

## Star Gate 201

### Chapter 201: A Low Key Arrogance (III)

Yuan Shuo rose to his feet and walked outside, bumping into Wang Ming returning with food.

“Are you not eating anymore?” he asked with surprise to see teacher and disciple leave.

“Nope, you eat!”

Fine then! Wang Ming was a bit dejected. A real disciple was best. Woe for an honorary disciple like him!

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The center of the campsite.

Hao Lianchuan had a large tent to himself. He was mulling over whether or not to summon Li Hao for a chat when his eyes darted to the tent flap. They lifted, admitting Yuan Shuo!

Maybe he’s come to his senses...

“Contact Hou Xiaochen, I want to speak to him!” Yuan Shuo said merrily before Hao Lianchuan had a chance to speak.

“.....” The director’s face instantly darkened with irritation. “You can tell me anything you want to say! The director may not be in. Apparently, Red Moon and Yama’s representatives have been spotted near White Moon City. The director might have left headquarters.”

It would be difficult to contact him if he wasn’t physically present.

“Try. Even if he has, they shouldn’t meet until the 28th. What, are they in a relationship to be meeting ahead of time?”

Hao Lianchuan was the epitome of wordlessness at Yuan Shuo’s response. “Is there a need for this, Yuan Shuo?” he couldn’t help himself. “Have I offended you in some way?”

“Nope.”

“Then why...”

“You want to listen in?” Yuan Shuo asked with resignation. “Do you really want to listen? This has to do with classified information, so it’s not necessarily a good thing for you to listen. Of course, I can’t stop you if you want to. You can just stand off to the side, how about it?”

Hao Lianchuan started and stopped several times before finally managing, “Forget it. I warn you, don’t think of causing trouble for me day in and day out. If I’d known you’d be like this, I wouldn’t have added you to the expedition team.”

“I know!” Yuan Shuo waved him off; he couldn’t be bothered.

Hao Lianchuan felt that he’d been marginalized again and grew all the more depressed for it. Meanwhile, Li Hao was trying to suppress his laughter. He didn’t have any ill will toward Hao Lianchuan, just that it was fun to see the man being thrown around the last couple of times.

Hao Lianchuan’s tent was different from the primitive environment of the other tents; his seemed more like a base of operations. There was a large display screen in the middle.

“To think that you’d really come up with this!” Yuan Shuo nodded. “It’s good for communications, right?”

“It’s alright, so long as the distance isn’t greater than three thousand kilometers. Most connections go through, but they might end if there’s supernatural interference. Entering the ruins will most likely cut off contact with the outside world.” Hao Lianchuan shifted some components around and infused a small hole with mysterious power. He finished with pressing some buttons.

It was late at night, but the screen brightened in less than ten seconds. A youthful face appeared on it, one with a languid air. He was about to speak when he saw Yuan Shuo on the other side.

“Professor Yuan, long time no see.” A smiling Hou Xiaochen snapped to mental alertness as he leaned against a chair.

“Director Hou!” A light danced in Yuan Shuo’s eyes. “It has indeed been a long time.”

“Director, he insisted on contacting you...”

“Mm, I understand.” Hou Xiaochen inclined his head. “You can attend to the rest of your affairs, I’ll speak with Professor Yuan.”

“Very well!” There was nothing for Hao Lianchuan to do but leave. He glanced at Li Hao as he vacated the premises—it was like the young man didn’t see him. The latter kept his head down without a word and didn’t move. He was a fixture by Yuan Shuo’s side.

“.....” Hao Lianchuan mentally threw his hands up at the situation and left. He disliked being in the same room as this teacher and disciple duo. It always put him in a bad mood.

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Inside the tent.

Li Hao shifted a chair over for Yuan Shuo. The professor sat down jovially. Hou Xiaochen assessed Li Hao with a smile.

“This must be Li Hao.”

“Correct.”

“He’s not bad.” Hou Xiaochen nodded. “Indifferent to favor or humiliation—being able to bide one’s time is a blessing. He suffered in silence for an entire year after a friend’s grisly death and did not reveal a single hint. He has a much better temper than you.”

The director looked at Yuan Shuo again after proclaiming his judgment. “You must have something to say since you’re calling me in the middle of the night.”

“Zhang Ting!” was the professor’s only response.

“Zhang Ting...” Hou Xiaochen turned the name over in his mouth. “Born of the Southern Range province and joined the Silver Moon Night Watchers three years ago. Originally serving at the Southern Range Inspectorate, she was reassigned to Silver Moon after offending her peers. She was of the Inspectorate to begin with and given an induction chance after winning marks of merit for her actions in executing missions. Thus she became one of the Night Watchers and her registered strength is Fullmoon...”

“Do you know her current strength?” Yuan Shuo asked bluntly.

Hou Xiaochen fell silent for a bit. “Are you in possession of something like an origin weapon? You have one of the eight family weapons, don’t you?”

“What makes you say that?”

“How can you see through Zhang Ting without an origin weapon?” Hou Xiaochen asked in return, then curved his lips in a half smile. “Or has your student done so? Is the bloodline of the eight families that wondrous?”

“Friend or foe?” Yuan Shuo couldn’t be bothered to answer.

“Hard to say.”

“Hard to say?” Yuan Shuo frowned.

“She’s most likely not of the three great organizations. My guess is that she’s here because some fellows want to prevent me from declaring independence. Her mission is most probably to keep an eye on me.”

“You’re preparing to secede??” Yuan Shuo was astonished. “Do you nurse this kind of ambition?”

“I don’t,” Hou Xiaochen chuckled. “But I will when I should. There’s no need to be overly surprised. The central region has been requisitioning personnel to itself and whittling away the strength of the borders. Everyone’s being thrown into the central region battlefield, resulting in countless casualties. Geniuses are absorbed into the central region, powerhouses are sent to the meat grinder... This is one way to restrain and suppress those who wish to declare independence. I quite approve.

“But for our Silver Moon, we only have so many powerhouses. We can’t even beat off the three great organizations. It is thus inappropriate to redeploy our troops and put our geniuses into their reserves! They’re dissatisfied after I refused them a few times and so sent Zhang Ting to watch me.” The director laughed, “If they keep forcing me, I’ll just secede!”

“.....” Yuan Shuo’s shock was evident while Li Hao’s jaw couldn’t be picked up off the floor. He’d discussed this matter in the car with Wang Ming and the others, but felt that Silver Moon hadn’t

been so inclined. But now, the boss of the provincial Night Watchers was brazenly saying that he was preparing to be independent!

“Don’t widen your eyes at me.” Hou Xiaochen looked at Yuan Shuo. “You’re nothing good yourself, what do you care about this?”

“I don’t,” the professor suddenly laughed. “I just hadn’t fathomed that you’d be harboring these kinds of thoughts. Based on my impression of you, you should be presenting yourself in the central region to ask for a flogging.”

“And why should I?” Hou Xiaochen chuckled. “Silver Moon would be safe and secure if they sent people to clean out the three great organizations. It would not be out of the question if I fought in the central region then. But with the situation as it is, trouble gnaws at the province. Silver Moon is abandoned if I leave, so why should I go?”

He laughed gently. “The Night Watchers, Inspectorate, and local army have reached an accord. Only the provincial government is not in agreement with us. Are you interested in joining us, Professor Yuan?”

“.....” Yuan Shuo found himself in an extremely awkward situation. He was just asking after the man in a general sort of way, but the director responded with an invitation to rebel! He replied in a muffled voice, “A lack of strength will see the gun shooting the bird that takes the lead!”

“Mmhmm, for sure,” Hou Xiaochen laughed. “So I’m in no hurry, we can take it slow. Seizing the defensive origin weapon on the expedition is also preparation for this goal. It might not fully be to your tastes if you join us now, but wouldn’t it be so satisfying when you can take another step forward and exercise your old style? You can kill to the point where people shudder at your name!”

A migraine was settling in for Yuan Shuo. He took a while to collect his thoughts. “What about Zhang Ting?”

“As you wish. She will not move against the Night Watchers or you, but don’t look to her for help if you run into danger. And if she dies, well then, she dies!” Hou Xiaochen was completely indifferent. “It’s fine if she dies, but Hao Lianchuan cannot die! Resolve some of his problems for him if you have effort to spare.”

“I’m a Dominator, he’s a Solar.” Yuan Shuo’s headache intensified.

“Uh huh!” Hou Xiaochen nodded smilingly. “That’s alright, do as you see fit. Ah, yes, do you want the method to extract blood pearls from scarlet shadows?”

“.....” Yuan Shuo stayed quiet.

“Then I’ll tell you. It’s simple. Use the soul of the origin weapon if you have one and directly draw upon the shadow. However, the weapons of the eight families might be different... That’s fine. Hao Lianchuan took the Flaming Phoenix Spear with him. You can borrow it.

“Kill everyone from the three great organizations if you’re able to when you’re in the ruins! If you can’t, go on the run once the expedition is over!”

“Run where?” Yuan Shuo frowned slightly at the director.

“Wherever you want. Send Li Hao to White Moon City.”

“I will!” Yuan Shuo agreed after some thought. “So on the surface, it will be me who takes the defensive origin weapon, is it?”

“If that sits well with you, then it will be.”

Yuan Shuo considered silently for a moment. “Very well, I’ll think about it. I will not owe you anything after this!”

“You never owed anything to begin with, it’s all up to you!”

Yuan Shuo turned to leave; Hou Xiaochen spoke up just before the professor departed. “I can give you a guarantee that the ruins of Silver City belong to Li Hao. I will not interfere!”

The professor shook, but didn’t say anything. He left with Li Hao.

Hou Xiaochen fell silent on the screen, resuming speech only when Hao Lianchuan entered after a while. “You can lend the Flaming Phoenix Spear to Yuan Shuo in critical moments!”

“Eh?”

“That’s all!” The screen darkened.

Hao Lianchuan cursed under his breath. Again? These guys are so irritating!

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Li Hao was still gripped by shock when they walked out of the tent. Independence? The notion had never occurred to him before, but he heard it from Hou Xiaochen today. At the moment, all thought of Zhang Ting and the three great organizations flew out of his mind. He knew full well what would happen the moment Silver Moon seceded.

It would be suppressed by the central region and attacked from all sides. Skystar Dynasty had not toppled yet, after all, nor had it fully lost control. There were plenty of personages harboring great



ambitions, but no one dared openly declare itself an independent nation. No one would possibly dare!

## Chapter 202: Old Friends Meet (I)

A camel that starves to death was still greater than a horse. In times of danger and true chaos, few were the initial instigators that lived to claim the final victory. Anyone familiar with history knew full well that whoever dared stick their head up at this time would be the next to die. Not to mention, there were very few border factions who ultimately occupied the central region after insurrection. This had ever been the case since ancient times.

Various thoughts floated to the fore. Next to Li Hao, Yuan Shuo was also quiet.

“Don’t think too much,” the professor finally said when they were almost back to their tent. “It’s not a big deal. Even if a minor Silver Moon does declare itself a self-reliant nation, that will not cause too much of a ripple.

“As for Hou Xiaochen... He won’t dare do so and will not do so unless he has absolutely no other options left.”

Li Hao nodded, but looked at his teacher with further questions. “Teacher... why do you think he wants to do this? Or is even thinking of doing it?”

And shouldn’t the director keep these kinds of thoughts a secret? He’d talked about it so openly!

Yuan Shuo mused for a while before saying slowly, “He has no choice.”

“No choice?”

The professor nodded. “I ask you, if Hou Xiaochen listens to orders from above and leaves Silver Moon to answer the call of war in the central region, will the Night Watchers keep the province stable under Hao Lianchuan’s leadership? Can they withstand the three great organizations?”

Li Hao shook his head upon thinking it over. Most... probably not. Hao Lianchuan wasn't that strong and he was a more honest and frank person. He didn't possess sufficient prestige—a detail easily observed.

Everyone revered the mention of Hou Xiaochen, Wang Ming was no exception. But when it came to Hao Lianchuan, Wang Ming smiled. Not in a jeering fashion, but because he found the deputy director interesting. The people quite liked him, but a person like this did not impart peace of mind in critical moments.

"Silver Moon's Night Watchers will lose their footing if Hou Xiaochen leaves," Yuan Shuo said calmly. "The province will be in trouble if control slips out of their fingers! Yet, he is defying orders if he doesn't go! Once... twice... thrice... Time and time again. If you are a person of note of the central region, do you think someone like Hou Xiaochen should remain in his position?"

That was why the professor said he had no choice.

"Why isn't upstairs taking this into account?" Li Hao frowned. "The province will be in danger if Director Hou leaves."

"Taking this into account?" Yuan Shuo smirked. "The central region is engulfed by chaos and the borderlands have long been forsaken. Right now, they seek to concentrate power and pacify the central region—that is their first priority! When it comes to a small province on the border, they'll give it up if they have to. The world is still theirs so long as the central region is still under dynastic control!"

Did the central region not know that the situation was very complicated?

They did!

But they still chose to proceed down their chosen course of action and issue a redeployment command again and again, wanting Hou Xiaochen to proceed to his new post in the central region. The director simply refused to leave. Otherwise, he should've left years ago.

“What level of strength is Director Hou?” Li Hao’s brows knit together. “How does the central region have the resources to spare when they’re in such disarray? They send a mid Solar with an origin weapon to keep an eye on him. It’s not worth that effort if the director is a late Solar... is it?”

Sending a mid Solar to lie in wait for three years just for the purpose of surveillance. Was this a worthwhile task? Zhang Ting might have ascended to late Solar in the central region, matching Hou Xiaochen’s strength. Would there be a need to compel the director then?

“It depends.” Yuan Shuo shook his head. “Perhaps upstairs suspect that he’s fully recovered from his wounds. If he has, he was a peak Solar back in the day. He might be greater than Solar now!”

He really wasn’t sure about this hypothesis. Only Hou Xiaochen knew if his injuries were healed or not. He didn’t mention if his injuries were severe, nor did he say he wasn’t wounded. As it stood, no one was certain of the situation. So while the three great organizations had large numbers of Solars in their ranks, they didn’t dare easily provoke him.

“Are you really going to leave Silver Moon, teacher?” Li Hao dropped the topic and thought back to what Hou Xiaochen had just said.

“I have to leave!” Yuan Shuo grinned. “I made all of my preparations before I came. Whether I kill Sun Yifei or he kills me... I can’t go back to Silver City after this. My old friends will miss me dearly once my strength is revealed. I’ll bring more trouble to you guys if I stay. Not to mention, martial dao has declined in Silver Moon and there isn’t much to the supernatural world. It’s hard for me to have more opportunities if I don’t go.

“Additionally, Red Moon has been keeping a watch on Silver City. But if they must choose between you and me, their main focus will still be on me. Ying Hongyue knows my character. Once I leave Silver City, I will seek revenge on him!” the professor spoke matter-of-factly. “If I kill a Red Moon Solar and vanish after this expedition, he’ll guess that I’m coming for him. He might still send people to Silver Moon at that time, but he’ll certainly send more people to look for me!”

Because Ying Hongyue had once lost! He knew what kind of person Yuan Shuo was. When a powerhouse of this level disappeared from public sight, he would find a way to fish out Yuan Shuo and utilize everything possible to kill him.

“That’s why I wish for you to break through to Dominator.” Yuan Shuo patted his student’s shoulder with a smile. “Only then will you have the ability to protect yourself. If I leave and you do not have the strength of a Dominator, I won’t be able to help you resolve your troubles in the future.”

Li Hao lowered his head.

“It’s time to grow! Good boy, who doesn’t experience some trial and hardship?” Yuan Shuo laughed heartily. “I left my home early on when I was young and began my tempering. My enemies can be found everywhere beneath the heavens. I don’t know how many I’ve killed or terrorized to reach my current heights.”

“I’m worried about you, teacher,” Li Hao said in a muffled voice. “If you really are going to seek revenge on Red Moon, they have many Solars and probably those above Solar. These are just bits and pieces we hear on the border. They may be much stronger than that!”

“Isn’t that good?” Yuan Shuo chuckled. “The stronger they are, the more of a challenge! I’ve only just started nurturing the five spirits in my viscera. I still need to refine them and my organs later on! The road ahead is long and I’ll feel no pressure if my enemies are always Sunflare and Solar.

“Silver Moon’s martial world was very strong in those days, but why were there no Dominators in my era?

“It wasn’t that we weren’t good enough, it was that we were too good. We were so much better than previous generations, but the drawback of mine was that we did not have any pressure from Dominators above us. Half step Dominator was sufficient to dominate the martial world, no one felt a sense of urgency. And so, a bunch of half steps never made the full step to Dominator!

“If there was even one of us who made the breakthrough, there would’ve been at least seven or eight Dominators to emerge from our martial world!”

The professor was half regretful and half self-satisfied when he reached this point. “The blame goes to me for those little bastards not breaking through. I dominated them so completely that they couldn’t breathe. I was only half step Dominator, so how did they dare be stronger?”

“If I’d advanced back then... Ying Hongyue, Sun Yifei, and others would’ve all stepped into Dominator. But I didn’t, which sapped their drive.”

Li Hao couldn’t help but break out in laughter. It washed away his pensiveness from moments ago.

“Then the battle tomorrow...”

“Of course we fight!” Yuan Shuo replied calmly. “Keep your eyes peeled tomorrow! I couldn’t employ my true strength before because we faced only supernaturals. Whether it was me crushing others or others crushing me, I couldn’t utilize my full potential as the opponent was not a martial master. Sun Yifei is a very good opponent!

“As for the ruins... they’re just an add-on! Defeating Sun Yifei is the real gain—one far beyond treasures. Treasures can be had anytime, but an opponent who is a good match is the impetus for life’s purpose.

“Therefore, don’t be concerned about exposing our strength. If we can kill them all, we’ll kill them. If we can’t, then we kill as many as we can. We can kill them all the same even if they’re on their guard!” The professor turned cocky again. “Little Hao, you should shine with extraordinary brilliance when the occasion calls for it! No one becomes a powerhouse from constantly keeping a low profile. I know your misgivings about revealing too much—that means danger increases as well.

“However, powerhouses emerge from danger! Hou Xiaochen keeps a low profile now, doesn’t he? Yet, he was a far cry from that back in his day. He was so prominent that he dared erupt in open hostilities against Ying Hongyue! It’s because of that that no one thinks little of him now.

“Qiao Feilong kept a low profile, didn’t he? He was so low key that he didn’t have time to flex his magnificence as a Solar before I killed him!”

The two he spoke of had entirely different endings. One kept his head down all the way to Solar and died before he could exhibit anything. The other was very conspicuous for a long time, stepping down after he was injured. He was so quiet after that everyone thought he was at the end of his rope, but his preeminence of yesteryear still existed. No one dared run afoul of him and those in charge had to send a Solar to keep an eye on him.

These were the results of two different choices.

Li Hao nodded without a word. Teacher and disciple soon returned to their tent; Liu Yan and the others were back. Everyone was extremely quiet. Liu Yan didn’t say anything, Liu Long didn’t say anything. The young man didn’t ask if they’d seen Hu Po tonight.

The Silver City delegation kept to themselves this night to give Yuan Shuo time to rest. He would answer the challenge tomorrow and his opponent was a late Solar from the central region. Although the group was fully confident in the professor, they were still secretly apprehensive. Solars were one level higher than Dominators, particularly late Solars!

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At the same time, beneath the broken Rift Bridge.

Sun Yifei did not erect a tent to rest in. The sky was his blanket and the earth his bed. He leaned against a rock and looked up at the stars.

Resplendence twinkled overhead.

His three disciples made rounds of the surroundings, clearing away bugs and pests. In actuality, no snakes, rodents, or bugs dared approach the area. After an indeterminate period of time, the taciturn Sun Yifei suddenly broke the silence.

“Moxian, does Yuan Shuo’s disciple really have the strength of late Sunderer or half step Dominator?”

“Most likely.”

“A disciple of the Five Styles...” Sun Yifei thought it over. “You will take the field tomorrow! Bring your full strength to bear and see if you meet a worthy opponent. If he matches you, he will be very helpful for your progression to Dominator!”

“If I fall tomorrow... Take your junior brother and sister back to the central region!”

Chapter 203: Old Friends Meet (II)

“Master...”

“Listen to me. The ruins are not important. Do not be the blade in another’s hand,” Sun Yifei said calmly. “Although I am fully confident, my opponent is Yuan Shuo. Necessary preparations must be made. There is a ninety-nine percent chance that only one of us walks off the battlefield tomorrow. Whether it is him or me... it doesn’t matter!”

“My greatest regret back in the day was that I could not advance to Dominator. I hope you will complete that dream for me! If you cannot overcome Li Hao, forfeit in a timely manner! It is no shame to lose—martial masters are not afraid of loss. No one wins forever and I will not send you to your death so easily...”

“I will defeat him, master!”

“It is good to be confident.” Sun Yifei nodded with a smile. “Regardless, leave as quickly as you can if I am defeated! Yuan Shuo will not stop you. Our grudge is one of our generation. The rules of the martial world are that disaster does not extend to the family! As long as you do not die to Li Hao, I will not target Li Hao after my battle concludes with Yuan Shuo. Neither will he come for you...”

The three disciples listened worriedly, but also didn't quite believe that their master would lose. How was that even a possibility? He was a late Solar, one crossed over from a martial master! Only those above Solar could defeat him even in the central region. They were in Silver Moon province, yet a Dominator was inspiring their master to arrange his final affairs!

“Master, then... why don't we go back to the central region!” The female disciple couldn't bear it. They didn't have to fight!

“Nonsense!” Sun Yifei snorted. “I came here to do battle with Yuan Shuo! Whether I live or die, it is what I seek. Remember that as martial masters, you can lose, but you cannot withdraw without a fight! Unless you are a Sunderer against a Solar, the difference between you and the enemy will not be too great. When that is the case or if you are even in an advantageous position, choosing to retreat marks the end of your road!

“The path of a martial master is more difficult to walk. If you cannot accept that, you can choose to be a supernatural when you return. Your path will be your own then.”

With that, he closed his eyes and ignored his disciples. Rest was in order so he could meet Yuan Shuo in the field.

Worry and unease filled the faces of Sun Moxian and his junior brother and sister. They couldn't sleep after their master's speech. They weren't the only ones tonight—sleep was elusive for many.

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August 27.



The sky had just brightened. Hao Lianchuan might not have slept all night as he rushed to the Silver City tent first thing in the morning. Yuan Shuo pattered around inside, feeling no sense of urgency at all. He briefly washed up, ate breakfast, and cleaned himself up again before walking outside.

Hao Lianchuan looked at him with reddened eyes. “Must you battle?” He’d wanted to come to the professor all night long, but held himself back. He really couldn’t help the urge when morning came.

“Are you a martial master?” Yuan Shuo looked at him.

“I’m... not?” Hao Lianchuan answered after a long beat.

“So you won’t do!” Yuan Shuo walked past him and pressed forward. “Silver Moon martial masters rarely avoid battle. Those who do are either truly much weaker than their opponent, or they’re a lily-livered weakling.

“Martial masters bravely forge ahead. They do not avoid battle if they think they will not lose, that they can fight. Such is the case at any time, any place! Hong Yitang of the Sword Sect refrained from battling me back in the day because he knew he was less than me. He admitted that he was a wimp, so I couldn’t be bothered challenging him a third time when he avoided me two times.

“Hao Lianchuan, you’re a decent person. What a pity that you did not ascend as a martial master. If you had, you would be stronger than you are now!”

Hao Lianchuan looked on wordlessly. There were plenty of supernaturals who did not ascend from martial dao. Who said that those who used to be martial masters must be stronger?

“But Sun Yifei is a late Solar...”

“I can beat him all the same!” Yuan Shuo brimmed with confidence.

“In that case, stop at first blood...” Hao Lianchuan changed tactics upon seeing that he was making no headway.

“There’s no such thing in our battles, unless we’re teaching our disciples. I will stop at first blood if Sun Yifei admits he’s my disciple!”

This is complete bullshit! Hao Lianchuan nearly lost his mind. “I’m doing this for your own good!”

“There’s a kind of love called ‘for your own good’. But you’re not my parents, so I don’t need your love. Hao Lianchuan, as opposed to wasting your efforts on this, you should consider what the consequences might be if I kill Sun Yifei.”

Hao Lianchuan utterly gave up! This was hopeless!

“What consequences?” he said weakly. “You’ll be the strongest of the gathering if you kill Sun Yifei. The other organizations will not give up the excavation, but they’ll likely band together. They’ll start off scattered, then unite the more we explore. We’ll just need to be on guard against alliances once we enter the ruins.”

Give up?

That wasn’t a possibility. If the other factions did so and the Night Watchers took the defensive origin weapon, the organizations wouldn’t be able to sleep at night anymore. Thus, they wouldn’t leave. They would just tighten what was a loose alliance.

Of course, this wasn’t important. What did matter was the potential consequences of Hao Lianchuan taking a stand and preventing Sun Yifei from killing Yuan Shuo. This was what had kept Hao Lianchuan up all night. He thought of Director Hou’s arrangements when his thoughts traveled here—he could lend the Flaming Phoenix Spear to Yuan Shuo!

“You don’t have any weapons do you?” He caught up to the professor and lowered his voice. “I can lend you a spear... Do you know how to use spears?”

“Don’t need it!” Yuan Shuo turned him down.

Hao Lianchuan was extremely close to stamping his foot with indignation. “This weapon is different!” He clenched his teeth and kept his voice down with effort. It was an origin weapon!

“Don’t need it, we’ll have greater trouble if it’s exposed. If we’re to use it, we should wait until we’re inside the ruins.” Yuan Shuo still turned the man down. He knew what the spear was, but he didn’t need it.

The Flaming Phoenix Spear was Silver Moon’s only origin weapon. It might result in greater trouble if it was unmasked. It might even attract uninvolved personnel—they’d come solely to take the origin weapon. It was the weapon’s first departure from Hou Xiaochen. No one dared attack the director, but it was another case entirely with the Silver Moon Night Watchers.

“But...” Hao Lianchuan said worriedly. “Really, you don’t stand a chance. You’ll have some hope with it in your hands.”

“I don’t need it, don’t worry, You can lend it to me after I win and we enter the ruins. You’ll witness some unexpected surprises then,” Yuan Shuo chuckled.

It was an unexpected surprise when the enemy realized they hadn’t fully seen through you. Yuan Shuo was only going to utilize the fire heart ape against Sun Yifei. He didn’t even want to expose the stone blade. As for whether or not he can match his old opponent, that would be apparent once they exchanged blows.

Yuan Shuo wasn’t willing to use these powerful weapons against Sun Yifei; neither was he concerned that the man might use underhanded tactics against him. Such was the unspoken accord of martial masters.

It would be an open and aboveboard battle!

Of course, it was normal to see vicious techniques being employed. Some specialized in this arena, so ruthless or brutal moves were acceptable. On the other hand, would Sun Yifei have a scarlet shadow with him?

Yuan Shuo deemed it unlikely. If the man knew about the shadows, his first reaction would be to kill and eat it. He wouldn't nurture it. Ying Hongyue would be aware of that as well, so even though Yuan Shuo could not see the entities, he knew that his opponent wouldn't have one.

In that case, what was the point of bringing to the Flaming Phoenix Spear?

The others caught up to them as the two spoke. Some were anxious and others excited. They were about to watch a battle between Solars! Most of them had never seen such a high level battle before.

Some tents stirred with activity in the distance. A few supernaturals kept pace from afar, also anticipating the battle.

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Only shattered remains could be found where the bridge once stood. A group of Ghostfaces hovered in and out of sight around Sun Yifei. The man was cleaning up the premises, creating a clearing beneath the bridge. He didn't seem to take note of the Ghostfaces behind him.

"Senior Sun," Hao Kong spoke up when it was apparent that Sun Yifei wouldn't address him. "Do you insist on fighting Yuan Shuo?"

Sun Yifei sent a large rock flying with a sweep of his staff. He tilted his head with a side glance. "Is there a problem?"

“Not at all!” Hao Kong answered in a muffled voice. “We just hope for the senior to show mercy and not to kill Yuan Shuo. That will easily cause conflict between Red Moon and the Night Watchers.”

“Fists and legs have no eyes. Life and death are not of consideration in the ring! Whoever shows mercy is always the one to die!” Sun Yifei was obviously declining Hao Kong.

The Solar in charge of the campsite kept a firm grip on his temper. “Senior, this is also Violet Moon’s inclination.”

“Violet Moon?” Sun Yifei turned back with a smile. “When Red Moon was established, the seven moons of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet soared into the sky! The Violet Moon now is not who she was before. To me, Violet Moon is still the little girl from that year. She died, and the one who inherited her position is trash. You threaten me with her??”

Supernatural power surged around him as many Ghostfaces raised their heads with anger. Whether it was real or fake anger, Violet Moon was their leader in Silver Moon. If they didn’t stir to indignation when she was being insulted, they would be in for it if she found out.

“All of you, stay away from me.” Sun Yifei flicked another glance at Hao Kong. “You rather disgust me. It is ever harder to see through Ying Hongyue after he founded Red Moon, especially those things beside you. I may not be able to see them, but I can more or less sense them. Don’t get too close to me, or I’ll want to kill you and take one of them to see if I can eat it.”

Hao Kong’s eyes widened with dismay and he fell silent.

“In that case, as you wish, senior! But I hope you do not take the bit in your own mouth too much when we enter the ruins. We’ve made arrangements, so please do not ruin the entire plan.”

“We’ll see!” Sun Yifei laughed and flapped his hand, as if shooing them away.

Chapter 204: Old Friends Meet (III)

Hao Kong said nothing else and vanished along with the Ghostfaces. They reappeared several hundred meters away, standing on part of a cliff that jutted out. They were plainly settling in to observe rather than leave.

Another group of people in black appeared a while later. They wore cloaks and chose another precipice to observe the battle. Sun Yifei flicked a glance at the group—the Celestial delegation. Red Moon liked ghost face masks. Although he was part of the organization, he didn't wear one and no one forced him to. Celestials liked black outfits and cloaks. Their style of operation was even more peculiar than Red Moon.

When it came to Yama, not many of their people covered their faces, but they were wreathed with dense killing intent. They were probably the most bloodthirsty out of the three great organizations and killed in a very gory manner.

A group of rather ominous people also claimed a spot as Sun Yifei ruminated. Theirs didn't jut out far enough, so they blasted away at the stone wall and had earth supernaturals create an observation platform for themselves.

The delegations of the three great organizations were thus all in attendance. The rest were not far behind. In a few minutes, people from the two local mid-sized organizations also came.

Those of Light Island wore white outfits and counted numerous female members among their ranks. They steered a floating ship to the premises—a supernatural object instead of a flying ship. It didn't reach the level of an origin weapon. The organization docked their ship in the air and looked down upon the earth, quite visible in their presence.

As for the Sword Sect, Hong Yitang broke through the air with a longsword on his back. He stopped at a far distance away and raised cupped fists. "Big brother Sun!"

Sun Yifei tilted his head at the latest addition and actually addressed the man.

“Hong Yitang,” he jeered. “Ranked last among the Seven Swords, to think that you’d be living a fine life while the others are dead!”

“Perhaps I treasure my life more.” Hong Yitang sighed, not angry in the slightest. He nodded at his own disciples. “Big brother Sun seems to have brought some outstanding disciples with you. If there’s a chance, we can let the younger generation conduct some exchanges with each other when your challenge is over.”

Sun Yifei followed his line of gaze and saw a young woman behind Hong Yitang. The look in her eyes was sharp and she held herself with the air of a swordswoman. She also wore a longsword on her back and was dressed differently from usual supernaturals.

“Has she grasped the aura?”

“Not yet.” Hong Yitang shook his head with some regret. “The aura is difficult to comprehend. If there’s a reason for the decline of martial dao, this would be it!”

Sun Yifei nodded, not voicing any condescending opinions. “Let today be the day! Hongxiu, you’ll spar with this young woman in a bit!”

Hong Yitang looked at Sun Yifei’s female disciple with surprise.

“Hongxiu is a late Sunderer,” Sun Yifei explained calmly. “Your daughter is roughly the same, correct? She looks like your daughter as the resemblance is striking. However, she feels stronger than you as you didn’t have this air of keenness around you back in the day!”

“She is my daughter. Hong Qing, greet Uncle Sun!”

Hong Qing swiftly walked forward and raised cupped fists. “Uncle Sun!”

“Spare the pleasantries, there’s no point to them! I don’t think much of your father, so don’t imitate him and be too scared to answer a letter of challenge when it comes for you.”

Hong Qing felt a bit awkward, whereas her father didn’t mind. “I might not be standing here if I’d accepted it. I’m less than him, big brother Sun, so why go looking for trouble?”

“Trash!” Sun Yifei cursed, then laughed. “But you’re right, you know yourself well!”

“Do you intend to go by the rules?” Hong Yitang looked at his remaining disciples.

“Can I not?”

“It’s not that, but Yuan... Yuan Shuo’s disciples don’t seem to be by his side. He only has a junior disciple that he took in a few years ago, and that one seems to have focused on civil subjects at first. He walked the path of martial dao only later and his tenure is less than three years.”

He meant to say, who’s going against him from your side?

Sun Yifei couldn’t be bothered to answer. What do you know?

“Step aside, I don’t have time to reminisce about the past with you!” He impatiently waved away the other.

Hong Yitang chuckled and walked back to the Sword Sect delegation with his daughter. As they moved away, Sun Yifei suddenly said, “Hongxiu and your daughter will be the opening act. They fight to first blood and the focus is sparring. You don’t have other opinions, do you?”



Hong Yitang's expression shifted slightly—not because it was bad to be an opening act, but that the opening act was usually meant as an appetizer. The brutal fights would follow after, as would the strongest opponents.

What did this mean?

The sword master thought that Sun Yifei would send his Slayer disciple to open the matches with Yuan Shuo's disciple. Plainly, this wasn't what he intended. He was going to send his senior disciples into the field!

Though confused, Hong Yitang wasn't at liberty to ask too many questions. "We can do that!" He nodded.

"Mmhhh, good!" Sun Yifei smiled and looked at his female disciple when the surroundings were clear. "We can't have you make this trip in vain. Hong Yitang's daughter is quite strong and roughly on the same level as you. That's good. A good match makes for the best opponent! Don't underestimate her.

"While I don't think much of her father, there are no weaklings among the Seven Swords of Silver Moon! As the Earthturner Sword, Hong Yitang turned heaven and earth upside down when he unsheathed his sword. Being a swordswoman as well, his daughter will not be weak. Swordsmen are still very strong among martial masters..."

Hongxiu nodded and asked hesitantly, "What about senior brother, master?"

"His opponent is that Li Hao! You and Hong Yitang's daughter will be sparring—treat it as a practice match between another of the same sect." Sun Yifei looked at Sun Moxian. "Meanwhile, you and Li Hao don't need to have any reservations. You are on a battlefield! You will attack without regret even if he can't take a single one of your blows. If you kill him, that's his fault for being too weak!"

Sun Moxian nodded heavily!

A new group of people walked in at this time. The Night Watchers had arrived!

Sun Yifei saw that person from a long distance away, that familiar figure that haunted his mind these many years. He straightened upright. “Yuan Shuo!”

“Sun Yifei!” Yuan Shuo grinned, as if seeing an old friend. “I thought you really did die that year, but to think that you’re still alive! That’s quite worthy of congratulations! Few are those who live after an encounter with me. I’d like to see if I can still beat you to death after all these years of living!”

“Give it a try!” Sun Yifei laughed heartily. “I’d like to see if you still possess your demonic air after cowering for so many years. I had the time of my life killing people in the central region. You had the same hiding in Silver Moon, didn’t you?”

Yuan Shuo chuckled without a response. Neither did Sun Yifei say anything else.

The professor waved everyone back and walked forward with Li Hao. An empty clearing of roughly one hundred square meters had been cleared beneath the bridge. It stood out as it was level and free of rocks.

“Same old rules?” Their exchange was blunt.

“Same old rules! We don’t need to say anything else!” Yuan Shuo grinned. “This is my disciple Li Hao. Are yours going to attack together or come one by one?”

“Only Moxian is needed!” Sun Yifei responded faintly. “I choose the venue, you set the rules. Nothing else needs to be said between us. Will our disciples be sparring or dueling?”

In sparring, one did not fight to the death. Opponents fought to the death in a duel!

“Have you gone soft?” Yuan Shuo smirked.

“I’m worried that you’ll be distracted when your disciple dies!” Sun Yifei sneered. “In that case, we duel!”

“My wishes as well!” Yuan Shuo glanced at Li Hao. The young man nodded, a motion echoed by Sun Moxian. Both sides were ready to destroy each other.

“Big brother Yuan,” Hong Yitang called out. “Big brother Sun says that my daughter and his female disciple can open the matches. Do you agree, big brother Yuan?”

Yuan Shuo tilted his head with a smile. “I do!”

Hong Yitang smiled back. Even though he was a Solar now, he was still less than fully confident when facing two martial masters of the same era as him. It wasn’t that he was weaker than them, but that he’d never felt confident in front of them. That was the case then, as was the case now.

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Yuan Shuo backed out of the circle with Li Hao and lowered his voice. “This is just as well, you can observe the girl’s moves. Since she’s also from the qimei staff discipline, her techniques and secret arts will be similar. While I believe that you’ll win... it’s best to be careful!

“Forfeit the match when you find yourself unable to win. Don’t force yourself to remain in the arena! If he kills you because you refuse to concede, that will make things dicey for me too!”

Li Hao nodded. That was all Yuan Shuo had to say. Some things weren’t that simple either. If Li Hao was defeated and had to forfeit in front of the public eye, that might heavily damage the aura of a younger martial master—particularly one that had to sense their aura.

The ancient records spoke of nurturing an aura of invincibility! If the martial master suffered a defeat during this process, it was the worst kind of failure to endure. Nine out of ten would falter at this step and never become a Dominator.

Much of the blame for so many Silver Moon martial masters being unable to break through lay at the feet of Yuan Shuo and the others. The candidates either died or were defeated during their process of nurturing the aura. How was it possible to advance to Dominator then?

Hong Qing strode over from the Sword Sect delegation, a longsword on her back. Sun Yifei's disciple Hongxiu also walked out with an aloof expression, a long qimei staff in her hands. Various powerhouses on all sides cast their attention to the two girls.

Two Sunderers! And two late Sunderers at that. This was a practice match of the Fullmoon level; it drew a lot of interest. Most in attendance were Darkmoons, this was a fight they could understand. Few were those that'd crossed paths with martial masters, so they looked forward to this sparring match as well. How strong were martial masters?

"They're really strong!" someone grunted with shock when the two entered the field.

There was nothing to see yet, but internal force flared when the two set foot into the ring. Gusts whipped around the area and sent some small rocks flying, enabling certain supernaturals to sense the might of martial masters.

Li Hao watched intently as well, not underestimating them just because they were weaker than him.

Chapter 205: Duel (I)

"Sword Sect, Hong Qing!"

"Red Moon, Sun Hongxiu!"

Martial masters did not exchange an abundance of greetings when they sparred, just brief self introductions. Hong Qing unsheathed her sword and stabbed forward. Smoke and mist coiled around the two opponents, kicking up sand and dust in a massive wave of pebbles.

“Break!” Hongxiu grunted and slammed her staff into the ground. The earth trembled—the entire surface shook. Within the haze, she raised her staff and brought it down on Hong Qiu’s head.

The two young women instantly shifted to combat readiness and met each other in battle. They didn’t exchange probing moves as both sides knew they were evenly matched at a similar cultivation level. It would come down to experience and proper usage of their arts.

Sword light shot in all directions while the staff danced through the air. Their moves were fast and ferocious! Some Darkmoons on the side were bewildered by the sight.

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The Night Watcher delegation.

“They’re so strong!” Sharp gasps abounded. “Why does it feel like they’re much stronger than the martial masters we met before?”

Why?

Because these were true martial masters with a heritage to draw from, not dabblers. Whether in terms of secret arts or physique, the two on the field were in peak condition. These kinds of martial masters were nothing that amateurs in martial dojos could compare to. Neither were secret arts available by the side of the street.

Currently, inside the clearing.

Hongxiu spun her staff so quickly that not even water droplets would touch her body. She swiftly advanced on Hong Qing. Longsword and staff clashed against each other; sparks flew in all directions amid a cacophony of clinks and clangs.

Two late Sunderers occupied a lot of space when they fought. The clearing created by Sun Yifei was instantly pockmarked with holes.

Outside the clearing.

Someone exclaimed with surprise. Hong Qing's sword stabbed forward, past the qimei staff, and traveled straight for her opponent's throat. Sun Hongixu's eyes glinted coldly as her staff spun fiercely like a meat grinder. It rotated at high velocity, seeking to envelop Hong Qing's longsword and the right arm that wielded it. It wanted to churn her arm to pieces!

Plainly, the opening for Hong Qing's sword was a weakness purposefully showcased by Sun Hongxiu.

The two young women fought with extreme viciousness despite their youth. Many supernaturals held their breath and watched with wide-open eyes. Some wore expressions of worry, as if unable to bear the thought of either of them being injured.

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The Night Watcher delegation.

Liu Long, Wang Ming, and Liu Yan impassively watched the fight. Wang Ming observed with a rapt look in his eyes, quite worked up by the battle. After a while, he turned around to see Liu Long and Liu Yan watching with blank expressions.

"Aren't you guys nervous?" he asked curiously.

“It’s just an opening match,” Liu Long replied after a moment. “It looks pretty enough!”

What does that mean?

“They’re being so vicious to each other,” Wang Ming responded with bafflement. “Look, that Hong Qing’s arm is about to twisted apart. How is that pretty?”

From his perspective, this battle represented the might of martial masters and how dangerous it was to cross paths with one. It was very exciting!

“Vice Captain Liu, what do you think?” Wang Ming looked at Liu Yan. Liu Long was too strong as a Dominator, it was normal that he didn’t think much of the fight. Then what about Liu Yan?

The woman flicked a glance at him and paused for a beat before saying, “They’re sparring!”

Wang Ming turned the response over in his mind. Sparring? So Liu Yan also wasn’t too impressed by the perilous fight that was beautiful in a deadly sort of way?

“This is the most amazing martial encounter that I’ve ever witnessed!” the handsome young supernatural said after a while. “Listen to the hum of the sword and the staff breaking through the air. Sand and rocks fly everywhere and the ground splits open... It seems so precarious! Director Liu, aren’t real martial masters supposed to be like this?”

“You’ll see soon!” Liu Long said calmly.

“Professor Yuan and Sun Yifei?”

“Maybe not!” Liu Long didn’t say much. Who says that Li Hao won’t bring a real martial master fight to you?

The captain didn’t have much experience facing off against martial foes, but he’d fought Li Hao plenty of times. Li Hao bore the demeanor of a martial master. If Sun Yifei’s disciple was also a real martial master, then the assembly today would be blessed with a sensational fight below Dominator.

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Inside the clearing.

The harrowing battle continued. Supernaturals around the perimeter gasped and exhaled sharply, like they were the ones who would die at any time.

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Immediately around the clearing.

Sun Yifei furrowed his brow. Although they’d said it was a sparring match, it still didn’t quite satisfy him. He looked at Sun Moxian standing next to him. “What do you think?”

“Not bad.” Sun Moxian chuckled. “Junior sister has solid foundations.”

“And?”

The young man fell silent. There was no and. That was it. She was performing acceptably and her foundations were solid. What else was there to say?



Sun Yifei laughed when his disciple didn't say anything else. Very good! As it should be, as he expected. Other than a pretty fight and solid foundations, there was nothing else to point out. Of course, Sun Hongxiu was less experienced than Sun Moxian and hadn't killed many enemies yet. She was to be commended for matching her opponent to this degree. The girl would have no problems handling ordinary supernaturals. Just listen to those reactions around them!

Derision appeared deep in the depths of Sun Yifei's eyes. It wasn't targeted at anyone; he simply scorned all supernaturals that were not born of martial masters. They were all trash!

The battle continued, but Sun Yifei wasn't interested in it anymore.

Neither was Sun Moxian. They looked into the distance at the same time, at Yuan Shuo and Li Hao.

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Li Hao and Yuan Shuo happened to be looking at them as well. Four pairs of eyes met. Li Hao smiled bashfully and quickly ducked his head. Yuan Shuo jeered and smirked at Sun Yifei.

The four swiftly retracted their gazes.

"Sun Moxian will not be an easy person to handle," Yuan Shuo muttered. "Martial masters can discern a thing or two from posture and the look in one's eyes. Don't treat his junior sister's strength as a barometer for his strength."

"Mm, I understand." Li Hao nodded. He wouldn't underestimate the other; he'd only treat his opponent like the captain. He would put himself in the mindset of their last battle, when the captain nearly beat him to death.

Li Hao wanted to coalesce the sword aura before the fight. Once battle commenced, he would only have one goal. The goal of a martial master was simple—kill the enemy! Everything else could be set aside in pursuit of killing the opponent.

Master and disciple on both sides were deep in hushed conversation while grunts and shouts abounded inside the clearing. A massive collision rang through the air, followed by two muffled thumps.

Hong Qing was struck square in the chest and flew backward, blood welling from her mouth. The ground fractured when she slammed into it. Sun Hongxiu wasn't better off. Her arm was pierced through and blood gushed from it. She took a dozen steps backward before stabilizing her footing. She breathed heavily, maintaining a tight grip on the staff. A proud look gleamed out of her eyes.

She was the victor! Although injured, she had indeed won. The Qimei Staff had defeated the Earthturner Sword!

"I concede!" A depressed Hong Qing spat out another mouthful of blood. She'd made a name for herself in the modern day martial world of Silver Moon. Even the older generation of martial masters numbered on her list of challenges. She won more often than she lost. Thus, Hong Qing considered herself to be very strong in martial dao.

But today, a disciple of the Qimei Staff King on par with her cultivation level had defeated her in a sparring match! It was a tough pill to swallow.

Off in the distance, Hong Yitang didn't say anything. It was normal to win or lose. A disciple of the Qimei Staff King was no ordinary person. As strong as his Earthturner Sword was, neither was the Qimei Staff for show. So his daughter had lost. It wouldn't have a great effect since she was yet to gather her aura. One failure was just as well. It would teach his daughter that there was always someone better.

"Big brother Sun teaches his disciples well! I wholeheartedly concede defeat!" Hong Yitang offered pleasantries while beckoning to his daughter. Hong Qing walked off in low spirits.

For some reason, she suddenly muttered when she passed Li Hao, "Don't you lose too. Our Silver Moon martial world has already lost once. Another loss would be humiliating!"

She left with large strides, still hopeful that Li Hao would win. He was also of Silver Moon's martial world. Who knew where that Sun Moxian was from? He wasn't of Silver Moon, in any case. His master had long left the province.

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Li Hao was caught off guard by the sudden exhortation, but didn't pay attention to it. Instead, he thought for a bit and asked, "Um... can I borrow your sword?"

He recalled that he only had Stellaris; there were too many people present and the sword was too sharp. It wasn't ideal to expose it. No one else he was with had a good sword, but this woman's was quite nice. He watched it pierce through a piece of rock and emerge undamaged.

Nice sword!

"My sword?" Hong Qing blinked. Wasn't he of the Five Styles discipline? That was a discipline that was skilled at the fist, palm, and claw. It wasn't adept with the longsword!

Despite those thoughts, she handed the sword to Li Hao. This was for the glory of Silver Moon's martial world!

Hong Yitang frowned and sighed inwardly. His daughter... was too naive. This wasn't good! It might give rise to unnecessary trouble if Li Hao used the sword to defeat or even kill Sun Moxian.

Of course, Sun Yifei might not mind—Hong Yitang was just too used to being cautious. He immediately quelled the slightest bit of dissatisfaction. The sword had been lent out, he might offend Yuan Shuo before Sun Yifei if he took it back.

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Li Hao flicked the blade with his finger when he received the weapon. He smiled at the ensuing crisp sword hum. Good sword! He took off his jacket, leaving a vest paired with Inspectorate issued leather boots. It made for an odd outfit, but he didn't care.

Across from him, Sun Moxian took down the staff he wore on his back and nodded at Li Hao. The two walked toward the center at the same time.

"Disciple of the Qimei Staff King, Sun Moxian!"

"Disciple of the Five Styles King, Li Hao!" The two were very polite in the arena.

Around them, supernaturals watching the fights were regretful that the first had concluded. Someone wondered in a carrying voice, "Apparently, Li Hao hasn't been a disciple for long and learned martial dao for less than three years. Is he just going to his death?"

"What a pity, that first match was a sight to behold. But it's no loss either way, we saw a great martial master fight!"

The conversation among supernaturals was that the upcoming fight would be nothing worth watching. It wouldn't be as exciting as the first one, in any case.

Within the clearing.

Li Hao and Sun Moxian looked at each other, not paying attention to anyone else. They had eyes only for each other. Li Hao's gaze was solemn. This was his first time truly meeting a half step Dominator—and in a duel, not a sparring match.

This was not an ambush, it was direct combat!

## Chapter 206: Duel (II)

Li Hao stuck the longsword into the ground; he was in no hurry to use it. Instead, he settled in the stance for the Five Styles. Likewise, there was only Li Hao in Sun Moxian's line of sight. He raised his staff; the two looked at each other. No one was in a hurry to attack, both were waiting for the right opening.

After a while, the crowd on the perimeter started agitating impatiently when the fight didn't begin.

"Why aren't they starting yet?"

"Are they playing house? Two guys looking at each other. Are they falling in love or what?" Those raising a ruckus were more from the small organizations. Not that many spoke up in the larger organizations as their hierarchy was more defined. The rank and file didn't dare utter a peep if those in charge didn't say a word.

Yuan Shuo gently stomped his foot on the ground. A piece of rock splintered into eight pieces and shot in all directions. The fragments moved so quickly that it was astounding!

Pfft pfft pfft! Puncture sounds echoed as the pieces connected with eight catcalling supernaturals. Half of them were dead on the spot!

The action stunned the crowd; those that survived did so with the aid of powerhouses who halted the fragment for them. Tempers rose exponentially until a long staff descended from above. Sparks crackling around the weapon, it landed with a boom!

A Sunflare was pulverized to dust—dead!

The premises instantly quieted down. Yuan Shuo had kicked the rocks and Sun Yifei flung the staff. The two powerhouses didn't say anything, they just continued to observe the fight. The perimeter was now so silent that a pin drop could be heard in the canyon.

Hong Yitang had long withdrawn to a remote distance and snorted at the situation. It was one thing when it was just a sparring match, now both side's prized disciples were dueling to the death. You idiots run your mouths without stop, I'd suspect they were two entirely different people if they didn't kill you for the offense!

These two fellows might slaughter the entire crowd first if they didn't shut up, then commence their own duel. Hong Yitang was all too familiar with their style because he'd been one of them back in the day.

Hard swallows could be heard throughout the assembly. This display of strength was too brutal! It only took a few words of opinion before the two martial masters butchered eight Darkmoons in quick succession, as well as a Sunflare!

Sunflare was the peak of Silver Moon strength. Solars were enigmatic personages who could not be fathomed. It was only on an occasion like this could they be found in abundance—they usually stayed out of sight in ordinary times.

The assembly was shocked, furious, and terrified. A Sunflare hadn't been able to withstand a single blow through the air! This was horrifying!

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The two in the clearing blurred into movement. They'd sensed fluctuations in each other when their masters attacked—opportunity had come!

Soundless and motionless, Black Tiger Heart Gouge!

A hand ripped through the air while a long staff jabbed for the head. Li Hao dodged adroitly and threw his head back with a howl. Tiger Roar Shakes The Heavens!

He clawed forward the second the staff hesitated and connected with a wet squelching sound. Blood and flesh flew through the air! The halted staff swiftly descended, as if pausing just to dispel Li Hao's faltering. It smashed down on its target!

“Hup!” the young man roared and sprang off the ground. He grabbed at the staff, which created an opening for it to crash down on his head. Blood spurted in all directions, but Li Hao maintained a firm grip on the staff and didn’t let it connect with full force. Though blood dyed his face, he was utterly fearless.

Both hands clasping the qimei

staff, he rose from the ground and erupted with the bear style. He followed the length of the weapon and brought his hands down in a hammer blow like he was a massive bear!

Sun Moxian shook his weapon, sending force reverberating up its length. Internal force exploded like blades, leaving bloody marks on Li Hao’s hands. The latter continued following the staff to finish his double-handed blow. It connected with a massive boom while a roaring Sun Moxian yanked away his weapon. He slammed it against the ground, shattering any rocks in its way. The fragments sprayed into the surroundings.

The two moved extremely swiftly, exchanging a dozen moves before most of the crowd recovered from two powerhouses killing those who’d given offense. Li Hao clawed bloody gouges into his opponent’s chest, whereas Sun Moxian broke the skin on Li Hao’s head.

The moment the long staff swung down, Li Hao flattened himself and followed it upward, like a water ripple. Hands and feet moving in unison, the two youngsters kicked each other on the ground. Rocks once more shattered explosively!

Smoke and sand billowed around them as Li Hao utilized the Five Styles to their extreme amid the dusty blowout. Sun Moxian was equally versed in fist and foot. While his staff was long, it was very agile. He drew it out and slammed it forward!

Li Hao suffered another blow to his chest —bones broke with a loud crunch. His fingers darted out like a sword, grabbing his opponent’s wrist to rip a large chunk of flesh out of it!

Both young men backed away. Li Hao leapt into the air before either side took another breath and kicked his leg out. A staff immediately hovered beneath his foot in response—the staff was like a spear and it wanted to run Li Hao through!

At the moment, Li Hao's leg was so nimble that it didn't seem human. It was more like a snake or the tail of a monkey! His leg wrapped around the staff and he curled the rest of himself around it with incredible flexibility. Waving his fists around, he punched Sun Moxian. Internal force roiled and explosive sounds tore through the air.

Sun Moxian spun the staff around and slammed it down on the ground!

Li Hao followed like a shadow, twining himself around it as if a monkey. He brandished his fists, occasionally curving them into claws and sometimes balling them up, delivering an incessant barrage on his opponent.

Those around the perimeter quickly found their attention held again. Li Hao was wrapped around the qimei staff and attacking along its length. He soon clawed bloody strips from his opponent and was in turn covered in blood when slammed into the ground.

Was there any beauty to their fight?

None at all!

There was none of the artistry from the first match, just violence! Indescribable violence!

Blood and flesh flew through the air as sand and stone sprayed everywhere. The fracturing of bone and squelching of flesh...

The surroundings were terrifyingly quiet—not only due to the earlier warning, but because such gory scenes didn't leave the crowd in the mood to discuss anything else. The only thing they knew was nerves that grew tauter the more they saw.



So this was a duel! They could understand the difference between this battle and the previous one. While the one prior had also been deadly, the two opponents had nursed too many misgivings. They didn't go for the crotch, pierce the throat, or stab the heart. Neither did they ruthlessly gouge the chest or smash through the head with incredibly violent strokes!

Martial masters were born for slaughter. Were they still martial masters if they didn't target weaknesses and just poked at their opponent's strong suit?

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Standing next to Hong Yitang, Hong Qing clenched her fists tight and stared fixedly. Her father also watched quietly, thinking back to the old days of Silver Moon's martial world. This was how it'd been—blood was shed in the arena and to shed blood was to kill!

What sparring matches? Those didn't exist! With the decline of martial masters after the rise of the supernatural, it'd been too long since he witnessed such a sight.

.....

In the distance.

Sun Yifei watched gravely. Sun Hongxiu and her junior brother were also very nervous.

"Shameless!" Sun Hongxiu grunted before her master sent her stumbling with a slap! She lowered her head without a word.

Neither did Sun Yifei say anything. He disciplined his disciple because Li Hao's latest hand claw had nearly connected with Sun Moxian's private parts. While the latter evaded the blow, his pants had split open and blood was dripping down.

Was the move shameless?

It was indeed shameless!

Other people could say so, but Sun Yifei's disciple could not! This was a duel to the death—if his own disciples found the moves dishonorable, what were they martial masters for?

The lofty martial masters of stories and legends were dead! All of the survivors had committed such deeds at one point or another. Grabbing the crotch and gouging the heart were normal moves. True martial masters could endure such tests. Those who couldn't were dead, and nothing needed to be said about the dead.

Sun Yifei only looked on silently. This was just the beginning. His disciple's aura was yet to be unleashed.

.....

In the clearing, Sun Moxian roared before sweeping the four corners with his staff. He forced Li Hao to hop and skip, jumping to and fro like a monkey! The former panted heavily. He was covered in blood stains that'd dyed his shirt. Li Hao was in no better shape as his face was full of dust. One of his legs was twisted. It seemed to have been broken by one of the staff strikes.

Suddenly, the look in Li Hao's eyes changed slightly.

"What should be demonstrated from the Five Styles and Qimei Staff has been put on display. Shall we get a bit more serious?" Sun Moxian regarded his opponent coldly and thrust his staff into the earth.

A rustle ran through the surroundings, but no one dared say a word. Get a bit more serious?

Li Hao took a few steps back and pulled out the longsword in the ground.

“My master is known for the Five Styles.” He flashed a grin. “I wouldn’t dare call myself of the Five Styles discipline if I didn’t fully showcase their ingenuity!”

Sun Moxian pulled out his staff in response. A surge of aura roiled through the area, sweeping away smoke and fog!

“The earth?” Li Hao’s eyes widened after he took his measure. Indeed, the earth! He sensed the ripples of the earth—Sun Moxian had comprehended the aura of the earth! What a coincidence. If it wasn’t for his teacher telling him to learn the aura of the sword, Li Hao would be using the one of earth at this moment too.

Who would’ve thought that a Qimei Staff disciple would comprehend the aura of the earth? It was slightly different from Li Hao’s—he sensed the vigorous firmness of the element! The staff seemed to be connected to the ground and its power enveloped the weapon. The earth sang with happiness when the staff was pulled out!

“Kill!” Sun Moxian’s momentum changed—he was a veteran general on the battlefield. No matter who it was in front of him, they would die from his blow!

The staff was like a spear—marvelous, intricate, and mighty. Sun Moxian was significantly stronger than before when he utilized his aura. The ground split open before the staff even connected with the earth.

Li Hao’s sharp eyes tracked it! The earth? Fantastic, I like that. His sword shot out, but it was a sword comprised of internal force!

A flash of sword light twinkled without sound and vanished. Li Hao also vanished on the spot. When he reappeared, the sword was about to stab into his opponent’s throat.

“Ghost Shadow Sword!” Sun Yifei identified slowly and looked sharply at Yuan Shuo. The old thing was adept at the Five Styles, yet passed on Ghost Shadow Sword to his disciple! This was unexpected.

### Chapter 207: Duel (III)

In this moment, the battle seemed to be Sun Moxian’s alone. His staff broke through the air with unparalleled ferociousness; the hum from Li Hao’s sword was nearly imperceptible. The latter moved like a shadow, swiftly drawing near and swiftly backing away.

Li Hao immediately retreated when his weapon didn’t connect with the enemy. Such was the Ghost Shadow Sword, as if an assassin.

The two sides became entangled with each other once more. The staff swung again and again, blurring into such motion that not even a droplet of water could get past it. It ensured that Li Hao’s sword couldn’t penetrate its defenses.

Sun Moxian abruptly roared and split the ground open. The four sides around the clearing caved in, revealing Li Hao’s figure. The staff instantly honed in on him and shot straight at his head. The aura of the earth had been deployed to great effect, fissuring the four sides around the clearing without anyone knowing. The aftershocks made Li Hao lose his footing and exposed his whereabouts.

“Kill!!” Sun Moxian roared. His staff seemed to split the air as rocks flew apart before the weapon even touched them. Danger was upon Li Hao!

He didn’t expect his opponent to fracture the earth; Sun Moxian’s aura was also stronger than he anticipated. Both his feet were off the ground—the situation was hard to endure and the descending staff even more terrifying. Li Hao still didn’t use the aura of the earth—he might not have time to deploy it even if he did.

In that case...

A ray of sword light exploded forth. A second and third followed in the blink of an eye...

The Nine Forged Force!

He instantly completed a switch of breathing methods. The more critical the moment, the more composed he was. He activated another secret art at this dire juncture!

“Break!” Li Hao slashed forward with six rays of sword light interlaid over each other. The longsword flashed out!

Rumble!

A violent collision sounded instead of crisp contact. The staff slammed down on Li Hao; he landed solidly on his feet. Although his feet sank into the ground, he erupted with just as much strength as before. He mercilessly pushed off and put full force behind a return stroke. The longsword followed the staff’s momentum in a domineering slash!

It was fast!

So fast!

The look in Sun Moxian’s eyes altered slightly. This was incredible strength! He shifted the staff with his right hand. Otherwise, the sword stroke would cut off all of his fingers.

Li Hao grabbed the staff the second it moved, thrusting forward in a violent fashion. It thumped into Sun Moxian’s chest—the young man’s rib cage broke and he spewed out a mouthful of blood!

The liquid arced toward Li Hao, who exhaled a mouthful of sword qi!

BOOM!

Blood and gas exploded in the air; bedazzled onlookers held their breaths. Everyone understood that the two were deploying moves and reacting extremely quickly. The slightest misstep would result in one of their deaths, particularly Li Hao! The two had suddenly exploded in the air...

Only Liu Long and the others knew how perilous the fight was. The nervous team captain wiped off sweat from his forehead. That had been too fast. If Li Hao had been unable to instantaneously switch breathing methods, he wouldn't have been able to layer his force six times and withstand that blow!

"Nice going, kid!" Liu Long watched with amazement. Li Hao had reached six layers of the Nine Forged Force! And the key thing was, the young man completed a switch in methods during battle. How composed did he have to be for that?

Logically speaking, it was a feasible action. But it required absolute calm. Was the kid born for martial dao? Who could retain such composure in a fight to the death? The staff would smash him into oblivion at the slightest slip-up. Wasn't he afraid?

.....

Within the arena, Li Hao instantly reversed the battle situation with the Nine Forged Force, injuring Sun Moxian with his staff instead. The two immediately clashed again. Even though Sun Moxian was the only employing aura, Li Hao still wasn't suppressed. It was thus apparent how strong he was.

His strengthened organs and physique, the Nine Forged Force, and various secret arts leveled the playing field. His body could withstand too much!

Even Sun Yifei had to frown in the distance. Under normal circumstances, the opponent would suffer internal bleeding if they caught Sun Moxian's blow. Their organs might shatter as he was deploying his aura, but Yuan Shuo's final disciple had strengthened his beyond imagination!

He was fine! This shouldn't be the case!

He looked at Yuan Shuo, who happened to be smirking back at him.

“So what about the aura?” the professor's lips vibrated. “The Breathing Method of the Five Styles is unparalleled beneath the heavens! How do martial masters have any weaknesses? Their organs are still a major strength!”

Sun Yifei did not respond; he looked back at the arena and lost a degree of confidence in his disciple. Although Li Hao did not seem to have his own aura and looked to be comprehending the one of the sword, the combination of the Nine Forged Force, Ghost Shadow Sword, Five Styles, and powerful internal organs meant that his disciple didn't command any advantage against Li Hao.

He'd thought that was all there was to Li Hao when the two went through their opening moves. It looked like Sun Yifei had rather underestimated Yuan Shuo and his disciple.

.....

Inside the clearing.

Flesh and blood flew everywhere as Li Hao and Sun Moxian pummeled each other with punches and kicks. When Li Hao took a step back, Sun Moxian also took a few steps back. The two were equally solemn.

Li Hao still bled from his head whereas Sun Moxian's wounds had run dry. The latter tightened his grip on the blood-stained staff. Li Hao yanked out the longsword that he'd stuck in the ground and charged with a loud laugh!

This wasn't enough pressure!

The stroke from that day resurfaced in his mind. Attack! Sever the self! Kill the enemy!

Sun Moxian's face twitched and he roared, bringing his staff down in a dozen swings. Bam bam bam bam...

Both weapons were precious treasures. With how Li Hao was using the sword, the staff splintered and the sword cracked from the stress. A loud explosion sounded as both exploded into fragments, shooting in all directions!

.....

In the distance.

A grave Wang Ming's eyes widened when he saw a fragment from the sword launch at him. He reached forward, wanting to catch it, but suddenly looked startled and manifested a pair of golden gloves around his hands. They were made of his metal energy.

Screech!

An ear-piercing sound assaulted the ears as the longsword fragment and a bit of sword qi sliced through the gloves. Drip drip drip... blood flowed from Wang Ming's hands. Gone was his usual joking banter—only a weighty solemnity was in its place.

I am a Sunflare!

These were just fragments from the two's ruined weapons. His mysterious power defenses were cut through when he tried to stop it. It continued through to injure his hand and nearly slice through that as well!



The pain didn't register. Lost in thought, Wang Ming stared at the cut that ran to his bone.

Powerhouses around the perimeter also tried to stop the fragments, as did a few supernaturals wish to pit themselves against martial master might. A Darkmoon emanating fiery sparks from his hands wanted to burn a fragment away, but it drilled through his power like it didn't exist and blasted his head apart!

Silence!

Deathly silence!

The two in the clearing were just Sunderers, the equivalent of Darkmoon. All Darkmoons in the audience quieted down; some Sunflares regarded the duel with incredible gravity. They no longer disparaged the fight in any way.

This was what it meant to be a Sunderer?

Was this what martial masters truly were?

.....

"Idiot!" Hong Yitang cursed lowly. Even initial Sunflares might die if the dueling disciples attacked together! Both were Sunderers—one had comprehended the aura and the other was nearly on the same level. That blow had been the equivalent of two martial masters in command of the aura shattering each other's weapons with full strength.

How dare Darkmoons attempt to catch the fallout?? Who would die, if not that idiot?

Supernaturals of small organizations were ignorant, alright! Did they think they could look down on martial masters just because they were larger than life? How had they not learned their lesson when Yuan Shuo and Sun Yifei acted earlier?

.....

Attention refocused on the center of the clearing. The longsword had shattered and the staff snapped into splinters. Wounds crisscrossed the two combatants—a byproduct of each other's internal force.

Sun Moxian heaved for breath, his panting clearly audible. He flung his right hand at Li Hao, the aura of the earth enveloping his fist. Punch after punch resounded, sending his opponent back again and again.

Still operating the Nine Forged Force, Li Hao didn't have a chance to switch to the Five Styles. He could only take the blows head-on. Regardless of how strong his organs were, blood began bubbling at the corners of his mouth from the relentless barrage.

This was what was meant to be a martial master! Blow after blow of gore and violence!

Fatigue didn't seem to touch Sun Moxian's battle craze. He alternated between hands as he continued punching, wanting to hold down his opponent until he beat the other to death!

Fist collided with fist, hand with elbow, and feet against feet. Their pant legs had long been shredded by the fight, revealing bloody legs.

It took quite a toll on Sun Moxian to overwhelmingly suppress his opponent in this manner. His own organs weren't strong enough and the recoil almost too much to bear. Some of them were giving out and bleeding internally. But he didn't give up, retreat, or stand down. It was the best time to go for the kill when his opponent faltered!

Li Hao was stronger than anticipated, but that was a source of excitement. Killing Li Hao was his goal! That would disrupt Yuan Shuo's mindset and might help the next duel to come.

The same thoughts ran through Li Hao's mind. In Silver Moon's martial world, the disciples fought first. Whichever side won saw a boost in momentum and hammered at enemy morale. Victory between evenly matched powerhouses was often determined by whoever's disciple won the earlier fights.

Killing the other side's representatives first was frequently the key to triumph. It was Liu Long who once mentioned this, not Yuan Shuo.

Although Li Hao was doggedly receiving a beating in the face of a heavy offensive, the look in his eyes was clear! His teacher had said that all aspects of battle and techniques were preparations for the final move. Everything was preliminary work to killing the enemy. Thus, this was only part of the process.

When Sun Moxian pulled back for another punch, Li Hao abruptly roared and spat out white mist that was as if sword light!

Sun Moxian subconsciously followed through his action, breaking the sword light apart. That, however, wasn't Li Hao's final move. He raised his right hand with a grin, baring teeth through bloody spittle. The Nine Forged Force erupted once more!

Internal force layered over his right hand as he thought back to that stroke. He fashioned his internal force into a sword, splitting his hand as force shot out of it.

In the distance, Sun Yifei's expression changed drastically.

"For..." He wanted to call out forfeit—something about this felt different!

Chapter 208: Duel (IV)

A ray of sword intent!

Sun Yifei wanted to step into the clearing himself and stop Li Hao. His feet shifted as a reflection of his desire; the far off Yuan Shuo didn't move from his position. It didn't seem that he would stop his opponent.

However, Sun Yifei's footsteps halted and anguish appeared in his eyes. His disciple... wasn't forfeiting!

A frown crossed Yuan Shuo's forehead and he flicked a glance at his age-old rival. Sun Yifei may be an outstanding martial master and excellent teacher, but he was not a good master. He did not make a move at this time. He hesitated because of the rules! The rules of the martial world!

Sun Yifei fixed an expectant look on his disciple. Forfeit... I won't let you die if you forfeit!

.....

Sun Moxian also sensed danger in this moment. The situation was very dangerous! There was an exceedingly sharp sword intent coming from Li Hao's hands.

But meanwhile, Li Hao seemed to be dithering over something....

Indeed, he was waiting. He waited for Sun Moxian to concede the duel. Although he wanted to kill his opponent and thereby cause Sun Yifei's heart to waver, doubt crept through his thoughts when he looked into his opponent's unfamiliar face.

Let's give him a chance to forfeit... It was the same as being defeated.

Sun Moxian, however, did not concede the match. His master had lost once and spent decades trying to regain his mental footing. This was the precise bridge that his master had jumped from!

Master might be gratified if I forfeit and live, but that might bring about a more severe impact than dying. Master might be stronger if I die. A grief-stricken heart might help him erupt with more power!

Not to mention, I am in the stage of gathering my aura. If I lose now, and to a rookie, how much motivation will I have left to eliminate my internal demon and set foot into Dominator?

A grin spread across Sun Moxian's face. Outsiders were ever hard pressed to understand the resolve of a martial master! A staff of internal force appeared over his fists!

"Staff of Qimei!" he roared angrily. The blow seemed to contain a tangible aura of the earth—it threatened to shatter heaven and earth with an explosive roar!

I may die... but I haven't lost yet! Doesn't master say that the victor is never determined until the final moment?

The blow was incomparably threatening and aimed square for the center of Li Hao's forehead. Sun Moxian wanted to smash his opponent to death with this final strike. No matter how strong your sword is, you have to be faster than me! Let's see who can stand firm in the face of danger!

Sun Yifei watched with agitation. His disciple neither yielded nor waited for death, Sun Moxian was stronger than him! It had been the same scene that year when he lost. When he lost to Yuan Shuo, he chose to jump off Rift Bridge instead of die to his opponent. His disciple was stronger than him!

Yuan Shuo, however, frowned slightly with worry. He hadn't thought that Sun Moxian would still be able to erupt with a final strike at this moment. The young man's internal force had melded with his aura—a sign of stepping into Dominator of Thousands.

Sun Moxian was breaking through at this critical moment! This was a feat that the Sun Yifei of yesteryear hadn't been able to manage! Could Li Hao stop this blow? Life and death would be determined here and now. There would be a victor a heartbeat later!

Yuan Shuo was worried, he wanted to intervene! He was a teacher, a master, and a father. A teacher could stick to the rules and have his disciple die by the rules, but a father couldn't! He would fall to a moral low ground against Sun Yifei if he intervened, but so what?

Li Hao roared with fury the moment the professor wanted to act! With hand as sword, strike!

One staff and one sword churned spatial turbulence into existence between them. The air exploded, as did the gravel around them. Supernaturals in the distance eyed the clearing warily!

“The killing intent of dual auras!”

Li Hao seemed to have comprehended the aura! These were two powerhouses ready to set foot into Dominator, not the rookies they were previously thought of. Even Solars grew nervous and gathered their attention, staring fixedly at the fight.

BOOM!

A collision that shook the heavens rang out. Sun Moxian looked blank as sword qi inexorably cut through his staff. How was this possible?? It wasn't possible! That blow had been the pinnacle of his life. It was so unrivaled that he felt it was on the Dominator level!

But still it'd been severed by a sword!

A line of blood appeared on his forehead. There was nothing about this situation that he didn't accept, he was just a bit confused. His lips shifted in a soundless question.

“It is not a blow of the mortal world!” Li Hao answered in between heavy panting, despite not hearing anything.

That sword was not of the mortal world! So you didn't lose to me in terms of strength or aura, but that we have not seen the same worlds. I have witnessed that stroke, but you have not.

An expression of potential understanding spread across Sun Moxian's face. He slowly toppled over after a long moment, hitting the ground with a bang. The line of blood crept from his head down his entire body.

Li Hao watched silently, neither agitated nor excited. This was the martial world! There was no grudge or hatred between them; this was only because their masters stood on opposite sides. They bathed in each other's blood so that their masters could occupy a superior position in the battle to come.

"Moxian!"

"Senior brother!" Anguished cries traveled upon the wind. Sun Yifei instantly appeared inside the clearing, looking at his fallen disciple with grief. He... seemed to have made a mistake. He should've stopped the fight!

Killing intent rose in his eyes when he looked at Li Hao, but he instantly quelled it.

"I will kill you!" He pivoted toward Yuan Shuo and clenched his jaw. I will!

"I await you!" Yuan Shuo answered coldly with a grave expression. His student had won, yet Sun Yifei did not break from the setback. He grew stronger instead.

But... so what?

Li Hao furrowed his brows and didn't say anything.

Remarkably, Sun Yifei didn't fly into a rage. He looked wordlessly at Sun Moxian on the ground. Raising a half hearted cupped fist salute, he stiffly walked out of the center of the clearing.

Well done, lad. Yuan Shuo looked at Li Hao. I will win too!

Sorrowful wailing rose in the air. Sun Hongxiu hugged a bloodstained corpse and keened with agony. "Li Hao, I'll kill you!" she screamed hoarsely. "I will!"

Li Hao didn't look at her. This was how martial masters should be. They did not cut down everyone on the other side today, and awaited their enemy's vengeance tomorrow. Year after year, duel after duel, until they themselves died in battle one day. Due to the rules, his teacher wouldn't kill Sun Hongxiu even if he won today.

Was this trite and cliché?

A little.

But Li Hao knew that his teacher was already someone who flouted more of the rules among martial masters. Compared to him, people like Sun Yifei were even more sticklers to irrelevant minutiae. This wasn't a bad thing at times. Adhering to cliché ideals meant that martial masters might bear more qualities that promoted ties of kinship.

A variety of thoughts ran through Li Hao's mind as he walked out of the clearing. He sagged to the ground as soon as he was clear; pain finally set in. He burned with so much pain all over. He'd won.

In the first battle, the crowd witnessed the magnificence of martial masters. It was a gorgeous spectacle and martial dao was indeed not bad. But by the second battle, no one was in the mood to offer any compliments. That had been only brutality! It was then that the supernaturals understood what was the martial society and world. Such had been Silver Moon twenty years ago. People died everyday—either on the way to deliver vengeance or falling to someone else's revenge.



What did they fight for?

For reputation, for profit. One could say that the core essence of a martial master was slaughter. Martial masters were born to kill, to exceed the strength of mortals and explore the limits of the human body. They sought to make a name for themselves and exceed those who came before them.

That was the way of the martial dao.

Why... did someone have to die? The thought rose in countless supernatural minds. As cruel as the supernatural world was, it was usually in pursuit of profit and treasure. The martial masters fighting in front of them did so for a grudge that was decades old, one that'd carried over to the next generation.

Some were surprised only in the last second, while others looked at Li Hao incredulously. Even Hao Lianchuan couldn't believe his eyes. This was Li Hao? A young fellow who'd only grown familiar with martial dao in the last couple of years? He just killed a half step Dominator in a duel!

What if it'd been a supernatural in the ring? Would an initial Sunflare kill Li Hao or be killed instead?

The might of martial masters was on full display the moment they grasped the aura. It was pressure on a mental level! If martial masters became Dominators, supernaturals of the equivalent cultivation were no match at all. Simply bringing the aura to bear would weaken ninety percent of supernatural abilities—special abilities were the only exception. Those that specialized in offense would not be able to stand against a martial master of their level.

Establishing his reputation with one battle!

The name of Li Hao, disciple of the Five Styles, would ring throughout Silver Moon after this battle. It'd been many years since a young powerhouse like this roamed the martial world.

Up ahead.

Liu Long and his people quickly walked forward to help Li Hao up. The captain frowned at all of the blood on the young man and helped him to the perimeter without a word. The atmosphere here was too oppressive! It hung so heavily that a Dominator like him wanted to leave.

Everyone around the canyon also felt it; Sun Yifei was a volcano ready to erupt. He left Sun Moxian's body in Sun Hongxiu's care and barely moved his lips.

“Go!” Take your senior brother's body and go! Go back to the central region!

The moment Li Hao killed Sun Moxian was the moment Sun Yifei knew that he might not be leaving today. If Yuan Shuo's disciple had improved so much in a few years, what about Yuan Shuo?

He could choose to avoid battle, but... was that truly an option? He was the Qimei Staff King! His disciple had already paid the ultimate price on his path of vengeance, could he leave after that?

Could he abstain from fighting?

No, he couldn't!

“Master!” sobbed the two surviving disciples. They clutched Sun Moxian's body as they wept.

They were too young. If Sun Moxian still lived, he might understand his master's motivation. Sun Hongxiu and her junior brother were too young to have experienced much. They didn't understand.

Sun Yifei stared at Sun Hongxiu and patted her shoulder. With Sun Moxian dead, the legacy of the Qimei Staff fell to her shoulders. He had other disciples, but he'd brought the most promising and

smartest ones on this trip. These were the ones most worth cultivating—even the Slayer of Tens. He didn't wish for all of them to die here and end his legacy.

## Chapter 209: Qimei Staff, Fire Heart Ape (I)

Tears streamed down the faces of Sun Hongxiu and the other young man. They quickly wiped their eyes dry. Sun Hongxiu knelt on the ground and kowtowed to her master, then put the corpse on her back to leave.

“Sun Yifei,” Yuan Shuo suddenly spoke from a distance. “Why not bury Sun Moxian in Silver Moon? He should remain here if he has no other family. Silver Moon's martial world is the homeland of martial masters. Since he has fallen in battle here, he should be buried here!”

The martial world of Silver Moon!

Sun Yifei looked at him and smiled after a moment. He raised his staff to the sky and smashed a massive pit out of the ground.

“He has no family, I am his family!” Sun Yifei laughed. “Very well, you make sense for once, Yuan Shuo. If you die, I will offer your head to my disciple!”

“And if you die, I will bury the two of you together!” Yuan Shuo responded calmly.

“That is just as good!” Sun Yifei's smile broadened. He stepped forward and reclaimed Sun Moxian's body. Amid his two disciple's teary gazes, he placed the corpse into the pit for burial. Sun Moxian had no family or master in the central region. It would be a lonely eternal rest. You might as well stay here! This is master's home.

Whether it was Sun Moxian or Sun Hongxiu, they were all war orphans. Hence, their surname was Sun.

A long staff pointed at the heavens! Dust and rocks churned, filling the pit in the blink of an eye and leaving behind a covered grave. Sun Yifei withdrew his weapon and looked at his two living

disciples. Sun Hongxiu hesitated briefly when her master looked at her, then spun on her heel and grabbed her junior brother's hand. She took off running, departing from this land of heartbreak.

Such was meant to be a martial master!

It was to ensure one's legacy carried on and await a chance for vengeance. Sun Yifei never spoke of giving up revenge—that concept did not exist. So long as the legacy of the qimei staff endured, then vengeance would be had until this inheritance fully vanished from the martial world. Otherwise, its heirs would one day arrive in Silver Moon and battle the heirs of the Five Styles again!

Yuan Shuo knew this, Li Hao knew this, all martial masters knew this, yet no one stopped the two young disciples.

Martial masters were always like this. They were a savage and cruel group, but also seemed hypocritically kind. It was very rare for an entire discipline to be exterminated over a duel. Despite knowing the benefits of eradication, very few people were truly willing to do so.

They knew that someone would be along for revenge, and so they waited for that eventuality. Or at the very least, they would not bring the fight to their enemy's door before the enemy grew into their strength. As one aged and taught disciples, one accepted a final disciple to guard the home. They would await for the enemy to come knocking instead of visiting the enemy when one still had the strength to.

The reason for all this? The rules!

No one defined custom; it was just passed on from generation to generation. Yuan Shuo had killed so many people in his time, but mostly in the arena. He rarely moved against their disciples, not unless those disciples went on the offensive first. Thus, he had a lot of enemies. More than could be killed!

It would take these people thinking that they could never have vengeance or for their legacy to naturally disappear in the martial world for these feuds to fade away.

.....

Sun Hongxiu and her junior brother left. No one stopped them, no one dared even move. Sun Yifei swept the surroundings with a vicious look, projecting especial ruthlessness. He stared at everyone except Yuan Shuo, waiting for his disciples to get a little further or even leave the province entirely. He didn't look at Yuan Shuo as he knew his old enemy would wait.

In the distance, a cold grip wrapped around the hearts of anyone he looked at—whether Sunflares or Solars. The gaze was tyrannical, maniacal, and bloodthirsty.

This situation continued for another half hour. Everyone in the canyon suffered in silence with Sun Yifei. Whether it was the three great organizations or Night Watchers, all were in tacit accord. No one wished to provoke the late Solar Sun Yifei in his berserk state. As for his two disciples, their strength was evident for all to see. No one cared about them, whether they bore a grudge or not.

Half an hour later, Sun Yifei suddenly took to the sky. He soared a hundred meters in the span of a breath and landed on the broken Rift Bridge. This was the bridge where he'd been once defeated!

Yuan Shuo likewise pushed off the ground and shot up like a rocket. He arced through the sky and easily landed on the other side of the bridge like a bird coming to rest. The matters of the martial world would be resolved in the martial world.

Down below, expressions shifted among the crowd. The two martial masters had easily ascended one hundred meters! While ordinary Sunflares could do the same, the two had accomplished it effortlessly through martial master means. This was very out of the norm.

.....

Li Hao was drained after his battle. He tilted his head toward the sky, then quickly frowned. There was a flying ship partially obstructing his side view—the Light Island delegation. They'd parked their vessel close to Rift Bridge, approximately one hundred meters away. There were quite a few people on board.

Yuan Shuo and Sun Yifei faced off overhead. A duel between martial masters was usually limited to a small area. Even if the two expanded their arena, they would most likely land to continue the fight. Thus, Light Island hovered in place instead of relocating elsewhere. This was the best place to watch the battle. It afforded the best and clearest view.

Li Hao continued to frown. A cold glint appeared in Liu Long's eyes when he followed the young man's gaze. They were courting death!

Martial masters did indeed stay within a limited confine when they fought—the same went for supernaturals. They wouldn't infinitely enlarge their battlefield, not to mention that when the opponent was in the air, it was tough to extend the arena in any way unless both sides were in the air.

Whether it was martial masters or supernaturals, they rarely fought in the sky unless they commanded an ability of the sky. The earth was where they belonged. However, were Yuan Shuo and Sun Yifei ordinary people?

"Ignore them," Li Hao whispered. "There's always some people who think they're very special and beyond the ordinary. Light Island is formed by a Heaven Favored, right?"

Wang Ming nodded beside him. Light Island differed from Sword Sect in that a martial master had established Sword Sect, while a Heaven Favored with great potential formed Light Island. Their founder was an early Sunflare and swiftly ascended to Solar not long thereafter. He was one of the few Solars in Silver Moon.

For martial masters, the second battle between disciples had been splendid. To others, that was just a fight between initial Sunflares. It was too far removed from Solar. Some were extremely thickheaded; the leader of Light Island fancied himself exceptional. Wouldn't it be downgrading himself if he suddenly shifted his vessel?

In the meantime, Li Hao knew that they were placed much too close. They didn't understand a martial master's aura! What was one hundred meters once his teacher fully deployed his aura? The Solar might be fine, but anyone below Solar would be injured or die to the incredible impact.

They absolutely had a death wish.

Li Hao turned his gaze back to the two combatants. He hoped that Sun Yifei would be affected by Sun Moxian's death, or his earlier duel with Sun Moxian would become a little bit meaningless.

.....

In the air, upon a bridge broken from the middle.

One person stood on each side. Tyranny still raged through Sun Yifei's eyes, but he'd recovered a modicum of calm. He stared at Yuan Shuo.

"You were the downfall of Silver Moon's martial world!"

"You can say that," Yuan Shuo chuckled. "So you've learned to bring the principles of righteousness down on my head?"

Could he say that? Well, he could!

Yuan Shuo's inability to become a Dominator twenty years ago had a great impact on Silver Moon's martial world. If he advanced, so many more half step Dominators would've lived. The remaining ones might've broken through.

Such were martial masters—they were an interesting bunch. So long as the great oppressor Yuan Shuo did not progress, everyone else seemed to be bottlenecked as well. But if Yuan Shuo had

stepped forward, then Dominators would've sprang forth like bamboo shoots after the rain. This was seen in multiple eras past—one person determined the upper limits of the martial world!

Many people rose with the wind when this limit was smashed, breaking through in quick succession and locating the next upper bound. If that limit constantly remained in place, that would be the extent of that era unless someone killed them.

It was an exceedingly marvelous state.

"I'm not bringing anything down on you!" Sun Yifei was calm. "I'm just filled with hate and regret! Your limitation prevented us from comprehending the beauty of Dominator of Thousands. We could not make any progress! I hate that we were unable to defeat you and pull you off from your throne!"

"My second hate is that I became a supernatural and cannot use the strength of a martial master to battle you!"

"My third hate is that I am less than my disciple. Perhaps I should've valiantly fought to the very last that year. Jumping from the cliff is my eternal shame!"

"You can fight to the last this time." Yuan Shuo nodded at him.

"I hope you don't disappoint me!" Sun Yifei raised his staff with one hand and pointed it at Yuan Shuo. "To battle!"

BOOM!

Leaping flames roared into existence before any technique deployed. They burned with a fury to immolate heaven and earth!



A fire supernatural! This attribute was suited for offense. Many supernaturals who excelled at attacking were of the fire attribute. Fire represented explosiveness.

Hao Lianchuan's eyes widened when the flames appeared. He was also a fire supernatural and a Solar. But when Sun Yifei's fire manifested, he suddenly felt that his flames were so much more inferior. They were both Solars, yet the gap between them was so great! It was incomprehensible.

He might be able to wield such might if he utilized the Flaming Phoenix Spear. Although Sun Yifei's qimei staff was forged from premium materials, it was far from an origin weapon.

Across the bridge, Yuan Shuo narrowed his eyes. The leaping flames were concentrated on the staff, turning it into a ferocious fire dragon. Sun Yifei's intent was clear—he wanted to use the methods of a martial master to defeat Yuan Shuo. He was only using fire supernatural abilities as internal force.

Yuan Shuo underwent a change as the flames were too hot for the human body to endure. The professor seemed to turn into an ape of fire, an image that shone into the eyes of all those watching. The fire heart ape was upon him.

Sun Yifei's eyes lit up—he seemed to see and discover something! He looked at his foe with unconcealed euphoria and the glee of meeting a good opponent!

## Chapter 210: Qimei Staff, Fire Heart Ape (II)

Others might not understand, but Sun Yifei did. Below them, Hong Yitang frowned with vague understanding and not full comprehension.

The ape style of the Five Styles!

The swordsman had seen it before—this was similar, yet not the same. It somehow made him feel... mediocre as a Solar.

Disturbances shifted the Red Moon, Yama, and Celestial delegations around the canyon; a shocking scene played out before they had a chance to guess. A fiery ape struck first in the sky, holding up the firmament with one hand and slamming its palm down. The void seemed to split open!

It was the ape style of the Five Styles!

“To battle!” Sun Yifei shouted with glee and struck with his staff, as if tearing heaven and earth apart. Staff met palm in an explosive collision, throwing off sparks in all directions. The two simultaneously switched positions and bounded higher in the air.

Rumble!

If Li Hao and Sun Moxian displayed mortal techniques in their clash, then these two truly demonstrated the methods of walking gods. The entire sky was dyed red from their confrontation.

A late Solar battling a Summoner of Spirit!

There was no trace of Yuan Shuo’s usual relaxed composure to be seen. He was as if a crazed elderly ape, waving his fists around with fire in his eyes and sweeping his long arm through the sky. He slammed a hand into the staff, grabbing it despite the fire that ignited over it.

Flames spread to the four corners as they fought. RUMBLE!! They were so fast that Li Hao and the others couldn’t keep up—the audience couldn’t register all of the moves. This level of battle was far beyond them.

Other than a few Solars who could still more or less see things clearly, even Sunflares were hard pressed to make out how the two were fighting. They could only see that the fire heart ape was tyrannically domineering in punching again and again. Sometimes, it delivered a barrage of a dozen punches that appeared as only one to the assembly.

Meanwhile, the qimei staff rose and fell with incredible beauty.

The two combatants abruptly shifted orientation and glided through the air, swiftly moving away from their starting points.

One hundred meters?

What did one hundred meters mean to them? It was the span of one footstep!

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In the sky.

There were nearly one hundred people on Light Island's flying ship. While that was a large delegation, there were also numerous Starlight among them. They would not be entering the ruins.

Everyone on the ship watched the fight, enthralled. However, a young Heaven Favored frowned slightly. The battle... seemed to be approaching them. He'd parked the ship here to demonstrate Light Island's might and didn't feel a need to move further away when Yuan Shuo and Sun Yifei entered the sky. That would be too embarrassing.

He was a Heaven Favored, one of Silver Moon's few Solars! He'd experienced smooth sailing ever since setting foot onto the supernatural stage and successfully establishing Light Island, turning it into a powerful organization. Even the three great organizations and Night Watchers showed him certain respect. They were unwilling to clash with the local Solar.

Therefore, the master of Light Island was very arrogant. He had the right and credentials to. But at the moment, his back prickled with fear.

This looks bad!

“Hurry and—” He wanted to say something when a long staff broke through the void and descended with unstoppable momentum! Aghast, the master of Light Island snarled with anger and quickly punched forward. His fist was as if the sun shooting through the sky—Divine Light Punch!

These two were doing this on purpose! He could sense it that these two bastards were purposefully shifting their fight toward him! But when he deployed his Divine Light Punch, an enormous fist of fire landed on him. There seemed to be a colossal ape swinging its fists through the air!

BOOM!

An incredibly menacing aura exploded like a volcano. It burst through the young Heaven Favored’s mind—he saw an ape raising the sky and hewing the earth open! The look in his eyes turned cloudy.

This was the aura of a martial master. Those who’d never comprehended or come in contact with it would not understand how strong Yuan Shuo’s aura would be at his cultivation level. The master of Light Island was a Heaven Favored, but he didn’t know martial masters.

In the far off distance.

Hong Yitang snorted with laughter, then shook his head with emotion. There was never a shortage of pigheaded people in the world. It was one thing to watch from the ground, but that fellow dared look down upon the two from the sky, as if he was watching circus animals perform tricks! These are two majestic personages that we’re talking about! They’re old demons that terrorized an era, how dare you watch them from up high?

You really have a death wish!

Heaven Favored? A Solar? There might not be a Light Island anymore from this moment forth. Solars were strong enough, but the context of who they faced also had to be considered.

A stunning scene developed in front of the assembly's eyes. The unquestionably powerful master of Light Island was sent flying right after he deployed his Divine Light Punch. An even bigger fist broke through his move and shattered his defenses. A blazing red staff descended in that very moment!

The staff blow was so unrivaled that it instantly immolated everything. The hovering ship broke into two with a loud rumble and the master of Light Island at its center... vanished!

No, he left behind a trace of light energy.

The enormous fist in the air fully landed and smashed the two ship halves into smithereens!

Cries and wails of agony abounded. A few Light Island supernaturals who survived fell down, their speed incredibly fast! New screams of horror sounded when their flight supernaturals realized that they couldn't fly!

This expanse of the sky full under the aura—one could even call it a domain. As the supernaturals were unable to break the aura's blockade, their abilities were constrained. Bam bam bam! These supernaturals unable to call upon their power crashed into the ground from a height of one hundred meters!

Most were instantly smashed to meat pies. A lucky few were caught by other supernaturals—they had to, otherwise the flailing survivor would smash right into their delegation. Some other lucky ones grabbed onto the edges of the canyon and escaped from the jaws of death.

Other than a handful of survivors, the mighty Light Island and nearly a hundred of its supernaturals had been instantaneously eradicated by two people! Their leader, a Solar, was decimated by a singular punch and staff blow!

It all happened in the blink of an eye, leaving behind only moans of suffering from the survivors.

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The Celestial delegation.

A group of powerhouses were petrified, freezing in positions of heads tilted up at the sky. Shocked eyes were the only thing to be seen beneath their hoods.

Could martial masters reach this level?

Everyone knew about Yuan Shuo killing Brokensky, but no one knew that he could kill Solars so easily!

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Red Moon.

Hao Kong's expression shifted drastically. He was equal parts horrified, incredulous, and angry. How was Yuan Shuo so incredibly strong? He'd blasted through a Heaven Favored's defenses with a direct punch—that'd been a Solar, not a Sunflare!

Weren't Dominators only barely on par with Sunflares? This wasn't possible! He could understand Sun Yifei being so strong, but not Yuan Shuo.

"How is that..." he murmured, still disbelieving and not wanting to believe. Greater than Dominator?

The thought occurred to many in this moment, not just him. But that wasn't possible!

Although there were rumors of martial masters in the central region setting foot into this level, they were barely glimpsed in the world these days. These mysterious powerhouses had vanished from the central region battlefield. Legend had it that they'd found the path beyond Dominator, but that was unsubstantiated whispers from the central region.

Today in Silver Moon, in this decrepit martial world, they saw a martial master kill a Heaven Favored Solar with one punch!

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The Night Watcher delegation.

Hao Lianchuan's expression changed again and again. Was this Yuan Shuo?

Light Island was... no more. While there was a scattering of its members left, the organization was dead. A mid-sized faction, a Solar, and multiple Sunflare had been obliterated by one punch and one staff blow.

It boggled the mind!

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Wang Ming's mouth was wide open next to Li Hao. He was bewildered and frozen. That'd been a Solar, not a Darkmoon—and that wondrous heavyweight was gone, just like that?

"Teacher!" He breathed out, his eyes startlingly bright. "I want to learn martial dao!"

Indeed, he wanted to practice martial dao now. My heavens, is this what it means to be a martial master? He was self-conscious enough when facing Li Hao's strength, but after seeing Yuan Shuo,

he understood that Li Hao wasn't worth shit. His colleague employed mortal methods; Yuan Shuo was a true god amongst mortals. That was why his level was hailed as a walking god. He was so unfathomably dominating that he could pierce through the firmament with one punch.

Could a Solar or anyone greater withstand such a punch?

No!

Even the prodigious Director Hao would likely quail beneath such a punch. Wang Ming looked at Hao Lianchuan—see, look at his wide eyes and dropped jaw!

Director Hao was plainly stunned beyond his senses.

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In the air.

The two swiftly flew back to land on the broken bridge. Their faces were calm, as if they'd just swatted a few gnats.

How dare someone stand over their heads and look down their noses upon martial masters? If they weren't punished for it, the world would think this was all there was to martial dao! At the very least, the martial masters who'd died twenty years ago would turn in their graves if Yuan Shuo and Sun Yifei didn't kill them.

Anyone who dared be so rude back in the day would be beaten to death for their impudence, so why not these supernatural brats?



The two seemed to be in good moods after teaching those unruly bastards a lesson. It was as if they really had just slapped some flies out of existence; neither of the two mentioned Light Island. Sun Yifei shook his staff and took a long look at his opponent.

“Yuan Shuo, you win on the path of martial dao!”

His old rival had reached another level.

“What level is this?” an expectant Sun Yifei asked with yearning. Battle had just begun, but he wanted to know so badly. Was there another path beyond Dominator? He might never have a chance to ask if he didn’t do so now. He needed to know.

“Summoner of Spirit!” Yuan Shuo answered calmly. “I have just entered it, and there is another level above it—Refiner of Spirit!”

“Summoner... Refiner...” Sun Yifei murmured. He was excited, he was forlorn, and he was reluctant to accept the situation. He looked at Yuan Shuo. “You have created a new expanse for martial dao. There is hope for all martial masters in the world!”

Even he himself didn’t know if he was happy or sad. He smiled radiantly at Yuan Shuo. “This battle is truly worth it to learn that there are more cultivation levels above Dominator. Yuan Shuo... a Summoner... Come, show me the might of a Summoner!”