

## Star Gate 24

### Chapter 24: I Feel Like I'm Really Strong! (II)

Li Hao followed without a word. The others gathered out of curiosity as well. Liu Yan's mouth was almost glued to the young man's ears as she whispered, "Show us everything you've got, don't hold back! You're so weak that it's pointless to hide anything. Pretending to be weaker than you are will only decrease what you gain from this. Chief still has some nice treasures on hand!"

Instead of responding, the only thing that Li Hao sought to do was to avert his ear from the woman's mouth. Don't blow air at me, it's dang uncomfortable.

"Hehehe..." Liu Yan smiled happily. Liu Long ignored their antics; it was the other female member who chuckled softly.

"Sis Yan, stop teasing him."

"Who's teasing him?" Liu Yan giggled delightfully. "Little Hao is so easy on the eyes—just look at our team of raggedy misfits! This one's skinny as a stick of bamboo, that one's fat as a wall. Chief is decent enough, but he's old and his skin is so leathery. He doesn't take care of himself at all! Little Hao's the best!"

The other three men's footsteps hitched, but no one said anything. For some reason, Li Hao felt that he'd innocently offended three people at once.

I didn't say any of that, Liu Yan did. Don't assign the blame to me!

They reached the fitness area, a zone replete with any equipment that one could think of.

Liu Long's tone remained the same as earlier, despite what'd just happened. "Humanity already possessed powerful cultivators before the supernatural domain was on the scene. Your teacher, for

example, commands tremendous battle strength because he's practiced the Five Styles to their utmost!

"The previous inspector general trained his Iron Shirt to great perfection. Regular blades could not pierce him and even guns left only external marks.

"These people are representative of those in the mundane field who have trained an art to its maximum. Before there were supernatural powers, we called these people martial masters! The greatest masters and grandmasters could withstand hot weapons with nothing but their bodies!"

Martial masters!

Li Hao listened intently—this was all new to him.

"There are weak and strong among the martial masters. Strength is often not the deciding factor. Some specialize in speed, others in defense, some are adept with force...

"Everyone has their own strengths and thus cannot be jumbled into one category. Those who are agile might kill those who are strong yet slow. Those who are strong might also kill a swift martial master with one blow.

"Martial masters always have one particular ability that sets them apart from ordinary people. That is what gives them their name! Strength and speed are the most direct manifestations. Ones related to defense, like Chen Jian, do not show themselves until moments of life or death. Thus, it is difficult to measure just how strong he is."

Li Hao nodded again, that made sense! He looked at Liu Long with curiosity. "So the chief means that it's difficult to determine weak and strong among martial masters? Which means... they're all similar...?"

"Bullshit!"

“.....” Li Hao fell silent. Isn’t that what you just said?

Liu Long turned to the young man. “Don’t think too much—strong is strong, weak is weak! Martial masters had their own categorization a decade or so ago, there just weren’t that many of them. Slayer of Tens, Sunderer of Hundreds, Dominator of Thousands! Those are the martial masters!”

Li Hao blinked. This naming scheme... was so literal! It’s too simplistic, isn’t it?

“Their meanings are readily apparent, aren’t they?” Liu Long seemed to know what the young man was thinking. “Indeed, it’s just that direct and straightforward! Everyone here possesses the capabilities of a soldier in a proper army. The lowest requirement for those hailed as martial masters is to kill a troop of ten head-on. That is the threshold for Slayer of Tens!

“Further up is Sunderer of Hundreds, a level far more difficult than you can imagine. If you can defeat a troop of one hundred soldiers with one blow, you’ll be that level of powerhouse!

“As for Dominator of Thousands...” Liu Long took a deep breath. “That’s theoretical. In reality, no matter how strong a mortal is, they face nothing but death if they meet with a contingent that is one thousand strong. That holds true even if there are no hot weapons deployed.

“Your strength and stamina will be readily exhausted in battle and there are limits to the strongest among us. It’s impossible to be a Dominator of Thousands!

“It wasn’t until supernatural abilities appeared that some supernaturals truly are this level in deed and name.”

Li Hao started and raised a question. “So based on what the chief says, if powerful supernaturals are on that level, the weaker ones are only Slayer of Tens and Sunderer of Hundreds?”

“Only?” Liu Long looked at him with some derision. “You’ll know when you actually meet them in battle! A Sunderer can defeat one hundred by themselves! Their speed and strength are unparalleled,

not to mention the special talents that a supernatural also possesses. A martial master who is a Sunderer will only manage a close escape if they meet their supernatural counterpart! Do you think that's weak?"

Li Hao remained quiet. A Sunderer of Hundreds... That didn't seem impressive, but if faced with a contingent of one hundred ferocious soldiers, he'd probably be beaten to death as soon as he barged in.

The young man was suddenly very curious about Liu Long's strength.

"Is chief a Sunderer?"

Liu Long remained coolly aloof, it was Liu Yan who answered with a smile. "You can say that, he can be barely counted among them. How does he lead us against the supernaturals if he's not strong himself? They're very powerful. Even the weakest among them is a Sunderer of Hundreds or worse to fight!"

It was Li Hao's first time clearly understanding how strong this team captain was. Of course, it was still a theoretical understanding since he didn't know what these cultivation levels really entailed. A Sunderer? Cool name, still doesn't sound all that scary.

"What about my teacher?"

"Your teacher was a Sunderer in his prime, but he has declined in his age. His stamina and speed have all decreased, so he's probably no longer at that level." Liu Long shook his head. "A portion of premier martial masters reached this level back in the day, but with the proliferation of hot weapons and supernaturals, everyone's shifted attention to the occult. Very few are those who are willing to put in effort to practice mundane martial arts!"

"Inducting mysterious power into oneself sends us to the heavens with one step. The body is strengthened and abilities heightened. Ordinary people can become a Slayer of Tens after a single

day, then a Sunderer grandmaster after a certain period of time! Who's willing to toil through the ancient martial arts given that?"

Liu Long sighed when he looked at Li Hao. "The supernatural field goes beyond the limits of the human body. It enables humans to become more than who we are and infinitely raises our maximum potential. A wooden barrel with the tiniest bit of water in it still holds more than a wine glass. The mundane martial masters are the wine glass, and the supernatural that barrel. Do you understand?"

The young man nodded to indicate his comprehension. It was so clear that it inspired despair!

Mundane martial masters would never advance beyond their upper limits if they couldn't conduct mysterious power into themselves, even if they trained for their entire lives. Years of labor still placed them below a newly initiated supernatural. How hopeless was this?

Take Yuan Shuo, for instance, a disciple since youth and now more than seventy years old. He was once a leader in the world of martial masters, but now possibly only had the strength of a Slayer of Tens.

This kind of capability made one only a novice when it came to the supernatural!

A grandmaster of more than seventy years could only compete with some young rookies. No wonder the professor said that the Five Styles were just another trick to save one's life, that it was more a fitness routine than anything. He never said that it was a method to kill because reality was too disheartening!

Having finished his introduction, Liu Long changed tack. "Go try things out. We want to observe your speed, strength, and capabilities."

Li Hao said nothing further and fully understood that there was no need to hide anything. His bit of proficiency with the ape style was truly nothing to this group. Thus, he launched himself into the

fitness area, jumping, tumbling, and swinging like an ape. He delivered the occasional punch to the sandbags placed around the premises.

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Outside the fitness area.

Liu Long watched quietly. The skinny Wu Chao shook his head after looking on for a bit. “He’s stronger than the average person and not that far off from some of our older inspectors. But... chief, will he be able to evade retaliation from supernaturals?”

“He’s definitely not a Slayer of Tens,” the portly Chen Jian said in muffled tones. “Two or three at most! This is the first time the Demon Hunters have recruited such a weak guy, isn’t it?”

Li Hao’s abilities might prove useful if he ran into two or three soldiers; he might even take out his opponents. But there was more than a tenfold difference between two and ten. In their eyes, the young man was much too weak.

Liu Yan crossed her arms and watched merrily. “He’s pleasing to the eyes, he can be our mascot! He can do support work and analyze the information we gather. He’s suited for a civil post, unlike you bumbling brutes!”

They should’ve had someone like Li Hao long ago, so Liu Yan didn’t think there was anything wrong with their newest member.

On second thought, the rest of the group found that she made a lot of sense.

“Are Slayers that big a deal against hot weapons?” Liu Yan continued. “They’re dead all the same after a blast! Of course, if we go up to Sunderers, they’ll be hard to deal with whether they’re martial masters or supernaturals.”

The main sticking point at that level was locking on to the target. One's eyes would see the enemy, the brain would give the command, but the enemy would then appear in front of you and smack you to death with one palm strike. Even the most powerful weapons were useless then.

Hot weapons were devastatingly useful only against opponents weaker than a Sunderer of Hundreds. Granted, it was still possible to kill a Sunderer with one if they were otherwise preoccupied.

“He must carry a hot weapon.” Liu Long nodded. “Choose some for him that are light and easy to use. His brains are what matter, not his abilities. It'll be easy enough to strengthen his body and speed if we can get him some mysterious power, even if he doesn't cross over to becoming supernatural.”

The team captain chuckled lowly. “The key thing is, he's not coming here solely for a civil post. He's an expert in ancient writing! Although he's certainly not up to Yuan Shuo's standard, he's useful enough for our purposes.”

The rest of the team nodded thoughtfully, that was true enough. Li Hao was useful in many ways, so it rather seemed like a good idea that he become part of the team.

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Busy jumping around from post to post, Li Hao felt that he was in great condition. At the very least, he was much stronger than before. He huffed and puffed his way out of the fitness area and asked with some expectation, “Chief, what do you think? Is there a difference between me and a Slayer of Tens? Can I count as one of them?”

He could totally take on ten people by himself!

Meanwhile, Liu Long paused with awkwardness and didn't know what to say. Where did this kid get his confidence from? How was this a display from a Slayer?

The rest of the team also looked at each other. Self awareness was a rare thing alright! A Slayer of Tens? Keep dreaming!

The silence stretched on until Li Hao felt that something was wrong. “A... Slayer of Nine?” he asked hesitantly.

Ringling silence answered him.

“Five?”

Still silence.

Li Hao’s expression slowly shifted. No way! I feel like I’m really strong after drinking the sword water. I can even spar with teacher! I can’t be that far off if teacher is a Sunderer? Teacher can only manage five rounds of the ape style for a dozen minutes. I can do nine minutes now!

Liu Long finally broke the prolonged silence. “Don’t think too much—laziness is what you should fear, not weakness. Work hard and you’ll find that a Slayer of Tens isn’t much of anything either.”

...silence stretched on again, but Li Hao understood. The hell, I’m not even a Slayer of Five? And he wanted to kill the scarlet shadow... Man, ignorance really was bliss and courage!