

## Teaching

Hiro looked over his Cultivation. He had chosen a Path and had been granted careful instruction on how to advance to the Foundation Realm. He had spent the first few weeks just training with his techniques, getting proficient with them. His teachers for this part weren't masters Ryun or Anatalien, but rather the instructors from their Sect. Hiro didn't mind, though he did wonder if he would get some instruction from them in person. Regardless, he had been given Essence Crystals and instructed to cycle it through his core several times before he was allowed to advance even a single stage.

He had also been given a choice of an Aspect. And that had been... difficult. He had been offered all the Aspects that the Twilight Melody Sect had access to, but he also knew that Zach would probably procure anything that he asked for.

Hiro was adept in the use of four Aspects. The first he gained out of need, the **Survival Aspect**. Second was taught to him by the Wardens, the **Blade Aspect**. Third, he learned from Naha, the **Shadow Aspect**. And the fourth came from Zach, the **Mind Aspect**.

When offered a choice of Aspects, he had thought about it a lot. He had even tried to ask Zach and Naha for advice, but both pointed him toward his instructors. Masters Ryun and Anatalien simply told him that it was his choice.

When it truly dawned on him that it was his choice, he... started to think more deeply about it. He knew that his Aspect had to be compatible with his Path, and the **Blade Aspect** seemed like the best choice. He already knew it, he had Class Perks with it. But, watching the other Cultivators, seeing their techniques and how... directly connected to their

Aspects they were, Hiro started to think. He could've picked any of the other Aspects that he had access to, and been safe in knowing that his Cultivation would blend seamlessly with his Class.

And yet... It did draw him, the idea to finally make a big choice for himself. Zach had gifted him with his Class, and the core of the Lord of Aspects Class was to seek out and master different Aspects. It didn't feel too wrong for him to pick something else.

So, he made his own choice, and picked the **Aspect of Space**. He had thought that it was a good idea, and when he had told it to masters Ryun and Anatalien, he thought that he saw approval in their eyes. But, since then they had been absent from his lessons, which made him doubt himself.

Regardless, most of his time was taken up learning the theories behind the way that Cultivation worked. And cycling, endless cycling. They had helped him reach the Lord Realm and were now ready for the next phase. They were preparing him to pick his second Path, and he was eager to start. It was his understanding from what he had been taught, that picking the second Path was crucial. That it was what made a Cultivator's Path take form. And he had been taught by Zach that he should have *meaning*, or an idea behind his entire being.

Zach had confided in him that his was knowledge, and Hiro was drawn to it a bit. Except that he also... he liked helping people. He liked traveling with the Wardens on missions, learning about the world. It was partly why he had been drawn to Space. It called to his desire to be... free. Not that he truly believed that he was trapped, he just felt like it sometimes. Perhaps he could go out there, perhaps seek not knowledge, but... secrets of the Aspects. That... that felt more real to him, more fitting.

And a blade was necessary on the road, being able to protect himself and aid those in need he encountered. Which was why he had accepted

the Path of the Sword. For his second Path, he had been offered many Paths. Some so powerful that he just knew they would make him strong.

Yet... in the end he was not drawn to them, to the ideas behind them. But one Path among them did speak to him, the Path of the Azure Mind. A mental Path, one that sharpened thoughts, that they used for menial work. Something in it drew him. Perhaps, it was the desire to banish the thoughts inside of his head that whispered of cowardice, that told him that he survived by running away. Ultimately, it did not matter, he made his choice.

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Ryun sat on top of the training building, observing his new student. He had kept his distance, though he had kept his senses on him always. Both he and Tali had agreed on how they were going to teach him. The first part of his journey on the path of Cultivation, they had entrusted to the Sect teachers. The reasons were many, but mostly because they were good at their jobs.

The Twilight Melody Sect had adopted a regulated education system, where every member is given proper instruction in Cultivation and helped to reach the Lord Realm. It took a lot of experimenting to get to this point, but now the Twilight Melody Sect boasts the largest number of Lord Realm individuals of any Sect. And many of them show signs of being on the path to advance. They had already gotten many Monarchs and Heavenly Realm Cultivators as well.

This instruction of course stopped after the Lord Realm, as that was the final Realm where outside help could substitute personal inspiration without doing irreparable harm to one's Cultivation. For anything above

Lord, Cultivators were encouraged to find a tutor, or a master. Though some did make the decision to try to advance on their own, and Ryun respected that.

Doing the same for Hiro was... partly because of who he was as a person. From what Zach and Nahamassa told them, it was clear that the young man had some... unresolved personal issues. If Ryun had guided him during his early Realms... well, Tali worried that he would've broken him. This way at least he had a solid foundation and understanding of what Cultivation was.

He should be better equipped to handle what would come in the future.

Regardless, Ryun was not only satisfied with the young man's progress, but he also approved of the choices he made, both his picks of Paths and Aspect.

He had been given the choice of any Path in the Sect, and Ryun could've made him powerful just by giving him a Path like his at his rarity. A Path near the end of its journey. And even if he never advanced beyond Lord, the Path of the Final End would've given him much power.

He had not chosen the easy path, instead he will need to progress his Paths on his own. Learn them, understand and master them. Ryun looked forward to seeing it. He watched as Hiro learned his second Path and was then given Essence to raise it to Peak Foundation.

Space was readily available all around them, but it would've taken a lot of time for Hiro to cycle. So, Ryun had the Sect pay for the Essence, as well as for his tier 6 Aspect. Zach had offered to pay, but Ryun and Tali had taken on Hiro's education, it was the least they could do for the insights that Zach had shared with them and what he was doing for Kri.

As Hiro finished cycling and advancing, Ryun stood up and started walking away. He would give Hiro a few weeks, his teachers had been told

to get him on the path of thinking about changing his techniques. But after a few weeks of contemplation, it would be time for Ryun and Tali to take over and see if he had what it took to push his Cultivation and improve his chosen Paths.

He was just about to jump from the building when he felt something. A tremble in the world around him and a rip. His Qi moved through his body, but he quickly stopped once he felt the presence inside of his head.

He turned and watched as a portal appeared in front of him, and then a moment later Selia stepped through. He smiled as she blinked her eyes and then returned the smile.

They rushed at each other and embraced. He could feel something clinging around her, an Essence. He wasn't quite there yet with his Soul sense, so he couldn't tell what exactly it was, but he could guess. She had returned from the afterlife. Her Qi however, was clear in his mind. It felt... heavier somehow, as if it had more substance to it now.

“Welcome back,” Ryun said. “You were missed.”

“I missed you too,” she said.

“How was it? We expected you a lot sooner,” Ryun tilted his head.

Selia sighed. “It had been... an ordeal. I want to tell you all about it, but we should find Erdania first. Where is she?”

Ryun closed his eyes and focused his sense until he found her.

“She's home,” Ryun answered. “Come, I want to hear everything, and then we must catch you up on things. It is good that you came back now, much is in the works.”

Selia raised an eyebrow but didn't comment. Together they went to find Erdania, and Ryun expected a long day of reunions.