

## Star Gate 131

### Chapter 131: The Commonalities of Martial Masters (III)

“.....” There was nothing Liu Long could say; he suddenly recalled in this moment that Yuan Shuo had indeed suffered from a punctured heart in the past. It was somehow fully healed now, and he’d risen another martial master rank. Everyone thought that he’d done so through a special method or slowly recovered to good health.

But it was the work of a treasure?

“If your teacher’s heart can be fully repaired, then so can my injuries. It’s just...”

“No ifs, ands, or buts!” Li Hao declared solemnly. “If chief says that you’re confident of rising to Dominator, I can have my teacher stand guard and heal your injuries. With two Dominators in the ranks, everyone will know how strong the Silver City Night Watchers are! We will triumph in all directions and make an example out of these guys!”

This guy seems more like the director than me, Liu Long grumbled to himself. He hesitated after looking at the serious Li Hao.

“Chief, martial masters should continue to press forward with indomitable will after entering Dominator of Thousands! Being overcautious is not the path to success! My teacher said this to me once and I treat them as absolute words of wisdom. I hereby gift them to you, chief!”

“Pressing forward with indomitable will...” Liu Long’s eyes danced around and he raised an eyebrow. “I am confident if my wounds can be healed! My physique has reached the necessary requirements since I’ve absorbed so much mysterious power. All I lack is the comprehension of the aura and the fact that I can’t use my full strength since I’m injured.

“If I can recover and your teacher is willing to give me some pointers at critical moments, I’m sure I can become a Dominator!”

He suddenly brimmed with confidence!

Li Hao was pulling random phrases out of a hat. For martial masters, marching inexorably onward was only to be expected after they set foot into Dominator. If they felt they didn't stand a chance, then they really wouldn't as that would mean the aura would fail to materialize.

Liu Long suddenly recalled the wave that he saw all those years back. Indomitable and unyielding! It was just soft and gentle water, but it blasted forward like a cannonball. Unflinching and undeniable. Once it started shrinking back and faded into the sea, the wave's aura began to disappear and leave it as languid water again.

"Chief, if you can enter Dominator of Thousands..." Li Hao suddenly chuckled. "When my teacher became a Dominator, he used his aura to guide me into Slayer. You and I both practice the Nine Forged Force. Perhaps your breakthrough will also help me, this is an act of mutual gain!"

"I think my teacher wouldn't mind exerting himself a bit more if I can also improve. I'm his final disciple, after all!"

He and Yuan Shuo both practiced the New Book of Five Styles, while he and Liu Long both practiced the Nine Forged Force. Thus, Li Hao could sense both auras and could guide others. As for other people, they might be able to perceive a thing or two, but wouldn't be able to help much since they were not of the same school of teaching.

Therefore, what he said wasn't false. If Liu Long succeeded, Li Hao did think that it would help with his own future breakthrough to Dominator. Experiencing two kinds of aura beforehand was a precious opportunity that occurred only once in a thousand years.

"I have no heir and the Nine Forged Force is almost lost in my generation!" Liu Long said somberly. "Since you've already learned Twice Forged.... I won't take you for my disciple. However, you are the martial heir of my family! If I can set foot into Dominator and grasp the aura of the Nine Forged Force, I will naturally not keep anything from you."

He had no descendants and Li Hao was his martial dao heir! Since he was the heir, the young man should experience the might of the Nine Forged Force.

“Also, if I fully recover and set foot into Dominator... I only said I couldn’t rival your teacher because I was injured! My abilities are less comprehensive than your teacher’s, but if my method erupts in full force, your teacher will not be able to stand up to it!

“Nine Forged is the layering of nine times!” Liu Long suddenly declared confidently. “Your teacher borrowed a few powerful supernatural objects to kill that Solar, but I might not need to! I am sure I can break through a Solar’s defenses, but of course I am less than your teacher in other areas.”

He didn’t mind revealing his weaknesses, but he also didn’t want his family’s heritage method to be belittled, especially by someone who’d inherited two styles such as Li Hao. He wanted to tell the young man that while your teacher is strong on a holistic level, I’m stronger when it comes to offense!

Li Hao thought rapidly—break through a Solar’s defenses? Really?

Upon further consideration, that might actually be true. After all, the layering of internal force nine times may not be any less than blade energy. His teacher was indeed a comprehensive powerhouse—the strength of the New Book of Five Styles lay in their all-encompassing balance, but his teacher had also said he wanted to practice the Nine Forged Force as well. That method was outstanding in terms of explosive power!

Of course, Yuan Shuo never mentioned having Li Hao teach him. Martial masters placed a high importance on heritage. They wouldn’t brashly pick up someone else’s knowledge by themselves, even if it complemented their own.

“Chief, do you want to give it a try?” Li Hao asked excitedly. “Success means that we’ll be able to strip them of their mysterious power, no matter what level of accomplishment you achieve. Sis Liu, Chen Jian, and Wu Chao will stand a chance of crossing over to the supernatural! There’s more than one thousand cubes of mysterious power from that Solar alone. With those three Sunflares... it might be two thousand cubes total!”

Killing supernaturals for their power was the dumbest move possible, but for those sorely lacking, this was the most direct and straightforward idea. Two thousand cubes was an astronomical amount.

Li Hao's mind flew through calculations. If his teacher went against Qiao Feilong and the chief went against the three Sunflares... No, it'd be best if the entire department went with Liu Long. They should use hot weapons to soften the enemy first—it'd be best if they could injure the enemy as thus.

The enemy was most easily killed when they scurried for shelter.

All of Silver City's Night Watchers would greatly increase in strength if the operation succeeded. There wasn't much issue with employing hot weapons. They just needed to eliminate these people before other powerhouses sensed the weapons. No one would care how many hot weapons were deployed, and people usually didn't think much about those who could die to hot weapons.

True experts wouldn't fall to hot weapons, unless it was a special time and place.

Liu Long's emotions surged. Kill a Solar and Sunflares! Set foot into Dominator! His mouth turned dry and he looked around in a transfixed state. He'd found it difficult to kill Darkmoons a few days ago, but now the kid invited him to kill Solars and Sunflares.

Am I crazy or is he crazy?

Liu Yan and the others were right—Li Hao was an immensely perverted guy deep in his bones.

“In that case, give me three days!” Liu Long intoned. “We'll brainstorm a way to take care of this ourselves if I can break through in three days! If not, we can't delay things either. Qiao Feilong must have ulterior motives in mind. We cannot warm a snake in our embrace and permit him free rein. We go to Director Hao if I don't succeed after three days!

“I believe that he’ll take a stand, but I do understand that you have your reservations. Just remember, Li Hao, that something is yours if you live to claim it. If you are not... then nothing is yours.”

Those were the same sentiments that Yuan Shuo had expressed. The young man suddenly felt that the thoughts of martial masters were very similar. If someone like Liu Long wasn’t at the Inspectorate, he’d be a local tyrant in the outside world.

Martial masters possessed strong self control. they didn’t lose their senses of self despite enormous power due to obtaining power step by step. They were very clear about what they needed and wanted.

Perhaps this was the greatest difference between martial masters and supernaturals—conviction!

Martial masters seemed to have more abundance and clarity in their conviction. While Li Hao hadn’t come in contact with too many supernaturals yet—Wang Ming was the one he was most familiar with—he did seem to perceive a lack of strong conviction.

Three days!

Liu Long felt that he could break through in three days. If not, hope was too dim and it was better to let the Night Watchers take care of the matter then.

“Good!” Li Hao nodded. “This matter should not be delayed, chief. Why don’t we go see my teacher now?”

“Let’s not be in such a rush!” Liu Long chuckled. “That will raise too much attention! You’ve already gone a few times today, so it’s not the best timing to visit now. Plus, I also need to make some preparations. Let’s go tomorrow!

“I will pay an official visit to Yuan Shuo tomorrow, extending him an invitation to attend the ribbon cutting ceremony in three days! Inviting everyone to attend the ceremony will be a perfect distraction. It will relax Qiao Feilong’s guard. He’s not a supernatural, so he’s not on the list of attendees. That’s the best time to kill him!”

He’d already settled on a date!

“The ceremony will take place at night! Night Watchers, y’know, are suited to operate at night. That will perfectly exclude some unpredictable factors within the city!”

Nighttime was suited for killing.

Li Hao nodded, not saying anything further. He turned and left, suddenly calling back, “Aren’t you worried that I’m lying to you, chief? That the enemy might be stronger, or that teacher might move against you after we kill Qiao Feilong?”

Wasn’t Liu Long the least bit worried about this? That his own side would turn on him?

“Am I afraid of that?” sneered the man. “If I was that much of a scaredy cat, I’d be long dead! I have some accomplishments to my name in Silver City only because I am willing to trust others!”

He either didn’t trust someone, or didn’t doubt someone he trusted. It was because of that he didn’t kill anyone when traitors infested the law enforcement team. Mu Sen had to oversee the deed for him.

Liu Long’s pros were apparent, as were his significant cons. Yuan Shuo was a more cautious and prudent sort. To put it bluntly, he was more treacherous and cold-blooded.

That was right, cold-blooded! Of that, Li Hao was well aware of! His teacher being good to him didn’t mean he was the same with others. Li Hao knew that he received this treatment because his teacher had lost all hope three years ago and treated him as a direct lineal disciple, teaching the

young man all of his knowledge. In the past, this kind of disciple was the equivalent of a son, or one even more important than a descendant.

#### Chapter 132: The Commonalities of Martial Masters (IV)

Li Hao never suspected his teacher's intentions and Yuan Shuo treated the young man as his own son. Such was the meaning of a direct lineal disciple and the final disciple. Meanwhile, Liu Long valued relationships more.

This meant that Yuan Shuo seemed more benevolent and congenial on the surface while Yuan Shuo was more coldly aloof. Thus, most people's first impressions were that Liu Long was harder to approach and more eccentric.

Li Hao suddenly grinned. Sometimes, it was quite interesting to see through to the true nature of things. Liu Yan wasn't as ardent as she seemed, Liu Long wasn't as remote, his teacher wasn't as pleasant, and he wasn't as naive and simple.

Ah, humans!

"Then... I congratulate us in advance, chief!" Li Hao left with a smile. Everyone was different, but one thing they were similar in was that they were all extremely decisive and acted without hesitation. If they said they would kill someone, then they would kill someone!

Liu Long couldn't even be bothered to conduct an investigation. There was no point to that. The confirmation of such powerhouses existing was the best evidence. Kill first, then talk!

That was their commonality.

As Li Hao walked out of the office, he mused over one question—what else should I do for this operation?

He wasn't strong enough to join the fight against the Solar or Sunflares. He would just add to the team's troubles instead! Sniping a target out in the wild was doable, but he lacked the qualifications to kill these people.

However, Li Hao wished—or craved—to do something.

“What can I do?” The young man thought of something after a while. He pinched the jade sword around his neck; this was his greatest source of confidence in the days to come. He could heal his teacher or Liu Long in a timely manner if they were hurt. If he stabbed his heart at a critical moment, would it explode with greater power now that he was a Sunderer?

Would it be stronger after it was unsealed?

All of this was unknown, but perhaps it could be tried!

He could try to unseal the sword ahead of time—it might bring him greater aid. If he was stronger and surprised the enemy with a blow at a crucial moment, that might result in unexpected positive effects!

An innocent smile blossomed on Li Hao's face. The smile persisted when he ran into Li Meng and Hu Hao along the way—a very simple and pure smile!

The two supernaturals were too embarrassed to greet the young man, but they smiled at him when they thought of how he was their little junior brother. They'd originally felt that Li Hao lacked sufficient qualification to be their superior, but they felt better after seeing such a sincere smile directed at them. Perhaps this was better, they were all part of the same big family. That made Li Hao better than that Liu Yan.

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Silver City continued to be quiet and peaceful. No one fathomed that three people had so decisively and resolutely made the decision to start a slaughter. Qiao Feilong was even more unaware that the



Li Hao who'd shown him a friendly face that afternoon and accepted a hefty present would be discussing how to kill him by the end of the day.

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In an even further direction.

White Moon City.

Hao Lianchuan met several people in secret to issue severe warnings.

"No one shall instigate trouble in Silver City before the excavation! I'm sure that everyone understands how important these ruins are. The Night Watchers are willing to share them with you because we wish to peacefully resolve these problems! But if anyone dares create problems in Silver City or Silver Moon during this time, we will show them no mercy!"

Various powerhouses standing in the surroundings expressed their standing on the matter, including troublemaker Red Moon from a while back.

"Don't worry! Everything can wait until the end of the excavation!" declared their representative with cold arrogance. Their organization would not brashly take action now, for fear of missing out on the expedition to the ruins.

As for the Night Watchers... no one felt that they would be an instigator. Silver City lacked the requisite strength; it was the same case for the Night Watchers here. The agency's mission as a whole was to uphold order. Many times, the decrepit Night Watchers only passively responded to events.

"That would be for the best!" Hao Lianchuan furrowed his brows. "Whether it's the war in the central region or its negotiations, none of it affects our partnership here! Silver Moon does not rank

high among the list of provinces and it does not hold any advantages. We hope to raise our overall profile through this cooperation!”

“Of course!” assented a powerhouse with a hellish laugh. “Don’t worry, Director Hao, we won’t cause trouble without reason. Not to mention, Red Moon’s behind Silver City, not us Yama. Director Hao has nothing to worry about from us!”

“Hah!” sneered the Red Moon delegation.

“I don’t care what you guys get up to,” Director Hao couldn’t be bothered with their bickering. “This is a warning. The Night Watchers may not be able to overturn you, but no one will be sleeping through the night if we truly bring out our full force!”

With that, Hao Lianchuan disappeared on the spot, a little more at ease. Silver City should be fine in the short term after this warning. Everyone still wanted Yuan Shuo to lead the expedition. Therefore, Li Hao should be safe during this period of time.

I’ve done my best... Li Hao should come to White Moon after the excavation is over. We can guarantee his safety here. Hao Lianchuan smiled. As for the possibility of Li Hao and the others stirring up trouble, the possibility never occurred to him.

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Silver City.

Peace reigned over the land.

The rainy season was over and consecutive days of rain finally abated. It was hot again.

Joyous Heaven Residences.

This was where Li Hao's current residence was located. The neighborhood was small and home to affluent citizens. There were only so many denizens and a fantastic coverage of greenery. It made for much purer air in the morning.

Li Hao ran through a boxing technique early in the morning. The experience was entirely different and so very comfortable in a spacious environment. His closest neighbor was several hundred meters away. No one would hear him if the disturbance wasn't great.

The New Book of Five Styles!

These days, Li Hao practiced the Five Styles on the outside and the Nine Forged Force inside. The Five Styles were techniques, the Nine Forged Force was an internal method—the layering of internal force. The Breathing Method of the Five Styles was the foundation from which internal force was born.

Currently, Li Hao experimented with the transition between breathing methods. Martial masters seemed less than supernaturals in this regard. Due to their late development, there was only one absorption method for supernaturals—the Energy Induction Method. There were certain variations to it, but they didn't need different breathing methods.

One method was also sufficient for all supernaturals.

Meanwhile, internal force required a different breathing method for each technique. It was much more complicated!

Li Hao was attempting to switch between the breathing methods for the Five Styles and Nine Forged Force, preventing being limited to only one in critical moments. Being able to use only the Nine Forged Force to layer his internal force and unable to use the Five Styles for his techniques was a detriment to his battle strength.

“Is there really no fundamental method to them all?” Li Hao contemplated as he ran through a boxing routine.

His punches layered upon each other like the waves. His legs tensed and he pushed off, but stumbled on his way to leaping into the sky. The fowl style operated sluggishly—a problem resulting from different breathing methods.

Li Hao swiftly switched to the appropriate breathing style and deployed Black Tiger Heart Gouge. However, the layered internal force in his body began drifting apart. With the cessation of the Nine Forged breathing method, the layers could not gather.

The young man continued without discouragement. He’d asked his teacher about his idea’s feasibility and received the answer that it would be very difficult to consider both sides, but one could try merging them.

Take the Breathing Method of the Five Styles! Given that the method employed five different animal styles, there ought to be five different breathing methods. However, Yuan Shuo managed to consolidate one singular breathing method to encompass all five.

If Li Hao was of a mind to incorporate a sixth style and reconsolidate the five so that the breathing method could be used for both methods, then he would be a grandmaster of martial dao for the new generation. Yuan Shuo had done so before!

Of course, this required a vast sum of knowledge, not simply imagination. The Nine Forged Force may not be a suitable match for the Five Styles, but methods were created by people. Yuan Shuo’s brain had held so much information that he’d employed a portion of ancient tomes to synthesize the New Book of Five Styles that he was so proud of. It was also why he treated it as strictly confidential.

“Although I’ve memorized a lot of the ancient books and received personal tutelage, I’ve just gulped it all down without thought. I haven’t digested it and turned it into my own knowledge, so there’s no way I can create the New Book of Six Styles as things stand!”

Li Hao was well aware that he couldn't. Perhaps his teacher could, but Liu Long wasn't willing to teach the Nine Forged Force to Yuan Shuo. Li Hao could not exceed his authority and rashly impart the method. This was a grave taboo in the path of martial dao.

He ran through the boxing routine primarily to digest some of the scarlet shadow's power within his body. He felt that he could soon project internal force from every inch of his limbs. While his rate of progress was fast, he still found it too slow.

This was his breakout period—energy from the scarlet shadow, jade sword, and mysterious power were accumulated in his body. He was just digesting them. Once he concluded this stage and no longer had the sword and scarlet shadow to pull from, his rate of improvement would sadly decrease.

Silver City was a very dangerous place for him. Reaching Sunderer was not enough to set him at ease.

#### Chapter 133: Understanding Aura (I)

Smack smack!

Li Hao switched from the Nine Forged Force after running through his last iteration and focused on the Five Styles. He threaded through the garden like a monkey, agile and light on his feet. He trained his gaze at the front door.

Several hundred meters directly across from his front yard was Qiao Peng's residence. Qiao Feilong didn't seem to live there. There was a ball of light in Qiao Peng's house, one that was visible from several hundred meters away. Radiance akin to the full moon flooded Li Hao's eyes. He could tell that this was the Plenilune that he'd seen at Qiao Mining Industries!

So that guy's come here.

Was he here to surveil Li Hao? Who cared. He demonstrated only the strength of Slayer of Tens if he summoned the ringing of bones and meridians. No one would care as it didn't pertain to the

overall situation. In fact, there would be a problem if he wasn't a Slayer—he would be too much of a trash talent that way and unfit to be Yuan Shuo's disciple.

It was time to report to work. Li Hao quickly tidied up, showered, changed, and walked out of his complex.

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Outside the garden.

Qiao Peng's car was already parked at the door. It was the Plenilune driving today; he kept such a low profile it was as if he was invisible. The car window rolled down.

"Commissioner Inspector Li!" called out a beaming Qiao Peng. "I didn't show you good hospitality yesterday and my father lectured me as well. I spent the night thinking about Liu Yan's matter and realize there's plenty of other fish in the sea. There's no need to offend the commissioner inspector on account of one woman!"

"If you'll show me some face, I'd like to treat you tonight. I've got a table reserved at one of the best restaurants in town—it's better to get rid of enmity than to keep it alive. I'd like to apologize to both Vice Captain Liu and Commissioner Inspector Li. How about it?"

Li Hao flicked a glance at him and irritably waved the man off. "Forget it, I have no interest in befriending young master Qiao. If I'm to befriend anyone, it should be Qiao Senior!"

He rode away on his bike, the meaning behind his words quite clear. Qiao Peng, you're not worthy. I'd be willing to exchange a word or two if your old man was here.

Qiao Peng frowned, but quickly recovered his calm. He watched Li Hao leave before asking, "Uncle Chen, he's a Slayer, right?"

“Yup,” the driver grunted and took a look as well. “He might’ve become a Slayer a few days ago. I sensed some hesitation in his practice this morning. Frequent interruptions means that he’s not too familiar with the boxing technique. It looks like Yuan Shuo has indeed skipped over Li Hao for his martial dao heritage.”

Li Hao had switched between breathing methods multiple times, causing stuttering in his routine. As a Plenilune, the driver could naturally sense the pauses. This was the hallmark of a rookie!

It was perfectly reasonable for Li Hao to struggle with the problem as he was a martial master newbie. Anyone familiar with the young man would know that he’d come in contact with only surface level trappings before this.

Qiao Peng chuckled, unsurprised by the response. “He became a deputy director thanks to Yuan Shuo’s influence—the Night Watchers were only taking action that most benefited them. A new Slayer like him, one that relied on mysterious power to reach his level of strength, leading some Darkmoons? I wonder what they really think.”

The driver didn’t answer.

“But the guy is diligent enough despite how cocky he is. He reports to work on time and clocks out when appropriate. He’s an interesting weirdo!”

As a Night Watcher deputy director, Li Hao still adhered to strict work hours and took a bike to the office... he really was a weirdo!

Of course, it might be because he’d yet to learn the lifestyle of this echelon of society, being newly promoted and all.

Qiao Peng lifted a hand as the young man disappeared into the distance. The car engine turned on and the vehicle headed for Qiao Mining Industries. He’d greeted Li Hao just to make it easier for a close look. There were now so many pairs of eyes on the young man that there was no need to get

overly close. It was just as well that he didn't want to go to dinner. All Li Hao did was scoff at Qiao Peng. While the latter could keep his head, he couldn't help the resentment that brewed inside.

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The former Law Enforcement building.

Li Hao reported to work on time, walking straight to Liu Yan's office instead of his own. He hadn't seen the vice captain last night; it was a rare sight to see her leave work early.

"Yo, is the sun rising from the west today?" Liu Yan laughed when she saw the young man. Li Hao voluntarily visiting her? What a rare sight this was!

Other than when he first reported for work at the law enforcement team, the guy hadn't come to her office at all. What brought him here today?

"I'm here to see you, sis." Li Hao grinned. "I haven't seen you for an entire night—you've gotten prettier!"

"Pah!" Liu Yan spat at a confused Li Hao. The heck? I'm complimenting you. This is called a pleasantry, what are you getting mad for?

Liu Yan couldn't help but curse with amusement when she noted his confusion, "What kinda crap is that? How am I prettier after a night? That's not a compliment, that's more like an insult! Big sis here is a widow and should be getting more gaunt by the day. Prettier after one night? Do you know what the problem with that is?"

Er... is there a problem with that? Whatever, there's a problem if you say so.



“What reminded you of me today?” Liu Yan smiled winsomely and set the topic aside.

“I have a present!” Li Hao raised the box in his hand. “I visited Qiao Mining Industries yesterday and Qiao Feilong gave me ten cubes of mysterious power to give to you. It’s his apology.”

Liu Yan’s expression froze stiff! She glanced sharply at Li Hao.

“Sis, there’s no reason to turn it down!” The young man remained smiling faintly. “I’ll take it if you don’t want it.”

The woman furrowed her forehead and said faintly after a while, “You take it then!”

She was unhappy, but didn’t say anything. Some things were set in stone after they were accepted, yet certain things could not be accepted! What did the Qiaos imply with this gift?

It was blood money!

How could Li Hao accept it?? He knew the full story and she was the one to tell him all about it! Liu Yan was irate, but she forced her temper down. Ten cubes of mysterious power... since he’d taken them, then he could keep them.

Li Hao scuttled near Liu Yan and said softly, “I’m worried we won’t have a chance to accept presents in the future if we don’t do so now!”

The woman raised a brow. What was that supposed to mean?

“Sis, us Night Watchers are the government’s supernatural organization. We are a legitimate agency of authority. Is anyone allowed to pull a fast one over us? Is there no vengeance we do not pursue?”

Li Hao needed to explain the details to Liu Long, but there was no need to do so with Liu Yan. All that needed to be said was one sentence—we take whatever vengeance we must!

“Don’t do anything brash!” Liu Yan hissed. “If we alarm Yama after already offending Red Moon...”

Li Hao laughed before she could finish. “Sis, you’re too far behind the times! What about Yama? You probably don’t know that some of the Night Watcher Heaven Favored in the central region offed Yama’s grandson! And took the organization’s most precious treasure! They’re beating each other to bits over there. That is the source of the war in the central region!”

Liu Yan and the others didn’t know because the flow of information was quite sluggish in fringe territory such as Silver Moon. There was no helping it, particularly as Silver City was on the border of this remote province. Being newly promoted, Liu Yan and the others weren’t even familiar with the Night Watcher situation in White Moon, to say nothing of the central region.

They only knew that it was a mess outside, but nothing about the specifics.

The vice captain’s expression shifted drastically and she looked at Li Hao with burgeoning excitement. “You mean... that the Night Watchers and Yama are already fighting each other?”

“That’s right!” Li Hao nodded emphatically. “What Wang Ming said to me should be true. He’s a highly prized genius among Night Watchers and a very important character in all of Silver Moon. Regular news won’t escape his notice.”

Wang Ming wasn’t part of the senior council, but he had potential. Upstairs wouldn’t hide this from him since they thought highly of him. He’d become a laughingstock if he ignorantly treated Yama as one of their own people.

The look in Liu Yan’s eyes deepened; she was becoming so agitated that she could barely contain herself. “So you mean... we’re... going to... move against Yama?”

Against the Qiaos?

“Indeed.” Li Hao inclined his head. “We haven’t fully decided yet, so don’t get too worked up, sis! So do you want the mysterious power? If not, I really will take it.”

“I want it!” Liu Yan answered promptly, obvious joy in her face. “You’re right, we may not have a chance to be presented with any in the future if this is true, so I want it!”

“Sis, did you finish absorbing all of the mysterious power you were distributed last time?” A merry Li Hao handed the storage box over.

She hadn’t received much, just twenty cubes. Liu Yan’s absorption speed should be faster after breaking through to Sunderer. Who knew if she finished her allotment?

“Pretty much, there’s just a few cubes left. What, are you done with yours? Surely not?! Liu Yan looked at the young man with surprise. Was he done with his? He was a Slayer who’d received thirty-two cubes. As fast as he could absorb energy, he wouldn’t do so everyday, would he?

Well, given how he’d used the energy on his last attempt, that could very well be possible. If that was the case, he was basically eating mysterious power.

One had to know that after joining the Night Watchers, Li Hao’s grade resulted in only one cube a month. That was a very large amount already—his salary wasn’t sufficient to feed him.

“No, I don’t lack mysterious power,” Li Hao laughed. “I’m just asking. It’s fine if you’ve finished it all, sis. If not, don’t hold back! We might have other sources soon and strength doesn’t come from being frugal!”

He was concerned that Liu Yan would use mysterious power sparingly and overly scrimp and save. If this operation succeeded, his agreement with the chief meant that his teacher wouldn’t demand

too much mysterious power. In fact, there might not be any taken away the team. What Yuan Shuo wanted was the ruins.

Given Liu Long's style, everyone on the team would receive mysterious power then.

"When do we do it?" Liu Yan asked after some thought.

Chapter 134: Understanding Aura (II)

"In a few days."

"Understood."

"Chen Jian and Wu Chao have recovered from their injuries and have been absorbing energy over the past couple of days. I don't know if they've made the crossover or become Sunderers, but they stand a high chance of breaking through," Liu Yan remarked.

Those two had also received their largest distributions of mysterious power ever. If they didn't ascend to the supernatural domain, then they had hopes of becoming Sunderers. As both Chen Jian and Wu Chao had absorbed some jade sword energy, their physiques were much enhanced.

After their process was complete, everyone's strength would have increased as a whole.

"That will be for the best!" Li Hao smiled. If everyone became a Darkmoon or Sunderer, then the entire team would've completed a full round of breakthroughs. They might all be useful in the field to come.

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After he left the box behind, Li Hao exchanged a few more words with Liu Yan, then went off to find Liu Long. Today, the branch director was going to pay an official visit to Yuan Shuo, the first

of Silver City. Liu Long himself was the most senior executive of Silver City's supernatural agency, so this kind of visit was necessary.

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At 9am sharp, Li Hao drove Liu Long to the Veteris Institute. The car weaved to and fro along the way, causing headaches in those keeping an eye on the young man. Li Hao's driving skills made it extremely hard to follow him! It was impossible to determine which direction he would drive next!

Thankfully, some people knew the destination. Apparently Liu Long was going to officially call on Yuan Shuo today. Both of them were martial masters, but very rarely met each other before. It was sad that Liu Long and Yuan Shuo shared an obscure past, that the two used to be estranged.

Some were eager for a show to start and for the two to erupt into a fight. That would be just their wishful thinking.

Both parties worked for the Night Watchers now. Although Yuan Shuo had successfully broken through, he shouldn't clash with Liu Long. This visit was supposed to be preparation for the ribbon-cutting ceremony in two days' time.

.....

The Veteris Institute.

Liu Long didn't notify the Institute beforehand or arrive with great fanfare, he was just here to call upon Yuan Shuo. While they had other goals in mind, Liu Long was still gravely solemn in the car. He didn't pay attention to how Li Hao was driving the vehicle and was silent for the entire ride.

"Chief, there's no need to be so nervous," Li Hao placated as he drove. "My teacher is very easy to talk to..."

Liu Long flicked a wordless glance at him. It wasn't his first time seeing the professor—the two had met many times before. But an official visit? This might be the second. The first had been when his father brought him in hopes of Yuan Shuo accepting him as a disciple. The drawbacks of the family's Nine Forged Force were too numerous; Yuan Shuo's Five Styles was a notable method that nourished the body.

His father had hoped that Liu Long could join Yuan Shuo's discipline. The former had almost been ready to retire as his arms were gravely injured to the point in which he couldn't wield a spear at full strength.

Liu Long still recalled how despairing and helpless his father had been when Yuan Shuo rejected him. Liu Hao hadn't wanted Liu Long to continue practicing the Nine Forged Force or even walk the path of martial dao! Yet Liu Long knew that he was Silver Spear Liu Hao's son. The Silver Spears were known throughout the province. If he didn't train, his family would be exterminated by enemies as soon as his father died.

Thus, when Liu Hao returned home, he taught the Nine Forged Force to his son with a very complicated mix of emotions. It wasn't an easy road to walk, and once a practitioner set foot on it, there was no way back.

The car stopped.

Liu Long awoke from his memories and glanced at the yard in front of the house. He took a deep breath before opening the car door and alighting.

The gate to the yard was already open. Yuan Shuo stood inside, right by the gate. He looked smilingly at Liu Long.

The director drew close, but a towering wave of aura pressed down on him as he approached the yard. His footsteps slowed while his boots sank into the ground. He raised his head to look at Yuan Shuo.

The professor remained smiling and didn't say a word. His eyes did all the talking for him. If you can't even walk into my yard while facing my aura, then I don't believe you can become a Dominator!

This is a test for Dominator of Thousands! Are you fit to become one if you can't pass even this? There's no need to waste time here if you can't do so!

Liu Long's gaze was coolly remote. He tensed his foot, raised it, and stepped forward again.

Bam!

The tile beneath his feet split open. Li Hao easily strode by his side as usual. He could sense his teacher's aura, but since it wasn't aimed at him, it didn't have an effect. Having sensed it once before, the young man didn't find it too strong. He was focused on Liu Long.

Each of the director's steps was taken with effort—the gap between Dominator and Sunderer was exceedingly large! Peak Sunderer Liu Long found it difficult to progress in the face of Yuan Shuo's aura!

Li Hao suddenly seemed to hear the sound of waves. Indeed, waves lapped by his ear. He tilted his head to see Liu Long exploding with layer upon layer of internal force. Powerful force surged out of him like a river overflowing its banks. It withstood the aura and enabled him to set foot into the yard.

A soundless contest!

Li Hao was rather envious in this moment.

Indeed, the young man envied Liu Long that he had the right to enjoy such treatment. His teacher had never tested him in this way as Li Hao had a ways to go before he reached this level.

Li Hao paused and stood behind Liu Long. A faint aura rose from the bottom of his heart as overwhelming pressure descended from the sky. He purposefully walked behind Liu Long so he could sense teacher's aura in action—one that was on the offensive instead of encompassing the subject.

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“Oh?” Yuan Shuo raised a brow and regarded his student. The lad was certainly interesting, he wanted to give it a try!

Although Liu Long was shouldering nearly all of the aura, the slightest seepage was enough to overwhelm Li Hao since he was yet to comprehend the consciousness. Yuan Shuo ignored the young man. He could try if he wanted. Observing a real aura would help him and at the very least, facilitate Li Hao to understand what it meant to be a true Dominator.

Yuan Shuo remained focused on Liu Long. He could also hear the waves! Liu Long seemed to have attained some understanding of this level, but his aura was... too weak. The professor raised an eyebrow.

It was then that Liu Long roared and stomped his foot, splitting the earth. Layers of force exploded from his arms and traveled down his body. His trench coat split around his arms, revealing blood-splattered limbs!

Indeed, they were usually covered in blood and went unnoticed since they were frequently inside a trench coat.

Liu Long's arms rippled like the waves, but a large amount of blood seeped out each time they moved. His arms could not endure the strain! The Nine Forged Force method was too strong and the director's constitution too weak in comparison.



Thrice Forged... Four... Five... When he reached seven layers, his muscles trembled seven times and blood shot out with a bang!

Disappointment dawned on Liu Long's face. He couldn't hold on! He couldn't sustain eight or nine layers. He was theoretically capable of it, but his body didn't permit him to fully deploy the true strength of the Nine Forged Force. He was also a few meters away from Yuan Shuo and loathe to give up like this.

You thought I was too dumb to be your disciple and now I still can't come near you even at my level of mastery. Is my family's heritage method really so much more inferior to your Five Styles??

"Hup!" he grunted. Eight layers of internal force!

Crack!

It wasn't his blood vessels, but his bones that seemed to be faltering. Tendons bulged on his arm—no, that was a blood vessel devoid of liquid. Liu Long forced Eight Forged into existence!

He split apart Yuan Shuo's aura with a punch and continued forward.

Li Hao was beet red. He took a step forward as well, but the aura was growing stronger and stronger. He fully sensed the difference between Dominator and Sunderer—they could not be mentioned in the same breath!

He was only experiencing a tiny bit of aura that Liu Long wasn't blocking, but it was enough to make him feel like he was going to split apart! Thankfully, his physique was incredibly durable. There was no sign of blood oozing out of him. It was more psychological pressure than anything.

"Humph!" he grunted and ceased operating the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. He switched to the Nine Forged Force instead—one layer, two layers, three layers!

Thrice Forged!

Li Hao concentrated the internal force on his legs instead of his hands. He broke the tiles when he stomped down and took a step forward. Damn the feeling was sweet!

“Do you wish to keep trying?” came Yuan Shuo’s voice. “Your hands will be crippled after nine layers!”

Liu Long halted, unwillingness shining out of his eyes. He clenched his bloody hands tight as he looked at Yuan Shuo. Did he dare try nine layers?

He didn’t!

It wasn’t that he was afraid of the pain, death, or being crippled. It was that he’d just established a Night Watcher branch. If he lost his battle strength so quickly, he would let down quite a few people.

“Hmph!” The snort was a mixture of defiance, anger, and frustration! Liu Long clenched his jaw tight and remained where he was. What kind of emotions should he bring to bear against the guy in front of him?

Yuan Shuo!

Chapter 135: Understanding Aura (III)

“The waves churn through heaven and earth...” came Yuan Shuo’s voice. “Nine Forged Force... Liu Long, even the waves can be angry!

“People say that a tidal wave is the fury of the sea! What might of the heavens is there in just the waves? Only with a tidal wave is there true might! You’ve never seen one! It breaks apart mountain and earth, churning through the land!

“Silver Moon’s sea is an internal sea. It’s too small, too weak! You should go out and take a look at the real sea outside the province. There’s a real sea there with real tidal waves. I once saw a tidal wave rip through the coast and turn a massive city into floodwater! The tallest buildings were toppled and the strongest martial masters were ripped apart!

“One against thousands? A walking god?” Yuan Shuo sighed with emotion. “In that moment, the tidal wave will tell you what it means to be one wave against millions! No matter how strong your weapons are and how powerful your body, you are crushed to dust when the wave slams into you!”

A walking god could kill one thousand at once, but a tidal wave could instantly demolish a city of millions.

Liu Long frowned with thought. He’d encouraged Li Hao to go see the world, but it was Yuan Shuo who said that he knew too little and his knowledge ran too shallow. A real tidal wave wasn’t thus!

“Elder Yuan, although I can see a tidal wave for myself... my body... is unlikely to hold up...”

“Have you ever seen the sea destroyed by a tidal wave?” Yuan Shuo smiled.

The response sent Liu Long into a daze. Could the sea be destroyed by a tidal wave? What did that mean?

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Li Hao was also contemplating behind the director. He’d never seen the sea before, but he had a lake. Could a wave in a lake destroy the pool of water? No!

What I’ve seen before are all lakes. His teacher was a pedagogue and wouldn’t mention this for no reason whatsoever.

“Wave... tidal wave... internal force... aura...” Li Hao’s eyes darted around rapidly. A surge of internal force swelled from his body. Internal force originated from the body and Sunderers could project it outward.

The Nine Forged Force was a strain on the body because it contained vibrant internal force. If waves floated on the surface, could internal force be layered on the surface?

As Li Hao thought through this, he subconsciously released a surge of internal force. A second surge was hot on its heels and he operated the Nine Forged Force, wanting to layer the two together. However, they quickly dispersed.

Projecting inward to out could not accomplish Twice Forged.

Why? Li Hao asked himself. Whether it was the sea or lake, they were in endless motion. They could be layered on the surface, so why not internal force? They were of the same body! Whether it was internal force or the physical body, they all originated from the same source.

The body as bridge? Li Hao considered his arms and thought back to an ancient tome he’d memorized. It spoke of the body as a bridge to erect the gate of heaven and earth. Inside and outside communicating in unison, the body as the source...

He didn’t quite understand it still, but partial comprehension seemed to hover at the edge of his mind. He retracted his internal force and no longer projected it. He couldn’t grasp the knack!

Li Hao extended an index finger, sending a faint surge of internal force through it. A second surge projected from it and settled on top of the first. The two tendrils layered together with extreme difficulty.

Inspiration struck the young man. He couldn’t layer internal force outside his body because the available surface area was too vast. That resulted in internal force coming in contact with too many surfaces and was easily dispersed. But what if he shrank the surface area to the size of a finger?

Another layer of force shot through his finger. If his manipulation of force was fast enough, why couldn't it be layered outside the body? If the subsequent surge of force formed before the previous one dissipated, why wasn't it possible?

The third layer!

His internal force broke with a sharp crack and swirled into a tiny vortex. Deep in thought, Liu Long whipped his head back when he heard the sound. His expression changed drastically at the sight of Li Hao making his second attempt. One surge of internal force, a second, a third...

Thrice Forged!

Sword qi shot out of the young man's finger with a muffled bang!

Lost in contemplation, Li Hao thought of a secret art recorded in an ancient tome—Lethal Force Point! Sending cutting sword qi out from one's fingers!

He hadn't thought much of it when he first saw it, but now he shot out a ray of internal force from his fingertip. It cut into the ground and left a small hole.

Liu Long's eyes widened when he saw the move. Projection of internal force! Not only that, but his internal force was layered outside of the body...

The man's jaw dropped as he stared at Li Hao. Sunderer!! The young man was a Sunderer and could utilize the Nine Forged Force outside the body! How was this possible??

In this moment, Liu Long fully understood Yuan Shuo's meaning. The waves could not destroy the sea and he was the sea. His internal force was the waves, so there was an inherent problem with which his internal force was destroying himself.

“Li Hao!” Liu Long murmured, sorrow springing forth from the bottom of his heart. He suddenly looked back at Yuan Shuo and lowered his head. “When Elder Yuan said I was too stupid to be accepted as his disciple, I refused that assessment and felt that my potential was decent. Now that I’ve seen Li Hao’s actions today, I finally realize... just how stupid I am!”

He looked down at his feet with unspeakable dejection and sadness.

So it turns out that I really am dumb. Li Hao understood many things with just a few words from Yuan Shuo and can even layer his internal force outside his body... I am... ashamed. Comparison is not only the thief of joy, but the thief of life. There really is a difference in potential between people.

Li Hao came back to the present and opened his mouth to speak, then quickly shut it again. He felt a bit awkward since not all the credit went to him. He’d just read a few old books and memorized strange trivia. That was why the Lethal Force Point occurred to him so readily. Liu Long had never encountered these before, causing deficiencies in his level of culture and knowledge banks!

This wasn’t innate potential, just the demonstration of learned knowledge.

Yuan Shuo likewise looked at Li Hao with a strange look and burst out into laughter. “My student is passable! Please come in, Director Liu. You should have gained something from this experience!”

Liu Long nodded and looked at Li Hao again, suddenly inclining his body. “My thanks!”

Agog with surprise, Li Hao wanted to say something in return, but the director had already stepped into the yard. He had an outline of what he needed to pursue. Oftentimes, just a thin barrier needed to be pierced before enlightenment was imminent. Today, Li Hao pierced that barrier for him.

The young man scratched his head with awkwardness and some regret. Why did I project my internal force for no good reason? How am I supposed to hide my strength now that chief knows I’m a Sunderer?

What a pity!

Yuan Shuo led the way with a small smile, but cockiness gleamed out of the depths of his eyes. Let's see how arrogant you can be now, Liu Long! My disciple alone can completely knock you off your perch. You wouldn't accept it when I said you were dumb—you accept it now, don't you?

Behind him, Liu Long soothed over his ruffled ego. He'd already gained a lot from this visit before even conversing with Yuan Shuo. Perhaps he did stand a chance of breaking through to Dominator today. The precursor to that was he was able to layer internal force nine times outside his body and truly grasp the aura.

.....

The Yuan living room.

Yuan Shuo and Liu Long respectively sat in the host and visitor seats. Li Hao did not have the right to sit among them as he was Yuan Shuo's final disciple. Hierarchy and seniority was very much observed at a time like this. Regardless of whether or not Liu Long was his supervisor or subordinate, Li Hao was only qualified to stand at a time like this and serve tea.

Such was custom!

In the supernatural world, strength was king. They bypassed many rules and customs observed by martial masters. There was no right or wrong, just a difference in style. To venerate only strength and lack even the decorum between teacher and disciple was too barbaric and primitive for many martial masters.

Li Hao first poured tea for his teacher, then for Liu Long. With that, he stood to the side and waited for them to discuss their matters at hand.

Liu Long glanced at the young man, then at Panther sprawled not too far away. He suddenly wanted to laugh! So I lack a disciple. How come the dog isn't being sensible and pouring a cup of tea for me? I've taught it martial methods, and earlier than Yuan Shuo!

Liu Long had indeed passed on the Nine Forged Force to Panther—not just the technique, but the method in full. He'd taught the dog up to Thrice Forged last time!

Silly dog!

.....

All Li Hao knew was that Liu Long first looked at him, then looked at Panther. He blinked, then felt awkward again. What was that supposed to mean? That he was the same as Panth?

The resigned young man didn't react. So your thoughts can also twist and turn like that, huh chief! And here I thought you were honest and frank!

Yuan Shuo brushed the surface of his tea with the teacup lid and took a small sip. He placed the cup down to regard Liu Long. "Li Hao's explained the matter to you, correct?"

"Correct."

"If you break through, can you fight three Sunflares with the strength of a new Dominator?" Yuan Shuo cut straight to the chase. "It's not that this old man thinks less of you, I know full well how strong the Liu family's Nine Forged Force is. But apart from that?"

Liu Long frowned.



“Are you fast?” Yuan Shuo asked with a faint chuckle. “Can you fly? How many steps can you take through the air? How will you chase them if they can bend the earth or fly? In all of martial dao, speed is the only factor that cannot be mitigated. Perhaps that saying is too absolute, but what if one of the three is adept at speed and can get away? Are you going to kill them through the air with nine layers of force?”

Liu Long opened and closed his mouth at multiple times, ultimately finding himself unable to answer. He couldn’t!

“This old man does not measure up to you in terms of explosiveness, of that there is no question. But I win in terms of comprehensive ability! I can give chase, I can flee. I can attack and I can defend. When it comes to the offensive power that I lack, my treasures can make up for it.

“And you?” The professor looked at Liu Long. “What if I pay the enormous price to help you cross over to Dominator, but you cannot even handle three Sunflares. If you let them go, that exposes me and Li Hao. Will you be able to shoulder the consequences of your actions?”

Liu Long’s face shifted rapidly through a series of expressions and he shook his head. “I cannot!” He swallowed all of his previous grandiosity. Indeed, how should he react if the enemy was skilled at escape? The Liu Nine Forged Force was most versed in frontal combat, it was best if the enemy met him toe-to-toe and didn’t run. That was the Liu preferred type of opponent—see who died when they both flung themselves at each other!

## Chapter 136: Li Hao’s Aura (I)

“Liu Long, you’re a martial master. You should understand even if my student doesn’t!” Yuan Shuo was very practical. “You know what it means to help someone cross into Dominator of Thousands, to become a so-called walking god. You know what it entails for the martial master rendering the aid.

“This idiot disciple of mine tells me to lend out a secret treasure and heal your wounds. You, too, know how difficult it is for a martial master to recover from years of accumulated injuries. How many martial masters have died at this step? It’s easy for him to speak of this when he doesn’t know the value of what he offers. Those who are not industrious do not know the importance of being thrifty! All he needs to do is say a few words!”

Yuan Shuo snorted with bemusement. “And he made the offer that all of the mysterious power can go to you? Are you kidding me? I can make an announcement right now that I’ll help someone break through to Dominator of Thousands in return for them killing three Sunflares for me. I ask you, Liu Long, won’t all peak Sunderers in the province come running to me and beg for the chance?”

“And some of them will have already comprehended the aura, making it easier to help them than you!”

Eyes wide, Liu Long nodded. “Elder Yuan is right! Just that alone is sufficient to win the undying loyalty of a martial master devoted to martial dao! They will wholeheartedly commit themselves to the cause even if death is a possibility!”

Yuan Shuo was correct. Guaranteeing Dominator would entice all martial masters who still worked toward a brighter future. The professor was spot on when he said just that benefit alone should be enough to have Liu Long place his life on the line.

“I can personally forgo any distribution of mysterious power, but if the others are involved, I hope I can claim some for them. Not too much, just according to their contribution.”

Off to the side, Li Hao glanced at his teacher and forcefully kept his mouth shut. It’d been his teacher who said to give the mysterious power to Liu Long, but he’d suddenly changed his mind. What did his teacher have in store?

“I don’t need that bit of energy. In fact, you might need it more, so it doesn’t matter!” Yuan Shuo remained as coolly collected as before. “I say all this just to let you know that you should not take this for granted. My student may be unaware of the particulars, but you do!”

“I wouldn’t dare!” Liu Long rumbled. “I did not think too much about it before, so I have indeed fallen short in some areas. My apologies for the oversight, Elder Yuan! It is part of our duties to conduct this operation and some personal grudges are mixed in as well. I should not be taking any additional benefits, but sadly, I am incompetent and find it difficult to be up to the task as a Sunderer!”

He truly hadn't thought everything through enough. He'd been shocked and overwhelmed by Li Hao mentioning that he could obtain thousands of cubes of mysterious power. After Yuan Shuo pointed all this out, the director subconsciously did find it slightly inappropriate.

"As a fellow martial master and the fact that you may soon be the second Dominator in Silver Moon, we should be frank with each other." Yuan Shuo smiled. "Our lines of communication should be open so that we do not clash with each other and sow the seeds for discontent in the future!"

"Elder Yuan speaks truly!"

"The ruins will go to Li Hao!" declared Yuan Shuo. "You and I will split the mysterious power! Li Hao will not share anything else we find, that goes to us alone. Of course, if you find it unfair that Li Hao takes the ruins..."

"Not at all!" Liu Long answered firmly. "Although Li Hao has not officially bowed to me as his master, he's already reached Thrice Forged in the Nine Forged Force. He counts as having inherited my family's martial legacy. As you know, Elder Yuan, the Nine Forged Force has never been taught to outsiders. In that case, Li Hao growing stronger is the outcome I desire as well!"

Yuan Shuo inclined his head with a smile.

"It's good that you agree! For martial masters like us, a martial heir is more important than anything else. We can set the rest aside for now, I will help you regain full health. Your arms must be the first focus as they are too damaged. As for whether or not you can comprehend the aura of the Nine Forged Force after they are healed, that is up to you. If you can smoothly break through to Dominator, then our partnership can continue. If you fail, then everything we said just now was just bullshit!"

"Of course!" Liu Long nodded and took a deep breath. He was both expectant and nervous. The state of his arms was the accumulation of years of practice. Did Yuan Shuo really have his ways to treat them?

The man didn't know, but since Yuan Shuo had agreed to their collaboration, then he could give it a try. If it was a success... then... Liu Long couldn't contain his agitation.

"Alright, we have no time to lose, let's begin right away!" Yuan Shuo waved his hand and slapped Li Hao on the back. "Keep a secret lookout for us and order a few dishes. Tell people that I am setting out a spread for Liu Long. No one will dare peek in on us then!"

"Understood!" Li Hao quickly agreed and walked out of the house, rubbing his neck. The little jade sword was gone—it looked like his teacher had decided to draw on the treasure himself.

There was no need to reveal that it belonged to Li Hao and that Yuan Shuo wasn't actually doing the director a favor. One should always be on guard against potential harm from others. While neither Li Hao nor Yuan Shuo felt that something would go awry with Liu Long, they still didn't want to say that the treasure was Li Hao's. Liu Yan and Chen Jian knew that the young man could call upon a bit of healing power, but they never mentioned it.

Some things needed to be played dumb about.

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Outside the front door.

Li Hao took Panther with him. The little black dog hadn't left with its owner—it wanted to take advantage of an opportunity to absorb more sword energy. Yuan Shuo kicked it out with a mighty shove. It followed morosely behind Li Hao.

The young man didn't care what mood the dog was in. He walked to a kiosk before the gate—equipment left by the Night Watchers. There was a communicator inside.

Li Hao didn't need to dial a number when he picked it up. "Prepare some dishes to pair with wine and send them in at lunch time. Keep an eye on the surroundings, don't let anyone approach!"

Sounds of assent came from the other end; Li Hao didn't bother finding out who it was before he hung up. Standing outside the kiosk, he played with a surge of internal force, gently propelling another surge from his body and instantly completing a second layering.

Projection of internal force, external layering of said force.

"This is just playing with the technique, it's not aura!" Li Hao was still mulling over what the aura was. Whether it was external or internal layering of his force, it was all directly tied to the Nine Forged Force.

The aura was also termed the consciousness as it touched upon the mental level.

This level of the mind... is also recorded in ancient texts. It's known as intent, mental force, and by other names. Accumulation before utilization, it is derived from the heart and makes the wielder invincible!

The ancient texts say that in the ancient civilization, whoever resolutely believed they were invincible could call upon something like an aura, even if they hadn't fully comprehended it. The only concern with this method was that they were crushed by defeat in the first instance of failure. Never did they recover from a stumble in an invincible aura.

Li Hao mentally paged through the many books that he'd memorized. Aura did not necessarily have to personally observed or imitated in the manner that his teacher and others had done. Some of the ancients created their own unique aura.

There were those who firmly believed they were invincible and held that belief from start to finish. They believed it even when they died—this was aura.

Some decided to cultivate an invincible aura—they nurtured their auras from the mindset of assurance of victory to invincibility. Once their areas were complete, they swept the lands and never lost a battle. They reached the apex with such an aura.

Those were all different from the ones that his teacher employed.

Different eras have different training methods, but they all share something in common. They bring their auras down on their enemies! To nurture an aura, one needs to foster qi and bring it forth from the inside!

Powerhouses were such not just because of the physical damage they could bring to bear, but also because of their mental fortitude. Those weaker were immediately smashed when the aura was unleashed.

How should I accumulate my aura? Li Hao's thoughts turned back to himself. Befriend the tigers in the mountains like his teacher? Or observe the sea like Liu Long and watch a tidal wave rear to the heavens? Or do as the ancients did and walk the path of invincibility? Or should he just build the faith that he was invincible and would win every fight?

He looked down at Panther, at where the little black dog was playing with its claws. It seemed to want to imitate Li Hao and complete one instance of external layering... But it couldn't project its internal force since it wasn't a Sunderer. It would be more effective to practice layering its farts.

"Panth, are you a martial master dog or a supernatural dog?" Li Hao snorted. Panther didn't seem to be a supernatural, so was it a martial master instead?

"Arf arf!" The young man didn't understand the response, but judging from the superior look it cast at the ground, it seemed to want to become an invincible dog.

"Aura... consciousness..." Li Hao ignored the dog. "What kind of aura should someone who keeps a low profile like me learn? Invincibility and the path of being undefeated? That's impossible, I'm not one of the ancients and don't have their training environment. No one can suppress the heavens for me and make peers fight me on an equal footing. No one can quell enemies for me..."

That would not work. The aura of invincibility required a strong clan with a strong patron, one that could subdue the land. His opponents would fight him on whatever terms he demanded! Or in times of peace, people would spar in friendly matches.

If Li Hao challenged Red Moon Sunderers in their current society... their Solars would run out the next second and crush him underfoot. He would have to eat the heart of a bear and the gall of a leopard to challenge someone in their home. There was no possible outcome other than being beaten to death!

“If that’s a no-go, then I have to comprehend the aura of nature,” Li Hao murmured to himself. “Respect must be given to heaven and earth, nature is also incomparably powerful. I have no right to gaze upon the strength of nature as a Sunderer! Not even Dominators or those stronger have the right, to say nothing of me.

“Therefore, I can only seek to comprehend it! Tigers are less than heaven, earth, and nature. If I compare the Five Styles and Nine Forged Force, the power of a tidal wave is stronger than that of a tiger. Of course, it also depends on how it’s used. It would be a joke if a tidal wave turned into a foot bath!

“Panther, what kind of strength in nature have you seen used in both land and sea? I’d like to comprehend that kind... As much as the waves roil over everything, they cannot destroy the earth. The same goes for hurricanes and lightning—they can break through the sky but do nothing to the earth...” The young man fell into deep contemplation.

“Humans walk the earth and the earth has existed for eons. No matter how mountains topple and land cracks, the earth remains. True danger often comes not from the sky or sea, but from the earth!”

He suddenly thought of earthquakes. When earthquakes occurred, they shook the ground and sky from inside out. Mountains fell, fissures opened, and all life trembled. He’d witnessed it once before, he really had!

A small earthquake struck Silver City once. Though minor, it still resulted in deaths.

Martial masters stood on the ground and even flight supernaturals must land at times. Li Hao stared at the soil beneath his feet, seeming to understand what he needed. No one could forever live in the skies! Only the aura and strength of the earth was unceasing and inexhaustible.

He stomped on the ground, erupting with three layers of internal force. A hole appeared in the dirt. Panther imitated his actions and slammed its paw down, shaking the ground and slightly numbing Li Hao's foot. The dog was likewise jittery from Li Hao's stomp.

Pausing, the young man looked at the dog, which looked back at him. Stomps and paw slams abounded as they had a grand time. Panther was playing, but Li Hao was not. Who says that the Nine Forged Force was a result of the waves? Liu Long felt that waves built upon each other, so he sensed the aura of the waves!

In the meantime, Li Hao felt that it was the layering of tremors. The waves were such, and so were earthquakes! Powerful earthquakes came in waves and their destruction matched that of a tidal wave's.

"Earthquakes are earthquakes!" Having once observed such momentum, Li Hao's heart still pounded when he thought back to it. He made up his mind when his thoughts traveled here.

#### Chapter 137: Li Hao's Aura (II)

The young man didn't have to imitate the two martial masters. A martial master's path was trod by one's own feet and everyone's aura was different. What he needed to do was to keep himself rooted in the ground and utilize the earth as his foundation.

He stomped downward again, thinking back to the scene of overwhelming destruction from the earthquake. When he stomped next, the boom that resulted was that of Four Forged! Not only that, but something different seemed to be visible to Panther's eye.

Li Hao seemed to have planted himself into the earth. While he swayed when he stomped, he remained standing erect. There looked to be a mountain towering behind him.



“Arf arf!” called the perplexed black dog. What was that?

Li Hao smiled. He did not know the aura, but he seemed to have found his path. He knew how to accumulate aura and how to nurture it.

“The ancient books record someone who kept a sword for many years and never used it. He stunned heaven and earth when he finally unsheathed it! A fearsome power was hidden within it, and the sword was hidden within the scabbard. Aura was brewed in the sword and I... meld and hide myself in the earth. I do not falter if the earth does not falter...”

Of course, that was just his wish. It was almost impossible to achieve, but Li Hao didn't mind!

Liu Long had come to comprehend the aura today. He was not successful, but the young man had grasped a few hints. What would Liu Long think if he found out?

This was why potential was sometimes not in the body, but in the mind. The heights that one's thoughts reached determined one's level. The physique only determined the present. Thoughts determined the future.

“Panth, you need to learn how to read and read some books!” Li Hao grinned. “If you don't know what logic is, what earth, heaven, and nature are, you will never understand how vast the future is. You will only be able to see what is at hand, but I can look ahead!”

“Arf arf arf!” answered the little black dog. It didn't fully understand, but it would remember these words.

Li Hao closed his eyes and spoke no further. He accumulated his energy for a while and stomped once more. Internal force brimmed from both feet, projecting outward into the earth. No holes were forthcoming this time. Instead, tremors shook the ground and spread outward for three meters. They shattered the flowerbed in the yard.

A blinding grin split Li Hao's face!

“Projection through all four limbs!” He accomplished that feat in this moment! He could fully project internal force from his legs and even comprehended a hint of something else.

“Li Hao, I’ll smack you to death if you keep destroying things out there!” An angry bellow exploded from the house. What was the kid doing out there? Pops and cracks and crashes, was he tearing down the house?! Not even the dog tore down the house, so how dare you try that, Li Hao?! You’re worse than the dog!

In celebratory spirits, Li Hao immediately drooped with resignation. I wasn’t destroying anything... Okay, fine I was.

He’d shattered the flowerbed and broken a few floor tiles. I hope teacher doesn’t want me to fix them, I don’t have any money. Have Liu Long do it. He doesn’t have any money either, but he’s first in command and can use public funds for it.

.....

Inside the house.

Liu Long was concentrating on his rapidly healing arms and almost broke out in laughter when he heard Yuan Shuo. The professor, however, raised an eyebrow.

“What you laughing at? I can sense that the kid will stun us all in the near future!”

“He has good potential, but Elder Yuan exaggerates a little too much.”

“Not potential of the body—I never cared about that!” Yuan Shuo answered with aloof pride. “You have exemplary potential for martial dao, the cream of the crop! Yet I do not care about that, I look for intelligence, reaction, and judgment! Such is the foundation of a martial master who will

proceed far down the path of martial dao! A martial master without their own thoughts, one who only knows how to follow the tried and true, will have trouble becoming a Dominator. Even if they manage to succeed, they are only fit to be someone's minion!"

Liu Long was speechless. Are you... complimenting me or insulting me? I have exemplary potential, but you still didn't want me. You're saying my brains suck, aren't you?

He'd never thought of himself as a fool, but he was an eternal idiot to Yuan Shuo.

"Elder Yuan, I was incredibly young then!" he couldn't help himself. "Even if I'm not that smart, how could you determine that from a single glance and conclude that I don't reach your standards?"

He really couldn't accept this.

"Did I need to take a second look?" Yuan Shuo snorted. "When your father brought me here, I asked you why you wanted to learn an outsider's craft since your father's Nine Forged Force is so strong. Do you remember how you responded?"

It took Liu Long a few moments to remember. "I... I said that as strong as the Nine Forged Force was, it had the drawback of harming the body. Father recommends the Five Styles, so I wanted to learn from Elder Yuan!"

Was there anything wrong with that? He still didn't understand.

"That's why I say you're dumb!" Yuan Shuo snorted. "I didn't need to observe anything to draw my conclusion. Remember you were here to ask me for help! Even your father was begging. You weren't young then—you were ten, right?"

"Around that."

“You were already ten, but didn’t have any usable brains. Remember that I’m stronger than your father! I was simply being polite when I said that your family’s method is very strong, but you went along with it and made it seem like you wanted to learn my Five Styles only because you had no other choice! I am the grandmaster of a martial discipline, but I am your last choice??” Yuan Shuo sneered. “I gave your father face in saying that he was strong. If I didn’t, I would point out that I can grind all three Silver Spears into the ground at the same time! If it was Li Hao, he would’ve said that as strong as the Nine Forged Force is, it does not compare to the Five Styles. One should naturally practice the strongest method for training!”

Liu Long’s jaw dropped. That’s it? You thought I was dumb for that?! I was just a kid! And my family’s Nine Forged Force is indeed strong, that’s the truth. I was supposed to kiss your ass for you to accept me?!

Liu Long had never fathomed that he’d been rejected because he hadn’t fawned over Yuan Shuo. How was this right?? Based on his recollection, he’d thought that with Yuan Shuo’s status, the grandmaster would want to hear the truth more. But ten year old Liu Long had erred when... he didn’t kiss up to the old man!

Fuck!

An apoplectic Liu Long turned purple. He would never admit that he was dumb, only that Yuan Shuo was too shameless!

“Ai!” Yuan Shuo sighed. You still don’t understand. You’re too straightforward—perhaps you have a little bit of intelligence, but that tiny amount is nowhere enough to be useful. The heart was to be trained first before martial dao. One had to learn how to be a person before becoming a powerhouse.

It would’ve been one thing if Liu Long had been the ten year old of a regular family, but he was the son of a dying father, the student of a martial master with abundant enemies. Who would want him as a disciple if he didn’t bend his brains to the task? Whoever accepted him was accepting a basketful of trouble and built-in enemies! How did the kid not understand this?

But you still don't know a thing even today, so you absolutely deserve running yourself into the ground.

"I'm not your father and can't be bothered to teach you, so we stop here!" Yuan Shuo didn't feel like continuing the conversation. A last wave of sword energy surged forth, making Liu Long's arms creak and pop. He swung his arms around like twin hammers, breaking through the air. His eyes widened at the effect and he stared at Yuan Shuo with shock.

"What kind of energy is this?"

It was so powerful! While his injuries weren't fully healed, they were essentially inconsequential. Many of his old wounds were gone. No wonder Yuan Shuo's punctured heart had recovered.

What is this?

"What, I'm not a criminal to have to explain myself to you," Yuan Shuo responded indifferently. "You often speak without thinking. Remember, whether it's a martial master or supernatural, we all have our secrets. Do I have to tell you about everything you see?"

I didn't mean it that way... Liu Long felt wronged. He was Yuan Shuo's junior, not to mention he wouldn't be able to take on the old guy in a fight. It was a very frustrating position to be in. If it wasn't for the hope of breaking through... He'd want to leave right now. This was maddening!

"I didn't mean it that way..."

"Regardless of whether or not you did, you shouldn't have asked!"

Liu Long's face darkened and he remained quiet. I really want to beat this old thing to death, he's infuriating! Here I thought my temper is fine enough, but I want to start throwing punches after a few words from him.

“Can you layer your force nine times?”

“I think so.” Liu Long heaved a sigh of relief to see the professor change topic. Fine, fine, I won’t ask anymore.

“Not think so, but must be so!” Yuan Shuo nitpicked irritably. “I didn’t expend all these resources for you to think that you can succeed with Nine Forged. Your life as a Sunderer won’t make up for all this energy if you can’t do it!”

“I’m sure I can!” Liu Long raised his voice, annoyance poking through. “One hundred percent, I’m sure I can!”

“That’s good!” Yuan Shuo smiled. Liu Long wanted to do nothing other than smash it in. The old man looked so ugly when he smiled!

“Li Hao, come in!”

The young man walked through the door after a moment. Yuan Shuo opened his mouth to start talking when he did a double take at his student. He scanned the perimeter of the boy’s body with some confusion. When he told Liu Long that Li Hao was sure to be a stunning personage and a grandmaster of the age, he’d meant in terms of the young man’s intelligence and mentality.

But right now, he sensed a wisp of something different.

Aura?

How was that possible?!

Li Hao layering internal force outside his body was shocking enough and induced immense satisfaction from Yuan Shuo. Yet as of this moment, he had certain suspicions.

“Have you grown stronger?” Yuan Shuo asked slowly after a moment.

“Yes, I can project internal force from all four limbs now. I’m peak initial Sunderer!” Li Hao laughed happily.

Liu Long was as surprised as Yuan Shuo was indifferent. An initial Sunderer didn’t amount to anything, no matter how peak they were. He wasn’t asking about this. However, he set this aside for now and looked at Liu Long.

“Come, let me sense your wave intent! Don’t have any reservations and ignore Li Hao. Ignore that dog as well, unleash your strongest state!”

Liu Long was surprised, but just as champing at the bit since the professor put it this way.

Let’s give it a try!

He waved a punch forward, rippling internal force through his arms like the waves, layer upon layer. One could vaguely sense leaping and soaring waves!

There hadn’t been much buildup when Yuan Shuo set foot into Dominator. Everything had been accomplished very naturally. Li Hao noticed something different with Liu Long—the chief needed to accumulate his aura! He needed some preparation before he could sense the consciousness at the apex.

Chapter 138: Li Hao’s Aura (III)

This doesn’t come as naturally to Liu Long as it does to teacher...

Li Hao realized as he watched the director. It would be a very forced breakthrough if Liu Long succeeded. It wasn't anywhere near as easy and natural as his teacher's. If it hadn't been for his teacher's injuries, he might've been able to set foot into Dominator without needing any outside help whatsoever.

A wave of internal force swept toward him; Li Hao planted his feet into the ground without a change in expression. Nine Forged Force!

When Liu Long's internal force entered his body, it followed his body's structure and rocked his insides. The young man grunted and stomped lightly on the ground, diverting the wave of force into the earth.

The ground shook and the floor tiles split! Fuck! Li Hao winced with dismay. He snuck a glance at his teacher. Shit shit shit, my teacher saw. I really don't have any money to fix your floor tiles. He knew that each tile was supremely expensive—five hundred each! He had to swap out an entire house's worth in one go, that required almost one hundred thousand!

Yuan Shuo's eyes were as wide as dinner plates—aura! That had absolutely been a fledgling aura! He wasn't seeing things, he'd already suspected it earlier. Li Hao was now leveraging force against force, diverting Liu Long's internal force through his body into the ground. That hadn't been the utilization of simple strength, but the manipulation of a kind of aura!

How is this possible? Yuan Shuo couldn't believe it. I didn't teach him this! Even if I did, I would've only said to imitate the five animals because that's the easiest way to comprehend the aura. Li Hao... seemed to have his own understanding.

Liu Long continued to rage with power, but Yuan Shuo ignored him. There was nothing to see there and no problems that he could discern. Even if the man was successful, he'd only be a typical Dominator with nothing special about him. He wouldn't possess many distinguishing characteristics.

A Dominator like Liu Long might've drawn more attention from Yuan Shuo in the past—before he saw how Li Hao was comprehending the aura. But now, the professor couldn't be bothered with another glance! He widened his eyes and continued to stare at his student.



A very guilt-stricken Li Hao lowered his head, ardently wishing for his teacher to look elsewhere. Stop staring at me! Isn't it just one floor tile? Liu Long's broken several, why don't you glare at him?

"Hup!" Liu Long's grunt drew both of their attention.

Yuan Shuo finally shifted his gaze while Li Hao dabbed at nonexistent sweat on his forehead. His teacher's look had been terrifying! Was there a need for that?? It's no big deal that I directed internal force into the ground. It's just basic manipulation of my knowledge and I still don't know much about aura.

The young man knew that he hadn't comprehended the aura; he just had a basic understanding and slightly swept the fog away.

Little did he know that one small step was a sign to Yuan Shuo that his disciple was on the right path. Li Hao possessed the requisite physique and had wrapped his head around the burgeoning notion of aura. If nothing went awry, the doors to Dominator of Thousands were creaking open to him!

Incredible!

Emotion rocked Yuan Shuo's inner world, but he had no words to express himself.

"Deploying moves in the air is useless!" he growled instead. "You're so weak that you're taking half a day to simply understand the aura. Nine layers of the waves are completely wasted in your hands!"

He punched with exquisite speed as he spoke; there was nothing but a looming fist in Li Hao's field of vision. It turned into a vicious tiger descending the mountain in the blink of an eye, one that pounced on its prey.

Liu Long appeared to be a massive wave, but was abruptly reduced to a tiny creek. The ferocious tiger grabbed him in its paw and flung him around—the difference between the two was apparent!

“That’s it? That’s not enough, you trash!” Yuan Shuo roared angrily. A bear descended in Li Hao’s line of sight next and a bear paw slammed down on the wave. The wave broke apart while in the real world, Liu Long rocked back on his heels from Yuan Shuo’s palm strike.

Shock crossed the director’s face! He could sense that he was about to break through, but he couldn’t put up a fight against the professor. It’d only been a few days since Yuan Shuo progressed, but the gap between them was so noticeable!

“Is that all there is to a tidal wave?” Yuan Shuo demanded aloofly. “Are you worthy of battling a Solar like this?! You’re dead as soon as they unleash their aura! Do you really think you’ll be able to match them just as a Dominator? I want to see a tidal wave, not a massage and shower! Your ugly face doesn’t even count as a bath!”

Liu Long flew into a rage! A bath?! Who are you belittling?!

“Break!” he grunted and punched again, his arm darting out like a spear. A water dragon erupted in the mental sense.

A loud bang answered him as Yuan Shuo seemed to transform into a massive ape. The ape sought to capture the dragon! The professor waved his hand and squashed his opponent, instantly clenching the water dragon to death.

“Haha!!”

The bark of victorious laughter incensed Liu Long beyond all reservation. His opponent was so strong that he couldn’t begin to match the other! He could not begin to withstand Yuan Shuo even with his aura in full throttle. The man in front of him was terrifying.

Liu Long had been concerned that they would spar to the point of losing their tempers, but now he realized that he’d thought too much. The only one to lose his temper was him, his opponent was just toying with him!

“Layer!” A forceful wave appeared, one wave piling atop another. Three, four... nine layers in the span of a breath!

Whoosh whoosh whoosh... boom boom boom! sounded by Li Hao’s ears. He stared raptly at the fight, at Liu Long’s fists and his teacher’s hands. One used the Nine Forged Force and the other New Book of Five Styles, both of which he knew. They were both Dominators—indeed, Liu Long seemed to have advanced in this moment. Unbeknownst to him, aura punctuated each of his moves and he brought it to bear against his opponent. He was simply being overpowered by the professor.

Regardless, it was now a clash between two Dominators. As a new Sunderer, Li Hao was afforded a rare opportunity to observe a fight of this caliber in close quarters. He subconsciously aped their movements, drinking in every single punch and palm strike. The young man couldn’t help but put himself in Liu Long’s shoes so he could perceive his teacher’s aura. He broke out in a cold sweat the second he did so.

So fast!

His teacher was too fast; Liu Long was entirely on the back foot. He wasn’t as fast as Yuan Shuo—whether in terms of reaction, adaptation, or deployment of technique. All Liu Long could do was doggedly match blow for blow!

Li Hao suddenly felt an icy grip around his throat. Yuan Shuo shifted his punch into a claw and swept at Liu Long’s throat like an eagle. The director roared and waved his fists around, wanting to use nine layered force to beat his opponent back.

No... he should retreat or dodge. He can’t hold it off! The thought rose in Li Hao’s mind.

Liu Long grunted—Yuan Shuo’s hand had disappeared. It was now around the man’s throat and clenching his windpipe. The professor easily brushed off Liu Long’s fists, sending them down the latter’s sides.

Dejection filled the director's face, yet Yuan Shuo didn't even look at him. He turned to Li Hao, a movement subconsciously echoed by Liu Long. What the director saw surprised the man.

Li Hao dripped with sweat as he forced his hands apart. He seemed to be trying to shove something out rather than attack someone. He was defying Yuan Shuo's hand, one that didn't exist!

The young man leaned backward as he thrust his hands apart and braced himself with his right arm, pushing forward! His palm did seem to connect with something and Li Hao pushed off his toes, performed a backflip and tumbled onto the ground, swiftly evading something.

Liu Long's eyes widened with surprise! Was this Li Hao's method of counterattack?

The heavily sweating young man returned to his senses after he rolled away. He glanced sideways at the silent living room and was seized by sudden awkwardness. He looked at how dirty he was, then at the two broken floor tiles his toes had dug into...

"Teacher and chief's battle was so marvelous that I couldn't help but try to practice a thing or two," Li Hao coughed lightly. "Teacher, the chief is our guest, so we can't make him repair the tiles that he broke. I'll pay for the repairs..."

Retreating in order to advance!

As expected, Liu Long swiftly interjected, "There's no need, I'll send people to fix them! I was too overworked to consider our environment. I'll have someone come by to replace them."

Yuan Shuo looked at his student with a half smile, a reaction that enlightened Liu Long. He looked speechlessly at the young man.

Was that on purpose? You said that to prompt my response so that I would fix the floor tiles. But of course, this was hardly Liu Long's current focus. He fixed his gaze on Liu Long for a long while. "You first pushed Elder Yuan's hand again, then counterattacked..."

“I didn’t!” Li Hao shook his head. “I couldn’t counterattack, teacher is too strong. I pushed so I could shift teacher’s claw attack to the side. His next move would be to quickly follow that up with a hand to the throat, so I could only push off from the ground to flee the premises. My opponent was too much for me!”

Indeed, he was outclassed by his opponent. That was why he’d rolled on the ground after jumping back—it was to run away as fast as possible. He didn’t intend to counterattack at all.

Liu Long stared into space before smiling ruefully. “Well I can’t get away, I’m not fast enough!”

This wasn’t a move he could imitate because he was too slow! He may be a Dominator now, but still suffered blow after blow. He would die to Yuan Shuo because he reacted slower than Li Hao. He was less than even the kid! Not in terms of strength, but with strategy and reaction. He relied too much on pure strength!

Did this count as a breakthrough? Was he a walking god, a Dominator of Thousands?

Hah!

Liu Long drooped, then couldn’t help but ask, “Did you comprehend anything from my aura?”

Li Hao hesitated, then nodded. “I did, and a lot of things!”

“What did you comprehend?” Liu Long insisted.

Awkwardness crossed Li Hao’s face and he wanted to respond with nonsense when his teacher commanded, “Speak the truth!”

“Chief’s aura is very strong!” The young man looked at his feet with resignation. “The waves build upon each other, each stronger than the one before! But there’s several things from my perspective. For one, you aren’t fast enough. For another, you’re not familiar enough with the Nine Forged Force. There are tiny hiccups when you layer your internal force nine times. They’re very feeble, but I sense them.

“And third, it might be because of your previous injuries, but chief doesn’t seem to dare to use internal force in your arms. You seem to be holding back...” Li Hao’s tone shifted. “Fire and water are heartless! I’ve yet to see the waves, but I’ve witnessed a raging gale. Chief, even water is violent!”

He punched outward with the sound of waves crashing upon the shore! An explosion ripped through the air! A furious storm seemed to be upon them; rain blasted into them. Violence!

Liu Long somehow sensed the violence of rain from Li Hao’s boxing technique! It was the explosive sensation of a storm so domineering that it would split the earth open...

This wasn’t water—or rather, it wasn’t the water of Liu Long’s impression.

#### Chapter 139: A Spare Tire (I)

“Water is as fast as a blade and keen without edge!”

Bam! echoed from another one of Li Hao’s punches.

“Chief, these are just my own thoughts,” the young man panted. “Please don’t mind the unversed, rudimentary aspects of them.”

“Your teacher says...” Liu Long sighed after a long moment. “That you’ll be a stunning character one day!”

I believe it!

He truly did in this moment. So water could be this violent! It didn't measure up to the majestic grandiosity of a tidal wave, but it felt that a single drop of water could break through the earth.

Liu Long abruptly punched forward.

BOOM!

An explosion ripped through the air like a bomb, a storm ripping through the firmament! This was water, the heartless element of fire and water. Liu Long closed his eyes to sense everything about it. He looked at the young man when he opened them again.

"It looks like Elder Yuan was right not to accept me."

Compared to such a genius disciple like Li Hao, Yuan Shuo would likely suffer a heart attack from sheer frustration if Liu Long was also a disciple.

Idiot...

He hadn't wanted to admit it before, but Liu Long had to today. He seemed to be too set in his ways.

Yuan Shuo stood with his arms crossed off to the side. His pride quickly transformed into approval. "You're not bad yourself! Setting foot into Dominator through borrowed aura... while you lack your own distinction, you're a Dominator nonetheless. You'll be fine against regular Sunflare!"

"I didn't understand before," Liu Long chuckled ruefully. Simple respect had replaced his aloofness from earlier. "After sparring with Elder Yuan today, I can tell that your strength far eclipses mine despite advancing only a dozen days ago. Everyone attributes your Solar kill to luck, but in my eyes, you would be able to fight a Solar even without outside help!"

Such was a true walking god! As for himself, the conclusion he came to after prolonged thought was that he was just a Dominator. On his side stood a Dominator of Thousands, while on Yuan Shuo's there was a god that roamed the land. There was no difference in their level, but a massive gap in strength.

"Congratulations chief, congratulations teacher!" Li Hao broke the atmosphere with a jolly shout. "Our plan is complete ahead of time. I'll fetch food so you can celebrate with some wine!"

They really needed to stop, Liu Long was about to abandon himself to despair if they continued! He was a Dominator at the end of the day, but was being checked to a shadow of himself. That would be too much of a pity!

Liu Long started laughing when the young man left. "Elder Yuan... I quite envy you!"

"He's my student. Don't think he's yours just because you taught him the Nine Forged Force," Yuan Shuo said proudly. "You won't do!"

"I understand." Liu Long truly was envious. He looked at the dog waving its paws and sighed. Damn it, the dog's not bad. How about I have a dog for a disciple?

.....

Noon.

Liu Long stayed for lunch in a house that now seemed rather worse for the wear. Countless floor tiles were shattered and debris littered the ground. Normal people didn't fight in their homes, so patently the three at the table weren't normal.

Liu Long had a strong appetite after breaking through and ravenously tore through the food. He was a domineering man to outsiders, one with a high position and imposing authority. That was not in



effect here. He'd been a child begging for tutelage when Yuan Shuo was in his prime. There was no place for him but humility in front of the professor.

Yuan Shuo sipped at a cup of wine—the only one to do so at the table. Liu Long may seem rough around the edges, but he didn't drink. Intoxication easily bungled matters. Meanwhile, Yuan Shuo's style corresponded to the old guard of martial masters. Food and drink passed through the man in a free and easy manner.

He drank wine with narrowed eyes, lost in thought and looking past Liu Long and Li Hao. He'd been worried about what would happen to his student once he left Silver City. The lad would be in constant danger if the matter of the eight families wasn't resolved. But since Li Hao had comprehended an outline of the aura, he was suddenly more at ease. Could Li Hao set foot into the Dominator level before he left?

Indeed, Dominator of Thousands!

Once the aura was grasped and energy from the sword to supplement, Yuan Shuo would be able to shove Li Hao upward if the former could obtain some more mysterious power of the five elements and scarlet shadows!

Aura was the thorniest problem bottlenecking martial masters. Nothing else was an issue in Yuan Shuo's eyes.

He'd obtained one thousand cubes of mysterious power after Red Moon attacked and constantly requested the Night Watchers to deliver them. The agency dragged its feet, impeding his own trades for the power of the five elements.

He hadn't been in a hurry at first. What was the rush? As fast as Li Hao was improving, they could not overly insist on haste. But now, urgency licked at his heels. Those bastards! They were too slow! Now that the lad had a fledgling aura, he was in a state of high speed development. Each day of delay was a crime; it was torture!

Yuan Shuo didn't consider the possibility of Li Hao devouring too much and causing experience to lag behind strength. The lad was different from other martial masters. The worst Dominator was still stronger than a Sunderer, no?

The lad could increase his cultivation level first, which would raise his strength accordingly. What was this talk of experience? Killing more people naturally brought about more battle experience; A martial master's strength came from the self; there was no danger of losing control.

In this regard, Li Hao wouldn't be in much trouble after rising to Dominator, despite his lack of experience. He just needed to refrain from being an idiot and running off to pick fights with Sunflares and Solars. He would be absolutely fine against Sunderers or Darkmoons.

Yuan Shuo suddenly rose as he considered the situation. Li Hao looked up and reached to fill his teacher's wine cup when the professor snatched up a nearby communicator. He thought for a bit and dialed a number.

"It's me!"

"Elder Yuan..." A familiar voice traveled out of the communicator—Mu Sen.

Li Hao and Liu Long looked at each other with surprise. What did Yuan Shuo want with Mu Sen?

"I can't get in touch with Hao Lianchuan, but I'm sure you can!" Yuan Shuo barked out coolly. "Tell him I want to see my mysterious power tonight, all of it! We can forget about the ruins if I don't! Don't give me any bullshit, delaying things won't make the problem go away. Are they waiting to pay only after the ruins? Or do they want to burn the cubes to me when I'm dead??"

"Elder Yuan, I, ah, we can't contact White Moon City either..."

"Mu Sen, are you sure you want me to go to your office and scream into your face?"

“.....” Silence came from the other end of the communicator before Mu Sen spoke with resignation, “We use the emergency contact method only when something major has occurred. It consumes effort and resources each time it’s activated...”

“The major occurrence is that I’ll kill Inspector General Mu Sen if Hao Lianchuan doesn’t give me my stuff. Is that reason good enough?”

“.....”

A silent Liu Long’s lips curved upwards. Li Hao held himself in with effort, deeply concerned that Mu Sen would hear something and identify who else was present.

“Very well, I’ll notify them right away,” Mu Sen capitulated with resignation. “But tonight... There’s quite a distance between us and them. Even if they’re ready, it will be very difficult to make a delivery tonight.”

“Hao Lianchuan can fly. It’s just one thousand kilometers, he can fly here! I don’t care about anything else, that’s all!” Yuan Shuo snapped the communicator shut and threw it to the side. He didn’t care how they arranged the matter. It was indeed difficult to communicate between cities, but if the most senior executive of the Inspectorate didn’t have a reliable manner to reach White Moon with, then the capital’s control over the province would instantly plunge.

Hao Lianchuan arrived so quickly the day that Red Moon attacked, a clear sign that they had their ways of communication. They just weren’t in use normally.

“Those fellows need a kick in the arse!” Yuan Shuo complained. “I know what they’re thinking! We’re headed to the ruins very soon and if I die there, they won’t have to pay me anything. If we survive, we do so with certain gains. A bit of mysterious power is nothing then! Li Hao, you already gave them your sword. It’s one thing to withhold treasures until after the expedition, but they want to hold back even the mysterious power from Brokensky...”

The professor worked himself up in a froth as he spoke!

“Teacher, it’s okay,” Li Hao placated. “We don’t have any use for it in the immediate future anyway.”

Bullshit! Yuan Shuo threw him a sidelong glance. Says who? You can use it right now, and you have great need for it!

Some more of the sword’s reserves had been depleted to heal Liu Long. There was less and less energy in the sword. If Li Hao didn’t increase his strength as quickly as possible, it would be very difficult to make swift progress once the sword was exhausted.

There was a limit to mysterious power absorption. One could not take in endless amounts. Li Hao could do so due to the sword neutralizing the energy for him. Otherwise, he would be only a little better off than the average person even if he possessed an excellent constitution. He wouldn’t be able to easily absorb thirty cubes in one go like he could now.

“Does Elder Yuan have immediate need of mysterious power?” Liu Long asked. “I have some...”

“Eat your food!” Yuan Shuo cut him off. He was well aware of the director’s tiny fortune. The man had received fifty cubes last time—a sizable amount. But what did that matter to Yuan Shuo?

Li Hao needed to train his organs and required the balanced power of the five elements. Liu Long’s wasn’t appropriate and there was very little of it. A regular Sunderer would find it sufficient, but it was far from enough for Li Hao.

Liu Long bent his head back to his bowl. He brought up business again when he was nearly full. “Elder Yuan, do you have more information about the three Sunflares?”

He only knew there were three Sunflares. Were they initial, mid, or latter? What kind of abilities did they have? He knew almost nothing about the enemy other than their level and number. Everything

else was unknown. It was nigh impossible to prevent unexpected and possibly undesirable developments under these circumstances.

“No,” Yuan Shuo responded. “That’s why I want Hao Lianchuan to bring up the rear! We won’t notify him if there’s anything good to be had, but if things go south, we’ll have him show his face!”

Liu Long blinked.

“Besides, shouldn’t someone from upstairs come to honor the formation of a new branch?” Yuan Shuo continued. “Hao Lianchuan is the most suited person! He can come congratulate you as a sign of how important this branch is regarded, and to intimidate the supernaturals that will be present. They won’t dare involve themselves in our matter. And if anything really is overlooked, Hao Lianchuan can clean up after you.”

Such were Yuan Shuo’s plans. He made them deliver his mysterious power tonight because it would have to be none other than Hao Lianchuan who did so. No one else was capable of doing so!

#### Chapter 140: A Spare Tire (II)

If not tonight, White Moon would have to send someone tomorrow and it would still be Hao Lianchuan! No other Sunflare would dare cross thousands of kilometers to transport thousands of cubes. There were supernaturals roaming the wild, waiting to commit robbery!

“Teacher, you’ve really considered everything!” Li Hao couldn’t help but sigh with appreciation.

Of course, who knew how Hao Lianchuan would react?

“And it doesn’t matter what he thinks,” said Yuan Shuo. “Can Night Watchers not eliminate wanted criminals? Not to mention, various factions are waiting to excavate the ruins with us. There will be no problems so long as it isn’t open warfare. The prerequisite to that is that they don’t know about Qiao Feilong’s true strength.”

Teacher and disciple nodded.

“Then does this mean we’re on our own for the three Sunflares?” Liu Long asked. He thought about the issue and mulled over what Yuan Shuo had said about having Hao Lianchuan bring up the rear. There shouldn’t be much issue with their proposed course of action.

Of course, no plan could be perfect. Fortune was snatched from the jaws of danger! But if Yuan Shuo wasn’t afraid, then what was he afraid for?

“I’ll need to make certain preparations after I go back and require the cooperation of the others. At the very least, we need to be ready for a besiegement.” Liu Long hesitated. “There are probably plenty of regular people in the mines. Once we use weapons of mass scale destruction...”

It weighed on him. Yuan Shuo was more ruthless than him when it came to this, but the professor was also aware of Liu Long’s personality. He didn’t outright say to ignore the regular people, but bent his mind to considering Liu Long’s concerns as well.

“They won’t let regular folks into that area because of the ruins,” Li Hao interjected. “During my observations, I noted there was a distance between the three Sunflares and ordinary people. They were at least one thousand meters apart.”

Not too far, and in fact, very close! But it was a distance that could be avoided if one exercised a little bit of caution.

“I have a suggestion if chief thinks this is ill-advised,” Li Hao mentioned.

“Speak your mind.”

“A public holiday!”

Liu Long blinked. A public holiday? He thought rapidly. “There’s no reason for a public holiday!”

“Why not?” Li Hao smiled. “Our Night Watcher branch is opening in two days. In order to celebrate this day and the fact that Silver City has its own supernatural agency, the entire city can relax on that day and the day after! We can say this to the city’s senior council and tell those below that it’s simply days off.”

Most people would return home for a two day holiday, particularly those who worked in the mines. They were overworked in normal times and would absolutely not stay in the mountain with the arrival of a rare holiday. Not everyone would leave, but there would be much fewer there than otherwise.

Since they would be one thousand meters away, that would decrease losses to the lowest amount possible.

“Won’t that unnecessarily alert the enemy?” asked Liu Long.

“It’s the entire city on holiday, not just him!” Li Hao laughed. “And it’s only targeted toward mundanes, the Qiaos shouldn’t pay it any attention.”

“But we must be on our guard!” Yuan Shuo objected. “Do you think it makes sense to give mundanes a holiday for a Night Watcher occasion? And will the Qiaos give those days off just because we say so?”

The professor swept a glance at his student and shook his head. “You do well with minor tricks, but you also easily commit mistakes in critical moments.”

Li Hao lowered his head without a word. Since his teacher had spoken thus, perhaps he had a plan.

“Declaring a public holiday outright isn’t a very reliable course of action...” Yuan Shuo narrowed his eyes. “Roughly a thousand meters away, are they? Then I’ll visit tonight and create an incident. I’ll collapse the mine! I’m familiar with the area as I opened a new mine there before. A few pokes and prods at the original collapse site will ensure that the ground continues to cave in. No one is in

the mines at night and the Qiaos will declare a company holiday themselves. They won't be back up to business for another ten days to two weeks."

"That's doable." Liu Long nodded. "It won't be the first. Qiao Mining Industries suffered a few collapses when I was on the law enforcement team. They were able to move on afterward due to a lack of casualties."

"That's normal!" Yuan Shuo chuckled. "Their area of collapse should be close to the ruins. There naturally won't be that many people there. But since it caved in, they have to rectify it. Now that they've started excavating the ruins, it's collapsed more than once or twice in recent years. Another occurrence isn't a big deal, and they'll certainly send their people away when they explore the ruins to avoid discovery."

Li Hao nodded. That was true. Another collapse wouldn't raise eyebrows since it wasn't the first time and the Qiaos would be more concerned than anyone that the incident might draw attention. They'd immediately halt operations to prevent a third party investigation.

Therefore, they would pause work as soon as the incident occurred.

"Can you avoid their detection, teacher?"

"No shit, I'm a martial master, not a supernatural!" Yuan Shuo hectored. The lad didn't even know basic fundamentals! The greatest advantage to being a martial master was that internal force blossomed from inside the body. There was nothing special about a martial master if they didn't project their energy.

Supernaturals were extremely hard pressed to sense their martial dao counterpart.

Li Hao laughed dryly and said nothing more.



Liu Long's assorted fears and concerns were set aside after deciding upon the overall direction of their plan. It was up to luck as to whether or not they would succeed.

It was up to luck to see if he could take down the three Sunflares.

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Based on Li Hao's thoughts, he wanted to add Hao Lianchuan to the cause for added surety. However, his teacher and Liu Long were gamblers at heart; the thought didn't cross their mind. They wanted to take care of this by themselves if possible and bring in the cavalry if they couldn't. This wasn't in accordance with Li Hao's expectations.

But at the moment, it was all the young man could do.

They continued to eat lunch without further discussing this matter.

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Li Hao left with Liu Long after lunch. There would be someone who came along to fix Yuan Shuo's floor tiles. That had nothing to do with Li Hao.

Inside the car.

Liu Long's eyes were shut as he contemplated something. He suddenly opened them when they were almost at the Inspectorate. "Do you think we should involve Liu Yan and the others?"

He was asking for Li Hao's opinion!

Startled, the young man marshaled a response. “We should if they still aren’t afraid of danger and want more resources. But if they feel that they want to live out their days in peace and just draw a salary, then we should leave them be. But to be honest, Silver City will be in danger if anything goes wrong with us. It won’t matter whether or not they’re involved.”

“So you think we should bring them into this?”

“You have your own considerations, chief.” Li Hao refrained from saying too much as Liu Long wasn’t the indecisive sort. He was just overly worried because this operation involved several Sunflares and the Demon Hunters were akin to his siblings. Li Hao was certain that if Liu Yan and the others knew, they’d all want to be part of it. Only Wang Ming and his people were hard to determine.

“Let’s hold a meeting,” Liu Long decided. “Should we let Wang Ming and the others participate?”

They were outsiders, after all.

“We should.” Li Hao offered his take. “They’re all young and highly driven! This is a chance to blend our department, or we’ll stay two separate teams that are difficult to integrate. We’ll become one group only after fighting side by side.”

“You’re right.” Liu Long smiled, then quickly resumed his customary aloofness. “While I don’t know the particulars of our enemy, I’m confident of defeating all three of them after becoming a Dominator! They’re three rats who’ve never shown their faces in the supernatural domain. Maybe they’ve never even raised a hand before. How much battle awareness can they have after the Qiaos hid them for so long?”

“Probably not much.” Li Hao smirked. “Maybe less than me!”

“Precisely!” Liu Long nodded in agreement. It wasn’t just the three Sunflares, but also Qiao Feilong. The man hadn’t fought for many years either. He was just a mere Slayer before, how much battle awareness would he hold even as a Solar now?

He could torture those weaker than him, but what of his peers?

Who knew if it was out of self-comfort or true belief, but confidence began to brim in Liu Long.

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The Law Enforcement building.

Wang Ming couldn't help but complain to Hu Hao when he heard that yet another meeting had been scheduled. He'd just come from visiting some corporations.

"People say that White Moon holds a lot of meetings and I quite agree! But after coming to Silver City, I find that it's the smaller places that are completely out of control!"

It'd only been how many days and how many meetings in that duration? Silver City held meetings at the drop of a hat!

He was immensely dissatisfied with Liu Long, finding the director to be someone indifferent to fame and wealth. The man was known among White Moon supernaturals as a cantankerous guy. But now he seemed more obsessed with the trappings of power!

He held nonstop meetings after becoming director. There was absolutely no end in sight! Not only that, but there was a ribbon-cutting ceremony in two days. Bah! They were Night Watchers, not a corporation! What was this nonsense about a ribbon-cutting ceremony? They were an absolute laughingstock!

"He doesn't do a single thing that he should be doing!" Wang Ming complained again. Hu Hao didn't say anything as he was a taciturn, reserved type. Li Meng, however, quite agreed.

“That’s right! When upstairs told us to come to Silver City, I was thinking it might be the same as last time and we might see some fighting. It might be dangerous, so they wanted us to come to temper ourselves. But after a few days... it’s either meetings or whiling the days away. We go to dojos and companies to waste time. I’m so bored!”

The heck was this! Li Meng felt that White Moon City was overestimating the martial masters of Silver City. They seemed to have entered retirement after the last battle. Every single person was busy displaying their authority instead of doing actual work. This was such a waste of the trio’s lives!

“Director Wang, Li Meng, let’s go to the meeting!” Hu Hao interrupted. They were in the law enforcement building! It wouldn’t do for someone to overhear them. They were a team, after all. They’d yet to grow close with Liu Yan and the others after these days. It only appeared that they were congenial on the surface.

“C’mon, let’s see what they’ve got in store for today,” Wang Ming snorted. “There’s a perfectly fine conference room here, but they want to hold it in the basement. They’ve seriously got too much time on their hands!”

The three grumbled and muttered among themselves, but still headed for the basement. This was where the meeting was being held this time.