow extracting some life force from the void.

“We can’t input energy from the Hao Cosmos into the model, so we’re substituting with energy of life,” explained the Black Armor. “The effects won’t be exactly the same, but they’ll be informative nonetheless.”

Li Hao nodded; the model shifted. The heart was as if a black hole. It gradually erupted with golden light and began absorbing the energy of life that was an imitation of energy from the Hao Cosmos.

The sight enthralled the onlookers! How incredible was it that the model seemed to be self-cultivating? How did it do that?

Countless supernatural locks manifested and Li Hao directed supernatural characters into all of them. “All of you have your preferences when it comes to auras and supernatural characters. You can choose the corresponding body part and operate it on my command!”

Supernatural characters appeared in the air and sank into the model. This trial wouldn’t be possible with a real person, but this model encompassed all possibilities and could contain all of the characters.

Li Hao began manipulating them as martial masters and supernaturals watched with interest. Supernatural locks were enveloped by supernatural characters. “Have your characters enter the secondary dimension!” the young man grunted.

The crowd sent their characters into the Hao Cosmos, causing many locks to disappear from the model. Only the unattributed ones were left, as well as a few attributed locks that no one was manipulating. The complicated model was suddenly much emptier, bringing the unorganized system into clear view.

Li Hao glanced sharply at the model; Yuan Shuo and the rest quickly ran through some calculations. A piece of paper appeared in front of Yuan Shuo as he traced some patterns. The old man’s expression grew more varied the more he drew.

“This isn’t enough,” Yuan Shuo said. “Senior, please erase all of the attributed locks!”

The Black Armor immediately hid all of the attributed locks not under someone’s control.

“The... locks that remain... resemble an item...” Northern Fist couldn’t help himself. There were a lot of dim supernatural locks left in the model—all of them unattributed.

The crowd looked at them closely, the remaining locks appeared to be drawing an image.

“Is that a sword?” A light flashed through Li Hao’s eyes.

“No, it’s a stick!”

“Bullshit, that’s obviously a mallet!” A variety of rebuttals came; Li Hao rolled his eyes.

“It’s obviously a sword! Look, the part that juts out is the hilt! But it doesn’t seem complete...”

“That’s right, it’s incomplete,” Yuan Shuo rumbled. “It lacks some parts to it, maybe from locks that we haven’t discovered yet. However, they well and truly do exist! The image looks like a sword if we fill in those gaps!”

The crowd exchanged glances with each other. Some things could not be randomly filled in. They either existed, or they did not. One could not haphazardly fill in the gaps just to make the image look more like a sword.

Yuan Shuo ignored their concerns and drew supernatural locks in the gaps. “Li Hao, absorb Water of Life according to these positions. Target these positions in your body and see if supernatural locks appear there.”

The human body was as vast as the cosmos. Randomly absorbing energy made it difficult to use the energy effectively, and Li Hao wouldn’t be able to stand it if he absorbed too much.

The locations that Yuan Shuo pointed out were originally blank. If supernatural locks appeared there... that meant they could use this as a basis of comparison to locate more unknown locks.

Li Hao quickly absorbed Water of Life and melded it into his body, directing it to the places that his teacher had circled.

The young man frowned after a while—nothing appeared.

He didn’t give up and continued to absorb Water of Life. It streamed into his body like it was regular water. Regular people might not discover these locks in their entire lifetime if this was the necessary step to discover them.

After a very long time, a subtle energy ripple came from his body. A supernatural lock floated into existence in the next moment, fragile as could be.

“There is a lock there!” Li Hao gasped with delight, prompting cheers from the crowd. Even the Black Armor couldn’t help but look at Li Hao, then at Yuan Shuo. He quickly drew a powerful, intangible lock where Yuan Shuo was targeting.

“So there really is a supernatural lock here!” Zhang An breathed.

Yuan Shuo lit up and darted into the model and tapped red dots into being. “Li Hao, try here and here. Hurry and see if there’s anything there!”

“Plant spirit seniors, provide Water of Life for me!” Li Hao requested excitedly.

The plant spirits around them promptly flooded the area with Water of Life, sending all of it into Li Hao’s body. The young man quickly directed it to the spots that his teacher had delineated.

More and more supernatural locks hovered in and out of sight at the targeted spots. They really did exist!

Li Hao was overjoyed; the others sweat profusely from nerves. It wasn’t a major issue if they made a mistake, but once a supernatural lock failed to appear where they expected it to, that represented some of their earlier work had been in vain.

It would be a waste of a lot of time and resources.

But now that the locks appeared one after another, it indicated that the model of the human body was exceedingly successful.

“This is a sword!” exulted an exuberant Yuan Shuo. “The locks follow the diagram of a sword and are symmetrical. If we fill in the holes and find one lock, that might mean we find two! Li Hao, the unattributed locks follow a pattern!”

“Am I unique, or is everyone thus?” wondered an overjoyed Li Hao. “A sword! Then...”

“This might be normal!” offered the Black Armor. “This world originally belonged to the Sword Sovereign. The humans and will of heaven in the new age is immensely affected by the Sword Sovereign—particularly the will of heaven! It was influenced by the Sword Sovereign’s sword intent before it was born. The dao meridians that you speak of... connate dao entities... The will of heaven will certainly imitate the existence that it believes to be the strongest and craft the bodies of the new age accordingly...”

Li Hao’s expression shifted, this was a distinct possibility! Humans of the new age had been modified according to heaven’s subconsciousness. They were a closer match for the will of the world. Connate dao entities were naturally the strongest and the greatest existence in heaven’s eye was the Sword Sovereign.

Therefore, the unattributed supernatural locks formed a sword!

“How interesting...” Li Hao’s face flickered through a variety of expressions. “In that case, what will happen if we fully outline the sword and open all of its supernatural locks?”

“We’ll know if we try!” Zhang An’s visor had disappeared. A keen light shot out of his eyes as energy surged into the locks.

“We can’t haphazardly connect them together!” Yuan Shuo quickly said upon seeing the Black Armor’s enthusiasm. “We need to connect them in the proper order...”

“I know!” nodded Zhang An. “I’ll just infuse them with energy first, I won’t do anything with them!”

The dim supernatural locks lit up one by one, resembling the stars after they were filled with energy. The second they lit up... boom!

A vigorous presence immediately appeared.

“It’s just a simple infusion of energy, but that is sufficient to cause a change...” The Black Armor was rather surprised.

Kaboom!

The formidable model of the human body exploded, leaving stunned expressions in its wake. The Black Armor murmured, “It couldn’t withstand the energy and the detonation was so strong that it destroyed the model...”

“Have no fear, all is well. The model can be replicated anytime after it has been successfully built!” He reached out with a hand, gathering endless energy and built another model. Energy once more infused it to light up various supernatural locks.

“Wait,” Yuan Shuo quickly spoke up. “One of the most important locks has not appeared yet. Energy not forming the basic circulatory loop was the key to that explosion. We need to complete the overall circulation of energy even if we haven’t located all of the supernatural locks. Senior, let’s light up all of the locks on the perimeter of the sword first...”

“Alright!” The Black Armor followed the good advice. Yuan Shuo stepped forward to fill in the gaps with illusory locks. Some of the other martial masters also stepped forward.

“That one’s wrong, it should move to the side a bit,” someone muttered. “I can sense energy gathering in my body in that spot...”

“Everyone should study the model together,” Li Hao quickly instructed. “Locate all of the areas in which you typically find yourself absorbing the most energy. Teacher may not be able to find them all by himself.”

The group trotted forward without another word, all of them searching, locating, and crafting supernatural locks. The process took a few hours and the outside world bustled with activity the entire time, but inside the ruins, a group of martial masters were diligently perfecting the new cultivation system.

Finally, the outline of a sword was fully lit up. The model burst forth with a domineering presence as soon as that was complete, surprising the Black Armor.

“Back away, let me try its strength!” he shouted. Everyone gave him space, also creating enough room for the model to swing a fist at Director General Wang.

The director general hadn’t minded being the target at first—he answered with a punch when the blow loomed in his eyes. However, he was the one who flew backward with a pained cry after the loud impact.

“How is this possible...” gasped the Black Armor. “I only infused the strength of peak Apex, but I’ve defeated an Immortal...”

“Even if my physical body isn’t as strong as it once was, even though I haven’t brought my full strength to bear, an Apex should never be able to defeat me...” Director General Wang sprang up from the ground.

“It’s not that, but that power converges after the supernatural locks are lit,” the Black Armor quickly said. “It even brings out strength from the Hao Cosmos and erupts in a surge similar to the enhancement of core origin dao. However, it’s different in that this strength comes from the body!”

“The strength of dao!” Director General Wang’s eyes widened. “The strength of a new dao!”

Indeed, this was the strength of dao.

Chapter 973: The Way Forward Is Beneath Your Feet (III)

“This is the power of a new dao!” The Black Armor nodded with excitement. “This is a new path! Only dao can enable one to metamorphose and grow stronger. Simply connecting 360 supernatural locks has brought forth the strength of a new dao!”

The crowd nearly sank into a frenzy with his words.

“Does the senior mean that our strength will metamorphose after opening 360 supernatural locks?” Li Hao asked incredulously.

“Yes!”

The group was first overjoyed, then anxious and fretful. Li Hao’s exuberant expression slid off his face. “360 locks??”

What a joke! That’s too much! Who can open 360 locks??

“What are you guys down about?” Yuan Shuo beamed. “You idiots, how much power did the senior infuse the model with? Just the equivalent of a seven element Arcanus, not a 360 element Arcanus! It’s just lighting up supernatural locks, not opening or snapping them! It’s a surface level excavation that’s less than maybe one tenth of their full capacity.

“It’s not even the equivalent of thirty-six locks and the difficulty within is less than ten full locks. Opening locks means fully snapping them, whereas the senior has only lit up one-tenth of their capacity. It’s a completely different difficulty level!”

Eyes lit up at his words. That was right! This was just a small foray into each supernatural lock.

“Partition each lock into ten segments so that opening just one segment will complete the circulation,” Yuan Shuo quickly explained. “Although that won’t be the equivalent of fully activating the entire system, just completing the circulation will result in an earth-shattering difference. Senior, try infusing the model with less power!”

“I have now accessed one hundredth of each lock.” The Black Armor withdrew some of his strength. “That is the equivalent of three element Arcanus. Who wants to try it?”

People looked at each other; Li Hao quickly honed in on one person. “Senior Light Sword, you give it a try!”

Me? Light Sword was rather surprised. Why me? There’s so many other people here. But... it’s fine.

It was just three element Arcanus. She was now the equivalent of six elements, so there really was nothing to three elements.

Zhang An struck without a second word!

Boom!

The blow even came with the sensation of breaking the void! That was a bit of an exaggeration as the void remained intact, but Light Sword could sense the inherent pressure. She roared and slashed with her sword!

Snowflakes flurried through the sky when the Light Sword technique was deployed.

BOOM!

Light Sword took one step back after the enormous collision. The sword light dissipated and the model’s fist had been sheared off. However, the woman was astonished and shocked. “That was almost five elements!”

The crowd was overcome with delight! That a three element Arcanus could bring the equivalent of five elements to bear was incredible! And this was just an experiment of the unattributed locks!

Li Hao's face flickered through various expressions. "There is inherent difficulty with excavating the unattributed locks, but not that much when we limit the depth of exploration to one-hundredth of its capacity. The process might be easier than breaking through to three elements, but the cultivator can utilize the strength of five elements.. This is remarkable!"

It was a festival in the ruins, yet Yuan Shuo stared at the pinpricks of light.

"The great dao is too far and this path is too long! One-hundredth is such, what about one-tenth? What about fully opening all of the locks? And this is only the outline, there is still the core of the body to explore and other undiscovered areas. I'm sure there are other factors to consider as well. Just unattributed locks alone is sufficient for us to toil for the rest of our lives..."

That put a dampener on the atmosphere as the crowd mulled over his words. That was right! They were just experimenting with the unattributed locks at the moment. It took 360 locks just to trace the outline of the sword!

"How many locks does the sword require?" Yuan Shuo murmured to himself. "One thousand? Two thousand? This doesn't require the aura, just a simple opening of the lock. It doesn't need that much in terms of brains or comprehension, only a pure eruption.

"So long as there are no mistakes in operation, we will be able to complete the reforms of this method with countless simulations. Take the outline of the sword, for example. Its cultivation is foolproof if there is no error in the order of the 360 locks. Everyone will be on par with a five element Arcanus if that is complete. We can also avoid certain locks in the process and just complete a localized circulation. Oh my heavens..."

The connotations of his hypothesis were equally astounding.

“By my calculation, completing the excavation of 360 locks might put one on the level of an Empyrean King!” added the Black Armor.

The crowd blinked. How was that possible?

“I mean an Empyrean King of this age, not including the effects of core origin dao!” the Black Armor said calmly. “That would be the equivalent of a Saint in New Martial...”

“360 locks only makes me a Saint?” Li Hao frowned. Now that was another kind of incredible! He could at most be counted as a nine element Arcanus in his current state, but seven elements already made him an Apex!

“There is a big difference between each level.” The Black Armor was very calm. “If we approach the cultivation system from your martial dao, all levels from 7 to 36 element Arcanus count as Apex!

“According to my calculations, 36 to 120 locks are Immortal. 120 to 360 are Saint. Completing 360 should make one an Empyrean King based on this era’s standards. If taking into consideration an active core origin dao in New Martial, then all cultivation levels need to be lowered by one grade.”

The stronger one was, the greater the gap.

“It’s probably going to be very hard to excavate 360 locks!” Li Hao’s frown deepened.

“But the way ahead is clear!” the Black Armor responded faintly. “Is it hard? Based on your speed, you can open ten locks a year and finish all of them in thirty-six years. Is thirty-six years a long time to invest for the strength of an Empyrean King?”

Their heart was insufficient!

Apart from the beginning days of New Martial, not even those of that illustrious age could improve so quickly. A mere three decades for the strength of an Empyrean King? Zhang An wanted to die from envy!

He was a genius, but hadn't made it to Empyrean King back in his time. That was not a level that one could set foot in just out of personal desire and hard work. It was a cultivation level second to only exalted emperor.

"Then... what if one fully opens all of the unattributed locks?" Yuan Shuo murmured.

"They'll probably be an exalted emperor," the Black Armor responded calmly.

Hard swallows could be heard throughout the crowd.

"Exalted emperor??" Director General Wang repeated incredulously. "Simply opening the locks will make one an exalted emperor?? Can one reach that level in such a straightforward manner? That's so easy..."

The Black Armor didn't say a word. Was it easy? Not at all! It was easy to speak of a situation when one wasn't caught in it. A complete sword diagram might be comprised of thousands of locks! Wang Ye was free to try it for himself if he thought that was easy! It was bound to be more difficult the more progress one made.

However, none of these concerns were on people's minds. For the first time, they felt that an exalted emperor was so close to them...

"We've all cultivated for more than thirty years," Sky Sword suddenly said in a muffled tone. "And we're roughly six elements. We've all opened the locks on our limbs, so that makes for ten total locks. It averages out to three years per lock, which means 360 locks will take one thousand years!"

That cast an abrupt stillness over the crowd. That's right, Li Hao opens ten locks a year, but that's not us! Setting aside the level of difficulty and whether or not opening the locks would succeed, can we survive one thousand years?

"That was then, and this is now," Li Hao chuckled. "Energy is abundant in the world now, so it'll be easy for everyone to open three to five locks a year. That means you'll be an Empyrean King in one hundred years and be able to fight a Saint of New Martial. That's incredible!"

It was just one hundred years, nothing compared to New Martial! Citizens of that age lived for tens of thousands, even one hundred thousand years!

"During New Martial, it was very common to see a genius take one hundred years to set foot into the Saint level," Director General Wang sighed. "The gap is not that great when seen from this lens, so all of you are the geniuses of this age then."

That comparison made these revelations palatable. One could only say that time was relative. He'd lived less than one hundred years—well, he was alive again now. The director general ignored the time they'd spent asleep and also heaved a large sigh of relief. He'd been nearly scared out of his wits before, thinking that all of these people could become Saints in the blink of an eye, or Empyrean Kings!

That was terrifying!

But now that he thought about it, it was nothing remarkable. Even Li Hao would only be a Saint of New Martial once he completed 360 locks. He would be in his fifties then, yet he was the favored son of heaven in this age and its leader. Just a Saint in his fifties? He was quite mediocre!

Don't compare yourselves with me, you have to compare yourselves with those perverse geniuses. Director General Wang's thoughts wandered to those such as the Human King. He was a premier exalted emperor in a few years, but you have to take a few decades to become a Saint, Li Hao. He'd smack you to death with one slap!

The world suddenly seemed a lot more fair to the director general.

Meanwhile, Li Hao didn't care about any of this. "The key isn't how long it takes, but what the road ahead looks like," he said joyfully. "And if it will continue onward. Can it be made mainstream? Can everyone walk it? As for time, that is affected by potential, resources, and opportunities. That's not important!"

It was enough that there would be a road ahead so long as they followed the prescribed order of things! As for the inherent difficulties or time required, perhaps they wouldn't see its end for their entire life. That was a person specific problem that had nothing to do with martial dao.

The crowd nodded at his words.

Chapter 974: The Way Forward Is Beneath Your Feet (IV)

"That's the ticket!" affirmed a gleeful Sky Sword. "Knowing that there's a path ahead of us is the key! Just like before, it was painful to hold on when there was no future after Dominator. But if a wide open road stretches on to the horizon, then there is hope no matter how difficult things may be!"

Everyone nodded.

Yuan Shuo had been studying something for a while when he suddenly said, "We can minimize the required scope. I've just tried several different configurations and think that we might be able to narrow it down to 36 locks or even fewer. A simple excavation of those locks will equip one with sufficient battle strength..."

"We shouldn't openly share all of the information we have! It will be motivation to some and despair to others. Too much will make the future impossible to attain for them... I think that we should publicize these 36 at most. Once all of them are fully open, then a cultivator will be at the Apex level of our age based on what the seniors say!"

His words made sense to the crowd. They were the geniuses of this era, but they also felt despair when they heard the number of 360 locks. And that was just an outline! Who knew how many locks

there were in total? Opening 36 of them represented peak battle strength in this time period. Of course, there was a high difficulty involved in that task as well.

“Additionally, it’s very easy to excavate the unattributed locks,” Yuan Shuo continued. “We can even force them open through sheer force—there’s no need to comprehend anything. It’s a cultivation path for the simpleminded and thus, much easier. In this age of burgeoning energy, perhaps we’ll soon see heavyweights with the battle strength of Apexes!”

The rest of the group flicked glances at him—who are you subtly insulting? We won’t be opening those locks! We want to open the attributed ones!

“There’s an inherent difficulty with selecting the right 36 locks that will complete a perfect circulation.” Li Hao furrowed his brows. “That’s one aspect. The other is that these unattributed locks cannot coalesce supernatural characters. How to seal off the major portion and open a minor portion is a good question... I’ll need a very reliable method to resolve this problem.”

“The Five Styles may be able to do that.” Yuan Shuo nodded.

Li Hao looked at his teacher.

“What are you looking at?” Yuan Shuo smiled. “If it does work, our Five Styles will be the Myriad Styles in the future. Just a mere five would be behind the times!”

“.....” Li Hao had voiced similar sentiments before, but it’d drawn his teacher’s ire.

“Therefore, there are indeed inherent difficulties with what we’ve proposed,” Yuan Shuo continued. “First, we need to locate all of the supernatural locks. Second, we need to study the corresponding circulation of different locks and the appropriate secret arts to open them. Just one may not be enough. Third, we will explore different kinds of secret arts—it’s best if there’s one that can be applied to all supernatural locks. Fourth, all of that was just for unattributed locks. Those with elemental attributes need to be researched in a different vein as well...”

The group blinked at his words, then inhaled deeply and turned to Li Hao. You do it, we can’t!

Li Hao's head hurt so much that his teeth ached. This level of difficulty... he might as well spend the rest of his life researching cultivation methods!

All they had at the moment was an outline. Dreams were beautiful, but it would take a very long time to complete the new cultivation system.

"Also, if what we are studying is true, then the entire martial dao system that we utilize at present needs to be overthrown," Yuan Shuo continued. "The system generally regarded by everyone as the right way isn't suited for these new ideas."

The crowd blinked again, then stirred with excitement. A brand new cultivation system! This was a feat that would see all of them leave their marks in history. Future descendants would know each and every one of their names!

Was this possible?

Even Li Hao was lost in thought. Completely overhauling the present cultivation system and rebuilding it?

"Whether it's unattributed supernatural locks or ones with elemental attributes, the level of difficulty between them isn't that great. Granted, the attributed ones will be slightly harder. However, they do not differ much in terms of battle strength.

"That is sufficient for a basis by which to rebuild the cultivation system," Yuan Shuo said. "System, cultivation levels, methods, secret arts, and a map of all of the supernatural locks... These are thorny problems. We are just at the beginning and might need endless years to complete this system!"

"If you lock me in a room for a few decades..." Li Hao murmured. "That ought to do the trick, right?"

“.....” Everyone looked at him. Do you want to give it a try?

Off to the side, the Black Armor looked silently at the dots of light and the sword outline. Why don't I... swap out for the body of a modern human? Since we can't go home, why don't I stay here and carve out a place for myself?

He looked at Director General Wang—the man was scratching at himself. He seemed to want to scratch a lock into existence. Too bad he didn't have any since he'd rebuilt his physical body according to the standards of New Martial.

Not too far away, Panther was also scratching at its body. The plant spirits stirred hopefully—do we have supernatural locks too? It's fine if we don't, can we somehow create them in our bodies? It... sounds nice to experience the new dao in an era devoid of core origin.

The first group of people to walk a new path was sure to be graced with immense favor and opportunity. Of that, everyone was well aware.

Li Hao didn't pay attention to any of this; he didn't have the bandwidth to consider this. “Let's set all that aside for now and look at the attributed locks. Senior, can you hide all of the unattributed locks? Everyone, manifest the attributed locks. Let's see if there's anything different about them. Do they still form a sword?”

The group shook from the implications, their spirits soaring. The attributed locks must be stronger and have greater potential to them!

A new round of experimentation began.

On this day, the martial masters in the ruins welcomed hope and light. They glimpsed a chance of catching up to New Martial and possibly eclipsing that illustrious age. Even though that hope was pathetically small, it was such an exhilarating and energizing development to have a future in this age!

They were no longer haphazardly smashing supernatural locks, no longer floundering in the dark for their next steps. No matter how perilous the way ahead was, an unlimited future stretched on ahead of them!

The group basked in bliss and elation. Caught in euphoria, no one paused to consider whether the new year had arrived in the outside world. For a split second, all of them wanted to just ignore the outside!

We have this huge mine at our disposal and see the way forward. Let's just stay here in closed door cultivation. We might be premier heavyweights after ten years! Ruling the world is nowhere as fun as cultivation!

.....

Lin Hongyu was quite lost when she reported to work at Skystar City the next day. Where was everyone? She strongly suspected that the Silver Moon martial masters and Li Hao had run off.

Indeed, there was no sign to be seen of Silver Moon martial masters.

Aren't I here to be the city lord? But... where should I go?

She couldn't find Li Hao anywhere, or any of his comrades. She was the strongest in the vast capital city and most critically, no one she asked knew where Li Hao and the rest had gone off to.

.....

The Skystar Commander Office.

Liu Long could be found here. Although Lin Hongyu had officially started her duties with no one to welcome her, he knew what proper business should be conducted. There were still people running the show at the Skystar Commander Office, it was just that Deputy Zhou was very busy lately.

There was nothing for it but for Liu Long to assume the responsibilities of others and personally take Lin Hongyu around, introducing her to those in charge of other areas. It was only now that the various institutions of Skystar City learned that Lin Hongyu of City of Supernaturals had come to take over the capital city.

Li Hao and those usually associated with him were nowhere to be found. It was... There was nothing they could say about that.

Lin Hongyu immediately felt pressure bearing down on her from all sides as soon as she assumed her duties. Endless tasks were piled onto her and she had to oversee countless matters. And yet, everyone had somehow disappeared. Hong Yitang didn't even show himself for the opening ceremony of the Skystar Martial Academy! That was a very important occasion!

He didn't neglect it on purpose, he'd originally gone to the ruins just to broaden his worldview, but found himself enthralled by what they were studying. He completely forgot about something as mundane as the first day of school.

Thankfully, Lin Hongyu was here. Adding Deputy Zhou and a few others to the mix meant that the turnout was decent. Those present for opening day furiously cursed those who were away. What could be so important that they missed even this momentous occasion? Each of them was more preposterous than the rest!

Even if they were in closed door cultivation, they couldn't all do so at the same time right now! There was work to be done in the world!

.....

At the same time, underground.

A group of people toiled tirelessly in either work or discussion. No one was sitting around idle; everyone was very busy. They were so busy that they'd completely forgotten about matters in the outside world. They were setting down the foundations of martial dao!

Every day was spent in further organizing the cultivation realms of the new martial dao, outlining the basics, and confirming the path ahead.

This was the sign of a new age.

Yuan Shuo's eyes were bloodshot as he took a large gulp of Water of Life to steady himself. He breathed out heavily and said, "We have the fundamentals of martial dao—or rather, the new martial dao!"

The group listened intently.

"The names of Slayer, Sunderer, and Dominator can remain. They're more straightforward and will help more people understand martial dao. Completely new names might result in some rejection as some might find the new dao less than the old dao.

"We'll set aside the path of supernatural characters for now and focus on the unattributed locks.

"Slayer used to be denoted by the appearance of internal force. As for why there was internal force within our bodies, how it was made, and from where it came from... we didn't know it before, but now I think we do!" Yuan Shuo smiled.

"The internal force that denotes the Slayer of Tens level comes from the process of opening one's supernatural locks! Or rather, dao meridians are what they're called now. Each lock can be partitioned into ten sections that we'll call acupoints. Clearing one acupoint connects one directly to the Hao Cosmos and permits the body to extract energy. That is internal force, which is the start of Slayer of Tens."

Nods abounded within the crowd. All of them had known the what, but not the hows before. Why did the body create internal force? No one knew. It was a natural byproduct of cultivation, what a silly question that was!

Chapter 975: Embracing the New Age (I)

By now, everyone knew that internal force was the result of opening the dao meridians. When the dao meridians were open, they connected to the Hao Cosmos. The energy emanating from the dao universe bloomed within the body, nurturing it. That came to be known as internal force!

This was a process of enlightening the heart and mind. Knowing the hows and whys made for better cultivation. Previous martial masters hadn't understood the theory within. Many premier martial masters didn't either, all anyone knew was that internal force could nurture the body.

As for how or why... how would they know? Hadn't internal force functioned like that ever since the ancient times?

"Clearing one acupoint of a supernatural lock produces internal force," Yuan Shuo continued. "That propels the cultivator into Slayer! Slayer of Tens can be further divided into four minor levels to facilitate a sense of progression. The initial training process might be too arduous and drag too long otherwise.

"Slayer of Tens will be known by the initial, mid, late, and peak minor stages. Each stage will be defined by nine acupoints. Clearing 36 acupoints will complete a minor circulation and produce internal force. Activating the circulation loop will project the internal force outside of the body. That is a hallmark of Sunderer of Hundreds!

"At present, we can view the 36 locks as an elementary circulation. It's the lowest number we've found that will complete a cycle. Clearing one acupoint in all of them is enough to establish a basic circulation. That will officially put one among the ranks of Sunderers!"

The group nodded their agreement.

“These 36 locks aren’t fixed in composition,” Yuan Shuo elaborated. “The exact ones can be adjusted based on the method that the cultivator is using, but that is a topic for another day. For now, we’ll use the Breakthrough Incantation as the foundation. This is the most stable method as it is modified from the Five Styles.”

Smooth and steady, keeping to the middle of the road was the first step. If someone wanted a unique path unlike any other... they could create it themselves!

There were so many supernatural locks; the group was just in the beginning stages. They hadn’t delved further into their research, and neither was there enough time.

“Clearing 36 acupoints of the 36 locks is the first step and makes one a Sunderer!” Yuan Shuo continued his explanation. “Sunderers are also divided into the initial, mid, late, and peak minor stages. The same rules apply. Each stage is defined by nine acupoints and clearing 72 puts one in peak Sunderer!”

Heads bobbed up and down again.

“In the past, we comprehended the aura at the Sunderer level. But right now, that is too difficult to grasp. Therefore, we’ll set aside the aura for now and continue in a foolproof way. Dominator will begin at the 73rd acupoint...

“At this stage, it’s no longer nine acupoints per level, but 36. That’s one circulation per minor level. Dominators need to complete 108 acupoints to reach mid Dominator, 144 acupoints for late Dominator, and 180 to be a peak Dominator.” Yuan Shuo smiled. “At this point, one will have cleared half of the 360 acupoints.

“Although we won’t have the strength of eighteen element Arcanus, I expect that we’ll be strong enough. Martial masters at this level should be much stronger than current Dominators.

“It used to be that Summoner of Spirit comes after Dominator, but that is no longer applicable. The spirit does not need to be summoned as cultivators are still strengthening their body at this level...”

It was Li Hao who frowned faintly. “Peak Dominator will require 180 acupoints... The next stage can’t have requirements like these...”

Yuan Shuo looked at the young man. Although Li Hao was Yuan Shuo’s disciple, he was also the pioneer and proponent of this new martial dao. The young man had worked tirelessly the past couple of days, forgoing sleep in a bid to shore up all inconsistencies. If he had a dissenting opinion, Yuan Shuo must take heed.

“Do you mean...”

“Is teacher prepared to have everyone continue excavating circulatory systems in the next stage, 36 acupoints at a time?”

“Precisely.” Yuan Shuo nodded. “This is the easiest and most straightforward way...”

“It doesn’t work like that!” Li Hao shook his head. “Teacher, that approach won’t work after Dominator. A dao meridian has been more than halfway opened at this stage. If we continue in this vein, the dao meridian will spontaneously collapse.

“The rest of the acupoints won’t be able to keep the dao meridian sealed after half of the acupoints have been cleared. The meridian will spontaneously break and inflict the force of 36 broken locks at the same time on the cultivator. Is there anyone who can endure that kind of stress? Teacher would be taking this course of action for granted if we proceed in this manner.”

“They’ll collapse?” Yuan Shuo raised a quizzical brow. “But I’ve tried it, the human model still operates when I continue in this fashion...”

He wouldn’t set forth such a risky course of action. That would be the death of a cultivator!

“The model isn’t a real person at the end of the day,” Li Hao shook his head. “It’s based off me—I can endure the strain, but that doesn’t mean others can.

“I had Senior Zhang weaken the model by one half and continued clearing acupoints. I found that if we continue in this vein after 180 acupoints, the 36 dao meridians collapse during the attempt to build another circulatory system. This is because these cultivators don’t have an aura, so they have nothing to keep the meridians in check with!”

“So this is the outcome... then...” Yuan Shuo took a deep breath.

“So we need a new plan of attack after Dominator,” Li Hao smiled. “We need to clear the remaining five acupoints of each meridian before moving on to the next. That will release the power within meridians by meridian!”

“Won’t that disrupt the circulation?” Yuan Shuo looked at his student with puzzlement.

“It won’t. I was experimenting yesterday—teacher didn’t see it because you were preoccupied, but everyone else did. There’s not much of an issue with my idea...”

Yuan Shuo looked at the rest, they nodded back at him. The hell? Why didn’t any of you see fit to tell me? I wasted a night’s effort!

Everyone was bleary-eyed from the intensity of their research efforts and their minds moved sluggishly. Who would think to remind someone else to watch Li Hao’s experiments?

A migraine was settling into the young man’s mind, but he managed to find his footing again. “Dominators should be able to walk through the air and fight in the sky! Those above Dominator can fight ten thousand at a time, shatter mountains, and cleave apart seas! That cultivation level... should be called Mountain and Sea!”

“They can break apart mountains and seas with a single move!” Yuan Shuo grinned radiantly. “I have the ability to topple mountains and sever the seas. What does everyone think?”

Soaring emotion gripped the crowd's hearts. To topple mountains and sever the seas! Martial masters could indeed accomplish these feats at that level. That made one a true legend, a walking god upon the land!

"I can shatter mountains and seas," murmured Sky Sword. "I can pluck the stars and capture the sun and moon. Martial masters are gods at this level!"

"That's right!" Li Hao nodded. "There are nine levels to Mountain and Sea—one level corresponds to one dao meridian. Only five acupoints need to be cleared for each level. Since there are nine levels, that means nine meridians need to be opened.

"Although unattributed locks are weaker, a nine element Arcanus can absolutely stand against an Apex. They'll also be able to fight seven or eight element Arcanus—their physical bodies will be stronger than their opponents! They might even be able to battle or kill peak ninth rank cultivators of New Martial..."

"Such is the Mountain and Sea level! The peak of this level is all nine meridians being open. That leaves one half of the meridians to be explored. Cultivators will absolutely be stronger than seven elements at this stage!"

There were nine levels to the Mountain and Sea level!

A soft murmur rose from the crowd as they repeated Li Hao's words to themselves. Excitement brewed as they grasped the connotations of having the power to shatter mountains and seas!

Indeed, based on Li Hao's categorization, that was the level that everyone was already at.

"So we are... of the Mountain and Sea level?" Sky Sword murmured.

"Indeed," Li Hao nodded. "Whether we're seven element or eight element Arcanus, my thoughts are that unattributed dao meridians should be grouped according to the standards of our time.

Attributed meridians, such as the ones we utilize, should be grouped according to the core origin standards of New Martial!

“That means to say that supernatural character cultivators should be able to withstand their New Martial peers and not lower their levels by one grade.” Li Hao was unspeakably solemn. “We are not weaker than anyone! Martial cultivators of our level can be one grade weaker than their opponents, but we cannot be.

“We will be known as the Mountain and Sea level even when we reach nine element Arcanus. But our level of strength makes it possible for us to triumph over those even stronger!”

“So does this mean that the Mountain and Sea level encompasses the New Martial cultivation levels below Apex?” asked the rest of the group. “That us nine element Arcanus are one step stronger than our New Martial peers? Our nine element Arcanus should be stronger than their half step Apexes in their time, right?”

Li Hao nodded!

Off to the side, the Black Armor was speechless at their childishness. Was there a point to lowering themselves by a grade to compete with Apex and below?

Based off Li Hao’s organization, the ninth level of Mountain and Sea in this age was indeed stronger than some New Martial ninth rank cultivators. Cultivators with attributed powers such as Li Hao and his group would be stronger than peak ninth rank.

But in this age, nine element Arcanus could defeat Apexes, alright? Even seven elements could manage the deed! Li Hao was downgrading himself by a level in this comparison, what was the point in that?

The crowd was incredibly excited by the new system; they didn’t care about the basis of comparison. So long as Li Hao thought it was correct, then it was correct.

Based on the previous cultivation system, the unattributed meridians of the four limbs weren't included in the assessment of one's strength. Those didn't offer any increase in strength, so one would only be a five element Arcanus if they broke all of the locks of the five organs and limbs. If there were any partially snapped locks, however, that made it difficult for an accurate gauge of strength.

Our ninth level of Mountain and Sea could fight your Apexes! We can do that even if the core origin dao is still present! We can fight beyond our cultivation level!

Although the cultivation levels and systems were different, they still delighted in this kind of comparison.

It felt so good!

Chapter 976: Embracing the New Age (II)

"There are twenty-seven partially opened dao meridians left after those nine are fully open," Li Hao chuckled. "When all thirty-six are opened, that puts the cultivator on par with the Apex level of the New Martial era. Pure martial masters need to be equivalent to the Apexes of this age, whereas those of us with supernatural abilities need to be equivalent to the Apexes of the New Martial Age!

"This stage can also be divided into nine levels. One level corresponds to three meridians, which is fifteen acupoints altogether. Nine levels will see twenty-seven dao meridians being opened. At the end of it all will be a cultivator who can overcome any Apex of this age. That would be about right!

"For us, we'll be able to break through the void and shatter the firmament at this stage. We will rival the core origin Apexes of New Martial, which is what our goal is! This level should be called Sun and Moon!"

Li Hao grinned. "Senior Sky Sword put it well—we will be able to pluck the stars and bring down the sun and moon. Such are the lofty aspirations that cultivators of our age should nurture! We vie with the sun and moon!"

His words sent the group into an uproar of hefty agreement. Each of them was seized by joy again. I can cleave the mountains and sea, seize the sun and moon, break the void, and reign invincible beneath the heavens. The new dao dares compete with New Martial for its glories!

They'd never imagined the possibility before. Yet, here their dao was and they were cultivators in possession of supernatural characters who could battle core origin powerhouses. In this moment, cultivators who could utilize supernatural characters were a higher level of being.

We will recreate the magnificence of martial dao!

The Black Armor didn't say anything. It was good that Li Hao and the rest constantly mentioned New Martial. That meant they respected, revered, and feared the might of his time. It was a kind of acknowledgement and approval!

Who paid attention to the weak and insignificant?

This further indicated that Li Hao's group were aware of how resplendently brilliant the ancient civilization had been. That stoked their lofty sentiments and made New Martial their goal to surpass. There was no need to pay it too much attention.

"Let's stop here with the cultivation levels. Going any further would put us in the realm of pure mythology!" Li Hao smiled. "It's very hard to open even thirty-six dao meridians at present. Even we would have to utilize some attributed meridians to reach that number. It's much easier said than done."

Any further cultivation levels would be empty talk of daydreamers if they created more without fully comprehending the levels. The names would be baseless and lacking the support of any practical theory.

However, the way forward was ahead of them! It was sufficient to know that there was a long way to go ahead and many paths to choose from.

“There are four minor levels total to Slayer, Sunderer, and Dominator!” Li Hao summarized with a smile. “There are nine minor levels to Mountain and Sea, Sun and Moon! From the 180 acupoints of peak Dominator, the 225 acupoints of peak Mountain and Sea, and to the 360 acupoints of peak Sun and Moon, these 360 acupoints will ultimately return to being thirty-six dao meridians.

“The number of acupoints dwindles when they are combined together. At that point, the true meaning of cultivation will be found in one supernatural ability per acupoint, one supernatural character per acupoint, and one battle technique per acupoint!”

The group roared with laughter. This day ought to be recorded in history! The new dao had come!

They’d jointly studied and organized it. Although their understanding only scratched the surface and there was only one method... and only one kind of circulation of thirty-six meridians... It still made for a powerful burgeoning new dao!

It could be popularized! It could be standardized!

Only a standardized dao was a true great dao.

The issue of the physical body had been completely resolved. The body could receive energy feedback from the Hao Cosmos through the process of clearing acupoints. They would no longer have to worry about the fragility of their physical bodies!

Utter glee seized the group as they basked in mutual glory!

“The great dao is with the heavens, yet humans can triumph over the heavens. We have established a new dao and walk a new path. It is not heaven’s intent that chooses us, but we that manipulate the heavens!” Li Hao threw his head back with a roar of laughter. His presence emanated from his body and collected into a supernatural character.

Dao!

Indeed, it was a character of ‘dao’. The young man had created a character out of thin air!

This character underwent a myriad of changes—various faces floated out of it. They were ones of powerhouses such as Yuan Shuo, Sky Sword, Tyrant Blade, Northern Fist...

Every single person present was imprinted within. Even the Black Armor, Panther, and plant spirits were included!

A change percolated through the world. A new dao had been created, one that vied with the heavens!

.....

The outside world.

Thunder roared and lightning crashed, gale winds howled! The world darkened—only it could create a dao. It was theft from the heavenly dao if someone tried to create one!

The nascent heaven’s will roared, slightly at a loss. Did someone dare seize the heavenly dao for themselves? It would naturally establish itself once it fully formed. Had someone stolen the fruits of its labor before it fully came into existence?

Heaven’s will was too young at this stage. Only a hint of consciousness had been born within it after it broke free of the main world’s control. It didn’t understand what it meant, so it could only vent its spleen upon the world.

Heaven’s will could not be thwarted! This is my world, I am the master!

.....

In various ruins across the land.

Thunder and lightning rumbled there as well!

Battle Heaven

The Ninth Division leader and others showed themselves with incredulity. “Heaven’s will has invaded the ruins... Has the protection of New Martial vanished?”

This wasn’t a good sign, but neither was it a bad development. At the very least, it meant that the ruins would not be able to protect them for much longer. On the other hand, that meant all of them would be able to leave the ruins because the ruins had become one with the world.

The world was revitalizing!

“Why has the pace accelerated again?” The stunned old turtle did not understand. “The great mine has not crumbled away, so why is the world awakening at an increasing pace? It should’ve taken roughly five years, but will it even need another year now?”

Why had this happened? Was heaven’s will so eager to free the New Martial powerhouses? Or had another development occurred that they didn’t know of?

It was all too strange! So strange that they didn’t know how to understand it.

.....

Ripples traveled through all of the various main cities and ruins apart from Battle Heaven. Thunder and lightning ripped through Silver Moon's sky as an assortment of figures materialized in the void. Formidable and imposing, they seemed to wave swords and spears from another universe away. Someone in another age broke through the firmament with a blade.

"Fight!!" could be heard faintly through the world. There were tens of millions of soldiers standing at attention, their blood qi soaring to the heavens and their battle intent reaching the cosmos.

The sight was reminiscent of when the vast army set off to war. The Sword Sovereign had led them out of Silver Moon to punish those who would not bend the knee.

Director General Zhao was stunned into a trance when he saw the sight. Heavens above! Can someone tell me what's happened now? Can someone tell me why the sight of New Martial marching off to war countless years ago has appeared eons later?

Indeed, he could tell that this was just the projection of powerhouses. The Sword Sovereign had once led more than ten million soldiers from Silver Moon through the Star Gate to march upon the universe. But why... had the sight reappeared now?

.....

In the ruins underground.

The 'dao' character flickered while claps of thunder roared. The Black Armor and Director General Wang were immensely shocked. They lifted their heads to the sky. How was there thunder and lightning underground? What kind of supernatural character was this? The character of great dao?

The Black Armor studied it carefully, finding it blinding to the eye. If even he found it piercing, it could be easily imagined just how radiant the character was.

"The overview of dao!" he murmured after looking at it for a while.

Everyone felt that the young man was the inventor of the new dao. As its researcher, participant, and discoverer, Li Hao had instinctively created a supernatural character that was the overview of dao!

This was incredible! So such a thing existed as well?

The Black Armor looked at the supernatural character once more, as did Li Hao. The young man regarded it with a strange expression that held hints of doubt.

“This is a nice thing,” he smiled after a while. “I can meld all of my dao meridians and supernatural abilities without an aura into it. It’s just like Martial Uncle Hong’s ‘sword’ character. Who would’ve thought that I’d run into this stroke of luck? Martial uncle, now you’re not the only one with a character that can shift through a variety of changes!”

The ‘dao’ character transformed into various supernatural abilities of thunder and lightning, gale winds, and torrential rain...

The group looked ardently at it, highly envious and wanting to create something similar.

“Coalescing dao into a character...” Yuan Shuo and the others contemplated it wistfully. How nice would it be if they had one too?

“No no no,” Hong Yitang laughed ruefully. “Your character seems to have combined all known auras and excavated daos. I think it has more potential than mine does!”

“No, although this was born of the world, humans can triumph over the heavens!” Li Hao grinned. “This is a marvelous item in Silver Moon world, but it’s just an ordinary character once we walk out of this world!”

The young man had come to some preliminary reflections about this creation. It would be very useful when he was in this world, but there would be nothing special about it once he left. It was formed of Silver Moon's essence; nothing else set it apart when he wasn't physically here.

This supernatural character would be nigh magical if he stayed in Silver Moon. He might be able to command all daos. But did Li Hao view Silver Moon as his life's goal?

No!

He didn't!

I have once seen vaster worlds, so why must I stay here for the rest of my life? This is my home that I will always come back to, but I am so young, so of course I should walk out of this world and take a look at the grand universe out there. I should meet that invincible Human King, the Supreme Zhang revered by all, and the Green Emperor who rules over half of the world...

I'll then pay my respects to the Exalted Blood Emperor who broke the world with one stroke and the principal that Zhang An can't forget...

How fun would that be? I also want to observe the universe's chaos...

So while Li Hao was gratified by the 'dao' character, he didn't lose himself in joy. It was just the overview of dao as formed by a minor world. What good was that for?

Chapter 977: Embracing the New Age (III)

Li Hao stowed the 'dao' supernatural character with a smile. "The new dao can be popularized, but what should be done with the old martial masters and supernaturals? The martial masters are easy enough to handle, they can easily switch between the systems. Not to mention, martial masters above Dominator wield significant advantages..."

“Then what of supernaturals? They’ve broken their supernatural locks, some of which may be among the 36. How to enable their recovery, if they have to start over, or whether they can incorporate their strength into the new system are questions that we must tackle next.

“We must, otherwise overhauling the cultivation system will be unfair to them, which would not benefit us either!”

Heads nodded.

“We do have a way,” Li Hao continued.” “At present, the supernatural locks that have been broken are mostly those with attributes. They can be used to coalesce supernatural characters! Supernaturals that progress from Starlight to Darkmoon, then Sunflare, Solar, and eventually Nova have broken the four locks of their limbs and one of the five organs. They’re not supernaturals of special attributes.

“Breaking the locks of the four limbs can be viewed as building their foundations for the fourth level of Mountain and Sea, but we need to find a way to solve their issue of their broken circulation. As for the locks of the five organs, just one supernatural lock is sufficient!”

The group nodded in agreement.

“The locks of the four limbs are part of the thirty-six,” Yuan Shuo interjected. “They’re just broken ahead of time, which means that their circulatory system won’t be as strong as others. But at their cultivation level, their physical body is stronger than a regular person’s. They’ll be able to endure more of the force resulting from broken locks, so that’s not a big problem!

“They’re not ordinary people, so they can suffer greater damage to their body. Mysterious power is a highly destructive power to begin with as it pummels the body both inside and out. Supernaturals need to endure the pain from this impact as well, so their current path isn’t a major issue.

“It’s just that Novas will need to coalesce a supernatural character, which means this dao will have to be disseminated and taught to others...” He looked at Li Hao. “Are you willing to permit that?”

The Five Styles had been transformed into the Breakthrough Incantation—Yuan Shuo was willing to let that be known by others since it would only benefit a bunch of martial brutes. But if the way to trace the supernatural characters was taught to others... that would give rise to a crop of supernatural character cultivators.

As of now, this was Li Hao's undeniable advantage.

"What does teacher think?" The young man smiled.

"You can do that, but... at present, I think it's better to disseminate the Breakthrough Incantation first since there are strong enemies at large," Yuan Shuo offered after a moment of silence. "We can convert cultivators below Nova to martial masters without aura or supernatural abilities first!

"Novas and Arcanus are the minority, after all. They can wait for a while. Those of this level are either with us or our enemy. Those with us will learn the method, whereas enemies... can do without!"

Whether it was Novas or Arcanus, supernaturals at this level were overlords of their locality. Yuan Shuo felt that there was no need to mass distribute something that would benefit them.

As for other cultivators, they would have one attribute to their name. The weakest of Starlight would be able to draw on whichever element resulted from the lock of their five organs. That was fine, it wasn't the biggest issue since that was only one dao meridian. None of the five organs were part of the thirty-six, so they could be ignored for now. It would not have a great effect on battle strength.

Only when it came to Novas and Arcanus did one fewer dao meridian equate to one less minor level, and hence a great impact on battle strength. This was also why Yuan Shuo didn't wish to share the method to draw supernatural characters.

One fewer dao meridian for Solars would turn them into Sunflares. That would be a visible weakening of strength. With the Breakthrough Incantation, however, they could quickly catch up. Thus, that deficiency wasn't a cause for concern.

"Teacher's words ring of experience and sense!" Li Hao nodded with a smile. "Whether it is Novas or Arcanus, those who are not with us are against us. There are almost none who are neutral! Then, it affects nothing if I do not teach others how to draw supernatural characters.

"The Breakthrough Incantation needs to be shared so that ambient energy levels are decreased. The world is awakening, but once tens of millions of humans cultivate and absorb its energy... Hahaha, I will further delay the second awakening!

"But if there are too many who are cultivating, they'll need to replenish their blood qi and physical bodies with nourishment. Although the sacred grain is incredible, there's too little of it. Not to mention, they'll need to eat other tangible food at some time, not just grain. Plant spirits can raise the grain we need, but other food..." Li Hao looked at Panther, the dog looked innocently back at him.

What are you looking at me for? Do you want to eat meat? I'm just one dog. Even if you want to eat me or want to feed me to everyone beneath the heavens, there won't be enough of me to go around!

"Although the Hao Cosmos returns energy to us, it requires a catalyst from the outside. One has to be a cultivator in order to access that universe," Yuan Shuo remarked. "So we do need nutritional items at our current stage. However...

"We might not need meat," he smiled. "It is said that there was a pill in New Martial that could nourish blood qi. It was created from herbs and other naturally growing ingredients. This was part of the dao of pills!"

"Pills have a good effect when it comes to supplementing blood qi," the Black Armor suddenly offered. "And it's easy to refine them. There should be many records in the Lu Zhen Research Center if you access it. It was the Director Lu himself who created the blood qi pills. He was their proponent since the early days of New Martial. But to locate the necessary herbs in this period...

“The world has just awoken, so much of it was as in New Martial. Those ingredients should be readily available. There might be some minute differences, however, so you may have to make some substitutions!”

“The Lu Zhen Research Center also looked into these topics?” Li Hao raised an eyebrow.

“Like I said, its namesake created the pill,” the Black Armor responded calmly. “Director Lu Zhen was the father of the Human King’s teacher. He is our senior and a premier researcher of initial New Martial. This site is just a branch that one of his students set up. What can be found inside is just the basic fundamentals!”

Li Hao smiled with delight. His problems were solved then!

“Judging from your words, you seem to want to standardize martial dao and make it available to all?” asked the Black Armor.

“Yes!” Li Hao nodded. “No matter how strong or weak, I wish for everyone to be able to train! It will fortify their bodies, extend their lifespans, and decrease the ailments they suffer from! They will be more vigorous when it comes to work and won’t drag down their entire family if they fall ill.

“If everyone walks the path of martial dao, then superhumans will no longer be special. Only then will true equality be possible! A difference in strength does exist in martial dao, but if everyone knows it, only this difference will exist. There will be no class differences!

“Once the boundary between mundanes and superhumans is dismantled, everyone will have the chance to become a powerhouse. Only then will the future be bright and obstacles surmounted!

“I’ve been studying New Martial lately,” Li Hao pivoted with a serious look. “I was curious why there wasn’t a large difference between social classes in the later days of New Martial. I realized that this was because everyone had opportunities!

“Whether it was civilians or exalted emperors, every youngster from every household had a chance to become a heavyweight. There were martial universities throughout the world. Those with high marks enrolled, studied and trained, and became powerhouses! This was the core concept of New Martial and a trait that I quite admire.

“The prevalence of martial universities in New Martial gave everyone an equal chance. Whoever established them was the real Human King!”

“.....” The Black Armor blinked, looking at Li Hao with a very complicated look in his eyes.

“Um... it was martial uncle’s grandfather, Supreme Zhang, who established martial universities throughout the world,” Director General Wang couldn’t help himself. “They didn’t exist at first, but when Supreme Zhang became the Minister of Education, he rolled it out to the entire world. That became the basis of civilians rising through life...”

“Whether it was the Human King or the exalted emperor of Battle Heaven, they were all civilians back in the day. They graduated from the martial universities...”

“Supreme Zhang? What a truly incredible man!” Li Hao praised sternly. “I, too, hope that there is someone who can assist me, this age, and this world in this manner! The dao of characters needs to be established as a dao beneath the heavens, as a path for all!”

He turned to face the group. “Seniors, which among you can help the world and all of life with creating this dao?”

“.....” No one responded; expressions shifted wordlessly. They were being asked to do as New Martial did in disseminating martial dao throughout the world, building martial universities through the land, and spreading education far and wide so that no one would be tied to their social class...

Hong Yitang's expression flickered through a variety of changes. Li Hao's magnificent goal was too great! Hong Yitang could build schools and be a proponent of education—he was already doing that. But Li Hao wanted far more than that!

He wanted this age's Supreme Zhang!

Who could stand by his side to herald the dao of peace for the world? With Silver Moon as the foundation for professions and to pave a smooth path for the new era...

The Black Armor didn't know what to make of this. That was his grandfather whom even the Human King respected! But today, the fellow with the greatest potential of this age said that he wanted a supreme just like his grandfather, someone who could create a new dao and era with him!

Who could do that?

Zhang An was highly satisfied that someone of this caliber, who'd never met his grandfather, would be so admiring. At the same time, he was also wondering who was up to the task.

"I am willing to accept this duty, but I would not dare be compared to Supreme Zhang of New Martial." Hong Yitang raised his head. "I will disseminate dao throughout the world and weaken the barriers between social classes. I can... remove some of the obstacles for the new era!"

Yuan Shuo had also been grappling with the speech and suddenly sighed, "I am willing to accept this duty as well. I will write books of dao and teach the new martial dao, as well as establish research centers of martial dao. From now on, the martial world no longer exists!"

He sighed with a great mixture of emotions. The martial world was... no more. Yet this was his disciple in front of him. This was their age, their world, their heavens.

Chapter 978: Embracing the New Age (IV)

“No, teacher,” Li Hao smiled. “The martial world lies within the heart and can be found anywhere beneath the heavens. I told you once that so long as you look around, everywhere is the martial world! What we see and do, we do as part of the martial world!”

“Everyone, this age is too foolish, ignorant, and lags behind. Let’s turn it into the martial world, how about it?”

“May martial dao thrive and prosper!” roared the group after a stunned pause. “The martial world will ever exist and the age will be filled with light!”

They were creating a brand new era!

We will accept this responsibility together!

The group seemed to change in this moment. Those of the martial world found the martial world everywhere. They would employ themselves where they could to advocate for education, martial dao, technology, and an improvement in their level of life.

Indeed, martial dao was more than just martial dao. Unimaginable changes would take place in the world when everyone was superhuman. Power would no longer be monopolized in the hands of a select few. Everyone would be superhuman and the divisions of social classes would be completely shattered!

.....

The plant spirits, Panther, Director General Wang, and Black Armor standing off to the side were a bit lost in the words they heard. The new age would be filled with light! Perhaps now was when this new era blossomed with light. The ones who led the vanguard and shone radiance where they tread were these people in front of him.

Demon Sword Li Hao, Five Styles King Yuan Shuo, Earthturner Sword Hong Yitang, Sky Sword, Tyrant Blade, Northern Fist, Light Sword, Sickly, Cannibal...

Zhang An watched them quietly, his still heart and cold blood beginning to heat up. I would've never dared say that I wish to imitate my grandfather. Today, in this place and time, a group of ignorant weaklings somehow say that while they don't measure up to my grandfather, they would carry out their plans regardless. They will disseminate dao throughout the world and spur on the martial world.

Grandfather... is this the heart of a heavyweight that you often spoke of? Strength doesn't necessarily come from muscle or abilities. If one's heart is strong, that makes one strong!

A million thoughts ran through the Black Armor's mind as he suddenly said, "I once oversaw a martial university, so you can come to me with any questions about your courses of action! My students know some too. New Martial may not exist anymore, but its dao and heart are still here!"

Li Hao blinked and tilted his head at the Black Armor. Zhang An smiled back at him and vanished on the spot. "I'm going off to cultivate!"

He disappeared.

Meanwhile, Director General Wang said after a visible struggle with himself, "I wasn't around to participate in battles of New Martial and also missed the rise of the Human King. Li Hao, I'd like to change to a new physical body and participate in this era!"

Li Hao stared at him.

"I am of New Martial, that will not change," the man explained earnestly. "But New Martial citizens are not wrongdoers. I'd like to participate in this age as those of New Martial vie for opportunity no matter the age!"

We fight for martial dao! The opportunity is right in front of me, so I'd like to fight for it.

Li Hao smiled and nodded after a long moment. “You can do that! But let me think about how to do this... A new body might entail that you need to be resurrected again. It will greatly weaken your strength...”

“That’s fine!” Director General Wang grinned from ear to ear. I am of New Martial, but I’m going to embrace this age now!

.....

Having clarified the cultivation system for the time being and determined the basic cultivation method of the Breakthrough Incantation, the group was able to set a course for their path to come.

Li Hao and his people now had their guiding principle and faith, as well as goals to work toward. Silver Moon was their martial world. They would make this martial world more vibrant and bright. Martial dao would prosper and the martial world would be found everywhere.

Completing the other systems wouldn’t be the work of one night. It was only now that the group collected their senses and realized that a lot of time had passed.

“Is it the year 1713?” Hong Yitang suddenly asked. “Has the school year already started at the Skystar Martial Academy?”

The premises suddenly quieted down; hot-blooded fervor was abruptly replaced by awkwardness. That... seemed to be the case. Not only that, but all of them had important missions at hand. They’d forgotten about their duties outside!

“Has City Lord Lin arrived?”

“Pro... bably?”

“.....” Sheepish glances were exchanged in the crowd. They’d completely forgotten about this!

“Then let us head outside,” laughed Li Hao. “We’re not in a hurry to finish everything right this second. Perfecting a cultivation system takes time. We simply have the first draft at the moment. We’ll study it in more detail once everyone’s strength grows.

“All of us, me included, will utilize this new cultivation system!” Li Hao’s tone grew solemn. “Everything is just theory at the moment and works in abstract. It can even be simulated through the model, but perhaps there really are some errors and adjustments that need to be made. As the vanguard, we need to fully perfect our creation. The other minor circulatory loops that my teacher mentioned also need to be built! It is a beautiful sight when a myriad of flowers bloom in unison!

“I’m of the opinion that all secret arts can have their own circulatory system. They don’t have to follow the preset approach and every cultivator’s situation is different. I hope that, in the future, Silver Moon will teem with martial academies and that each of you present will become the founder of a cultivation style...”

Standardization would strengthen people, but in a formulaic way. That would take away from the beauty that was a martial world of a myriad wonders. The thirty-six dao meridians might not have to be the same set of thirty-six that they’d deduced upon. Substitutions could be made, which might result in different functionality.

“In addition, we can experiment how unattributed and attributed dao meridians might be compatible with each other in various ways,” Li Hao commented. “Perhaps one attribute dao meridian can be paired with thirty-five unattributed ones. Everything can be tested. There are a myriad paths of dao—we are advocating the easiest and most direct, the one most conducive to cultivation. However, we are all rogues of this era, so we can explore as our heart wishes.

“So long as we don’t experiment ourselves to death, we can dance with death in our experiments!”

“.....” The group burst out laughing at the young man’s audacious words.

“Humans have human meridians, monster spirits will have monster spirit meridians.” Li Hao then looked at Panther with a sudden grin. “The great dao does not differentiate between humans and monster spirits. The world’s consciousness has just been born. I’m thinking that... since the heavenly dao isn’t human, it will not show favor only to humans! You’re a martial master dog. Unfortunately, it’s tough to communicate with you. You can search for your own path, however, because the theory is the same. Do you understand me?”

The black dog nodded with great urgency. It might be the first monster spirit in this world that could learn from boundless human knowledge and was skilled in the martial aura. It was a martial master dog!

“Seniors, there is no need for you to imitate us.” Li Hao then turned to the plant spirits around them. “You are heavyweights of New Martial and I do not think that age will topple so effortlessly. It might be difficult for the seniors to sense the existence of core origin dao while you are limited to this world, but a dao universe is not so easily destroyed.

“The newly born Hao Cosmos might have squeezed the core origin universe out of its place. Or they might be coexisting side by side, but isolated from each other.

“Seniors can continue down the New Martial path to strengthen your bodies and mind. Although core origin has been extinguished, that does not mean there is no future ahead of you. If you keep at it and wait for the Star Gate to open, the seniors might spontaneously break through the moment you encounter core origin again! It is hard for plant spirits to improve, so it might be more of a loss than a gain for you to switch to a new body.”

His words caused the previously tempted plant spirits to sway uncertainly.

“Does Commander Li mean that... plant spirits cannot cultivate our dao meridians like the commander?” came the imperial guard’s mental ripples.

“Perhaps you can, but... it won’t be a worthwhile endeavor!” Li Hao shook his head. “It’s only a matter of time before the Star Gate opens. Of course, I can’t guarantee opening the Star Gate since I

might die ahead of schedule... I can only say that it will be open as long as I am alive! Whether it is sending the seniors back home or wherever you prefer to go, I will open that door.

“So perhaps, it might not take that many years. If you return to New Martial, then there might not be that much of a difference between the dao of the Hao Cosmos and core origin dao. It’s just a tiny amount of time to wait, whereas the seniors would be sacrificing thousands of years of cultivation... It would be a very unprofitable decision!”

Upon further consideration, the plant spirits found that the young man made sense. If the Star Gate was opened again and core origin dao reintroduced to this world, or if they left to return home, they might be leaving with less than their current strength if they followed Director General Wang’s footsteps.

Li Hao’s words were entirely true. All the same, the plant spirits were also thinking that the young man was more worried about his supply of Water of Life. He’s probably concerned that no one will be able to supply Water of Life to them if we get weaker! These guys have been drinking it like regular water lately!

Although the Hao Cosmos existed and Water of Life would no longer be a limiting factor in the new cultivation system, the resource still expedited training. It wasn’t necessary for powerhouses anymore, but that didn’t mean it was completely useless.

The plant spirits didn’t speak of this, however. The young man made some sense. If they continued to cultivate and strengthen their primary bodies and minds, they might be able to erupt with accumulated effort the next time they encountered core origin. That would result in a large step forward on their cultivation!

“Even I cannot be certain that New Martial still exists, and I am a citizen!” Director General Wang couldn’t help but say. “How are you so certain?”

Li Hao seemed to be more confident than the denizens of that time! He said that New Martial was probably still there, why was that?

“Because... I feel that those who have walked through valleys of death will not be so easily defeated!” Li Hao smiled. “No matter what age it is, so long as the people do not forget their original intentions after they have weathered many storms and attained success, then they will not collapse. Their minds will remain even if their physical bodies are no longer! New Martial will still be there so long as humanity exists.”

Director General Wang blinked. Deep within the mines, Zhang An also paused. Those who have walked through valleys of death...

Indeed. Which of the Human King and his companions hadn't stared death in the face over and over again throughout their struggles?

Chapter 979: The Curtains Rise (I)

The notable figures of New Martial had reached their goal step by step, footprint by footprint. How many obstacles had they overcome and how many dangers had they faced? They'd created something magnificent from nothing at all, established an age, and extended thousands of years of glory!

Would people like that truly die? Yet, these New Martial citizens had less confidence in themselves than Li Hao did!

The young man didn't say anything else. He simply felt that since the Human King had weathered so many hardships and dealt with so many adversities, how would he and his companions be defeated without a second word? Judging from what his people said about him and Supreme Zhang, none of these titans had changed even after attaining their goals.

Could personages like that be toppled just because an enemy wished to?

How was that even possible?!

Perhaps the enemy was more formidable than previously imagined or perhaps other matters were keeping them away. But so long as they were alive, a group like them would not be defeated so easily.

Li Hao rather felt himself to be in the same position. His experiences and breadth of vision were far less than that of these august figures, but he could sense that even now, he was much stronger and more tenacious than who he'd been when he resided at Silver City. He had improved one hundredfold, one thousandfold!

This was because his heart had grown! Whatever difficulty, enemy, unknowns, or fear, none of it could defeat him! If even I am this way, then how could those people be routed? Even if they were, that would only mean that the enemy was too strong, so strong that the Human King and his companions were killed in an instant.

If that's the case, then nothing else needs to be said.

But... is that possible?

Li Hao's theory was that it hadn't been long since Silver Moon had decoupled from the main world. Ties between the two weren't severed before because Silver Moon Territory had still been within New Martial boundaries. That meant that New Martial continued to stand. It had shone for so many years, it would not be extinguished so easily.

Director General Wang chewed over the young man's words; he didn't find his decision to discard his current body to be a mistake. He was still a New Martial citizen, he'd just chosen to embrace this new era. He would still be a New Martial citizen even after he grew stronger.

It was just a different dao. Walking a different path didn't entail severing relationships or turning his back on his identity.

.....

Li Hao spent some time soothing the New Martial existences. This period of cultivation had instilled within him some tolerance and understanding of those who called New Martial home. Or perhaps, it could be more accurately described as acceptance.

They were of different ages and of different species, but they could seek to coexist peacefully while retaining their differences.

It was impossible to conquer the myriad of worlds in the vast universe. Additionally, Silver Moon bore the legacy of New Martial. They were connected as a same family, like two sides of a coin. Even if this world did seek independence, the two could be allies or at the very least, two civilizations that developed peacefully without interfering with each other.

It was due to these considerations that Li Hao chose to placate the plant spirits at the time. If in times before... he would already be generous enough to not be on guard against them! The young man might even be secretly pleased if these plant spirits chose to forsake their current bodies. That would produce so many discarded trunks for his use!

“Then let’s step outside for a breath of fresh air.” Li Hao stood up in an exceedingly good mood, organizing the area around him. “It’s not a good idea to be completely absorbed in cultivation. Let’s meet City Lord Lin and discuss how to swiftly roll out martial dao to the rest of the world!”

“Sounds good!” Everyone was in lighthearted spirits and walked outside.

“The great dao is much more stabilized after its rules have been established,” Zhang An said from behind them. “The world is stabilizing as well. You need to be quick about absorbing energy, or else the second awakening will soon be at hand!

“Additionally, this is only a temporary stopgap that will delay the second awakening. The more cultivators there are, the more it will further stabilize the world. A balance in energy consumption will be reached—you will take from the world in the beginning, then return the energy in later stages...”

This was another circulatory loop. When powerhouses interacted with energy, it had the effect of tempering the world because they were pulling more energy from the Hao Cosmos. That was the energy of the dao universe, which would in turn strengthen this world. Only in the initial stages would cultivators pull more from the world itself and create an energy imbalance.

“I understand, thank you for your reminder, senior.” Li Hao nodded. The second awakening was destined to take place, he wouldn’t be able to delay it for too long. Immortals, Saints, and even Empyrean Kings would appear when the world awakened. That was when his troubles would really begin.

Of those, the young man and everyone else was aware of. So whether it was the nine ministries, royal family, or three great organizations, all awaited the second awakening. They could tell that Li Hao and the Silver Moon martial masters did not wish to use New Martial might against New Martial citizens. They wanted to fight by themselves!

Since the young man was unwilling to compromise in this matter, then great conflict might occur.

.....

Li Hao chuckled when he walked out of the ruins. Minor changes seemed to have taken place in Zhang An this time. This illustrious personage from the early days of New Martial, Supreme Zhang’s grandson, no longer seemed as bleak as before.

The group filed out of the ruins, sensing something different as soon as they emerged.

“The world is indeed more secure,” Hong Yitang observed. “Not only that, but we seem to have more of a connection with heaven and earth. My auras... are very lively!”

“Energy is more active, which will bring auras—or dao—into clearer focus!” Yuan Shuo concurred. “The auras of heaven and earth are closer to us now, so we’ll feel more of it when we incorporate our auras into the world.”

Li Hao gave the new revelations a try—supernatural characters melded into the void. The auras of heaven and earth gathered!

Energy around them surged toward Li Hao's body like he was a starving plant spirit. The sight made people's scalps tingle with numbness. This guy's ability to devour energy was even more terrifying than that of plant spirits!

Li Hao raised his head to look at the sky; he seemed to sense something.

"How interesting!" he grinned. "Heaven's intent seems to be stirring with irritation. I think I'm pissing it off?"

"Heaven's intent is not man's intent," snorted Yuan Shuo. "So what if it's annoyed?"

"We can't say that, teacher," Li Hao laughed. "Heaven's intent has isolated us from the main world so that we have a chance to develop independently. Therefore, it's a good person... good consciousness to us! We can try being more polite next time and follow its will. There might be something in it for us if we do so!"

"....." The group paused, then bent over with stifled laughter. Li Hao had quite the imagination!

"We can fool heaven's intent!" the young man said seriously. "It's newly born and can't sense much because it's not a living person. What it can sense is some major auras. When auras meld into the world and become one with it... It gives us a vehicle by which we can fool the heavens!"

He sent the 'dao' character into the void; certain thoughts rose from it.

"Heaven's will is eternal and I am a willing believer. I facilitate your growth and the development of the world. I hereby dedicate my life to this world..." This was Li Hao's mediation, a prayer that he purposefully displayed for the rest.

The group noted the world shifting before a surge of power manifested in the void, then slammed into Li Hao's body. The young man smiled as he swallowed it, then turned to the stunned crowd with a smile.

“What are you looking at me for? A child is smarter than the will of heaven at present! It’s just a strand of consciousness out there somewhere. Meld your aura into the world and speak nicely to it for some presents! I’d gotten sidetracked by a tangent before and thought that it was heaven’s will manipulating our hearts.

“That’s not the case. Heaven’s will is very weak. If not, it would’ve long taken over the world. We wouldn’t have had the chance to discover the Hao Cosmos then. At the same time, these presents are limited!” Li Hao expounded. “Some energy doesn’t mean anything. The true key is when we fight enemies. Those of you who integrate your aura into the world can borrow more power from it. Teacher said this before!

“We need to follow heaven’s will when we incorporate our aura into the world. Then, we need to learn how to borrow strength to suppress enemies when we do battle. This is where we need to convince heaven’s will of a belief—our enemies will destroy the development of the world! The will of heaven will protect the world.”

Jaws dropped as the group listened to Li Hao. Was this permissible? Could they borrow more force from the world if they melded their auras into the environment?

Li Hao nodded seriously, prompting a flurry of action from his eager seniors. All of them directed their auras into the void and muttered various entreaties.

“Heaven above, you are my mother and father. We wish to protect the world, develop peacefully, strengthen the world, expel and exterminate enemies...”

Aura upon aura sank into the world. This was the sight that greeted Lin Hongyu when she arrived. It was like she’d stumbled into a cult meeting. A bunch of lunatics were praying to evil gods!

Wide-eyed, she stared at even the noble and righteous Sky Sword muttering under his breath, bowing and praying reverently to the sky.

The hell?

She was suddenly fearful and wanted to back away. Had these crazies... fallen in with some evil god?

There were indeed gods and divine spirits in this world. There was a Divine Nation situated at the end of the western direction. It was said that local deities that'd been eliminated during New Martial took shelter there. Countless people worshipped them in that nation. As the master of the City of Supernaturals, Lin Hongyu was aware of that part of the world.

She also knew that divine spirits might really have awakened in the Divine Nation of the west. That... wasn't what had overcome Li Hao and the rest, was it?

"Ah, City Lord Lin is here, my apologies." Li Hao drifted out with a smile. "I was busy with some matters before and forgot about the time. I do apologize for not welcoming you..."

Lin Hongyu quickly kept her thoughts in check and flashed a smile. "It's to be expected that the commander is busy. Um..." She looked at Sky Sword and the rest, pretending to be curious. "What are the seniors..."

"They're trying to fool the heavens and borrow more power from the world."

Lin Hongyu almost snorted with laughter. They really were crazy! How childish could this group of old farts get? Hoodwinking the heavens to get more strength out of them? Who are you kidding? People say that Silver Moon martial masters are strong and vicious, but no one said that they were this childish!

etvolare's Thoughts

Honestly, I'm with LHY lol.

Readers on Discord have given me a breakdown of TMR's cultivation levels -- I gotta say, no wonder TMR readers are so excited. I'd be right there with you!

It's also nice to corroborate name-related translations across different series. It's either a shot of feel-good confirmation, or "fuck why did I translate it like that" lol.

At the very least the cultivation similarities are nice fan service. Now let's see if there's a plot tie-in. I've got Refined Dark Matter speculating SG is a prequel. Anyone else?

Chapter 980: The Curtains Rise (II)

Lin Hongyu was about to mouth empty pleasantries when Sky Sword abruptly grunted and broke through the air with his sword. Sword intent flared to the heavens.

"Demons walk the world, my sword will slay evil!" he continued to mutter.

BAM!

A surge of frightfully domineering sword aura manifested. Endless energy gathered from the four corners as Sky Sword's blow cut down the firmament! Majestic sword intent shattered the dome of the heavens.

KABOOM!

A cloud disintegrated in the sky as sword intent unfurled in all directions. Gale winds howled through the surroundings, ruffling Lin Hongyu's hair. The woman stared, utterly dumbfounded. Sky Sword was peak six elements, the same as her.

When it came to strength, she didn't think of herself as weaker than Sky Sword. But at the moment, he struck with such undeniable momentum and unparalleled might that the very heavens split apart. This sword reached the strength of seven element Arcanus!

She was so stunned that she couldn't comprehend what she was seeing. So... Li Hao had spoken truly. They really could fool the heavens and receive a boon of additional strength. That wasn't a joke!

Lin Hongyu was shellshocked! This was actually possible!

After a very, very protracted pause, she turned stiffly toward the others who were still trying. She gulped for air and couldn't maintain her composure. "Commander... Why is this possible?" she asked breathlessly. How was this possible??

"Probably... because we are sincere of heart?" Li Hao chuckled.

Sincere of heart? Lin Hongyu murmured to herself. She melded her aura into the world the next second and brandished blade intent. The urge to give it a try was too strong to deny!

"As the heavens bear witness, my blade strikes down demons... The heavens are my parents..." she murmured and struck!

Nothing happened. Not even a ripple. She looked dazedly at Li Hao. "Commander... do I need to pair this with other techniques?"

Why hadn't anything happened?

Li Hao sighed. This person... looked so smart, but why was she being so silly right now? He smiled and patted her on the shoulder, then realized it might not be appropriate since she was a woman.

"Don't try, it won't do a thing if you did." He withdrew his hand with a smile. "You need the blessing from the new dao!"

“New dao? The one of supernatural characters?” Lin Hongyu blinked before quickly understanding.

“Yes and no,” the young man laughed. “I’ll tell you later. These elderly folks can run their experiments first. Let’s head to the city lord manor for a chat. I’ve found a good location for the residence—the royal palace. But... a lot of people have died there. I can’t be bothered to head over there for cleanup, so we can switch to another place if you want.”

“It’s fine.” Lin Hongyu was still sneaking glances at the rest. “Commander, why does this resemble the mythical blessing of core origin dao?”

“It’s not the same.” Li Hao shook his head. “And it only works in Silver Moon Territory. It’s completely useless once we leave this world. Core origin is a blessing from the dao universe, so it can be employed even further out in the universe at large. We can’t utilize it because our world is fully sealed shut. What they’re doing now... isn’t the same!”

It could only be described as receiving some local benefits due to adhering to heaven’s will. It was two completely different concepts.

Despite Li Hao’s noncommittal discussion, Lin Hongyu couldn’t help herself! Do you know the little technique you speak of will make these people invincible among their peers? They’ve surpassed anyone of their level. How is that a little technique? What doesn’t count as a little technique to you?

“The commander is really...” Lin Hongyu didn’t know how to describe the young man in front of her. “Commander, let’s visit the city lord manor. I’ve never been, it’ll be my first visit to the royal palace of Skystar Dynasty.”

Li Hao nodded with a smile and headed in the direction of the palace. Hong Yitang swiftly caught up to them; the man’s footsteps were dogged by Yuan Shuo. The latter flicked a glance at Hong Yitang—what are you always following my disciple around for??

Meanwhile, Hong Yitang was speechless at the reaction his actions caused. I have important matters to discuss! Yuan Shuo was acting like he was stealing the old fart's wife!

“Commander, it's perfect that City Lord Lin is here. I think we need to carefully study and simulate what we discussed before...”

“I think so too!” Yuan Shuo quickly concurred.

“.....” Lin Hongyu was confused and looked at Li Hao.

“We want to imitate the martial universities of New Martial,” the young man smiled. “And create a complete education system for the people in order to popularize martial dao. And not just martial dao—making strength available for all is just a secondary goal. The key is to achieve certain mental reforms!

“Why do we cultivate? I think there are several key points to introduce once everyone has some strength to their name. First, we train to strengthen our bodies! Second, we train to improve our lives. Third, we use our strength to maintain peace, not to shatter it.

“Fourth, we facilitate the rise of our people and civilization. Silver Moon is but one dot in the grand universe. What's the point of fighting amongst ourselves? New Martial is the best example of that. At present, we're still very far away from New Martial, but we can trace their footsteps and inherit some of their spirit. Everyone will be a dragon then, instead of just peering up to a mountain without learning their craft!”

Lin Hongyu listened quietly and nodded at the key points. To popularize martial dao and reform thoughts. This was a grand undertaking!

“Commander, our enemies are yet to be exterminated and the world's disorder may be just starting,” she murmured. “It is... a bit too early to be rolling this out?”

“No, not at all!” Li Hao shook his head. “Even if I fail, even if everyone fails, the people will awaken despite Ying Hongyue or New Martial winning. They will not cause the people to sink into oblivion again!”

“You would not wish to continue living in darkness after you’ve seen a new world. Those who have seen the light no longer think that the darkness is beautiful... That is the seed of civilization!” Li Hao waxed eloquent. “I once glimpsed some people and matters of New Martial, I think that’s when my heart changed. Now I see further and hope to gain more.”

“You do not have such aims because you’ve yet to see the same sights. But once you have, you will not think our present circumstances are good and can continue as is...”

“Therefore, rolling out these things does not hinge on how disorderly the world is. Neither does it depend on who eventually wins Silver Moon—but of course, I will win!” Li Hao leered. “Those guys out there are just clowns prancing around! True New Martial citizens or those with New Martial spirit will not pit themselves against me. Any who do are just people who simply lived during that age, they are not of New Martial!”

“A bunch of dancing clowns will not amount to anything! Therefore, we should start our efforts right this very moment! I want to raise the literacy rate in Skystar City because I want everyone to be qualified and have the chance to experience more. At the very least, they need to know how to read!”

“Well, they don’t need to worry if they really can’t learn how to read. I’ll figure out a way to get some New Martial films on the screens when the sky canopy system is complete—that’s what they’re called, right?”

“Yes, films!” Yuan Shuo nodded.

“I’ll use those to spread the word and play them on repeat,” Li Hao laughed. “It’ll excite people and let them know what a true civilization is. It won’t work if our personal desires aren’t strong enough. We need to seek perfection!”

“Commander, this...” Lin Hongyu was shaken by what she’d heard. “This will require endless labor and resources, as well as time...”

“I know!” Li Hao nodded. “But it’s not futile effort. This will create a shield of peace at our backs. Everyone will crave peace, strength, and a beautiful home to their rear! Only then will our soldiers dare and be willing to fight!

“In this vein, this is how our people will support our quest of domination! They will know who it is that brings them a wonderful life.”

Lin Hongyu listened quietly and glanced at Li Hao. In this moment, he seemed to be standing in a warm spring breeze. He was different from the young man that she’d met on prior occasions. Lin Hongyu didn’t know why such changes had occurred in Li Hao, but the person in front of her... gave her a very comfortable feeling.

This was something with ideals, goals, targets, and thoughts of his own.

“Of course, this is all predicated on full stomachs!” Li Hao continued. “Additionally, a wonderful life isn’t one in which we just sit around and wait for death! It’s one in which we all fight for a common goal! Only first generation fighters bear this kind of spirit. It’s not a life in which we are happy just because we have free food and drink.

“Such is the same when it comes to sharing martial dao! People might not treasure what is too easily had and could possibly take it for granted. Therefore, we need to let them know that these things are the fruits of their labor, not something that fell into their laps!”

Hong Yitang continuously nodded in agreement.

“As it should be,” Yuan Shuo added. “Even you suffered through a few years when you initially learned martial dao. The people cannot receive enormous benefits if they do not even touch the threshold of dao. Otherwise... you would not be reforming or improving humans, but breeding snakes.”

Lin Hongyu continued to listen quietly. She'd thought that she would hear a plentitude of ambitious bravado when she came to Skystar City, such as calls to conquer the four continents, the trample the four nations, unify the world, to crush New Martial, or how powerful their martial dao was...

But she heard none of that!

Li Hao, Hong Yitang, and Yuan Shuo were the core of the Skystar Commander Office. They discussed none of what she expected. Instead, they debated how to awaken the people's mind and plant the seed of civilization in their hearts.

Lin Hongyu grew lost in thought. There were no ambitions or lofty aspirations to be found here, no grandiose statements to be heard. Just... simple talk of day-to-day life.

Were these people really not worried about their enemies?

The woman hadn't wanted to speak of her thoughts, but decided to voice them since she'd given her allegiance. "Commander, I feel that under present circumstances, strengthening a selection of heavyweights is key..."

"I know, so we've been cultivating." Li Hao nodded. "That cultivation continues even now."

"Now?"

"Yes." The young man nodded again. "Even this conversation is cultivation! You haven't understood yet that the world does not belong to one person alone, it belongs to a group of people! Even ants will have their own thoughts and strength."