

BloodLine 1331

Chapter 1331: Part 1: Silver Mark Warrior(Breakthrough)

From MC's Perspective

The two mysterious energy streams entered my body. One of them entered my bones, and the other entered my dantian.

This scene stunned me. The mysterious energy started strengthening my bones. The Dark Red skeleton began to undergo a transformation.

At this time, the second mysterious energy began to change my dantian. The space inside my dantian was already big. Now, it broke the limit of the Black Mark Level.

From the outside, the dantian remained the same. But the space inside the dantian underwent a transformation. It had now reached the Silver Mark Level.

But the changes didn't stop there. The space continued to widen before coming to a stop a few minutes later.

If anyone outside looked at my dantian space, they would be shocked, because my space was greater than that of the average Silver Mark Warrior.

Click!

Suddenly, I felt some shackles break within my body.

When the transformation came to an end, I started comprehending what had happened.

A few minutes later,

My eyes glinted with understanding. My body, mind, Sound, and Inheritance Force had reached the level of a Silver Mark Warrior.

I had obtained the second Chapter of the Shock Force Integration Method earlier. Now, I understand what to do next.

It was the Guardian God's Sealing Force Inheritance Method.

After completing it, I would turn to the Bloodline Method. I thought it would take a couple of days to achieve a breakthrough in the other two methods.

Then I collected my thoughts and started comprehending the second Chapter of the inheritance method.

Compared to the first Chapter, the second Chapter was more difficult. It had many more routes. I could understand why; it would take some time to comprehend it.

So, I started memorizing the routes.

Time went by,

That night, I opened my eyes and stood up. I had completely memorized the new route. But I didn't start practicing immediately.

I decided to practice the second Chapter of the Shock Force Integration Method later. I wanted a breakthrough in the other two Inheritance Methods first.

Then I turned off the switch. World energy began to decrease. When it was gone, I opened the chamber door and stepped out.

Master Austin had given me full access. I could use it anytime I wanted. But right now, I wanted a deep rest.

A few minutes later, I exited the Golden Lightning Palace and headed back towards my residence.

It didn't take long for me to get there. After arriving at the residence, I went inside and closed the door.

Then I entered the bath to take a long shower. The bath lasted for 20 minutes. I walked out and changed into comfortable clothes.

I went to bed next and rested.

The following day,

I woke up and did my morning routine as usual. Then I left the room after getting ready. I went directly to the Golden Lightning Palace.

I didn't meet Master Austin this time. I went directly to the Essence Chamber. I came across members who were training early.

They were surprised upon seeing me because I was quite early this time.

On the other hand, the members were surprised to see Zack early. But they were surprised for another reason as well.

They found the oppression coming from Zack Lockwood was stronger. It was not like someone with Black Mark Level strength walking past them.

They felt as if a Senior Silver Mark or Gold Mark Warrior were walking past them. It was completely unbelievable to them.

"Did you guys notice that?" a female Silver Mark Warrior asked her friend.

There were six people there, three male and three female warriors. All of them were Silver Mark Warriors.

So, they felt the changes clearly. Their eyes filled with shock and doubt. They watched Zack Lockwood leave.

When he was gone from their sight, they looked at each other's faces. The male members were even more stunned.

"He broke through!" a middle-aged man uttered.

Hearing that, everyone had a realization.

There was a rumor going around that Zack Lockwood was lucky to survive in that secret land, and that he didn't have any real benefits. That was the rumor going around.

"Yes, he broke through. But he was being low-key about it. No wonder he didn't leave the faction. He must be digesting the benefits," he added.

They decided to share the news with their friends.

Essence Chamber

I turned on the switch. The world energy started filling the room. It didn't take long for world energy to fill the room completely.

I came to the middle and sat cross-legged on the ground. Then I closed my eyes and started comprehending the dull golden rune in mind.

The golden rune was the Guardian God's Sealing Force Method.

Time went by,

The dull golden rune became denser and denser as time passed by.

Meanwhile

The news about Zack Lockwood was slowly spreading. The members started sharing the news with their friends.

It didn't take long for the news to spread around the whole Thunderflame Faction. Everyone was shocked.

They were discussing something else a day ago. Now, the news about Zack Lockwood shocked them.

On the other hand, the Faction Leader Clifford was in his office. The rumors reached his ears as well. He immediately called Austin and asked about it.

Austin neither agreed nor denied it. He revealed that he had given full access to Zack Lockwood so that he could use the Essence Chamber any time he wanted.

Hearing that, Clifford sighed in relief. He thought the news was likely to be true. He decided to meet him later.

Since Zack Lockwood was busy practicing, he didn't want to disturb him. Then he spoke to Austin about Neil Smith. He advised Austin to move on.

They had real big challenges ahead. The foreign creatures were pressing them hard. A few warrior camps had already been attacked.

Austin was not a fool. He listened to him. After discussing a few other things, they ended the call.

Clifford didn't know what to say. The secret land trip had harmed them. They got no benefits; instead, they lost people.

Next time, he wouldn't allow anyone to go without getting information on the secret lands first.

Chapter 1332: Part 2: Silver Mark Warrior (Breakthrough)

Star University:

Rumors about Zack Lockwood started appearing online. Someone from the Thunderflame Faction posted that Zack Lockwood had become a Silver Mark Warrior.

At first, no one paid attention, but then more and more online posts started appearing. It immediately drew the attention of warriors from other factions.

They were in disbelief. When they started reading the comments, the warriors from other factions were shocked.

They couldn't help but wonder whether the members of the Thunderflame Faction were fooling them, because the faction leaders and main elders had confirmed that Zack Lockwood was still a Black Mark Warrior.

How could he have become a Silver Mark Warrior in one or two days? Unless they saw the situation with their own eyes, they wouldn't believe it.

However, news of the online posts reached the warriors of the top ten factions, including the Inner Hall and Core Hall.

Before, Zack Lockwood was popular in the Outer Hall and Inner Hall. Now, the online posts were drawing the attention of the Core Hall warriors.

Many of them were training hard each day, so this news came out of nowhere and surprised them. Some of the Silver Mark Warriors heard about Zack Lockwood from their junior faction members.

Now, these Silver Mark Warriors found the online posts offensive. Most of them were at the warrior camps; otherwise, the posts would have offended a lot more people.

At this time, Morton Redford saw those online posts.

He was dumbfounded. The next second, he smiled. "It was funny. The Thunderflame Faction members are joking," he thought.

Yet, he wanted to verify the truth himself. But the problem was that Zack Lockwood never left the Thunderflame Faction.

He began thinking of a way to lure him out.

Dean's Office:

Dean Jerome and the Purple Mark Guard were discussing something else, but the online discussion attracted the attention of the Purple Mark Guard.

He, too, thought it was a nice joke, but he wanted to tell Dean Jerome first. Suddenly, he brought this matter up amidst the other topics.

Dean Jerome's eyes flickered with surprise.

He said, "If it's true, then it's good news."

The Purple Mark Guard was taken aback.

He said, "Dean, do you believe these online posts?"

“The faction kids might be joking with each other,” he added.

Dean Jerome smiled and called Faction Leader Clifford. The call connected, and he asked about the online posts.

Faction Leader Clifford told him that Zack Lockwood was in retreat. He had been given full access to the Essence Chamber by Main Elder Austin.

The reason behind the rumor was that Austin’s palace members noticed Zack Lockwood was stronger than before. He was giving off the coercion of a Silver Mark Warrior.

Dean Jerome then told Clifford to confirm the news first. After ending the call, he turned toward the Purple Mark Guard.

The Purple Mark Guard had been listening to the call as well. His heart was stirred. He couldn’t believe the news was true, but from the words of Faction Leader Clifford, it seemed to be.

“Did you hear him?” Jerome asked.

The Purple Mark Guard said, “Dean, if the news is true, then other factions won’t stay silent. Especially the Klein Family.”

“As far as I know, they have ordered their Core Hall members to pay attention to Zack Lockwood,” he added.

Dean Jerome smiled and said, “You were really keeping an eye on the threats surrounding the kid.”

“I’m his guardian. I’m sure he will become a great warrior in the future,” the Purple Mark Guard replied.

Dark Variant Faction:

Old Man Vince heard the news from the main elders. He was surprised. Ever since Dean Jerome warned him, he had stopped taking direct action against Zack Lockwood.

He knew that the kid had the full support of Dean Jerome and the Thunderflame Faction. But that didn't mean he would stay silent.

He decided to share the news with other forces anonymously.

Human Bloodline Faction:

Faction Leader Francesca was surprised by the news. She immediately thought of Zack Lockwood's bloodline method.

Like any other inheritance method, the Bloodline method is the same: the second chapter will appear after completing the first chapter.

She decided to meet Zack Lockwood later.

Virtual Training Lab:

If anyone was discussing Zack Lockwood seriously, it was those in the Virtual Training Lab. Old Man Daniel was interested in Zack Lockwood's data.

He didn't have data on Zack Lockwood's Black Mark Level strength, but when he heard about the online posts, he, like the others, refused to believe it at first.

He immediately called Ronnie Seth to get confirmation, as Ronnie had Zack Lockwood's contact info.

If they could hear it from Zack Lockwood, it would be good. Old Man Daniel then heard back from Ronnie Seth.

Zack Lockwood was not picking up the call. But he would get news from others. Until then, Old Man Daniel decided to wait.

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From MC's Perspective:

Inside the Essence Chamber, the sound from the digital device was disturbing me. I opened my eyes and turned off the device.

Then, I continued to focus on comprehending the first chapter of the Sealing Force Inheritance Method.

Time went by.

That night, I stopped practicing and opened my eyes. I found the dull golden rune in my mind was thicker than before. There was progress.

I wanted to continue the practice the next morning.

I stood up and turned off the switch. World energy began to decrease. When it was completely gone, I opened the door and walked out.

I turned toward the exit. The scene before me stunned me. The Palace members were waiting outside.

Everyone's eyes were on me.

"What happened?" I asked.

There were General Rank Warriors, Black Mark Warriors, and Silver Mark Warriors. Everyone was looking at me.

“Are you a Silver Mark Warrior now?” one of the females asked.

Hearing that, my eyes flashed with a glint. Now I understood what this was about. They had all been waiting for me.

I shook my head and didn’t respond. Then, I started leaving. The warriors felt the coercion of a Silver Mark Warrior coming from Zack.

Now, they believed that the rumors were true.

“It’s true,” the female warrior said. She herself was a Silver Mark Warrior. She did not expect to see such a young Silver Mark Warrior.

Chapter 1333: Part 1: Austin’s Test

From MC’s Perspective

I left the Golden Lightning Palace, but I knew that a new headache was coming. The senior members, who were Silver Mark Warriors, had seen through me.

They would definitely spread the news next. I could only endure it and stay low key. I needed to succeed in other Inheritance methods as well.

Soon, I returned to my room. After entering, I closed the door. Then, I went to take a bath.

Meanwhile

The seniors were really determined. They had started spreading the news around. In the middle of the night, many members were active online.

They didn't sleep. They usually slept very late at night after chatting with friends, and that day was the same.

After talking with friends, they were about to sleep.

Buzz!

Several news posts were uploaded by members of the Golden Lightning Palace. The news came out suddenly.

The notification about the new posts reached everyone. The people who were about to sleep decided to look at them casually.

But when they read the news, their sleepiness vanished. Their minds became active again. They opened the online page and started posting comments under the posts.

The post was made by an anonymous account, but it was about the senior members of the Golden Lightning Palace confirming Zack's strength, which was now at the Silver Mark Warrior level.

At first, everyone thought someone was reposting an old post. But they noticed the little details; it was confirmed by senior members that very night.

It caused shockwaves among the Thunderflame Faction members. If the news was true, why hadn't the elders revealed it?

The Core Hall should have added his name to the list. Then why were the elders not doing it?

As time passed, interested warriors continued to discuss this topic. Some groups discussed it until early morning.

The Following Day

I woke up. After completing my morning routine, I left the residence. I headed straight towards the Golden Lightning Palace.

On the way, I came across more warriors. Their number was greater than yesterday, and everyone was looking at me.

I noticed their badges; they were Black Mark and Silver Mark Warriors from other places. What were they doing near the Golden Lightning Palace?

On the other hand, the warriors were there because of the late-night post. They wanted to confirm the truth of the online post with their own eyes.

Now they were seeing Zack Lockwood. They could feel that the pressure coming from him was different than before.

It was obviously greater than the Black Mark Level. The Silver Mark Level warriors felt a sense of danger.

I reached the Golden Lightning Palace and walked inside. Instead of going to the Essence Chamber, I headed towards Master Austin's residence.

Master Austin had texted me yesterday, but because I had turned off my device, I hadn't noticed his reply until this morning.

I walked up to the door and saw it was already open.

Creak!

I pushed the door fully open and walked into the room. I saw Master Austin seated on the sofa, reading a report.

He noticed my appearance.

“Come here and sit,” Austin said.

However, his gaze was still locked on Zack. He was seeing Zack properly after giving him full access.

As his gaze became deeper, he saw a silver aura forming behind Zack. It was proof that Zack Lockwood had become a Silver Mark Warrior.

Austin’s heart stirred. He had thought Zack Lockwood didn’t get any benefit in that treacherous secret land, but it appeared everyone was wrong.

“Zack Lockwood’s previous accumulation must have been strong,” Austin thought.

He needed a little push in that secret land. Now that he has become a Silver Mark Warrior, he can be added to the Core Hall.

But he didn’t know why the kid hadn’t spoken up yet.

I sat opposite Master Austin.

“Zack, what happened?” Austin asked. “You have become a Silver Mark Warrior. Why haven’t you reported to me yet?”

Hearing that, I was stunned. Then I immediately thought of a good answer.

I said, “Master, did you forget about the Thunderone Force Inheritance?”

Austin’s eyes flickered. Then he understood. He couldn’t help but laugh at himself. How did he forget about Zack Lockwood’s Thunderone Force Inheritance?

He turned towards Zack. Once again, he saw that silver aura around Zack, and he thought of something.

He stood up and said, "Come with me."

Hearing that, I stood up and followed him. He left the residence and went to the front yard.

"I would like to see your Silver Mark Power of the Water Variant," he said.

I was stunned again. I hadn't stored enough shock force inside my dantian. It was the result of the second chapter of the shock force integration.

"Okay," I replied.

Austin thought of a good idea and started to walk again. This time he went behind the building.

I followed him. We arrived at the back of the building where there was a large open land.

The other members were on the other side of the building, practicing in the training area. Here, it was Austin's private space. Members couldn't come here without his permission.

Austin walked up to a small shed. He opened the shutter and walked inside.

At this time, I was confused. What was Master Austin up to? I saw him searching for something inside the shed.

Shortly afterwards, Austin walked out carrying an uneven, flat black shield. The shield's edges were cracked.

My eyes flashed with a glint. It appeared he had gotten this shield from a battlefield.

Austin saw through his disciple's thoughts.

He said, "You are right. It's a shield."

Hearing that, I smiled at him. Master Austin saw through me correctly.

"I got it from the battlefield. You have to use your Silver Mark Inheritance force to strike it," Austin added.

Hearing that I started to calculate. I decided to use little bit of new shock force to mix with the bloodline force.

It will definitely be powerful than before.

Chapter 1334: Part 2: Austin's Test

From MC's Perspective:

After hearing Master Austin's words, I nodded to him and looked at the uneven black shield.

Then, I continued to circulate the bloodline power, which was a bright blue water force, in my dantian.

The blue water force stirred. I mixed it with the new shock force power and proceeded to circulate it through my body.

A bright blue water drop mixed with golden and silver energy appeared at the tip of my finger. The golden and silver energy was dense and sharp.

The small water drop was more powerful than before. The shock force was more destructive than before.

On the other hand, Austin saw my power. His gaze locked onto the bright water drop, and his eyes flickered.

"Zack Lockwood's inheritance force is more powerful than before," he thought.

Boom!

I pointed my forefinger at the uneven black shield. The next second, I shot the bright water drop at it.

Swoosh!

A bright blue streak of light swept across the place. In the blink of an eye, the bright blue light struck the uneven black shield.

Boom!

A deafening sound occurred.

Master Austin withstood the force. He didn't even move one inch from the spot, but the uneven black shield had a small crack.

The blue streak of light had left a terrible mark on it.

Austin's face changed. He knew the grade of the Black Shield. Even a Gold Mark Warrior cannot break the shield.

Yet, Zack Lockwood's attack left a crack in it.

I saw the result, and my eyes flashed with satisfaction. The power of the new shock force was stronger than before.

Then my gaze fell on Master Austin. He seemed to be bewildered. I figured it out; it must have something to do with the uneven black shield.

"Master, what's the grade of the shield?" I asked.

Austin collected his thoughts and said, "It's a Grade 12. Gold Mark Warriors can use this shield. Yet your attack left a crack in it."

Then he thought of something, and his expression became serious.

Austin said, "Zack, don't show off your strength yet. It will alarm others. Just try to focus on getting a breakthrough in Thunder One Force."

Hearing that, I nodded to him. After some talk, we returned to the residence.

I started heading towards the essence chamber. I came across the warriors there, but I ignored them and went straight to the chamber.

The group of warriors was still discussing Zack Lockwood's strength. They didn't know when he had become a Silver Mark Warrior.

After arriving at the essence chamber, I entered. The door behind me closed automatically.

I flipped the switch.

Buzz!

World energy started filling the room. I went to the middle and sat cross-legged on the ground. world energy became denser.

I closed my eyes and started comprehending the dull golden sealing rune in my mind. The rune of the Sealing Force was denser than the previous day.

I continued to focus on comprehending it.

Outside

The news of Zack Lockwood's breakthrough became official because most of the Thunderflame Faction warriors confirmed it.

Not only the warriors from the Golden Lightning Palace, but the warriors from other palaces confirmed the news as well.

This broke the rumors that Zack Lockwood didn't achieve any breakthrough in the treacherous secret land.

Some of the warriors started feeling envious. However, since Zack Lockwood belonged to their faction, it also comforted them.

It didn't take long for the news to start appearing on online posts. In a matter of hours, it became a major topic of discussion.

Main Hall

Faction Leader Clifford and other main elders were seated in their seats. Clifford had called for the meeting due to Dean Jerome's call yesterday.

When everyone was there, Old Man Clifford didn't waste his time. He turned towards Austin.

"Dean Jerome called me yesterday. He wanted to know the current status of Zack Lockwood."

"What happened to him?"

"Did he become a Silver Mark Warrior?" Clifford asked Austin.

Main Elders Cathy, Leola, and Rosie were present as well. Their gazes turned towards Austin. Main Elder Ann, sitting in the adjacent seat, looked at him too.

A bright smile appeared on Austin's face. The sadness caused by Neil Smith's demise was gone.

He said, "Zack Lockwood had a breakthrough. He is a Silver Mark Warrior now. He is just busy getting a breakthrough in the Thunder One Force inheritance method."

Hearing that, everyone's eyes flickered with understanding.

"No wonder he didn't come to see me these days," Ann said from the side.

She had been wondering what Zack Lockwood was up to. Now she understood; he didn't have time to visit her.

"He was using the essence chamber," Austin said.

"Harumph. I have an essence chamber facility as well. Next time, I'll make him practice in my Healing Palace," Ann said.

"Maybe he feels uncomfortable. There are more female warriors in the Healing Palace," Cathy said jokingly.

Old Man Clifford smiled. Others were smiling as well because of the good news.

"So that kid benefited from the secret land. Maybe it was not enough for him to get a breakthrough there," Leola said in a serious tone.

"That must be it," Cathy said.

"That day, he told us that he had faced many do-or-die situations. Maybe the crisis stimulated him, so he got a breakthrough here in a few days," Rosie said.

"Main Elder Rosie is right. According to the statements of the warriors who went there, no one gained any significant benefits. Everyone faced life-or-death crises there," Clifford said.

Then he thought of something else. His expression turned serious.

"So he has to get a breakthrough in two inheritance methods. He got a breakthrough in only one so far. No wonder Zack Lockwood was staying silent."

"I forgot about it," Clifford said.

Austin then said, "Faction Leader, I heard the warriors from the core hall were keeping an eye on Zack Lockwood."

"If he enters the core hall, he will be targeted by the people of the Klein Family. Who knows? They could order their own family warriors to kill Zack," Austin added in a cold tone.

Chapter 1335: Morton's evil plan

From MC's Perspective:

I was standing in the meeting hall. The faction leader and the main elders were discussing the future.

Faction Leader Clifford and the others heard the words of Main Elder Austin.

Clifford said, "Zack, if there is anyone who desires to harm you, you should not hold back. You can fight. I'm sure Dean Jerome must have eyes on such people."

Hearing that, I replied, "Don't worry, Leader. I'll take care of myself."

Clifford nodded in relief. Then he thought of something and said, "Okay, you can go back. I want to hear news of your next breakthrough soon."

Hearing that, I nodded to him and greeted the other main elders before walking out of the place.

Clifford watched Zack Lockwood leave. Once he left the meeting hall, he turned towards the others.

"You don't have to worry about him. I think Dean Jerome is already keeping an eye on Zack. If there is anyone trying to harm Zack Lockwood, then he would know," Clifford said to Austin.

Then they shifted the topic and started discussing other matters.

About 20 minutes later,

I returned to the Golden Lightning Palace. As usual, I ignored the other warriors and came to the essence chamber.

I opened the door and walked inside. I had full access, so I didn't have to worry about other things.

I turned on the switch. The outlet opened, and World energy began to fill the room.

I came to the middle and sat cross-legged on the ground. Then I closed my eyes and started focusing on the dull golden sealing rune in my mind.

The dull golden rune was lifelike.

Time went by.

The sealing rune became denser. At one point, the rune stopped throbbing.

Click!

The next second, I felt some shackle break. New information appeared in my mind. It was the second Chapter of the Sealing Force Method.

My heart stirred. Before I could digest the information, a dull golden stream of energy shot out from the sealing rune.

The special stream of energy entered my mind, soul, body, and inheritance force. All of this happened within seconds.

Click!

My mind and soul, which were already at the Silver Mark Level, continued to grow further.

Not only that, but my bones, muscles, veins, and inner organs were getting stronger. The mysterious stream of energy entered the dantian.

From the outside, the dantian looked the same. But the space inside the dantian grew.

Seeing that, I was not surprised. It was the same thing that happened when the Shock Force Integration Method broke through.

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Core Hall

Silver Mark Warriors were practicing hard. A few of them were discussing Zack Lockwood being a Silver Mark Warrior.

Unfortunately, none of them could go and verify the news. There were warriors in the core hall who were close to the Klein Family.

They were following the news of Zack Lockwood. But the news that came this morning was a shock to them.

None of the Silver Mark Warriors believed it. Most of the warriors ignored the news. But the warriors belonging to the Klein Family were worried.

They didn't know how to confirm the truth.

In the core hall, Morton Redford was present as well. This news was like a thunderclap falling on his head.

He immediately left the core hall and went to the public area. He wanted to meet any Thunderflame Faction member.

It didn't take long for him to find a small group. Warriors from other Factions were asking questions to one of the warriors from the Thunderflame Faction.

When he got there, he heard that they were asking about Zack Lockwood as well. He paused his footsteps and continued to listen to their words.

"Yes, it's true. Zack Lockwood is a Silver Mark Warrior. We have to call him Senior Brother hereafter," a middle-aged man from the Thunderflame Faction said.

"No, you are wrong."

"If it's true, then why hasn't he come out yet?" a warrior from the Elemental Faction asked.

Next, the other warriors surrounded the Thunderflame Faction Warrior and started asking questions.

Actually, they were warriors sent by their seniors to confirm the news. It would be too much for Silver Mark Warriors to seek the truth themselves.

So, they sent out their junior brothers.

But Silver Mark Warrior Morton Redford continued listening. He wanted to clear out these people and control the Thunderflame Faction Warrior alone.

The Thunderflame Faction Warrior found the atmosphere to be strange.

He said, "It's not me. But the Senior Brothers and Sisters told us that Zack Lockwood is a Silver Mark Warrior."

Hearing that, the other warriors were shocked. The middle-aged man was serious, so they didn't press further.

Morton Redford was angry. He couldn't afford to wait any longer. The task given by the family was important. If he doesn't do anything, then others will act.

Because he was not the only one who was ordered to take down Zack Lockwood. If he completes the task before others, then he can get more benefits.

He then thought of a plan. He thought Zack Lockwood wouldn't be coming out any time soon. No one could force him to come out unless they did something to make him angry.

Morton had done some work and found out that Zack Lockwood had a few friends. One of them was Ronnie Seth of the Dark Variant Faction.

Earlier, he didn't want to use this plan. Now he thinks he has no other option. Even if it means offending the Dark Variant Faction, he was ready to do that.

Then he walked away from the place. He was going to find juniors to teach a lesson to Ronnie Seth. According to the information he collected, Ronnie Seth is a Black Mark Warrior.

A few minutes later,

Morton Redford arranged a few men. They were looking around the Virtual Training Lab. They knew Ronnie Seth frequently visited the Virtual Training Lab.

At this time, Ronnie Seth was in the Dark Variant Faction. As usual, today he walked out of the Faction and was planning to go to the Virtual Training Lab. But he didn't know the danger that awaited him.

Chapter 1336: Francesca showed up

From MC's Perspective

Inside the essence chamber, the transformation took effect. The four streams of special energy broke the shackles.

The inheritance force, body, mind, and soul underwent transformations. The dull golden sealing rune in mind broke through to attain the Silver Mark Level.

Next, I could focus on the Bloodline power because the Thunder One force was gone. It had fused with the previous lightning method to become a new purple lightning method.

It was a complete method with a new route that I could only figure out slowly, because the brand new lightning bolt run was under the control of the shock force rune.

So, I didn't have to pay attention to it separately. Then, I decided to spend a few more hours stabilizing my new strength.

Time went by.

That night, I ended my practice. I opened my eyes, stood up, and turned off the switch. The world energy in the room disappeared in the blink of an eye.

When it was completely gone, I opened the essence chamber and walked out of the room. To my surprise, no one was there.

I guessed everyone must have thought I had left.

Then, I made my way towards the exit. Soon, I walked out of the Golden Lightning Palace and started heading towards the residence.

It was the middle of the night, so the whole place was quiet. Not a sound could be heard. As I walked on, an unknown feeling appeared in my heart—as if someone were watching me.

I paused my footsteps and started looking around. The whole street was quiet. Not a person could be seen walking around.

But the feeling was not wrong. I was sure something was going on, even though I couldn't see it. My eyesight could cover up to 500 metres. It was astonishing.

If others knew about it, they would be shocked to the core. Not only that, but my perception could cover up to 500 metres as well.

Since I couldn't find anything using my eyesight, it was time for perception. So, I activated my perception. I closed my eyes and began to perceive.

From 100 metres, 200 metres, 300 metres... 400 metres and 500 metres. Suddenly, I found a figure hidden in mid-air.

My heart skipped a beat. My intuition was right. Someone was indeed watching me. But I didn't know who it was.

No one comes to the Thunderflame Faction just like that. It must be the Faction Leader or the main elders. If possible, it could be Dean Jerome.

I collected my thoughts and started walking towards my residence. My perception was still active. I could feel a shadowy figure following behind.

A few minutes later, I arrived in front of the residence. Instead of going inside, I turned around and confronted the person.

I looked towards the person in mid-air.

"I don't know who you are, but I have already found you," I said to the person.

Swoosh!

The next second, a middle-aged woman appeared before me. Upon seeing her, my eyes gleamed.

She was none other than Francesca Ball, the Faction Leader of the Human Bloodline Faction. I didn't expect her to come.

"Zack Lockwood, it's true that you have become a Silver Mark Warrior. You have found me. But I guess your bloodline method is yet to break through," Francesca said with a smile.

Hearing that, my eyes glinted with understanding. Unlike other Inheritance methods, the bloodline method is a visual method.

"Faction Leader, you have come at the right time. I'm going to focus on the Bloodline Method next," I said to her.

Francesca walked up to me.

“Then I’m glad that I have come at the right time,” she said.

Hearing that, I looked around before opening the door to invite her inside. If anyone saw her, it would be a huge problem.

Francesca walked into the home. She then sat on the sofa. She asked me to sit as well, so I sat opposite her.

She said, “The bloodline method of our family is a visualization method. Your progress will be faster if you practise in a suitable environment.”

“If you practise in the essence chamber, it will take a lot of time for you to break through,” she added.

“Suitable environment,” I muttered.

“Yes, our family land has a special secret land where Clan members can cultivate without problem,” Francesca said.

Hearing that, I was dumbfounded. It was impossible for me to disclose my identity as a Bloodline Warrior.

Francesca saw the hesitation. She then thought of a good idea.

“There is a hot spring near the Volcanic area located close to one of our borders. I plan to take you there after meeting with Dean Jerome,” Francesca said.

Phew!

I heaved a sigh of relief. That was close. I didn’t want to disclose my bloodline connection with the Ball Family.

“Okay, then I’m ready to practise in the hot spring,” I replied to her.

I could understand, because the bloodline element is a boiling hot water variant. The hot spring is the natural place for it.

“Then be ready tomorrow morning.” After saying that, she was ready to leave.

I accompanied her to the exit. She disappeared from the spot and appeared in mid-air. In a flash, she was gone from the place.

A hint of surprise appeared in my eyes. It was not the first time she had come here anonymously, yet no one was able to sense her.

Then I closed the door and walked into the room. I went to take a bath first. The bath lasted for 20 minutes.

I walked out of the bath. Then I changed into comfortable clothes. After doing that, I went to bed to sleep.

The following day, I woke up early and started doing my morning routine. Since Faction Leader Francesca had spoken, I was sure she would be here sooner or later.

An hour later, after getting ready, I sat on the sofa comfortably, waiting for her call. In the meantime, I took the device out and started browsing the online news.

Suddenly, one of the recent news items caught my attention. It had happened last night, but the online posts had been appearing since midnight.

When I read the article, my eyes flashed with anger.

“Ronnie was sneak attacked,” I muttered.

Chapter 1337: Part 1: Seething Rage

From MC's Perspective:

After learning that Ronnie Seth had been sneak attacked, I couldn't sit still. I began to go through the online posts again. I wanted to know whether the news was true or not.

As I continued to go through the online posts, it became evident that the information was true. I stood up and decided to investigate the truth myself.

A few minutes later, I left the residence and started heading towards the exit. This time, I didn't hide my presence. I walked boldly, my gaze darkening.

The members passing by were taken aback. They didn't know what had happened. But they noticed Zack Lockwood's expression. The next second, they knew something was wrong.

A couple of passersby paused their footsteps and started discussing.

A group of people with discerning eyes knew something about Zack Lockwood's relationship with Ronnie Seth. Both of them were good friends, despite coming from rival factions.

People started posting news online then and there. Obviously, there were more who were interested in Zack Lockwood's current news.

This was another time for them to watch the drama unfold. Zack Lockwood had always been low-key. He rarely came outside, so they didn't want to miss out on this opportunity.

Meanwhile

I arrived at the exit. By this time, I had come across more than a hundred members. They were on their way to the common training facility, but my appearance had changed their minds.

I walked out of the Thunderflame Faction territory. Then, I started heading towards the virtual training lab. I didn't care if the whole outer and inner hall saw me.

Main Hall

Faction Leader Clifford was in the main hall discussing something else with the main elders. It was the daily morning meeting regarding the warrior camps and news related to their members.

Suddenly, the disciples of the main elders started texting them in the middle of the meeting.

But no one answered the calls or checked the text messages. As the seconds went by, the main elders were getting annoyed.

Even Faction Leader Clifford was confused. He swept his gaze across everyone. His eyes were filled with doubt.

He had never seen everyone getting calls and text messages at the same time. The main elders didn't know what to do. Even they were perplexed.

Buzz!

Faction Leader Clifford got the text the next second. This time, everyone was dumbfounded.

Faction Leader Clifford took his device out and read the text message. His eyes filled with disbelief the next moment.

"What?" the old man muttered.

"Who provoked the kid this time?" Old Man Clifford added.

Gasp!

Main Elder Cathy and the others took a sharp breath. They had very rarely seen Faction Leader Clifford have an outburst. They knew something bad had happened.

Austin finally asked, "Faction Leader, what happened?"

Everyone's gaze turned toward the Faction Leader. Clifford's expression was ugly.

He immediately summoned one of the non-main elders from outside. Seeing that everyone had fallen silent, they waited for the person to arrive.

A few minutes later, a hunchbacked elder walked into the room. He greeted everyone before looking towards Faction Leader Clifford.

"Tobias, what's going on?" Clifford asked.

The main elders Austin, Ann, Cathy, Leola, and Rosie were looking at the hunchbacked old man. He was the Purple Mark Elder.

However, his potential had been exhausted. There were many like him; they were the pillars of the Thunderflame Faction.

The situation was the same in other factions. But the main elders were the strongest among them, which was why they held their positions.

"Leader, what are you asking about?" Tobias asked. He had been called here abruptly, so he was confused right now.

Clifford noticed the doubt. He didn't know how Austin and Ann would react, but he decided to ask anyway.

"I'm asking about Zack Lockwood," Clifford said in a serious tone.

Hearing that, everyone was taken aback. Austin and Ann's expressions shifted. They knew Zack Lockwood was practicing inside the essence chamber, so they didn't know what was going on now.

The hunchbacked old man understood. Though he was old, he knew about the latest information, including what had happened just now. The hunchbacked old man nodded his head and started telling them.

Virtual Training Lab

Inside the virtual training lab, I met with Old Man Daniel and the other staff. They all looked angry and helpless.

They all seemed to be waiting for my arrival. Old Man Daniel looked furious. He walked up to me and looked into my eyes.

"Kid, you are late. Your friend's situation was critical. He was admitted to the infirmary. No one was allowed to see him," Old Man Daniel said. His tone sounded sad and frustrated.

Hearing that, my heart boiled in anger. I didn't want to talk too much. I wanted to know who did this.

"Elder, who is it?" I asked him.

At this time, I found the gazes of the staff were on me as well. They were all angry and frustrated, just like Old Man Daniel.

They knew my characteristics. If I knew the culprit, I would teach them a lesson.

Old Man Daniel began to contemplate. He didn't want to trigger Zack Lockwood because he didn't know the attitude of the Thunderflame Faction Leader and the main elders. So, he was hesitating.

On the other hand, I could guess his thoughts. He must be thinking about the consequences. Very few people used this facility as it was.

I didn't want to cause more trouble for him and the facility. I thought that the background behind the attacker must be strong.

"Alright, I will find the attacker myself," I told everyone.

Then, I glanced at Old Man Daniel and the staff before exiting the virtual training lab.

The faces of Old Man Daniel and the other staff changed drastically. They didn't know what Zack Lockwood was going to do next.

"Wait!" Old Man Daniel shouted.

He didn't want Zack Lockwood to fall into a trap.

However, I heard Old Man Daniel's shout, but I ignored him.

Chapter 1338: Part 2 : Seething Rage

Thunderflame Faction, Main Hall

The hunchbacked old man, Tobias, finished saying everything. However, everyone's expression was grim.

Austin stood up from his seat and said, "I'm going to check on him."

Swoosh!

After saying that, he left the main hall. The other main elders didn't say anything. The hunchbacked old man, Tobias, was ordered to leave. Once he was gone, the faction leader reacted.

"It appears someone is targeting the kid again," Faction Leader Clifford said.

"They have targeted the kid named Ronnie Seth. He seems to have a good relationship with Zack Lockwood," Ann said.

"He is from the Dark Variant Faction. I don't know how that old man Vince is going to react," Faction Leader Clifford said in a solemn tone.

Main Elder Leola, Cathy, and Rosie's expressions were solemn.

"We had thought everything was going to be fine, but it seems not. Could this be the plan of Faction Leader Vince?" Leola asked.

Faction Leader Clifford's eyes turned solemn. He knew that Dean Jerome had already warned Vince. He didn't think Vince would dare to go against Dean Jerome.

"I don't think it's him. Let's wait to see what Austin gathers," Clifford said.

From MC's Perspective

I walked out of the virtual training lab. I could hear the constant shouting of old man Daniel behind me. The staff seemed to be coming out as well. My eyes flickered, and I turned around to look at them.

Old man Daniel was standing outside with the staff. I swept my gaze across everyone.

I said, "Don't worry. I won't cause any problems. I'm going to check what's wrong with them."

Daniel saw Zack Lockwood. He found Zack Lockwood's eyes to be serious; he didn't seem to be lying. Daniel sighed inwardly.

"Alright, he will be careful. Let's get inside," old man Daniel said to the staff. The staff members relaxed their brows. Then, they walked back into the building.

Daniel gave a look towards Zack Lockwood before walking into the building. Daniel thought that it was a trap set for Zack Lockwood, meaning Ronnie Seth was not the real target.

He wanted to remind Zack Lockwood, but Zack seemed to know all along, so Daniel was not worried about him.

On the other hand, I started walking to the infirmary. On the way, I came across warriors.

Most of them were gathered in a public place. Their numbers were high. It appeared they were not here coincidentally. I walked past them and headed towards the infirmary. Not long after, I noticed this group of people was following me.

A hint of coldness flashed in my eyes.

I was right. Someone had found out the link between me and Ronnie Seth. The culprit's real target was me. To think they had dared to plot inside the campus. I collected my thoughts and continued walking towards the infirmary.

It didn't take long for me to get there. Many injured warriors were receiving treatment here. They were warriors who got injured during fights in warrior camps and dangerous missions outside the campus.

My appearance didn't attract attention at first. But when I started asking about Ronnie Seth, the healers were stunned. Some of them checked out my Thunderflame Faction badge and seemed to show hesitation.

Swoosh!

"I knew you would be here," I heard a familiar voice from behind.

Hearing that, I turned around and saw the person. It was none other than Master Austin.

"Master," I greeted him.

Austin nodded his head and said, "I know what happened. Come with me. We will see Ronnie Seth."

I nodded and followed him. The healers nearby were scared to react. They didn't expect a Main Elder to come here and from the Thunderflame Faction, no less.

We started walking down the corridor. Then we took a right turn at the end and came to the second room.

Two healers were standing outside. They were guarding the room; no one was allowed to go inside. But when they saw Main Elder Austin, they were terrified.

"Move," Austin uttered.

Hearing that, the two healers moved aside.

"Don't allow anyone else in until we come outside," Austin said to the guards.

The guards nodded their heads. Austin then opened the door and walked inside. Seeing that, I followed him into the room.

We approached the main bed where the injured Ronnie Seth was lying. His whole body was covered in bandages. He seemed to be asleep.

Seeing that, I didn't know what to say because Ronnie Seth was not weak. He was a strong Black Mark Warrior. He had obtained the Black Lightning Inheritance.

It is one of the most powerful Inheritances. No one in the same rank should be able to hurt him. Yet, he was beaten down like that. It would be even more impossible for veteran Black Mark Warriors to do this.

They were strong, but not strong enough to make Ronnie Seth this miserable.

"What are your thoughts?" Austin asked.

Hearing that, I collected my thoughts and said, "It must be a Silver Mark Warrior who took action. Otherwise, it's impossible to defeat him."

A hint of appreciation flashed in Austin's eyes.

He then said, "You are right. It was done by a Silver Mark Warrior. His family is an ally of the Klein Family. His name is Morton Redford."

I didn't expect Master Austin to have this information so fast.

"Don't think about attacking him. He is a Silver Mark Warrior. He must have done this to lure you out. You have just broken through. You need time to control your new strength," Austin said.

Hearing that, I smiled and said, "Master, I don't think it's good to make him wait. Next, he will target our Thunderflame Faction members."

"I can fight across ranks. Now that I have become a Silver Mark Warrior, I doubt he could defeat me," I added.

Meanwhile

Dean Jerome came to know about the news. He was not surprised. He had been watching the movements of the warriors close to the Klein Family.

When the news of Zack Lockwood's breakthrough to the Silver Mark level appeared, it must have unsettled many people, forcing them to take action against him.

Chapter 1339: Part 3: Seething Rage

Dean's Office

Dean Jerome was not going to interfere because he knew Zack Lockwood had broken through to the Silver Mark Level.

He believed Zack could handle the brat from the Redford Family.

Human Bloodline Faction

Faction Leader Francesca was about to visit Dean Jerome's office when the news reached her ears. She was stunned. She never thought Zack Lockwood would face problems so soon.

She then came to know further information from the main elders, who had received the news from the members. It didn't take long for Francesca to get the full picture.

She now knew who the culprit was.

"The Redford Family," she muttered.

She knew that the Redford Family was a second-tier family connected to the Klein Family. Her eyes flickered.

She thought that news of Zack Lockwood must have reached the Klein Family, and they had started moving their pawns.

She shook her head in frustration. She had wanted to take Zack Lockwood to the volcanic area where he could use the environment to achieve a breakthrough in the bloodline method.

Now, this has happened. She raised her eyebrows, contemplating whether to take Zack Lockwood to the volcanic area or not.

Then, her eyes flashed with a glint as she made the decision.

She left the Human Bloodline Faction and went to meet Dean Jerome. She thought only Dean Jerome could make a decision about this.

From MC's Perspective

"If you want to kill him, then you have to do it outside the campus. Here, you can't break the rules, even if you have our support," Austin warned his disciple.

He could understand the anger, but he also knew rules cannot be broken. No matter what. Even if you are right, you can't break the rules here.

Hearing that, I didn't say anything because I agreed with his words. Suddenly, I thought of the bloodline method. Faction Leader Francesca wanted me to practice in the volcanic area.

She was going to take me away today, but this had happened.

"Master, I'm going to do a mission outside the campus," I said.

Austin's eyes flickered. He was hoping Zack Lockwood would remain calm, but he didn't expect him to make the decision right then and there.

However, he was not angry. He thought Dean Jerome would support Zack Lockwood. If Zack Lockwood broke the rules here, then Dean Jerome would definitely punish him.

Yet, it was a different situation outside.

"Okay, then I'll ask the Faction Leader to arrange a mission for you. The mission won't be difficult, but you can use the opportunity to take down the enemies."

"I doubt the people will send Gold Mark Warriors after you. If they do, then Dean Jerome will be pissed off," Austin said.

Hearing that, I agreed with him. Then we decided to leave. Ronnie Seth was unconscious; he won't be waking up anytime soon.

We walked out of the room. The healers were there, but no one came to visit Ronnie.

"Take care of this kid," Austin said to them.

Both the healers nodded their heads. Why not? They didn't dare to offend Main Elder Austin.

Swoosh!

I left with the Master. Soon, we returned to the Thunderflame Faction. He brought me to the main hall again.

When we got there, I was stunned by the scene. The main elders and the Faction Leader were there as if they had been waiting for us.

I stood in the middle of the room. Austin went to his seat and sat down.

Faction Leader Clifford saw Zack Lockwood. He turned towards Austin and asked, "What happened?"

Hearing that, Austin began to tell him what had happened in the infirmary.

A few minutes later, Clifford asked, "So you want to deal with the person outside the campus?"

Hearing that, I was not surprised, so I nodded to him.

"If you go outside, do you think you will face that person only? The Klein Family will send more warriors," Clifford said in a serious tone.

I didn't know what to say. Seeing my silence, he went on to say more.

"Don't make any quick judgments. I will go and talk to Dean Jerome. In the meantime, focus on getting a breakthrough in the Thunder One Force," Clifford said.

"Okay," I replied.

Austin agreed as well. Since the Faction Leader had spoken, he was not going to speak against him. He knew Dean Jerome was the only person who could guarantee Zack Lockwood's safety.

Then they talked about a few other things before asking me to leave. I walked out of the main hall and started going back to the residence.

Faction Leader Francesca had told me that she would be here. I guessed she might have heard the news. I didn't know whether she was still willing to take me there.

Soon, I arrived at the residence and walked inside the room. I went to the sofa and sat down.

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Dean's Office

Dean Jerome had someone in his office. The person was none other than Faction Leader Francesca.

Dean Jerome was not surprised. He had already deduced the reason.

"I guess it's time for him to get a breakthrough in the Bloodline method," Dean Jerome said upon looking at her.

Faction Leader Francesca sighed. She said, "Nothing can be hidden from the Dean."

"Okay, you can take him away. But you will be followed by unwanted people. And I don't want you to kill them," Dean Jerome said.

Hearing that, Francesca was stunned. She thought the Dean would tell her to protect Zack Lockwood.

"Don't worry. You can take action if there are any Gold Mark Warriors or above involved," Dean Jerome added.

Phew!

Hearing that, Francesca breathed a sigh of relief.

"Okay," she uttered.

"Someone else is coming as well. You can leave for now," Dean Jerome said.

Hearing that, Faction Leader Francesca left the office room.

Shortly afterwards, Faction Leader Clifford arrived at the Dean's office. Dean Jerome was not surprised. He calmly looked at him and asked, "What happened?"

Faction Leader Clifford smiled and said, "Dean, we encountered a new problem. It has to do with Zack Lockwood."

Chapter 1340: Sign of rats

Dean Office

"I know what's going on. If he goes outside, there will be someone to protect him," Dean Jerome said to Clifford.

Clifford felt his heart set at ease. He had been worried that no one would protect Zack Lockwood outside. They couldn't be present around Zack Lockwood all the time.

"Don't worry about him. Just watch over the other members. The Klein Family could make use of the members in the Thunder Flame Faction," Dean Jerome gave him an advanced warning.

Hearing that, Clifford was taken aback. This was new to him. He didn't expect the Klein Family to lay low.

Before he could say anything else, Dean Jerome said, "I have a mission for this kid. Go and bring him here."

Hearing that, Clifford nodded and left the room.

A few seconds later, Faction Leader Francesca appeared.

Dean Jerome said, "The Purple Mark Guard will take Zack Lockwood to Star City. From there, you can join them. I believe both of you can take down the other Purple Mark Warriors."

After saying that, his eyes flickered. To be honest, he was being extra cautious. He was sure that the Klein Family had lost patience. They would definitely send Purple Mark Warriors this time.

If Zack Lockwood didn't need the time and place for a breakthrough, Jerome would have sent him to the warrior camps already.

Francesca was internally shocked. She didn't know the threat surrounding Zack Lockwood had reached this level. She nodded to him and left the office.

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From MC's Perspective

I was brought to the Dean's office by Faction Leader Clifford. Dean Jerome was behind the desk. Upon seeing him, my heart stirred. I didn't know whether he could detect the changes in my mind.

The Purple Lightning Runes had become one.

Jerome's eyes fell on me. He could see a silver aura forming around me. The pure silver aura was proof that I had become a Silver Mark Warrior.

He then looked away and didn't pry further into the details.

He said, "I'm going to send you outside for a mission. The Purple Mark Guard will escort you. With his backup, no one will be able to hurt you."

Hearing that, I got confused again. I had an appointment with Faction Leader Francesca. But I couldn't make a decision right now.

Faction Leader Clifford relaxed. He knew about the Purple Mark Guard. Not many among the main elders could defeat him. Rumor had it that he was going to become a Half-step Red Mark Warrior soon.

That was a terrifying rumor. So, Clifford was at ease.

Dean Jerome then spoke a few words to Faction Leader Clifford. After that, Clifford left the spot.

Dean Jerome then turned towards me; he smiled and said, "Kid, you are making life difficult for everyone."

The Purple Mark Guard next to him stood with his arms crossed and nodded.

On the other hand, I was surprised by the fact that Dean Jerome couldn't find the changes in the inheritance rune. It made me feel more awe at the power of the source runes.

Jerome didn't know whether I was paying attention to him or not.

He said, "You had a breakthrough in the Shock Force Inheritance. Next, you will have to break through the bloodline method. Otherwise, they will find clues."

"Okay," I replied.

But I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I didn't know how long I was going to be able to hide the truth.

"Take him. I'm going to see how many rats follow you," Jerome said.

"Let's go, kid," the Purple Mark Guard said.

Hearing that, I nodded to Dean Jerome and thanked him. If not for Dean Jerome, I didn't know how many attacks would have reached me.

Swoosh!

The Purple Mark Guard grabbed my shoulder and left the place.

In the blink of an eye, we left the campus and started going towards Star City. We were moving in mid-air at high speed. I only saw a blur in front of my eyes.

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Star City

Faction Leader Francesca had come here in secret. But she had already found four unknown Purple Mark Warriors hiding among the people. Her eyes flickered. She thought Dean Jerome was right.

The Purple Mark Warriors had entered their city. There was no need to hide their identities. In other words, they were here for other reasons. It could only be confirmed if they decided to attack Zack Lockwood.

Swoosh!

In a flash, she saw two people appear before her. The two people were none other than the Purple Mark Guard and Zack Lockwood.

"You guys can leave. I have found five people. I will stop them," the Purple Mark Guard said.

Hearing that, Faction Leader Francesca agreed. She was a Half-step Red Mark Warrior. Unless another faction leader appeared, no one could stop them.

Swoosh!

She grabbed Zack Lockwood's shoulder and disappeared from the spot.

The Purple Mark Guard then turned around and spotted those five Purple Mark Warriors.

He looked at them. Just as they had guessed, the five unknown people hiding among the public walked out. They joined together and started walking towards the city border.

The Purple Mark Guard smiled and decided to block them as they left the border.

Swoosh!

He disappeared from the place and appeared before them. The five Purple Mark Warriors were shocked.

They were all Purple Mark Warriors, but the Purple Mark Guard was close to becoming a Half-step Red Mark Warrior.

They were simply no match for him.

"Identify yourselves!"

"You guys are trespassing at Star University," the Purple Mark Guard said in a cold tone.

The faces of the five people changed. They realized that they were exposed. They wanted to flee. The next second, a terrifying pressure appeared on them.

The five Purple Mark Warriors were unable to move from the spot. Their hearts were covered with a sense of crisis.

They don't know what to do right now. If they do anything wrong, they will be crushed by the pressure.