

Mystical 131

Chapter 131: Practice 1

Yoda coughed twice.

"I won't be able to make it. The injury on my shoulder would take a few months to heal."

"I have been remiss in my considerations," Crohn nodded to show that he understood.

Garen contemplated for a while.

"I need to recuperate too. I can't fight immediately. Even if I did, I would be no match for Duskdune Shura. Although I'm unwilling to admit it, Duskdune Shura's martial arts have reached a peak level."

The atmosphere in the room was temporarily subdued.

Crohn sighed. He gestured for the soldiers to open the doors. Several maids entered to serve breakfast: a type of pale blue baguette paired with some apple slices, large chunks of pineapple, and a cup of unknown red drink which was fizzing.

Everyone didn't speak much. They just silently started having breakfast. Only the sound of knives clashing with forks could be heard from time to time.

Garen ate silently, while at the same time carefully estimating Duskdune Shura's true strength, as well as the time he needed to recover from his injuries.

"Duskdune Shura painstakingly schemed to get a hold of the Golden Sword Throne, it's apparent he has a certain level of confidence in succeeding. I wonder how much any of you knew about Duskdune Shura before?" Crohn asked in a hushed tone.

Garen was the first to shake his head, expressing ignorance.

Su Lin shook his head too. He merely shifted his gaze towards Yoda, the Eight-Arm Dragon King.

Yoda had thick bandages on his shoulder. He swiftly reached for the food on the table with one hand and stuffed it in his mouth.

"Don't look at me. I'm not too clear about it either. Duskdune Shura and I are experts of the same generation. This organization was something he joined or established later, I've just heard about it for a long time."

Even though they knew his words were not entirely reliable—it wasn't that he didn't know, he was merely reluctant to reveal what he knew—Su Lin and the rest didn't force the issue.

Garen finished the drink in one gulp, and gently put down the cup.

"In fact, regardless of what motives Duskdune Shura harbors, regardless of what ruins he's gone to, it's impossible that he doesn't reappear. When he emerges from the ruins, we'll know what he really wants. What we need to do now is figure out how to deal with him. Previously, we had so many people but were still defeated. If we had to do it again, based on the true strength and power we have here, do you think we would actually be able to hold him off?"

Upon hearing Garen's words, everyone fell silent.

Only Lieutenant Lenny who had just joined them frowned.

Garen shook his head.

"I'm just a martial arts practitioner; I don't want to get too involved. Whenever you come up with a plan to deal with Duskdune Shura, Su Lin, you just tell me. I need to go down to recuperate now. Regardless of what the plan is, now everyone is injured, and won't be good for anything if we don't recover. Excuse me."

He stood up, turned around and left through the door.

Walking through the red-carpeted corridor with soldiers standing guard along it, Garen exited the small building.

The sky was bright outside. Small patrol motorcycles would come over from a distance from time to time.

The originally empty space in the estate was now full of patrol guards in yellow uniform. Temporary security fortifications were built in corners which were easy to defend and hard to attack. All around the buildings, on the roofs, were patrol guards on duty.

The whole estate had transformed into a large military camp.

Garen took a deep breath. The smell of smoke and blood remnant from the battle yesterday still filled the air.

He strode towards the lake outside of the estate. He planned to have a good rest and go for a swim to relax.

Suddenly, a guard wearing a yellow helmet ran towards him from a short distance away. He stopped in front of Garen and saluted him.

"Mr Garen, a young boy is asking for you outside the estate. He refused to leave no matter what."

"A young boy?" Garen instantly recalled the kid with a runny nose he met near the home of the Eight-Arm Dragon King. "Could it be him?"

"Thanks for informing me. Please lead me to him."

"Certainly. Please follow me." The guard nodded, turned around, and jogged towards the entrance of the estate.

Garen followed at a moderate pace. His one stride equaled two to three of the guard's. It looked as though he was striding casually, but in fact his pace was not slow.

Soon, going past the heavy defense, in the temporary guardhouse constructed on the right side of the entrance, Garen saw the young boy with a runny nose.

The boy looked pale. Both his arms were swollen beyond recognition, almost double their original size, like he had two adult arms affixed to his shoulder. He was wearing a sleeveless gray linen shirt and his hair was messy like a chicken coop.

Once Garen walked in, he recognized the kid who had previously asked him to teach him how to fight. But what made him speechless was that the kid had a burden with him: an adorable petite young girl.

When he saw the young girl, Garen squinted.

The atmosphere in the entire guardhouse became somber. A terrifying sense of oppression lingered overhead like dark clouds, as if the sky was about to collapse on them.

It wasn't just the boy, even the two guards supervising by the side shivered, and almost pulled out their guns in alert.

This was the strong sense of oppression that Bravery had towards all living beings; it was their biological fear towards danger and predators.

The boy was trembling from head to toe, and his face seemed paler than before. His chapped lips were almost bleeding.

"Shenanigans!" Garen sat in a chair and looked at the boy and girl indifferently, without a hint of compassion in his eyes.

But the strange thing was that, when everyone was trembling in fear, the expression of the pretty little girl who had a pitiful expression on her face changed, from one of terror and panic, to a calm and sly look. A trace of surprise flashed across her face.

"How did you discover me?" Her voice was clear and subtle, like a bird call.

"Looks like it was you who instructed him previously..." Garen didn't give a straightforward answer. He stared fixedly at the girl. "I wondered how a young kid could have possibly noticed my true strength. You're so old yet you pretend to be young. It's really my first time encountering a martial arts practitioner like you."

"Bastard! What do you mean by 'old'?!" The girl's gaze changed; it looked as though she had been stabbed in a sore spot. "Don't you recognize the virtue of respecting your elders and caring for the young?! If this kid were not unsuitable to inherit my martial arts, do you think I would have specifically asked him to find you?!"

The girl's words instantly shocked a few guards around them. They swiftly drew their guns and aimed at her.

"Keep calm. She's merely an expert trained in a unique martial art." Garen raised his hand to calm the guards down. "Please leave us. I want to have a proper conversation with them."

"I'm sorry. Towards unknown foreigners, we have to supervise the whole process. This was the highest command given by Lieutenant Lenny," a captain walked in and said calmly. "Mr Garen, please don't put us in a tough spot." Upon entering the guardhouse, he felt a strange sense of danger triggering the hair on his body to stand on end, and his hand subconsciously clasped the gun on his waist. He stared at the strange little girl.

Garen shifted his gaze to the young captain.

""

"It's fine. I understand your difficulties. We'll speak outside then."

He retracted his Bravery, and everyone instantly let out a sigh of relief.

He stood up and walked straight out of the guardhouse towards a small forest outside the estate.

The boy, led by the little girl, followed closely behind. The three soon disappeared into the woods.

Walking at a fast pace for a distance until they couldn't be discovered, Garen turned around and stopped walking.

"Well, who are you and what are your motives?" Garen calmly looked at the girl behind him.

This seemingly adorable and petite girl who looked no more than eight or nine years old gave him the sense of an old monster inhabiting a child's body; she was definitely not an ordinary martial arts practitioner.

The girl's height only reached his waist. She was wearing a shabby currant strappy dress. Her maroon long hair was straight and smooth, with horizontal bangs on her forehead. On her feet were thick black cotton socks and red leather boots. Her skin was supple and fair as snow, and her wine-colored eyes were blinking.

Walking through the woods thick with foliage, she had a skip in her step as her long hair fluttered with her every move; it gave the impression of innocence and charm.

But ever since Garen attained the level of Grandmaster of Combat, he had stopped judging people by their appearances alone.

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"What are your motives?"

He silently looked at this strange little girl.

"You can call me Celine. My motive is simple. I want you to receive Erudas as your disciple," the girl Celine skipped the nonsense and got straight to the point. "Originally, I didn't intend to expose myself. But to be on the safe side, I think it's better to be honest, in case it would affect future relations."

Garen glanced at the gullible young boy who followed behind her.

"I've heard that, in the Secret Martial Art world, there is a type of Secret Martial Art that shrinks the body to reduce the loss of spiritual essence in order to prolong life. I didn't expect to actually see an example of it."

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"I'm glad you recognize this old lady's power." The girl proudly raised her chin. "I intended to accept him as my own disciple, but my martial art does not match him. That day, I saw you at Yoda's house and realized that your martial arts style fits this kid's characteristics perfectly. Most importantly, Erudas seems to be determined to follow you. He was actually foolish enough to complete the training as you instructed!"

At this point, she looked as if she had a headache.

"I have just witnessed Duskdune Shura's true strength, rumored to be the peak of the previous generation. I wonder what your true strength is like," Garen changed the topic and said casually. He began to slowly gather a surge of strong, terrifying Bravery.

The large amount of Bravery surrounded him, and condensed into the invisible shadow of a mammoth.

No roars, no movement, the mammoth just silently shrouded over Garen. It stood there with a murderous look in its eyes.

An invisible pressure fell on the girl, Celine's body.

"Duskdune Shura...You've actually met him before?" Celine was shocked. Her petite body somersaulted away as she gently evaded the oppression of Garen's Bravery.

Garen narrowed his eyes. She had evaded the oppression of his Bravery with such ease and avoided a direct confrontation with him. It was apparent that she was no ordinary character. To be able to accurately sense the speed and extent of the Bravery oppression of another martial arts practitioner, she must have been a Grandmaster of Combat with Bravery of her own.

He gradually raised his right arm, ready to fight.

"Keep calm! It's not your style to bully children at random, is it? If it were to get out that the Divine Marshal of Southern Sky Holy Fist Gate bullied a seven year-old little girl, sob sob..." Celine's expression turned in an instant. Tears streamed out of her eyes. She tugged her clothing down a little to reveal her fair shoulder and started screaming, "Ra...!"

Clap!

Garen's face twitched as he rushed over to cover her mouth.

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Celine struggled for a while, but Garen's strength was much stronger than hers, so she failed to escape.

"Help! He's trying to..." Garen put his hand over her mouth and greatly muffled her voice, but he could still understand what she was trying to say.

Garen's head ached. People would consider him a pedophile if they saw what he was doing to this little girl and he did not know how his parents and sister would think of him.

"Let me go...!" Celine shouted.

"Stop saying random sh*t and I'll let you go." Garen felt his temples were throbbing.

"I won't say it anymore!" Celine nodded like a chicken pecking at its food.

Garen slowly released her after hearing her words.

Celine wiped the dust off her clothes and stepped back. "Pervert!"

Garen's expression changed again. "Well, I already gave you the chance..." He spoke in a gravelly tone and pounded his fists against each other several times.

"Fine, I'll stop." Celine finally had a serious look on her face. "You were planning to take Erudas in even if I didn't come, right?"

"You already knew?" Garen nodded. "He has talent and perseverance. Actually, if he's trying to learn from me, perseverance is much more important than just talent."

He stared at Celine. "I think you already knew a lot about me, but I still know nothing about you."

Celine hesitated for a second. "I'm the heir of the ancient Martial Arts, Neptune Fist, and I think you already know that I'm much older than my appearance. I used the Essence Locking Techniques to keep myself in a peak state. As an apology, I can give you the secret techniques if you want.

"Neptune Fist..." Garen scrunched his eyebrows. "I didn't know that there was still a heir of that sect."

"I'm the last one," Celine answered in a light tone. "By the way, I'm still a virgin."

Garen was speechless. "Well, I don't care about that! Please don't change topic or else I can't follow."

"Virgin Grandma, someone's coming," Erudas suddenly said.

Garen was surprised and had not noticed the footsteps until Erudas told him.

He turned around and stared at the young boy Erudas. "Your sensory perception is keen... I didn't notice at all..."

Garen thought for a second and glanced around. He noticed that Celine was getting nervous.

The footsteps were getting closer, he could hear people swearing, and the tension was building up.

"Follow me," Garen finally spoke. He turned around and walked toward the manor. Celine felt relieved, grabbed the boy, and followed behind Garen.

After resting in Su Lin's manor for three days, Garen felt much better and had recovered from the injury.

Angela asked for a courtyard close to the lake and moved in. Garen spent most of his time training the Mammoth Secret Technique and he wanted to make sure that his body was in the best condition. He also started preparing the equipment needed to learn the Firestream Fist.

Celine and Erudas stayed with Garen the whole time and did not go to any other places. They lived in a temporary tent beside the courtyard and the army brought them supplies every day.

Garen helped the boy recover by invigorating the blood circulation around his arms, but Garen did not mention anything about teaching him Martial Arts.

However, it seemed like the two did not care. They looked happy living in the tent provided by the army and probably had not had a good rest in a while.

It was afternoon, the setting sun decorated Lake Saima with rays of red sunlight, and the golden reflection on the surface of the lake was breathtaking.

Inside the rectangular yard beside the lake, Garen dangled from a black iron frame. Garen's hands and face turned purple due to the exertion.

He inhaled deeply and his stomach rose. The purple color disappeared slowly from his face and hands as he inhaled.

Hoo!

Garen exhaled all the air in his torso and started hitting his palms with his fingers. This repeated process was how he learned the Dark Iron Palm. In order to practice this low-rank Secret Technique, he had to hang from the frame.

The Dark Iron Palm was a low-rank Secret Technique and a lot of people tried to learn it. Martial Artists or people who were just interested in Martial Arts would try to learn it after obtaining the Secret Technique. No matter how weak a Secret Technique was, it would still be stronger than average Martial Arts.

Of the many people that practiced the Dark Iron Palm, the best of them had palms harder than iron and their palm skills could deal damage with their evil power. However, they were only slightly stronger than normal Martial Artists.

Low-rank Secret Techniques were created by Martial Artists that broke past their limitations. The Dark Iron Palm was a bit better than the Iron Body because it could convert the toxins and useless substances in the body into evil power.

By practicing the Dark Iron Palm, Garen could better maintain his health. Garen kept repeating the procedure and would hit his fingers against his palms every time he exhaled all the air from his abdomen.

His long purple hair blocked his view, so he decided to close his eyes and check the skill bar. After practicing the basic training method for a while, some changes finally occurred to the bar.

The row for the Dark Iron Palm started getting blurry.

"Finally..." Garen was excited. He started practicing this morning and finally made some progress by the afternoon.

The words behind the Dark Iron Palm changed quickly: "Dark Iron Palm: Beginner Level (Two levels in total)."

Garen felt something heavy and muddy inside his body that quickly travelled toward his hands. His body was relaxed but his hands became heavy.

He opened his eyes and looked at his palms. Garen's hands had already turned grey as if they were soaked in ink.

Garen looked at the attribute bar unintentionally and noticed that some of the attributes had changed as well.

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His Stamina increased from 2.09 to 2.15.

"Nice, I didn't expect the Dark Iron Palm to help increase my Stamina," Garen observed his hands carefully.

"I wonder how much damage it can do. Let me give it a try first." Garen looked around and found a small white tree at the corner of the yard.

Garen reached at his feet and untied the rope. He landed on the ground and walked toward the tree quickly.

He raised his palms and pressed them against the surface of the tree. Nothing spectacular happened, but there were two black handprints left on its surface after Garen lowered his hands.

Two black ants were climbing up the tree and they slowed down right after reaching the handprints. Their legs trembled, their bodies curled up, and then they fell from the tree after several seconds.

"That's the poison from the Dark Iron Palm?" Garen glanced around. "I need something more than the ants. Umm..."

Angela called the guards and asked them to find some cats or dogs. Then, Garen started forcing them to touch the handprints on the tree. The handprints disappeared after killing a dog.

Garen finally had a general understanding of the strength level of the poison from the Dark Iron Palm. "Way too weak. Killing some small animals is the best it can do. Maybe it'll work on a normal person, but all of the Grandmasters of Combat have high resistance and Dark Iron Palm will do no damage to them."

"Well, let me see what the Firestream Fist can do." He asked the guards to bring him the equipment for practicing the Firestream Fist.

It was a whole basin of black iron sand and the basin was placed above a large pot of burning charcoal. Garen stood in front of the basin and rolled up his sleeves.

"The Mammoth Secret Technique can be combined with the Iron Body, but I'm not sure if the Dark Iron Palm can be combined with the Firestream Fist. I hope I still have some Attribute Points left. If I do, I'll be able to level them up to the highest level!" Garen shook his head and stopped thinking. He quickly put his hands into the sizzling sand and then immediately took them out. Garen kept repeating this process.

He also used the special breathing and blood circulation methods from the Firestream Fist technique to ensure that the blood flow in his body was correct.

Garen's hands slowly turned reddish. Although he reached the master level of body hardening techniques, his hands were still burning after constantly contacting the heated sand. His skin had turned black due to the Dark Iron Palm and the resulting dark red color looked like rust.

The size of his hands doubled and dense maroon patterns slowly rose from the skin of his hands.

He could feel the heat from his hands and a chill rushed down to them from his brain. This chill started to slowly neutralize the heat from the iron sand.

Garen closed his eyes and stared at the skill bar. After a while, changes appeared to the row with the Firestream Fist.

The text became blurry: "Firestream Fist: Beginner Level (Four levels in total)."

Another change appeared on the skill bar after he reached the beginner level of the Firestream Fist. The Firestream Fist and Dark Iron Palm's text became blurry at the same time.

"I knew it! The Firestream Fist and Dark Iron Palm were all Secret Techniques that train people's hands. Learning them together will create a new combination, just like the time I trained the Iron Body and Boulder Martial Art!" Garen stared at the changes with excitement. This was the reason why he had decided to learn these two Secret Techniques first.

The Firestream Fist and Dark Iron Palm disappeared from the skill bar simultaneously and were replaced by a new skill.

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The new skill finally appeared clearly.

'Unnamed - Mutation Firestream Fist: Level One (of Four), Firestream Fist skills blended with Dark Iron Palm, eliminating impurities and toxins by applying heat from the inside and out, while enhancing Vitality and heat resistance. Attacks on enemy will produce heat poisoning. Training is conducted by alternating both skills to advance.'

"So it's based mainly on Firestream Fist, blended with Dark Iron Palm?"

Garen was deep in thought. Previously, it was the same for Mammoth Secret Technique, with Mammoth as the basis blended with other Secret Martial Arts. It seems that the current situation is similar.

"Nomenclature-wise, since it's a combination of Dark Iron Palm and Firestream Fist, then the name should consist of half of each. I'll call it Dark Crimson Technique then."

As the thought flashed across his mind, the new skill on the Skills Pane quickly changed from 'unnamed' to 'Dark Crimson Technique'.

His special ability let flow a continuous refreshing stream of Qi into his hands. Garen could clearly feel his hands were being fortified at an alarming rate; it was obviously the effect of Dark Crimson Technique Level One.

Chhh!

He immersed his hands simultaneously into boiling hot iron sand, and didn't bother removing them.

The hot iron sand pressed on the skin of his hands; his palms felt a numbing sensation.

The part of his forearms above his palms was gradually reddening, with blue veins popping up. Qi and blood kept coursing through his palms at a high speed.

After 10 full minutes.

Garen suddenly took his hands out and laid a backhand on the wall behind him.

Sizzle...

A gust of white smoke instantly effused from the wall. The wall covered in green moss was imprinted with a black handprint, and there was an unpleasant burnt smell in the air.

"Dark Crimson Technique... Level One can withstand temperatures of about a hundred over degrees. Such a high temperature can be achieved by transferring Qi and blood to the palm, amazing!" Garen was secretly impressed. "This is merely Level One. If I can raise it to higher levels, combined with my mutation Mammoth Secret Technique and Body Hardening Technique peak, then I'll be able to kill and injure at will!"

He retracted his hands, walked to a basin of water on the left of the fire basin, and put his hands in it.

The clear water in the cool basin slowly emitted a sizzling sound, and a waft of water vapor drifted upwards. Garen's fists gradually returned to its normal pale tone.

He removed his hand and used a little bit of force. Blood flowed through his palms as it regained its temperature, and once again emanated a scalding heat. Both palms instantly turned from white to a pale red.

From afar, his hands merely looked like they were filled with blood in the veins, and nothing seemed abnormal; it could very easily be concealed.

"This tactic could only increase deadliness in close combat, effective only when I am able to have physical contact with the enemy. Unfortunately, the biggest disadvantage of low-level Secret Martial Arts is that there is no corresponding combat skill to match with them."

Garen recalled the scene of confrontation with Duskdune Shura. "If I had mastered Dark Crimson Technique then, I could have caused additional damage to him in the direct confrontation, and deterred anyone else from having direct confrontations with me."

At that time his hand-knife strike collided with Duskdune Shura directly. If he could have used Dark Crimson Technique then, he could have injured him by surprise.

"Dark Crimson Technique shall be my concealed skill, just to increase deadliness by dealing a surprise strike."

He relaxed the Qi and blood in his palms, and they were gradually restored to his original pale skin tone.

He tugged on a coat and put it on then walked to the entrance of the courtyard, opened the door, and exited. On the riverbank were the short and tall figures of Erudas and Celine; the former seemed to be telling the latter about something.

When both saw Garen come out, Erudas immediately scuttled over.

"Master! When can I learn your martial arts?"

"Don't call me Master. You're not my disciple yet." Garen was clad in white casual clothing. His long hair was messy and loose, with a hint of red visible between the strands. Coupled with his tall and muscular physique, merely by standing in front of the both of them, he exuded an immense sense of oppression.

He glanced at Erudas's shoulders; it seemed to have completely recovered. Obviously, it was related to the help from Celine throughout this time.

"Looks like you have almost recovered?"

"Yes, Master!" Erudas replied loudly. His small body stood straight. He had cleaned himself up too; he looked much better than at their first meeting. He had defined features, and his short copper-brown hair paired with his delicate white skin showing a tinge of a blush, made him seem like a doll.

"Today, I'll first teach you about something fundamental," Garen said calmly. He put his hands, one after another, on his chest. One hand grasped tightly while the other held on loosely; his legs were in the bow stance.

This was the combat stance that he had revised from White Cloud Combat Arts of White Cloud Gate and perfected.

"This is the initial hand pose inherited from my original sect. It is able to handle attacks from all sides except the back in the shortest amount of time. Let me tell you something important in advance. Martial arts practitioners absolutely should not allow themselves to have their backs facing their enemies. Apart from certain special combat techniques, common martial arts from general sects adhere to this taboo."

"Grandma Virgin told me that before too," Erudas replied innocently. "I'll be powerful as long as I start out with this pose?"

"Because you've saved some time needed to raise your hands to attack. Just like...this!"

Chshh!

With a spin, Garen's right arm axed horizontally like a butcher's knife in a Swing Form strike directed at Celine, who was standing with her body facing sideways.

His arm was like a blade, creating a hissing sound as it cut through air.

Wham!

A section of wooden log was broken in two, and the pieces fell to the ground.

Celine flipped backwards, and evaded the strike with grace. She landed steadily on top of a large white rock nearby; she looked fazed.

"What are you doing?! Don't you know that you should respect your elders and love your young?!"

"Erudas, watch carefully."

Garen disregarded care and quickened his pace forward, his stance instantly converting into Shot Form. His slapped his right palm forward.

"This is Shot Form!"

Wham!

The rock cracked at his palm strike, and bits of rubble flew in all directions. Celine barely managed to evade with a jump, and was shouting in anger.

Garen curved his right arm, and let his right hand swing outwards swiftly like a whip.

"This is Swing Form!"

Crack!

A small tree in the woods by the lake, with a trunk as thick as an arm, crashed to the ground.

Celine was scampering about as she was chased by Garen.

"You bastard! You only know how to bully underage girls! Ahhh!" Almost hit by the falling tree, Celine's face was flush with anger as she ran off into the distance, cursing all the way.

Garen reverted to a normal pose, turned around, and gently exhaled. Those few strikes were all made in one breath, but it was over before he had time to exhale.

"Stances are the postures that make it easiest to attack and defend. If you were to casually stand straight, then the distance it takes for your arm to be raised is much larger than if you were already adopting a stance. Don't belittle this minute amount of time saved. In a real fight, it may come down to this little bit of distance."

"Yes, Master!" Erudas replied loudly even though he didn't fully comprehend what he heard. After seeing Garen's powerful and tough attacks earlier, his eyes gleamed in admiration.

"From today onwards, stand in this stance every day, until you can't hold it any longer, until your knees tremble!" Garen said calmly.

"Yes!"

Garen nodded. This kid had some decent talent, was resilient, willing to endure hardship, and even obedient—he would do whatever he was told—this was the ideal disciple. Even if Garen didn't have any intention of receiving a disciple at the moment, he couldn't help but give him a few pointers now and then.

When he saw Erudas begin to create the stance on his own, Garen corrected his mistakes then directly walked towards Celine standing in the distance.

"Come with me."

Celine stared at him fiercely, hesitated, but still followed.

The two of them walked to a set of stone table and stools in the woods, where Garen sat down naturally.

"The descendant of Neptune Fist, it is said that your Neptune Gate was a crucial great sect in the North. In ancient times you almost separated to declare your own duchy. I'm sure you must be privy to a lot of secrets?" he took the lead to speak first.

Celine jumped onto a stone stool and crouched on it.

"What do you want to know? Let me be clear upfront, I don't know much either."

"I want to know about Duskdune Shura. He defeated me using a type of martial arts called Dragon Gate. What is that?" Garen asked his first question.

"Dragon Gate?" Celine's petite face wrinkled. "You're sure it's Dragon Gate?" Her expression started to turn serious.

"I'm sure. The names that he exclaimed were 'the first Dragon Gate' and so on, from first to fourth. Every strike that hit me completely paralyzed my body, it was strange." Garen was fixated on this point. His Body Hardening Technique was based on the principle of flowing Qi and blood, yet his opponent's Dragon Gate could actually paralyze the body and control Qi and blood—it was like the bane of the Body Hardening Technique.

Celine became silent, seemingly recalling a memory.

The night breeze made the leaves in the woods rustle, and brought with it a slight chill. The rays of sunset shone through the leaves at an angle on the ground, tree trunks, the stone table and chairs, and the two of them. There was a vague sense of beauty like a painting of maple woodlands.

Celine stretched her fingers out to gently brush away the fallen leaves from the white stone table. A yellow beetle gently climbed her index finger.

"Seven Dragon Gate is rumored to be an ancient martial art that is a unique general sect martial art. I do not know the specific methods of training in it, but it is very powerful."

She paused, then continued, "The unique characteristic of Seven Dragon Gate is that it continuously increases in power."

"Starting from the first Dragon Gate, the second, then the third. If a person was continuously hit by all of it, the power of each fist will continue to increase. At the same time, it is capable of obstructing the flow of Qi and blood. The further it progresses, the more it is capable of slowing down the movement of the opponent, to the point of complete paralysis. This is an extremely terrifying consecutive-strike martial art. I can't believe Duskdune Shura has actually mastered it."

Garen's brow twitched. "We're equally Grandmasters of Combat, but he is so much stronger than me!"

"EDDC"

"'Grandmasters of Combat' is merely a collective description of a select few martial art practitioners who have reached the human limit. Naturally there would be stronger and weaker categories within. It's only normal," Celine said matter-of-factly. "Now there are these so-called Grade E and Grade D categorizations. Those are the levels used to categorize the strength of firearms. In actuality, almost all Grandmasters of Combat are Grade D, including you. One level higher would be Grade C, which is currently the category for special unit weapons, such as special gunpowder and powerful weapons made from special materials. These are incapable of being defended by Grandmasters of Combat. Perhaps only a very small number of Grandmasters of Combat can achieve this level. Duskdune Shura might be one of them."

"Then do you know about the existence of people with supernatural abilities?" Garen asked in a low voice.

"Supernatural abilities? You mean telekinesis?" Celine was shocked. "You've encountered such people?"

Garen nodded.

"In my years of wandering, I've encountered them multiple times too. Those people are very mysterious. They have developed strange abilities through telekinesis, and view themselves as beings transcending mortals. But in actuality, they are merely poor souls from failed experiments, detesting the world because of a tragic incident," Celine said softly.

Chapter 134: Clarity 2

"The experiment failed? What happened?"

"I don't know. Several dozens of years ago, a group of people escaped from a human subject research center. I've seen telekinesis before and I knew they were strong, but that's all I know." Celine shook her head.

"Last question, do you know anything about the Golden Sword Throne?" Garen asked in a light tone.

"What's that?" Celine looked confused.

Garen stood up. "That's all I wanted to ask. I don't know what happened between you and that little guy and I don't care. However, if you want me to stay with you and protect you, you should at least pay me."

"I already prepared something for you." Celine sneered. She took a black scroll out of her pocket and threw it toward Garen.

Pah!

Garen carefully caught the scroll and looked at it. There were several tiny words printed on the surface of the scroll: "Essence Locking Technique."

"That's the payment."

Garen stared at her for a second, turned back, and left with the scroll. He returned to the courtyard and finished his dinner before receiving Su Lin's message.

He quickly headed to the meeting room inside the manor. Garen had promised Su Lin that he would help to fight against Duskdune Shura, so he would not leave the manor before it was done.

Most of the others had already sat down in their seats by the time Garen entered the meeting room. Yoda, the Eight-Arm Dragon King, was not here and his seat was taken by a tall slim blonde lady wearing a tight black leather suit. Garen could see that her breasts were covered by black bandages through her open collar. The lady was not wearing underwear and was quite alluring.

"Let me make an introduction. This is Miss Mayer Iriland, an international police officer, " Su Lin said after standing up. "She's here for Duskdune Shura as well."

"She's trying to track down Duskdune Shura?" Everyone in the room looked surprised. Duskdune Shura could easily escape when surrounded by many special agents, yet Mayer was trying to track him down alone. They thought that Mayer must be someone special.

The two generals, Su Lin, and Aris all stared at the lady. Her face was not that attractive, she showed absolutely no expression, and it seemed like she did not want to spend too much time with strangers.

"It seems like I'm late. I think everyone here has already heard about how strong Duskdune Shura is, so I'm not going to go over that again. Based on a telegraph I obtained from Kandivella, at the borders of the Yalu Confederation, Duskdune Shura has already arrived at the ruins of Kandivella." She gave everyone in the room a cold look.

"Everyone, as an officer of the international police, I hope you can follow my orders so we can catch Duskdune Shura together. I heard that there is someone here that can fight against Duskdune Shura one on one. Please stand up."

The others immediately began to stare at Garen. Garen scrunched his eyebrows. Although he was not happy, he still stood up.

"Try your best to slow down Duskdune Shura and create space for my people. Follow my orders when we start the mission," Mayer said in a calm tone.

"Wait," Garen stopped her, "my sole purpose is to protect my friends. I don't care about other things."

"Please notice that I am not asking. I'm giving you an order and you have no right to disobey it." Mayer furrowed her eyebrows. "I'm an officer from the international police and I have the authority to give orders. You can sit down for now."

"Orders?" Garen sneered. "Who the hell are you?"

The two generals had bitter smiles on their face. While Su Lin and Aris sat by the side, they also did not know how to deal with such a situation. Su Lin was trying to ask Garen to calm down by signaling with his eyes.

Mayer's expression did not change and it seemed like she had already expected a situation like this.

"Mr. Garen." She took out a pile of information sheets and put them down on the table.

"These are the records of the murders you have committed since you debuted. You killed about 35 people, directly or indirectly. You can choose not to follow my order. and I'm willing to shoot you to death for all the murders you committed.

"Are you threatening me?" Garen narrowed his eyes.

"I'm not. Actually, I'm giving you a chance." Mayer stared at Garen calmly. "Follow my order or die. Your choice."

"I choose to kill you!" Garen grinned and pulled the door off the wall.

BOOM!

The door was about two meters tall and it flew toward Mayer while spinning like a fan blade. Garen's aim was accurate and the door did not hit anyone else.

CRACK!

Mayer used a high kick and easily smashed apart the entire door. She quickly turned and did a side front snap kick toward Garen's head.

Her long leg drew an arc in the air and a silver blade popped out from the bottom of her high heel. She aimed at Garen's temple.

Strangely, Mayer's side front snap kick was vibrating intensely, as if she could change the direction of the kick at any time she wanted.

Su Lin held Aris's arm and retreated with her. He knew how strong Miss Mayer and Garen were. Although Su Lin was a great Martial Artist himself, he still did not want to get involved in this.

BAM!

Garen hit Mayer's dagger with his palm. The dagger broke and pierced the ceiling.

BAM BAM BAM BAM!!

The two kept trading hits, with Mayer using an array of different kicks with her slim legs. Garen blocked most of her attacks but was still hit in the chest several times. Mayer was much faster than him.

They already left the meeting room and the fight had moved into the hallway. The guards did not know what to do and decided to stay away from the two combatants.

"Axe Kick!" Mayer yelled as she raised one of her legs high into the air and kicked down vertically as quick as lightning.

BANG!

"Naive!" Garen grinned, grabbed her leg, and swung her toward the wall.

BOOM

Garen suddenly stopped moving and it was almost like time had paused.

He grabbed Mayer's right leg and was about to smash her against the wall.

Mayer held onto a wall lamp tightly with her left leg still planted on the ground. Her face turned pale and she bit her bottom lip hard, but there was still no expression on her face. Mayer was breathing heavily and she had not expected Garen to be so strong.

Garen looked at a head-sized hole in the wall beside him as dust sprinkled down to the ground.

"Old man, what the hell?" He looked at the other end of the hallway.

Yoda, the Eight-Armed Dragon King, wielded a black heavy sniper rifle in his hand and he was aiming at Garen. Yoda's face flushed and he looked furious.

"Let Mayer go. I don't care about the others, but I will f*cking kill you if do anything to her! Don't even try!"

Garen gave Yoda a cold stare. "You really want to die."

A strong aura spread through the hallway as Garen's body started expanding. At this distance, he was sure he could kill them both after taking one hit from Yoda.

"Go away Yoda! I don't want you to help me!" Mayer yelled. It seemed like she was not appreciative of Yoda's support.

"Yoda! Garen! Stop. For the God's sake," Su Lin said suddenly. "Miss Mayer, it's a misunderstanding. Let's calm down. We should work together to fight against Duskdune Shura."

"Alright, calm down everyone." Lenny walked out of the room with her cane. "Miss. Mayer, I understand that the international police has the right to give orders, but Garen is not a part of your system and he doesn't like being ordered to do things for you. You know what, how about we let General Crohn give out orders this time? He knows the situation very well."

Garen released Mayer's right leg. He did not really want to kill her, but he simply disliked her arrogance.

The generals did not want to get involved in this fight. Yoda's presence made him want to kill Mayer and Su Lin immediately stepped in after realizing what Garen was going to do. Su Lin did not want the situation to get worse at the point.

"Cunning old prick," Garen mumbled. Mayer's leg was injured and she was having trouble walking away. She had previously given Garen a hard look the whole time while she was speaking and Garen needed to assert his dominance. Otherwise, Mayer would think he was scared.

Garen did not want to waste time anymore, so he turned back and walked out of the building.

"Garen, wait." He heard someone's voice coming from behind.

Su Lin quickly caught up and put his arm on Garen's shoulder.

"Sorry, there's nothing my father can do at the moment, so we had to let you deal with Mayer. She was always so arrogant and we needed to make sure she did not mess up our plan."

"I understand. Mayer was trying to flaunt her skills by fighting me, but she did not expect me to be so strong. Her combat skills are good and she's a Grandmaster of Combat. She must be strong since she's going after Duskdune Shura." Garen crossed his arms and laid his back against the wall by the exit.

"What's her relationship with Yoda?"

"Yoda has been chasing after her for many years..." Su Lin had a bitter smile on his face, "However, Mayer doesn't like him at all. That's all I know about them. She's one of the registered Grandmasters of Combat in the federation. Her kicking techniques and tracking skills are incredible."

"Well..." Garen was speechless.

"You did very well last time and we'd be dead without you. We'll take care of Duskdune Shura later. They already learned how serious the matter was and they will send more people here. There is one more thing. I need you to go to a place with me and we will be finished after that. What do you think?" Su Lin spoke calmly.

"Sure, no problem." Garen did not hesitate.

He owed Su Lin two favors, the one for his sister and one for the time he got surrounded by the enemies on his way back. He had not yet reached the Master Level of his Body Hardening Techniques at that time and he would have taken some serious damage without Su Lin's aid. The government was pursuing him as well and the situation could have become much worse.

These were the reasons why Garen decided to stay with Su Lin first before going to the Southern Sky Holy Fist Gate to obtain the secret techniques. Garen wanted to keep his promises and Su Lin was his friend.

"Let's go. We will drive there." Su Lin patted Garen's back and walked toward the parking lot.

After several seconds, Garen saw Celine appear out of nowhere and she landed on his right shoulder.

"Get off me." He scowled.

"I'll go there too. I need you to protect me," Celine responded in a cute tone, while sitting steadily on Garen's shoulder.

"Fine. Come with us." Su Lin looked at Celine and smiled, "There is no point in hiding it anymore."

Chapter 135: Hunted 1

Howl...

A white line cut through the middle of the vast sandy plains, extending into the distance beyond the horizon.

A silver car was slowly driving on the white line. Silver patterns were engraved on the side of the car; it looked exceptionally luxurious.

The car quickly reached a flat land. The back of the car kept blowing up sand and dust, which made it seem like a yellow tail.

From above, this flat piece of land had a few tiny yellow balls on it, arranged in a whirlpool shape.

The car slowly stopped at a ball on the outermost rim.

After a series of car doors opening and closing, three youths alighted from the car: two adults and a child.

The two adults had different images. One man had flaming red hair and looked handsome. He looked like a playboy who enjoyed women and drinking.

The other man was tall and well-built. His dark purple hair draped over his shoulders. There was a hint of coldness in his ruby eyes. He had an arm across his chest, and on it sat an adorable little girl.

"What is this place?" The tall man was Garen, who had followed Su Lin out. He gently shook his arm to allow Celine to dismount.

"Somewhere on the edge of Thakanriknar Desert, I'm not too sure either. I've merely followed father's instructions to find this place," Su Lin said while shaking his head. "Let's go. The thing I'm looking for is in the middle."

He took the lead and walked towards the center of the round whirlpool formation.

Garen and Celine followed closely behind.

The three of them advanced inwards in a straight line along the gaps between the balls of the round whirlpool formation.

From time to time, Garen would touch the balls as he passed by. They felt cool and hard to the touch, and rough too; there were a lot of honeycomb-like holes on the surface.

These balls were all two meters tall and entirely dark yellow, almost inseparable from the sand that it stood on.

The three of them reached the center of the round formation. In the middle was a three-meter-tall yellow ball, the largest of the lot.

Su Lin stood in front of the ball, constantly groping for something. Soon, with a gentle press of his palm, a round piece of yellow stone block the size of a fist gave way with a click, and revealed a deep, dark hole beneath.

He reached and groped for a while, then gently took something out: it was a black bundle of cloth.

He swiftly opened the bundle. There were remnant pieces of yellow pebbles inside, and nothing else.

"I can't believe we still haven't found it," Su Lin sighed and turned around. "He is indeed Duskdune Shura. He managed to eliminate so many locations to find this place merely based on father's lie."

Garen walked up from behind.

"What is it that you're looking for?"

"The real Golden Sword Throne was hidden here by father," Su Lin explained. "But now it's been removed. This gamble with Duskdune Shura, no matter how you look at it, father has lost. Only this piece of black cloth which was wrapping the throne is left."

Garen ignored the deeper meaning of his words and other circumstances. Suddenly he narrowed his eyes and stared at the black cloth bundle in Su Lin's hands.

He slowly reached out to take the black cloth bundle from Su Lin's hands, just like how one would take something for a casual look.

At the touch of the black cloth, a refreshing stream instantly flowed from the bundle into his fingers.

Garen trembled slightly, then inconspicuously started to pretend opening up the cloth to inspect inside.

The stream from the black cloth continuously flowed into his fingers, then along his palm, shoulders, chest, and finally into his brain.

Within seconds, the stream from the black cloth instantly weakened and disappeared.

He could suddenly feel in his hands the scalding heat of the cloth from being baked in the desert for too long.

"Let me have a look," Celine said excitably.

Garen casually threw her the black cloth. He vaguely heard Su Lin say something, but he couldn't hear clearly anymore. His entire attention was concentrated on the Attributes Pane at the bottom of his vision.

'Strength 2.64; Agility 1.22; Vitality 2.15; Intelligence 1.53; Potential 112%'

Potential at 112%!

"Sure enough...it really is Potential!" Garen was delighted. "Finally! Finally I have new attribute points!"

It had been too long since he last acquired new attribute points, he couldn't even remember when it was. During this time, his enhancement had all been due to his training in Secret Martial Arts.

"Garen, Garen?..." Su Lin's voice came from beside him.

Garen snapped out of his daze, and looked at Su Lin who was looking at him puzzled.

"Sorry, I was thinking about something and zoned out."

"So now are you planning to go back to Huaishan or...?"

"I've changed my mind," Garen said in a low voice. "I want to track down Duskdune Shura with you."

"Oh?" Su Lin was mildly surprised.

"Come on, let's head back." Garen turned around and walked straight towards the car.

He didn't care what Celine and Su Lin thought. He got in the car and, with his back on the seat, closed his eyes as if he were sleeping. But in actuality, he concentrated all his attention on the Attributes Pane and Skills Pane.

His current situation was clear at a glance.

'264 122 215 153 112%

'Strength 2.64; Agility 1.22; Vitality 2.15; Intelligence 1.53; Potential 112%

——— Secret Martial Arts ———

Mammoth Mutation: Explosive (Top level) Skin Hardening Level One (Iron Body); Blood Qi Stabilization (Boulder Martial Art);

'Firestream Fist: Level One (of Four)'

"There are a few options now. The first is to enhance the effect and level of Mammoth Mutation Secret Martial Art. Another is to enhance Iron Body and Boulder Martial Art, which are now at rudimentary level, to Level One. This would also have a similar overall effect to enhancing Mammoth Mutation Secret Martial Art, but the specific effects of enhancement would be unclear."

"The there's enhancing Firestream Fist from rudimentary level to Level One. It only requires a little attribute points. The question is whether it's worth using the points on this attribute."

He started to hesitate.

There were a few mysterious symbols on the back of the Skills Pane. It represented the clarification on the attribute points required to forcibly enhance skills.

'Attribute points can enhance low level skills by one level per point, and mid-level skills forcibly by one level every two points. For high-level skills, five points are needed to enhance one level, not to mention the need to meet skills learning and enhancement requirements. Failure to enhance might be due to incomplete data collected.'

Initially, his Mammoth Secret Technique was supplemented by the wad of paper soaked in medicinal water, and after that aided by his Master, Fei Baiyun's medicinal pill. Otherwise, he would have to honestly practice and train sequentially to enhance it, or rely on adding attribute points.

"Practicing Secret Martial Art is unusually difficult..." Garen suddenly gave a long sigh. He considered the progression of Secret Martial Art difficult even with his special ability and conditions, needless to say how it would be for other martial art practitioners.

Most martial arts practitioners were the same. Even if they had talent and trained diligently for 10, 20 years to achieve a hard-earned Secret Martial Art, they would still be helpless in the face of firearms.

This bitter sentiment was perhaps only understood by Secret Martial Art practitioners who have trained hard to hone their craft.

At this moment, Su Lin and Celine had gotten in the car as well. The car slowly started, turned a corner, and headed back towards the direction they came from.

The three of them did not speak in the car.

Garen kept considering which skill to add the attribute points to. He obtained these points after much difficulty, it was a world of difference compared to the attribute points he easily obtained before.

Attribute points are easy initially but would gradually become difficult. After his body developed resistance towards most Antiques of Tragedy, it had become more difficult for him to easily obtain Attributes. Unfortunately, he had understood this too late.

After final consideration, Garen's vision finally fell on Agility.

So far, he had realised in his battles with myriad experts, that the defence of his peak Body Hardening Technique was sufficient, but he seemed to always have to put up a forceful resistance because his speed was unable to keep up with his opponents'.

In his martial arts journey, the most important skills were Strength and Vitality, followed by Agility and Intelligence.

"My defence is sufficient for now. Even if faced with Duskdune Shura's Dragon Gates, as long as he doesn't engage anything above the fourth Gate, it wouldn't cause me much harm. So now the most important thing is to add to Agility and Intelligence. If I can't keep up in agility and speed, that means I would constantly not be able to keep up with the enemy's position. The enhancement of Intelligence would also benefit me in terms of my grasp of the situation. But for now it's better if I enhance practical true strengths.

He looked at that bit of hard-earned Attributes and finally made up his mind. He cast his vision firmly on Agility.

On the Attributes Pane, the value for Agility gradually blurred and changed from 1.22 to 1.52.

"Huh? Attribute points have reverted to increasing by 0.3 every time?" Garen was slightly surprised. He instantly noticed that, as Agility was enhanced, Strength followed suit, and gradually changed from 2.64 to 2.66.

Just as he finished adding Attributes, Garen instantly felt as though his body was about to float. Obviously it was caused by a large-scale increase in Agility.

The enhancements gained from the addition of 0.3 to Agility in one go, for a Grandmaster of Combat who had precise control of his body like Garen, were exceptionally great.

He closed his eyes and felt the change which made his entire body feel light.

Originally he planned to split the Attribute points up and add some to Intelligence. After all, the enhancement of intelligence would eventually have a trickle-down effect on all other aspects. But in the end he gave up on that idea. The effect of the Intelligence Attribute, based on his prior analysis, was the integrated enhancement of comprehension, analysis and memory. But for someone like him who was able to directly and swiftly grasp the basics of academic subjects as long as the Attribute requirements were satisfied, that wasn't very important.

Intelligence was like a skill in martial arts: indispensable, but would only play a role in a situation where the gap between strengths wasn't too wide. Under absolute Strength, any skill or strategy would be superfluous.

After all, the more concealed and meticulous a plan was, the more it required a precise linking of every moving part; a mistake in any one part would result in the complete collapse of the plan.

And most importantly, he was not aiming for victory in the grand scheme of things, but was instead in pursuit of the true purpose of martial arts. It was the same reason he was passionate about martial arts—his goal that he carried over with him from his previous life on Earth—to break through the human limit and achieve evolution.

The purpose of martial arts, apart from combat and killing, was to break free from the shackles of human limit, and achieve personal evolution. This was also the limit that many Grandmasters of Combat in this world were pursuing.

Garen was familiarising himself with the changes to his body. He reached a fist out and repeatedly opened and clenched it.

Learning from the words and deeds of Fei Baiyun, Farak and Eldest Senior Sister, he had now become more firmly set on this goal.

The car was slowly turning around. They were further and further from the round whirlpool formation behind them, until it disappeared beyond the horizon.

In front of them to the right, a stationary white car appeared in the distance, its headlights reflected the blinding sunshine like the eyes of a goldfish. A man stood in front of the car. He was a bearded man who wore a white cloak and wrapped himself up like an Arab. He was leaning on the front of the car bonnet and doing repairs. The car constantly emitted black smoke and strange clunking noises could be heard from time to time.

Su Lin drove past the bearded man.

Outside the right car window, a caravan of camels carrying loads could vaguely be seen cutting through the desert in the opposite direction. Dark-skinned men swayed as they rode the camels and marched on forward. A breeze brought with it the crisp sound of camel bells from the distance.

In the car, the three of them were quietly admiring the scenery outside.

The endless stretch of yellow desert gave the illusion that it was delicate and smooth under the sun, like top-grade fine porcelain.

Su Lin gradually slowed the car; the sound of the engine became much softer.

Snap.

A small grey figure stepped on the car window then rapidly leaped over the car, from right to left. It landed on the sand to the left of the car and swiftly ran into the distance.

Only after it was a distance away did the three of them clearly see that it was a small animal similar to a cat, like a kitten with rabbit ears. Its body was covered grey fur. Compared to a cat, its ears were much larger, much longer, and were constantly wiggling.

The eyes of this little guy narrowed into slits as it ran; its four little legs moved without pause, but it was still very stable.

"Bat-eared fox. A common small animal." Su Lin looked speechlessly at the four tiny paw prints left on the car window.

"Isn't this area close to the entrance of the desert? I didn't expect to see a bat-eared fox," Celine lamented.

Chapter 136: Hunted 2

Garen sat to a side and didn't speak. He was still quietly experiencing the changes to his body brought about by the enhancement to Agility.

The car continued to move forward. Not long after, Celine suddenly turned around to look out the back of the car.

"Someone is following us from behind."

Su Lin looked into the rear-view mirror and was slightly stunned.

"Followed? I don't think so. I checked carefully before we set off."

Vrooom...

The sound of an engine coming from behind the car got closer and closer.

Wham!

The car was hit hard once. It started shaking violently and they were almost thrown off course.

"Damn it! We really are being followed!"

Su Lin had an idea. He hurriedly turned the steering wheel to evade the tailgate.

Wham wham!

Two more crash sounds. Two black cars flanked them from the right and left. The rear-view mirror broke off in the crash.

"What the...! Where did these guys come from?! My limited edition Bolshoy!" Su Lin glanced at the broken rear-view mirror with a pained expression. He was frantically turning the steering wheel in an attempt to escape from the flank attack.

Wham!

A loud crash came from the side again. The right side of the car was instantly dented and almost hit Garen who was sitting in the back passenger seat.

"Find somewhere to stop the car!" Garen shouted in a deep voice.

"I'm trying to!" Su Lin was panicked too. In this kind of situation where the car was flanked, the cars behind would crash into them if they stopped. It would be difficult even for him to sustain such an impact.

If the timing wasn't right, the car might even flip.

Wham! Wham wham!

Three consecutive crashes made the car shake violently; it started spinning like a top from the impact.

Garen and the others inside were dizzy from the spinning. Garen was relatively fine; Celine and Su Lin's heads bumped onto some hard parts in the car.

Rattatatat!

The rear windshield broke with a crash. Garen shielded Celine with his body and held her down on the car seat. Bullets continued to strike the interior of the car and golden sparks could be seen from time to time.

"Damn it, it's a light machine gun!" Su Lin shouted.

"Find a chance to stop the car!" Garen roared. The sound of the machine gun was too noisy; they couldn't hear each other clearly.

"I'm trying!!!" Su Lin replied loudly. He leaned over the steering wheel to steady it. Under these circumstances, Garen would probably be fine, but Su Lin and Celine definitely didn't have such a strong peak Body Hardening Technique. They would be badly injured if they got hit a few times.

Wham!

It was another crash. The black car to their right closed in on them. A man in black clothes pulled out a black rifle and aimed it mercilessly at them.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

A cluster of bullets hit the silver car.

Su Lin stepped on the brakes as hard as he could, but the car—clipped by the three black cars—continued to spin and zoom forward.

Suddenly, a large hand reached in from behind and held his head down.

With a bang, a cluster of bullets broke the side window and flew over the large hand. A few bullets actually hit the back of the hand, and blood spurted out from it.

"Damn it, I can't stop the car! What cars are they driving anyway? The horsepower is so big!" Su Lin started cursing. The brakes under his feet had been completely rendered useless.

He took out a handgun from his waist and wanted to shoot out of the car, but there was no chance.

Garen was just about to stick his head out and jump out from the broken car door when, with a bang, a cluster of bullets suddenly shot in from the hole on the door and hit him squarely on the body. The immense impact shook his entire body and he was shot back into the car.

"Damn it!"

Garen grabbed a piece of debris from the car door and flung it out of the car.

With a whoosh, the debris shot out spinning.

Bang!

A cluster of bullets hit the car door debris and actually sent it flying backwards. It hit Garen's chest with a bang.

Bang bang bang bang!!

A stream of violent gunshots continuously greeted Garen's body; the impact completely prevented him from getting up. His body started to get warmer as the temperature rose; it was the intense heat generated from the impact and friction of the bullets.

Garen was completely pinned down as shot after shot of shotgun pellets forcefully struck his body.

"Stop the car!" Garen roared.

"The brakes have failed!" Su Lin punched the steering wheel hard.

Garen barely raised his head again when—

Bang!

—another shot hit him hard in the face.

"Go to hell!"

Crank!

He tore out the entire rear passenger seat and flung it at the black car to the side.

With a thud, one of the black cars on the right started flipping at the impact of the sofa and veered off the road, rolling down the sand dune by the road.

With a boom, the car suddenly exploded. The few men in black clothing who had just leapt out of the car were engulfed in flames.

The two other black cars were shocked and didn't dare to stay too close anymore, backing off a distance.

"Are you alright?" Su Lin asked loudly.

Garen took a breath and was about to reply when, suddenly the edge of his eye caught sight of something behind them, and all his hairs instantly stood on end.

"Fuck! It's a rocket launcher!" He didn't have time to think beyond that; he merely felt a chill run down his spine. "Jump!"

There was a low roar.

He was the first to jump out of the left side. He rammed the car door off with a bang; Celine and Su Lin followed him out.

Boom!

The silver car transformed into a ball of flames and exploded.

The three of them rolled for a distance on the sand. The black cars sped forward from the force of inertia before they halted to a stop a distance away.

Garen had just managed to raise his head when he saw a group of people alight from the black cars. Two of them were carrying rocket launchers and were already aiming towards Garen and the others.

A terrifying sense of threat surged towards him.

Without second thought, he grabbed the petite Celine and jumped out a few meters in a side leap.

Boom boom!

A large amount of sand and dust was blasted into the air and sprayed down all around like raindrops.

Garen grabbed Celine and rolled down a sand dune, finally avoiding the sight of that group of people.

They kept on rolling for quite a while until they were dizzy before stopping motionless at the base of the dune.

"Pfff! Pff pfff!"

Spitting out the sand in his mouth, Garen rolled over and stood up. He picked the dizzy Celine up with one hand and slapped her across the face a few times.

"Wake up! This isn't the time to faint!"

Celine's face was red hot from the slapping, but it managed to wake her up.

"You bastard! How dare you slap me?" She struggled to break free from Garen's grip, but to no avail. After that bout of rolling, she was dizzy and weak, completely unable to exert any force.

Garen stood up and looked up at the peak of the dune.

"This is the first time I've been chased into such a miserable state!"

"Bastard...they're after me. I've implicated you in this!" Celine coughed for a few times.

"You stay here! I'll go check on Su Lin," Garen said, and immediately started to climb the dune.

As he reached the top, he saw Su Lin walk towards him, also covered in sand.

"Are you hurt?" Su Lin asked loudly.

Shaking his head, Garen walked towards him.

"Where are the people who attacked us?"

"They're all gone." Su Lin pointed towards the distance. Two black dots could be seen in the distance: it was the two black cars escaping. "They were obviously after you or Celine. They targeted all their firepower at you! Damn, even the KTR rocket launchers are out! I've only heard of this being the new product developed in Weisman, I can't believe they dare use it blatantly in such a place! My 36 million dollar limited edition Bolshoy!"

Su Lin was obviously very irritated, with the pain of losing his car shown across his face.

"This is not the time to be worried about your car! Alright, I don't think they were after me. They should have been going after Celine."

Garen carefully recalled the situation earlier. It felt like all the firepower was directed at Celine.

It was indeed like she said: those people were after her.

Clang!

Suddenly at the bottom of the dune, a piercing metal clanging sound came from where Celine stood.

Garen and Su Lin looked downwards. They saw Celine and a person in black clothing fighting each other. In a distance, there were three other figures cloaked in black rushing towards Celine.

"We have to save her!" Su Lin said in a low tone and rushed down the dune.

Garen was slightly slower, but followed behind.

Clang!

Celine's petite face was serious. She did a back flip and landed on the sand. There was something in her hand that seemed to be capable of forcefully resisting her opponent.

"You again..." With a tiny hand, she gently pulled from her waist a silver belt—more than two meters long—and flicked it hard. The silver belt produced a series of crisp cracking sounds and transformed into a straight, hard rod.

Two whooshing sounds were heard, and two metal blades appeared at the tip of the rod. The belt had transformed into a trident-like exaggerated weapon in the blink of an eye.

Celine waved the trident around, and drew a few silver lines in the air with it.

Bang!

At the sound of a gun, a cluster of bullets hit her squarely in the back.

Clanging sounds could be heard from the collision. The yellow sand around them strangely sprayed up and a large amount of bullets were repelled and hit the ground. The yellow sand and dust enveloped Celine.

Chhh.

Not far from Celine, a young man with long, white hair pulled out two daggers from his thighs and ran straight into the sand without hesitation.

"Stop the other two."

"Yes!"

The three figures clad in black nearby turned around and leapt at Garen and Su Lin without hesitation.

The white haired youth dashed towards Celine: his footsteps on the sand became more and more rapid, faster and faster.

Hiss!

A black mark suddenly appeared under his leather boots where he stepped on the sand.

The youth instantly combined his daggers into a short knife. Celine's petite figure reflected on the blade.

"One flash!" the young man shouted as he rotated his body and slashed a silver-white mark with the blade.

Chhh!

Clang!

A bang was heard.

The yellow sand scattered from the shock, turned into a rim of yellow stripes, spread out in all directions, and gradually dispersed.

The white-haired youth who was holding the short knife, was elbowed hard into the ground.

The sand and dust dispersed to reveal Celine holding the trident.

Her head of copper-brown hair fluttered in the wind. It was as if Celine turned from a child into a mature teen. She gripped the trident in one hand, and covered her chest with the other. Her legs were long and her waist was slim; her pale translucent skin had a jade-like luster when it reflected the sunlight.

"Neptune Fist, Myriad Water Jasper Technique!"

Celine was overlooking the white-haired youth from a height; her eyes seemed to contain the roaring and rolling waves of a vast ocean.

She flipped the trident pressed on top the youth's head.

Clang!

Blood spurt out from countless wounds on the white-haired youth's body. He had a look of disbelief in his eyes.

More than a hundred wounds tore the skin of his entire body. All his arteries burst and blood squirted out, as if overwhelmed by some immense pressure.

"You...actually...are able to..." Before he could finish his sentence, he fell backwards and died.

Celine retracted her trident and concentrated her gaze on the weapon in her hand. The turbulent shade in her eyes quickly calmed down.

Pfff!

She quickly covered her mouth, but still could not prevent a mouthful of blood from spilling out. The viscous blood dripped from the edges of her palm.

Chapter 137: Sin Gerro 1

"You alright there?" Garen asked walking towards Celine, carrying two the men in black.

"Well, you've grown, haven't you?" He added, glancing at Celine's matured hourglass body with a hint of mild surprise.

What used to be children's clothing had now morphed into a few strips of cloth, barely covering her important parts. The cloth again threatened to fall off just as Celine was about to cover her mouth. Startled, she quickly reached for her clothes and clutched them tightly.

"I'm fine. You don't have to come any closer!" Celine panicked slightly and whipped her trident off the ground, bringing with it a large amount of yellow sand.

The whirlwind of dust and dirt blocked Garen's vision, and as the sand slowly fell to the ground after some ten seconds, Celine had reverted back to her usual six, seven year old childish look with her ragged, oversized clothes. Her body was covered in blood and she carried a pale white look on her face.

With a gentle push off the ground, Celine leapt up into the air and sat on Garen's right shoulder. The trident in her hand had shrunk back into its original shape, resting on her waist.

Garen furrowed his eyebrows.

"You'd better explain everything when we get back, or I'm afraid I'll have to toss you out."

"It's just a combination of the modified version of the Contortion Technique and Essence Locking Technique. I can't maintain my real body for long, it's seriously injured. In any case, I can only move about freely in this state." Celine answered, softly.

Garen looked down at the corpse and said. "And what of these people?"

"They were sent by an old enemy of mine. They just want me dead." Celine finished, her expression slightly forlorn.

Garen squatted down to examine the white haired corpse.

It seemed as if it was gored by hundreds of knives simultaneously; dense, fresh wounds covered the corpse, leaking blood that dyed the sand on the ground crimson.

"One of my secret techniques, from the Neptune Fist. Myriad Water Jasper Technique. It's too bad I can't use it very often." Celine said plainly.

Garen didn't reply her. He fished a card out from the corpse, and on it bore a symbol: the seven of diamonds.

"Did you find anything?" Su Lin asked as he hurried over from afar. He was holding up another card: the 3 of diamonds. "I found this."

"Was it on the body of the assailant?" Garen asked.

Su Lin nodded.

"It's the Poker Organization, from Weisman. I'd heard of them in the past, but I hadn't expected to see them within the federation."

"Poker Organization... ? Do you have any concrete information on them?" Garen asked softly.

"It will take time. These people had the balls to attempt to kill us. They're not getting away with this, not on my watch." Sulin let out a cold laugh. "I will investigate this Poker Organization once we're done with the Duskdune Shura incident."

"Are you sure?"

"This isn't Weisman, and they dare to act wildly here! Do they suppose they're the Duskdune Shura, then? " Su Lin mocked. "Whoever touches me means to pick a fight against the Belfatalia household! They're picking a fight with the whole Special Agent Bureau and the government!"

"No one would come out unharmed when they go against the government!"

Garen's lips twitched ever so slightly, as if he wanted to say something, but held his tongue.

"For now, we need to take care of the Duskdune Shura first, it's a matter of the Federation's prestige-." stated Su Lin.

"Whatever the case, we should head back fast. We'll need to walk back or hitch a ride, since our car is blown to pieces." Celine said as she cut off Su Lin.

Su Lin nodded. "And about that other issue, you'd better see it through to the end." he added.

"Don't worry. I'm not going anywhere." Celine replied, curling her lips

.

Thud.

Tea cups were set softly onto a black wooden table.

Two siblings, Celine and the Aris took their seats side by side on the same row, and opposite them were Garen and Su Lin.

The four of them sat in a small study room opposite each other. Celine, bored to tears, flipped a large, black book endlessly, as if looking for something among its pages.

To her side, Aris was fiddling with a red raindrop shaped gem, not bothering to raise her head up and look at Garen at all.

Su Lin and Garen were gazing out the clear study window to their right, where an innocent looking plain sat just outside the building.

Yoda, the Eight-Arm Dragon King was scolding Erudas loudly, whip in hand.

"Straighten your god damn arm!"

"Yes, sir" Erudas replied loudly.

"Don't stick up your ass!"

"Yes, sir!"

Crack! The sound of the whip rang through the air

"Do you understand human language, you brat? Don't stick up your ass! Do you understand?!"

"Yes, sir!!!"

"My fucking God, could you be any more stupid!?"

Yoda seemed to have take a sudden interest in scolding Erudas, who was standing outside, upside down, on his head. It seemed like Yoda was teaching him Gun Art.

The sound of endless rambling permeated through the window into the study room.

Garen broke his gaze and looked at Celine. The girl was smirking as she looked out the window; it was very likely that she had something to do with it, as well.

"We have news of the Duskdune Shura, by telegram. I called you guys over the moment I received the news." Su Lin tapped the table rhythmically.

"Let's hear it." Garen was very interested in the Duskdune Shura. To be more precise, he was interested in the Golden Sword Throne, currently in the enemy's hands. He could imagine the huge potential it would bring; there were still remnants of the Antique of Tragedy's power left inside the black cloth. This might be his first time coming across an Antique of Tragedy with this amount of potential.

Su Lin glanced sideways at Garen, puzzled at his change of attitude at the mention of the topic. However, he didn't think much of it.

"The Duskdune Shura were last seen on a road towards Sin Gerro."

"Sin Gerro?"

Not only Garen was surprised, Aris seemed taken aback as well.

"That one near Xi Fan Province..? That Sin Gerro?" Aris asked in a low voice.

"That's the one."

"They've crossed the border, then.. Sin Gerro is pretty much half sealed up at the moment, it's going to be tough; although the place is tiny, it's rich with trade. It receives much more income than the federation" Aris said as she furrowed her eyebrows.

"I know of this, too." Garen nodded his head. "I've heard that Sin Gerro deals in ores and gems. To think the Duskdune Shura would bring the Golden Sword Throne to such a faraway place."

"The federation has assembled a small task force, codenamed Slash. Within it are people who are proficient against the Duskdune Shura. All of the experts in the southern region that we could gather have all been called together" Su Lin explained. "I have seen what the Grandmasters of Combat can do, so we've invited two of them into the force. One of them is from Crimson Sand Sword. Garen should have heard of them before."

"Oh? The Crimson Sand Sword? Could it be Beo?" Garen asked curiously.

"It is. One of the twin stars of the south, the strongest martial artist in the Crimson Sand Sword, surpassing even the Great Elder and Founder. Rumor says that he's on par with Andrela." Su Lin nodded in agreement.

"And what of Andrela?" Garen asked, as he recalled the days fighting alongside that man with such talent.

"I heard that he had an epiphany after the match with you. He went deep into the mountains to further his training, and no one knows of his location at the moment. That guy is obsessed with martial arts, he'd stop at nothing to pursue it." Su Lin said, voice filled with emotion

"He'll be at a different level once he resurfaces." Garen beamed with confidence. "I've learned a lot from that fight as well. If not, I wouldn't have stood a chance against the Duskdune Shura in battle."

In actuality, Andrela was more talented than Garen was. If not for his own innate talent, he confessed that he would be no match against the rate at which he is improving.

"So where does Andrela stand among the Grandmasters of Combat?" Unaware of just how strong Andrela was, Garen took this opportunity to ask.

"I know this! I look up very highly to Master Andrela" Aris exclaimed, butting into the conversation. "I would have entered the Celestial Circle Gate if not for my love of the sword arts."

She cleared her throat.

"Master Andrela's sword art has already far surpassed the Celestial Circle Gate's elites, with the exception of Rolexia. As a Grandmaster of Combat, he is currently sitting well above average. To be precise, he is one of the best in this generation, save for the elites from the previous generation. Oh and of course, you're currently the strongest Grandmaster of Combat in this generation Master Garen."

"What I wanted to know was against all of the Grandmasters of Combat, including the ones from the previous generation." Garen bellowed in laughter, shaking his head.

"Andrela. I met him a year ago."

Celine's voice spoke up, from the side.

She gently closed the book in front of her and closed her eyes, as if reliving a memory.

"Even if the previous generations were included, his prowess is, without a doubt, one of the best. Assuming the Grandmasters of Combat are separated into four categories - Lower, Middle, Upper and First Class Ranks, he will probably stand at the edge of the Middle rank, skirting the Upper rank. He is climbing to the Duskdune Shura's level at an incredible pace." Celine explained. "After that match with you, he would likely be at the Upper rank."

Garen's heart leapt in his throat.

"Duskdune Shura... Is it even possible for a human to attain that kind of level?"

"It's plausible. Duskdune Shura have been considered the pinnacle of martial arts for a long time. No one is stronger than them. Among us humans, they are known to be the best." Celine finished. Her gaze then fell on Garen, eyes brimming with emotion.

""Andrela is improving at an incredible rate. Aren't you worried Garen?"

"What's there to be worried about?" Garen asked, holding unease.

Celine's lips curled into a sly smile.

"Your secret martial art but a low grade third rater - the White Cloud Mammoth. Under such a poor foundation, you've managed to reach a level so high that people have thought it impossible; but that's the limit. There's no way to get any better than you are now. Can you live with that?"

Everyone could read between the lines written by Celine. The duo became the focal point of the occupants in the room.

Garen was silent.

He knew; the White Cloud Secret Art had indeed reached its theoretical limit. He had stretched this secret technique to the extreme limit, so much so that even the founder of the White Cloud Gate himself was no match for him.

As he was now, he was imprisoned by his own secret technique.

Its grade was simply too low.

"If you had a higher level secret technique like Andrela of Celestial gate, you might be able to reach Duskdune Shura's level as well." Celine's voice had a slight tone of temptation.

"What are you trying to say" Garen looked at her calmly.

"Why not be the Dragon King of Protection of the Neptune Fist?" Celine smiled with cunning. "I can give you an even stronger secret technique."

Garen furrowed his eyebrows.

It was certainly a tempting prospect. A stronger secret technique would mean a brighter future.

However his mind was on the the promise between him and his teacher, Fei Baiyun. The White Cloud Gate had nurtured him, brought him where he was. With the Founder unconscious, he had a great responsibility upon him.

"I regret to say," Garen answered decidedly, "that I will not learn the Neptune Fist."

Chapter 138: Sin Gerro 2

Celine's face fell.

"My Neptune Fist is one of the best in the history! The secret techniques are ahead of its generation; the pinnacle of secret techniques! With the amount of talent you have, you can achieve what nobody has achieved before. You might even achieve what the Duskdune Shura are trying to obtain! I am giving you the opportunity to reach the pinnacle of martial arts, the opportunity to improve further from there onwards! You're not even considering it?!"

"Don't waste your time. My mind is made." Garen replied flatly.

"Fine. You are still young anyway. There are plenty of chances to regret afterwards " Celine said in a low voice.

"Forget about the secret technique for a minute; when do you plan on leaving?" Su Lin asked.

Celine immediately looked elsewhere and whistled.

Su Lin immediately knew that this girl had taken fancy to this place, was trying to use it as a shelter.

"Celine." Garen's deep voice boomed. "As the successor of the Neptune Fist, besides your own Neptune Fist, surely you know of other lower grade secret techniques right?"

"Low grade secret techniques? I know a whole bunch, why are you asking this?" Celine lowered her head and asked out of suspicion.

"Don't you feel that you need to repay us somehow since you're treating us as bodyguards right now?" Garen asked as he glanced at Su Lin, looking at him for support.

"Yeah that's right. We never agreed on letting you stay with us. You'll only bring us trouble." Su Lin nodded repeatedly.

"If you do not want us to leave you behind when we're in trouble, you should give us something in return, right?" Garen sneered.

"You want low grade secret techniques?" Celine asked. "Why do you need low grade secret techniques? What use are they?"

"I won't object if you want to fork out secret techniques with higher grades, but would you want to? " Garen shrugged.

"Fine." Celine replied happily after some consideration. "What kind of secret techniques would you like? Of what type? I have quite a few secret techniques under my Neptune Fist. Let's see what you have in mind."

"But I'll have to warn you first; once you've decided, a long period of time is required to master it. Your rate of progress will plummet once you reach the age of 25, and will only get harder from then on. You have to get the basics down pat first, before anything else. The higher the grade of secret technique the better it'll be for you, and the highest I have with me is the Neptune Fist Fundamental Secret Method." She added on.

"Your highest grade secret technique? Is it stronger than Master Andreas?" Aris asked out of curiosity.

"Definitely." Celine proudly replied. "In addition, I can only give one set to Su Lin and Garen. My Neptune Fist's secret technique is not free after all."

"Fine. I want a secret technique that's based on hidden weapons." Su Lin voiced out immediately.

"I want one that is based on palm strikes." Garen added on.

"Hidden weapons and Palm Strikes? No problem." Celine nodded her head. "Have you made up your mind? This will be the compensation for protecting me and Erudas. You'd better be sure!"

"Of course." Su Lin answered without any hesitation.

Garen nodded in agreement as well.

"The grade better be good."

Celine nodded her head with some finality.

"Don't worry, I will give you the basics first. I'll teach you guys the level 2 once you have mastered level 1. Figuratively speaking."

"Alright! Let's do this now, since the Slash organization is set to leave this afternoon." Su Lin said as he couldn't wait anymore.

"There's no need to rush, I'm sure they won't be able to touch the Duskdune Shura even if they're there. He's on another level of cunning. I know a bit about him, and of the situation at hand. It's most likely correct." Celine curled her lips as she explained. "I'll let you decide on the secret technique first. Alright, tell me what you'd like to learn. What path will you take?"

Half an hour later...

Both Garen and Su Lin went back to their own rooms and started packing for the trip with the task force.

On their hands were two pieces of paper, both packed to the brim with information on their respective secret techniques.

Garen half-sat, half-laid down on his bed, studying the first page of his paper on the first line, the name of the secret technique was written clear as day.

'Red Jade Secret Method'

It was a full set, consisting of different kinds of palm strike techniques. It even had guidr to achieving the special effects of the secret technique.

It was similar to the Mammoth Secret Technique containing the White Cloud Combat Technique and Explosive Fist Arts. They come in a set.

Garen flipped to the annotation section in the last page.

'The Red Jade Palm, once mastered, instills the palms with extreme heat. Combustion of any object is easily attainable when combined with proper palm techniques, and the heat of palms has very high penetration and is thus able to disrupt the temperature balance of the enemy's body, killing the enemy silently.'

This Red Jade Palm was catalyzed off a subspecies of poisonous snake known as the fire jade snake. Its combat techniques were classified into wrapping, biting and twisting.

These three techniques were mainly used for evasion, attack and defense.

Garen gazed at the skill progression tree in front of him.

A technique from the Red Jade Palm had manifested on the paper.

'Red Jade Palm: Not Learned (Three levels total) Requirement : Strength 0.7, Agility 1, Constitution 1.5, Intelligence 0.9. Requirement met. Do you want to learn this technique?'

"Looks like constitution is the main attribute for Red Jade Palm. One needs at least 1.5 in order to be eligible to learn it. In other words, only the trained professionals are eligible to practice this technique." Garen thought to himself.

Garen's stared at the 'yes' symbol for 3 seconds as the notification to learn Red Jade Palm popped up.

With a searing zap, the symbol disappeared.

The paper that was in front of him had, like a scanner, been transferred into his head. His understanding of the technique rose in quick succession, as if he had been studying it for a long period of time.

"Alright then, let's start with the basic breathing technique!"

Breathing technique, specific posture and even musical rhythm were a must during practice for any secret technique. The higher grade secret techniques may even require external energy as a catalyst. The Red Jade Palm was considered to be a second rate secret technique that was a grade higher than the Mammoth secret technique. It was one Celine wracked her brains to pick; one that did not require any external support.

For all its advantage of not requiring a catalyst, it had one caveat: it was incredibly difficult to master.

This secret technique was the type that required some blood and sweat.

Garen calmly matched his breathing with the technique. Breathing rhythmically without pause, his huge lungs inhaling and exhaling large amounts of air. A hissing sound began to echo around the room. As if there were snakes in the room, poised to attack.

It was morning, and he needed to head down to Sin Gerro with the Slash task force to eliminate Duskdune Shura in the afternoon. Although Yoda would not be with them this time around, the line-up was still very impressive; much stronger than their previous attempt. Although Garen hadn't seen Beo in action before, he knew that he was no ordinary Grandmaster of Combat. With them were 2 more Grade D professionals, who could go toe to toe with himself, as well as members of the international police. There were also some from the Special Agent along for the mission.

Garen confessed that with this line up, with Beo singlehandedly locking him in place, in addition to the sheer firepower within the team, even Garen would be humbled.

Now that he had obtained a new secret technique, one that is of a higher grade than his own Mammoth Secret Technique, training was imperative in increasing his power.

"Now if I had the Golden Sword Throne..." Garen's eyes were brimming with energy. The Golden Sword Throne had become his number one priority, as it would greatly improve his physical attributes and technique levels at an incredible pace. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity!

Sin Gerro.

The Needle Green Pine Forest Ocean Park; a place covered in sweeping lands of greenery. In its center was an almost mirror-like pond, along with a river that partitioned the land with its meandering banks.

It was like drawing a landscape on a green coloured handkerchief

Within the forest lies a small, white road, penetrating through the forest. There was a signboard at the entrance, written in the Gerro language: Lake Road.

The center of the Lake Road was about 300 meters away from the entrance--

The sun blazed overhead, seeping through the cracks in the forest canopy, bathing swathes of land that littered across the uneven land in pillars of glorious sunlight.

Monochrome police cars were lined up in the forest clearing, flash lights in strobe; uniformed policemen were stringing a perimeter of yellow tape, and others were surrounding a deep crater at the center of the clearing. Camera flashes mimicked the police lights as flashes of strobe lights accompanied the shutter clicks of pictures being taken. Still others were furiously jotting down points on notebooks.

The sound of buzzing engines could be heard nearby, as another police car pulled up short of the yellow tape.

Three young policemen, two male and one female, exited the car with a rhythm of thumps of doors closing. They were dressed in plainclothes, the badges in their hands shining as they reflected off the sunlight.

"Officer Joseph from the Emergency Agent Department. These two are my colleagues. Please let us through."

The officers on duty looked at his police badge and immediately let him through, responding with an air of respect and reverence.

The man called Joseph was dressed in a black leather shirt. He had pale yellow skin, large eyes with thick eyebrows, and deep eye sockets typical of workaholics who work in the office. He bore a very stern look on his face.

He brought his colleagues toward the pit and knelt down to take a better look.

Inside the pit was the blurry outline of a male corpse, one half of its body nowhere to be found. It was as if something had torn it apart from its right shoulder to his right leg. Where his body would be, there was only soil, dyed red with blood.

"Identity of the deceased?" Joseph asked as he stood up.

"We're still investigating. We can determine its identity by backtracking his time of arrival, and by matching his attire with ones of other places. However, we require more time." The policeman answered.

"Any witnesses?"

"None. It was as if there were wild animals moving about in the surrounding area. We think it was an attack by one of them."

Joseph massaged his own temple.

"Were there any forest rangers nearby?"

"Thomson has been looking. It might take a while for him to find one." The girl who came together with him spoke softly.

"This is the third incident within three days!" Joseph murmured.

"Are you ok, Joseph?" The girl beside him hugged him lightly and kissed him on the cheek.

"I'm alright, Annie." Joseph returned her kiss.

"Sir! I've found something!"

Joseph rushed to where the policeman was shouting; it was a green field under a big pine tree.

A white identity card sat serenely on the grass, unmoving.

Joseph knelt down, and wearing a rubber glove, picked the card up.

"Bring it back and perform a fingerprint scan."

"Yes sir."

Chapter 139: Tailing Behind 1

Garen was standing in the bedroom, his hands drawing circles slowly in the air, like he was stirring something.

Slowly, he pushes his hands out in front of him and halted. He kept his arms the moment both of his palms glowed a deep red.

"Success. The Red Jade Palm... What an incredible trick. I've the basics down, but for this to be used in combat still requires some practice. All I can do now is train."

Although he was among the ranks of the Grandmasters of Combat, making his combat skill far superior than that of a commoner, practice was still needed to bring the most out of any secret technique, especially in combat.

Garen relaxed his posture. He was excited to see what the Red Jade Palm would bring in the future.

He took a look at the skill progression tree again. The Dark Crimson Technique had disappeared as it was combined with the Red Jade palm.

‘Red Jade Palm: Learned (Level 1), Fire Strengthen Grade 1 (Dark Crimson Technique), Vitality Strengthen Grade 1 (Dark Crimson Technique)’

"How strong is the Red Jade Palm in combat, I wonder, on top of being enhanced by the Dark Crimson Technique." Garen slowly re-adjusted his blood flow, and released himself from the practicing state for the Red Jade Palm.

He never got a chance to use the enhanced Red Jade Palm during actual combat. However, he knew that his destructive power would definitely be much stronger than it was before. He had a hunch as to how powerful the Dark Crimson Technique was. He even had obtained a technique enhancement and another set of technique that had strong palm strikes, which was a higher grade than the White Cloud Combat Technique.

He still needed 0.3 Agility to be eligible for enhancement.

Garen could feel that his strength had increased. In the realm of the Grandmaster of Combat, most of them had already maximised their physical attributes, and it would be incredibly difficult to further them from then. In this realm, the difference between the strong and the weak were defined by the prowess of the technique, fighting state, experience and techniques. As the Grandmasters of Combat's physical attributes required a certain quality to maintain at the highest level, they needed to spend a lot of time each day to maintain their body states. If they hadn't put in the effort, their body attribution would without a doubt regress.

Only Garen, who had an almost terrifying innate talent, could prevent any regression on his physical attributes without training. He could even rely on these attribute points to reach peak physical state.

This was an almost unthinkable method of improvement.

The difference a small point of physical attribute would make to your physical abilities was massive. In the eyes of the Grandmasters of Combat, any small advantage was considered a gorge in terms of battle strength. These small differences could determine life and death, victory and defeat during battles.

What more, then, would 0.3 Agility points be!

Garen packed his shirt and gathered his thoughts, and, swinging the door open, went out of the room.

Nearby, Su Lin was talking to Yoda, his back resting against the corridor wall.

Celine was hitting Erudas with a stick as she was giving out instructions. For some reason, she seemed very interested in him.

"Ready?" Celine turned around and asked Garen.

"All set." Garen nodded his head. "But, are you going as well?"

"Of course. You guys won't stand a chance capturing Duskdune Shura if I were absent. He's not a simple as you might think." Celine replied.

"When are we moving?"

"We will let the people from Slash leave first." Celine glanced at Su Lin nearby.

A few people were going about with their business in the open lot beside the small building, as this was a rather large alley between the two buildings, it was repurposed as a small training ground.

After a while, footsteps of the soldiers and the humming of car engines could be heard coming from the manor.

Everyone stopped what they were doing and turned their attention to the manor, walking to the manor entrance, and into the garden driveway to see what was going on.

A large number of soldiers and military vehicles were being mobilized out of the manor, and at the center of the fully equipped military men stood a white vehicle.

At this moment, four people dressed in different attire boarded the vehicle, among the

four were martial artists, military officers, and the most eye catching of all of them was a young man with blue eyes, blue hair and even eyebrows.

This man was in blue attire and had a blue sword by his waist, as he gave off a cold and cruel aura.

Garen recognized him in an instant as he saw him.

"That's Beo! He finally broke through! The last time I saw him he was still behind Andrela. He managed to do it in such a short time!" Garen was shocked.

"He's still not as fast as you!" Su Lin shook his head. "Beo must have been agitated by you and Andrela. I heard that he wanted to challenge you after that duel you had, when the time was right. He obviously thinks that he's still not strong enough to do it though, since he hasn't approached you even though he knows that you're here."

"Which means that when he challenges me, he'll believe himself to be above Andrela then." Garen said softly.

"He's not called the number one martial artist from the south in this generation for no reason. You'd better not take other challengers lightly." Su Lin said as he looked at Garen.

"Please lead the way, Celine since you said you know where to find the Duskdune Shura." Garen told Celine.

Celine frowned at the Slash team, as if deep in thought.

"There's no need to rush. We'll follow them from afar. This is considered a personal investigation since we are separated from the team, we have freedom of movement. I'm sure those two generals know, and agreed to this. They obviously want to have us as an insurance since we will be in the dark from all these parades. Plus we have Garen if all else fails.

"That's alright, I'll leave it up to you then." Garen said as he shrugged his shoulders.

"The only problem is, what should we do if we meet Duskdune Shura again?" Su Lin asked with some apprehension.

"Let me handle it when it comes to that" Garen added. "I've learnt a lot after the match with him the last time. We should be fine as long as we don't get hit by his Seven Dragon Gate Combo."

"Indeed." Celine nodded her head in affirmation. The party looked at the car slowly leaving the manor. Only when it could no longer be seen did they start for their own journey.

"Alright, it's our turn to move out. Be careful if you meet Duskdune Shura. We're not here to have a death match with him."

"That we'll be sure to do. Alright. I'll go and prepare us a car and we'll head straight for the airbase."

Su Lin was the first to exit, followed by Garen with Celine on his shoulder.

Only Yoda and Aris were left to note their departure. Aris' eyes gleamed with a hint of worry.

"Brother is the weakest among them all. Why did he want to go and join in the fun?"

Yoda smiled, "Don't worry. Although Su Lin lacks strength when up against a Grandmaster of Combat, but he is considered a very strong opponent for a commoner. And with a trump card up his sleeve, he's not to be trifled with."

"A trump card?" Aris looked at Yoda curiously.

"In the words of some, he is a talented person..." Yoda replied.

13th May 2987

Sin Gerro - Pinehill City

One day later...

Bang!

In the meeting room in Pinehill City, Beo, his face full of rage, slammed his palm onto the desk. His equally fiery eyes were staring at the cops in the room.

"Let the people in this room be my witnesses," Beo said word by word. "There will be a big incident tonight!"

"Please calm down Beo." A middle-aged police officer who was sitting in the master seat said. "We don't have any evidence or any clues, and you want us to approve mobilization of the special forces to lock down the central building? You have to understand that that area is the Pinehill City's central. It would affect the whole city if there were any movement there! This is no child's play!"

"Executive Jayne, I..."

"Save it, Beo. I know you're talented, but you are clearly being too rash about this incident. I think you should take some rest, since you've lost your cool over these three cases." Officer Jayne said flatly, before standing up to leave the meeting room.

Tch.

A fat, white policeman opposite of Joseph stood up and glanced sideways at him, as if he wanted to burst out laughing.. "Don't be angry now, Sir Joseph."

Others in the room laughed and shook their heads.

"A murder in the central building? Hah! This is the funniest thing I've heard this year." A tall and lanky policeman sneered at officer Joseph as he walked past.

Soon, Joseph is the only one left in the meeting room.

He stood, fists clenched, silent without a word.

"Remember, Joseph. You're different from the others. The world you see is much more than the others. That is your ability... It is the ability of the Hilarita Household."

Grandfather's last words appeared in his mind once more.

"Listen closely... close your eyes.. and listen... those words in the night..." Grandfather's weak yet firm speech echoed in his mind once more.

.

"Joseph unconsciously closed his eyes and listened closely with his ears.

Ding.... Ding Dang... Ding... Ding Dang...

The sound of a gramophone in the distance floated into his ears. Along with it came sounds from the gentle breeze and leaves rustling outside... the low rumble of a car engine, footsteps along the corridor. He could even hear the sound of his own breathing, his heartbeat, blood circulating in his veins.

Joseph focused on his hearing, and slowly, his surroundings drowned into the background, with the exception of a piece of soft music.

The muddy music started to clear up, and the static within came along with it, louder and louder, louder and louder.

Bzz... Bzz Bzz... Bzz... Bzz Bzz...

"That's...." Joseph furrowed his eyebrows.

The music faded into another piece once again. A small, hushed voice emerged from deep within the static, having a conversation with itself.

Bzz.. Ahh!!... Bzz Bzz... My beloved... Dear.. Bzz.. Come to my side... No!!... My love... Bzz...

The rather sweet conversation had suddenly turned into a bloodcurling scream. It was inexplicably strange.

Joseph was drenched in cold sweat. He opened his eyes, and a girl with a pale face was staring at him.

Woah!!

He was so startled that he took two steps back. He blinked, and then in front of him was nothing but a quiet, empty room.

He almost fell on the chair, his hands running through his hair. After a few lungfuls of air, he shook his head in disbelief

"She's going to appear whenever you close your eyes. That's the price you pay for listening..." He spoke softly to himself.

He quickly stood up, grabbed the dossier on the table and stormed out the meeting room.

He couldn't idle by and let a tragedy occur.

Even if no one were to support him, he still had two of his colleagues!

Chapter 140: Tailing Behind 2

Click!

Joseph, loaded the gun, a look of determination on his face.

"We need to stop them! They are planning to hold a grand hunting ceremony tonight at midnight sharp. We have to be there before then or else the whole Pinehill City will be in danger!"

Under the yellow lighting of the basement, there were two others, one female and the other male, armed with guns looking at Joseph.

"Have you gone nuts, Joseph!!" Johnson's eyes were filled with both shock and worry. "The central building will be fine. The police have already sent people there in case anything would happen..."

"Listen, my partner!" Joseph raised a hand to his shoulder. "Do you trust me?" He stared directly into Johnson's eyes.

"Of course! We've been by each other since we were kids, and you're the best friend I have!" Johnson replied with affirmation

"No one believed me! Not a single one!" Joseph took a big breath. "I know this is absurd. I beg you Johnson, my best friend, and Annie, my beloved! Just for this night. We need to stop them tonight!"

"Stop what?" Annie butted in. "I believed in you Joseph but what can we do for you?!" Her eyes overwhelmed with worry and love. "You're not shouldering this on your own! You still have us!"

Joseph took in a few lungfuls of air and whipped out three small brown leather pouches from his waist. He gave everyone one each.

"Bring this with you! Remember that! Do not let this pouch leave your side no matter the reason! Bring it with you whenever and wherever! Do not lose the pouch! The enemy we're facing is nothing like we have ever faced before! No one can go against them without this!"

"What is this"? Annie asked as she shook the pouch. She could barely hear some water sloshing inside.

"This is holy water. We can restrain them with it. If we have this with us, they'll be weakened if they come within 10 meters.. Please do not leave this without you at all cost! Please!"

"Are we entering some horrifying Sci-Fi novel?" Johnson joked. "Do you need me to gather a few more people? My cousin is a professional boxer! Amateur level six! He's the local's boxing association's vice president, too!"

"It's no good. I've tried getting help from others but it's no use." Joseph shook his head. "They're not human..." A bead of cold sweat escaped his brow as he recalled the scene.

Annie and Johnson looked at each other; they both knew, from Joseph's voice, the pain he was in.

Hum...

It was the afternoon, and the sky was grey and cloudy.

The green mountains and hills covered the landscape like a carpet, and in between was a river flowing freely, just like yellow silk across the land, stretching to the distance.

A white, four-winged plane glided serenely above the greenery, its engine producing an incessant rumbling sound.

The airplane flew over a waterfall at the river mouth; the roar of water crashing into the valley below echoed above, shooting large amounts of vapor so high it seemed like it could brush the plane's bottom hull.

The airplane's side door was ajar and in it was Garen, wearing a T-shirt and jeans, looking at the river below.

"Where is this?" He asked loudly.

The pilot was, surprisingly, Su Lin. He had styled his fiery red hair into ordinary bangs, and he had a golden earring on one of his ears. He was whistling a melody that was slightly off beat.

"We're just outside Sin Gerro. There's a private rest stop half an hour away from here and we can take a rest there, and at the same time refuel the plane."

"It's so beautiful..." Celine looked down at the giant waterfall from the other door. "Is this the Great Waterfall Shifariya? The one located on the borderline of the Federation and Sin Gerro?"

"That's the one. Based on our current speed, we still have about three hours before we reach the place Duskdune Shura was last seen; Black Rock City." Su Lin replied.

"You don't have to come with us, you know. This operation is highly dangerous." Garen said as he looked at Su Lin.

"Don't worry. Don't you look down on me. Although I'm not as strong as you, I've no problem running away when my life is in danger!" Su Lin smiled, rows of white teeth lining his mouth.

"I can smell the scent of the Slash team." Celine twitched her nose and said suddenly, "It's fresh; the Slash team left was less than half an hour ago. They should have taken off again based on the height of the smell. Judging from the timeline of our path, they should have taken off from the place Su Lin mentioned, 30 degrees North East from us."

Su Lin whistled and said. "Are you that accurate? Looks like the puppies ought to be ashamed!"

"Go to hell!!" Celine shouted in anger as she choked Su Lin by his neck.

The airplane jerked up and down violently for a moment.

Garen shook his head calmly throughout the exchange, choosing to remain silent.

Since their journey from the manor, Su Lin and Garen witnessed Celine's true ability. She had an amazing sense of smell.

Celine had memorized the scent of all the members of Slash and Duskdune Shura, hence there was no need for them to tail the team from behind too tightly. She could smell them as long as they were not an hour or a specific distance apart from each other. In addition, they also knew the Slash team's route, so it was impossible to lose them.

As Garen had gotten tired of the view below, he closed his eyes and started his breathing technique for the Red Jade Palm, and begun practicing his secret technique once more.

If he could obtain more attribute for the Red Jade Palm he had learnt yesterday, he could greatly enhance the effect of the Red Jade Palm to an unimaginable level. This was the only thing Garen was excited about.

Recently, he realized that superimposing low grade secret techniques was not necessarily a good thing.

He managed to obtain another secret technique, be it the lowest grade, from Celine. It was a secret technique that involved kicking. Regrettably, this secret technique required a body with high flexibility.

Although Garen had learnt the technique, it was merged together with the Mammoth Secret Technique and there has been no change since.

He suspected that it was because these two techniques were of opposite nature, or most of the techniques were the same, which had no help to the Mammoth Secret Technique.

Garen then went to Celine again and ask for secret techniques that were body enhancement in nature but to no avail. There were little secret techniques that did not require external assistance. It was impressive of her to be able to recall so many from her memory. Garen had no choice but to go inquire about one at the Southern Sky Holy Fist headquarter.

"But before all that, I need to obtain the Golden Sword Throne." Garen eyes were brimming with fire. "The Golden Sword Throne is useless to most people since it would lose its primary purpose upon usage. I might be able to get my hands on it when the Slash team is dealing with Duskdune Shura. But first..."

He clapped his palms and they were bright red for an instance.

"I have finally learnt the Red Jade Palm. With the body enhancement from the Mammoth Secret Technique and the effects from the Red Jade Palm, I really want to know which one is stronger when we clash, my Mammoth Secret Technique with the Red Jade Palm or your Seven Dragon Gate!" It was without a doubt tempting to every fighter to challenge a Grandmaster of Combat of the highest level from the previous generation.

A fighter's aim was to be able to improve, to evolve and constantly challenge the limit of one's own body. This was what it meant to be a true fighter.

Garen was no different. There were too little people who could go up against him, and Duskdune Shura had showed him the power of the ancient and mysterious secret technique, the Seven Dragon Gate.

As both of them were strong in body hardening technique, Duskdune Shura had a much softer strike than his. Although the Seven Dragon Gate was not that strong, the crazy ability to stiffen others was definitely the big killer.

Garen's main plan was to go head to head with the Duskdune Shura. He wanted to see how strong his Mammoth Secret Technique's maximised body hardening technique superimposed with the Red Jade Palm and the enhancement of the Dark Crimson Technique was. Furthermore, he had added 0.3 agility points into his attribution. Garen clearly felt that he could keep up with Duskdune Shura's attacks now.

Duskdune Shura's attack was not considered fast among the Grandmaster of combats. He didn't have strong powers and high defense as well. However, as every aspect of his attributions were moulded together, it reached such a perfect balance that there were practically no flaw in it.

He was faster than the strength based fighter, and stronger than a agility based one. He also had techniques that could bypass any defense.

However, no matter how strong he was, he was too old to fight for any extended period of time. Even in this state, Garen was not confident that he could win against his opponent. He wouldn't dare to fight against Duskdune Shura if Celine hadn't taught him a little trick to counter the Seven Dragon Gate.

Half an hour later...

The white airplane descended slowly as it landed on a strip of parking apron caked with mud. It slipped on the brown mud for a few hundred meters before finally coming to a stop.

The airplane's propeller spun its final rotations with a whiz before coming to a halt.

The parking apron was a gigantic reddish brown circle. Soldiers in dark green uniforms came rushing into it to the airplane. One of the soldiers had a small notebook on his hand and he seemed to be noting down the airplane's serial number of sorts.

Another soldier dismounted his horse, and hurried the still running soldiers rushing to the plane.

"Sir, how much fuel do you need?" He ask Garen, who jumped off from the airplane.

"Ask the person behind me. I know nothing about these things." Garen shrugged his shoulders.

Su Lin was the next one who jumped down from the plane.

"Glenz number 7, max it out as, we will be heading off shortly. Do you have any food here?"

"Definitely, but we only have local dishes here." The soldiers grinned as he rubbed his hands and said, "We can find a couple of native girls as well..."

"Native? Are there still native people here?" Celine jumped down from the airplane shortly after as she combed her long hair.

"Yes. The Surian Forest is huge, and there are a lot of primitive tribes living in it. We managed to capture a few native women..." The soldier shut his mouth up as soon as he saw the little girl.

"I will go and settle the preparations..." He smiled embarrassedly and turned away.

Su Lin nodded his head as he looked at the soldier walked away.

"This parking apron is built by Sin Gerro and the Edge Security Company. It looks quite fancy here."

Garen looked at Celine.

"What , have you notice anything?"

Celine looked confused as her nose twitched again.

"They've separated."

"Which direction?" Garen asked further.

"Slash and Duskdune Shura have separated. Both of them are heading to different locations." Celine looked up at Garen's face. "Who should we follow?"

This was the time for the strongest, Garen, to lead the team.

Su Lin looked at Garen, as if he wanted him to make the decision as well.

"We'll follow Duskdune Shura." Garen hadn't expected this at all. He took a deep breath and said, "The Slash team will definitely realize this sooner or later. We will definitely gather together if we follow Duskdune Shura now."

Both Celine and Su Lin agreed to his proposal.

"Let's move once we had something to eat and finish refuelling" Su Lin immediately arranged the plan. "Let's catch up to Duskdune Shura before the sun sets."

"Is that even possible?" Garen looked at him skeptically.

"No problem! This plane is my beloved limited edition collective series number 1043,

Daphne!" Su Lin's smile was so bright that even his teeth peeked out from behind his lips.

"How many limited edition items do you have?" Garen was speechless.

"This will never be revealed to the public, just like a girl's age." Su Lin patted his shoulder as he walked towards the row small houses next to the parking apron.

"Are you guys going to call some girls later?" Celine asked Garen.

"Yes..."

"Give me two of them as well."

Garen was lost for words as he looked at Celine, who then jumped onto Su Lin's shoulder.

"Just joking. Haha..." Celine burst out in laughter the moment she was far enough away from Garen.

Hopeless, Garen started in the same direction.