

Star Gate 161

Chapter 161: Hou Xiaochen (III)

“Teacher, absorb energy from the sword first.” Li Hao ran through a boxing technique as they conversed. “We can go to the ruins and figure something out if that’s the end of it. There should be a way to replenish the weapon.”

The energy in the jade sword seemed to be running out, but there should still be a little left. Yuan Shuo hadn’t absorbed it all, possibly out of concern that they’d be unable to refill the weapon once it was empty.

“There’s no rush!” The professor was also running through a boxing routine. “I won’t die that easily. This way is better, so we should maintain this condition for a few days. Hao Lianchuan is able to discern a thing or two. It’d raise his suspicions if I’m suddenly recovered.”

With that, Li Hao dropped the topic as well. They finished their morning training and ate the breakfast that the Institute delivered. After that, Li Hao received a call from Liu Yan—someone had come from Night Watcher headquarters.

Huang Yun!

The old man from White Moon City who’d been scared off by his teacher. To think that the Night Watchers really would send them rewards. How rare!

Li Hao looked at his sunbathing teacher after he hung up. “Teacher, will you be paying a visit to the Inspectorate?”

“Let’s go. We still need to show Hou Xiaochen face, given that he sent someone with the items,” Yuan Shuo laughed. “But he has nothing good to give, I know all of the treasures that the Night Watchers possess. I personally dug many of them up and they’re not useful to me.”

Neither teacher nor disciple held high hopes, but they would accept whatever it was since it'd been delivered to their doorstep. It was an unnecessary waste otherwise!

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At the same time.

The law enforcement building.

Hao Lianchuan was rather surprised. He couldn't help but look at Huang Yun and growl with curses. "Those guys didn't listen to orders and went rogue, but Director Hou is rewarding them so richly for it? Isn't that encouraging them to do the same thing next time??"

Blood pearls, and five of them! There was even one belonging to a Solar being given away!

Hao Lianchuan knew a little about them. Some Red Moon powerhouses carried them on their body, but they were very hard to locate and extremely difficult to extract. He'd speculated that their Brokensky owned one, but didn't have the ability to retrieve it. Only Director Hou could with the origin weapon, but the director never left White Moon City. So while Hao Lianchuan thought there was likely to be one on the Red Moon powerhouse, he didn't think of trying to claim it.

The Night Watchers held very few of them in storage. This one from a Solar was the only one of its level.

The agency used this material to nurture new talent. They gave Darkmoon blood pearls to rookies, facilitated their breakthroughs to Slayer, then crossed over to the supernatural domain. Most directly entered Darkmoon and saved everyone a great deal of time.

Take Wang Ming, for instance. He'd received a Darkmoon blood pearl at the beginning, though he hadn't known what it was. Director Hou was rewarding the Silver City branch with so many!

“I don’t know, ” replied an innocent Huang Yun. “Manager Yu wanted me to deliver them, so here I am, the errand boy.”

“It’s nothing to do with you!” Hao Lianchuan retorted with dejection. How should he assign them? Although Director Hou hadn’t given instructions, he knew that the Solar level one had to go to Yuan Shuo.

The Sunflare one must be for Liu Long. As for the three Darkmoons... supernaturals didn’t have much use for them, so they were probably meant for Li Hao, Liu Yan, Wu Chao, and Chen Jian. But what was the point of only providing three blood pearls? There should be four!

Hao Lianchuan suspected that Director Hou didn’t know that Li Hao had become a martial master, or that he knew and hoped that the young man would make the crossover in the future. That was why he didn’t send one for Li Hao, out of concern that the lad would find it difficult to ascend after he improved as a martial master.

“So this means that the director wishes for Li Hao to become supernatural, and not to advance further on the path of martial dao?” Hao Lianchuan thought rapidly. Although Director Hou hadn’t said anything, he could more or less guess the director’s meaning.

Did he think well of Li Hao or not?

Liu Long and the others arrived as Hao Lianchuan mused over the possibilities. Wang Ming beamed radiantly when he saw Huang Yun. He was very familiar with this particular Sunflare as they’d carried out missions together. It was also Huang Yun who sent him to Silver City.

What a good man he was!

Although Silver City was a bit disorderly and killed people left and right, Wang Ming had obtained 120 cubes after killing someone. He needed to thank Huang Yun for sending him here!

The current Wang Ming didn't even want to return to White Moon anymore. Although unexpected gains occasionally took place at headquarters, they were in the form of one or two cubes for a small mission. It was a tidy sum over the course of a year, but couldn't hold a candle to 120 cubes at once after killing a Sunflare.

Pangs of guilt struck Huang Yun's conscience to see Wang Ming and the others. He hadn't thought battle would break out in the city so soon after he sent them here. But when he saw Wang Ming's brilliant smile, he took a second guess. Was the boy actually satisfied with these arrangements?

He couldn't tell!

The door swung open as he guessed at the answer; Li Hao walked in supporting Yuan Shuo.

Huang Yun swiftly got to his feet, petrified of giving offense. The old demon was growing ever more domineering and Director Hou had said that he'd possibly fought another Solar. Damn, the old man was terrifying!

"Director Hou sent Huang Yun with rewards." Hao Lianchuan skipped the pleasantries. "Five blood pearls! They're a precious medicine that can enhance a martial master's internal force and enhance their physical body! Yuan Shuo, Liu Long, Liu Yan, Wu Chao, and Chen Jian will each receive one!"

"The others will go without for now since these treasures are ineffective for supernaturals."

Wang Ming and the others didn't mind; Li Hao stayed silent. It was fine that he didn't receive any. He didn't really care.

But when Hao Lianchuan took out the flasks in the box, Li Hao's eyes darted around. Yuan Shuo's pupils shook as well when he sniffed the fragrance. The professor wasn't familiar with blood pearls because he'd never received one, but he was rather surprised in this moment.

Blood pearls?

Their presence... seemed a bit like the unique energy ripples stemming from scarlet shadows. He could also sense one of them particularly brimming with energy. It was richer than the scarlet shadow that Li Hao had absorbed last time.

“What is this?” Yuan Shuo couldn’t help but ask. “Where is it from?”

“Director Hou expended a lot of effort to obtain them,” Hao Lianchuan answered curtly. “Ordinary people can’t extract it. He even utilized an origin weapon to secure them! Use them well, Professor Yuan. This is the only Solar level blood pearl in all of the Night Watchers!”

Solar level?

Blood pearl?

Yuan Shuo mused deeply, first glancing at Hao Lianchuan, then at Li Hao. He had some guesses—perhaps... these came from Red Moon. Hou Xiaochen once killed a Red Moon executive outside White Moon City. Was it then that he obtained their scarlet shadow?

Origin weapons...

If ordinary people were unable to extract blood pearls, they might be able to when equipped with origin weapons. Of course, Red Moon might have their own unique methods.

This was a marvelous item! Last time Yuan Shuo was heavily injured, he’d used both sword energy and scarlet shadow energy to recover. The latter was even more effective when neutralized by sword energy.

The professor had found it quite regretful when the scarlet shadow energy was exhausted, so to think that Hou Xiaochen would send over a Solar level treasure at this time! Not only that, but there was another one that looked to be Sunflare.

Yuan Shuo glanced at Liu Long and suddenly said, “Liu Long, you don’t need yours. I’ll buy it off you for three hundred cubes.”

Liu Long was a Dominator. A Sunflare scarlet shadow was additional splendor to his strength, but not much use. Therefore, Yuan Shuo wanted to give it to Li Hao. If the young man absorbed it, he might swiftly progress to mid or late Sunderer!

Added to that the effect of aura, that would propel Li Hao into Dominator faster.

“Professor Yuan, you cannot force a transaction...” Hao Lianchuan frowned.

Three hundred cubes of mysterious power was a lot! However, Director Hou plainly wished for Liu Long to utilize the blood pearl to set foot into the Dominator level or heal his old wounds. The item was also very useful for latent injuries.

It was very normal for a veteran Sunderer like Liu Long to have accumulated wounds. The blood pearl would enable him to make a full recovery and enter Dominator of Thousands.

Liu Long didn’t know about the benefits of this item and wouldn’t care if he did. His injuries were healed.

“It’s fine.” He nodded. “Take it if you like it, Elder Yuan. I don’t care about mysterious power...”

“Now that would be robbery,” Yuan Shuo chuckled. “Three hundred cubes it is. It’s worth this amount. The item’s effects are different from person to person, but just know that it won’t be that effective for you.”

“I trust Elder Yuan.”

Hao Lianchuan had to interrupt. “Don’t agree so easily, Liu Long. He won’t dare do anything while I’m here! This item can heal your wounds and help your cultivation take a step forward. It’s much more valuable than mysterious power for you!”

It was one thing if he didn’t know, but once he did, Liu Long cared even less about it. I’ve already broken through! No wonder Elder Yuan says it won’t be effective.

“Thank you, Director Hao, but I don’t need it. I’ll find a way to progress myself...”

Idiot! Hao Lianchuan cursed. These Silver City people were completely intractable! Liu Long didn’t understand a word he said, so it was his own fault for being tricked by Yuan Shuo!

I wash my hands of this!

He passed three blood pearls to Wu Chao, Chen Jian, and Liu Yan. He tossed the remaining two to Yuan Shuo and walked downstairs. “I’m going back, you guys do as you wish!”

A place like Silver City gave him high blood pressure every time he visited.

Huang Yun hastily caught up to the director. He didn’t want to be alone with Yuan Shuo.

Laughter traveled out of the office when they left.

“Looks like Director Hou’s ticked off,” Liu Long chortled.

Yuan Shuo chuckled as well, then reminded the team, “Don’t brashly eat the blood pearl. Fatty and skinny, you two need to think carefully. You’ll easily break through to Sunderer if you take it, which means ascending to the supernatural will be very hard for you. You need to consider things carefully!”

With that, he clapped Li Hao on the shoulder. “We’re going back!”

Blood pearls formed from scarlet shadows!

Yuan Shuo was in a very good mood. His injuries might be healed if he took the Solar level one. Of course, he’d rather use sword energy if there was enough of it. His student wouldn’t be able to digest the Solar blood pearl. If he could neutralize it with sword energy, it might launch him one step forward on the path of Dominator.

Hou Xiaochen really had given them a good treasure this time!

Yuan Shuo quickly descended the stairs with Li Hao in tow. The young man was also worked up. The Sunflare blood pearl was likely for him. So... did this mean he could grow stronger again?

Chapter 162: Secrets of the Eight Trigrams (I)

The Yuan residence.

Li Hao and Yuan Shuo stared fixedly at the two pills in front of them. The scarlet shadow energy they were familiar with had been shaped into the form of pills.

“Who would’ve thought that Hou Xiaochen would really send us some treasure?” Yuan Shuo was quite agitated. “He must’ve obtained this after killing Red Moon powerhouses. If origin weapons can extract them, I wonder if the stone blade can?”

This was his focus. He’d thought that only Li Hao could touch the scarlet shadows, so despite Yuan Shuo having some ideas or wanting to kill Red Moon members for their shadows, there was nothing he could do. He couldn’t even see them, much less feel them. How could he extract their energy?

But if Hou Xiaochen could do it, why couldn't he? Wasn't the stone blade an origin weapon?

At the very least, Yuan Shuo felt it highly likely that the family weapons were also origin weapons. There must be something special about them that enabled them to extract blood pearls. His thoughts moved rapidly with this new possibility.

He wanted to kill people!

Kill who?

Red Moon, of course.

His desires hadn't run so deeply before and he hadn't been able to overcome Red Moon, so there was no need to seek revenge against the organization. He'd easily make a target out of himself instead.

But what if he could extract their scarlet shadows after killing their members? This energy was an ultimate treasure for martial masters!

Yuan Shuo was delighted not only because he'd obtained blood pearls, but also that it was better to teach someone how to fish rather than just give them fish. He wanted to learn from Hou Xiaochen how to extract Red Moon's power.

With that, he would be able to hollow out the organization. Well, the caveat was that he survived his ambitions and wasn't chased down by the organization's powerhouses.

"This won't do, I need to talk to Hou Xiaochen!" Rare excitement flickered across Yuan Shuo's face. "After I get the method, I'll make a clean sweep of them when the urge strikes me. Perhaps we'll strike it rich! This and the sword energy means you'll quickly set foot into Dominator."

Li Hao also grinned broadly. What a happy occasion!

“Teacher, I feel that this Sunflare level blood pearl seems only a little weaker than the big shadow from last time. Was that shadow not a Solar?”

“Probably not. Brokensky was only initial Solar, so his shadow was possibly just peak Sunflare.” Yuan Shuo had absorbed most of the peak Sunflare shadow’s energy and left a small portion to his student. Li Hao had utilized it to progress to initial Sunderer. This time, he wanted Li Hao to absorb all of the Sunflare blood pearl. The young man should be able to project internal force from his torso after that. He might not be able to from his head—there was still danger in that, but he shouldn’t be too far off.

Combined with his preliminary understanding of the aura, that would place Li Hao at peak Sunderer. Once his grasp of the aura improved, he would successfully set foot into Dominator.

Having paved the road for his final disciple and plotted out his future, Yuan Shuo felt ever more certain that he could not remain in Silver City for long. He needed to leave and take everyone’s attention with him.

“We go to the ruins tonight!” The professor suddenly decided. “We need to do this quickly. If we can’t open them this time, we wait. I’ll think of a way to conceal the ruins and you’ll pretend they don’t exist. We’ll explore them again once we accumulate enough strength.”

He’d only needed to glance at the ruins to know they were more than met the eye. He’d given the door a try and punched it—it remained unmoving. If both Li Hao’s sword and his blade couldn’t budge it, they would have to wait for better timing.

“Understood!” Li Hao nodded, staring fixedly at the red pill. Anticipation grew in his eyes. He’d absorbed a decent amount from the scarlet shadow last time and dual cultivated with his teacher, giving most of it to his teacher. This time, they each had one. Perhaps the effects would be so much more than he expected.

Teacher and disciple said nothing more. They nursed their own thoughts and busily painted a wondrous future. Visiting the ruins was on the agenda for tonight. Hao Lianchuan had left and they called the shots in Silver City now. Any disturbance they kicked up would be easily quelled.

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The sky slowly darkened. It was completely dark at 9pm.

The Yuan residence.

Teacher and disciple elected to walk on foot instead of taking the car. Two shadows leapt and bounded through the night. They moved exceedingly fast and were as light-footed as apes and monkeys. The two wore black outfits as they shifted soundlessly through the gloom.

Although Yuan Shuo's injuries were yet to fully heal, he far outstripped his student. Li Hao began employing the ape style to compensate, but he couldn't catch up with his teacher no matter how he tried.

The young man set aside the ape style once they left the city. He exuded a faint aura when he stomped his foot and borrowed the force of earth to further understand the aura of earth. The combination of blood qi and aura last time had been a great improvement as he'd deepened his understanding of the aura.

Now as he ran over the ground, he focused on satisfying feedback from the earth when his feet connected with it. Li Hao ran faster and faster as he increased his comprehension.

Up ahead, Yuan Shuo looked back with a smile and also increased his pace. How nice! The lad explored his own unique understanding of the aura and didn't continue his teacher's path. That wasn't a bad thing. On the contrary, Yuan Shuo was gratified and proud of his disciple.

He himself was strong and the professor also thought that his aura was very domineering. However, that didn't mean he wished for Li Hao to be the same as him and walk the exact same path. He was foremost when it came to the aura of the Five Styles. It would be very hard for Li Hao to surpass him, which was not what Yuan Shuo wished to see.

As Yuan Shuo picked up the pace, so did Li Hao think furiously behind his teacher. Not fast enough! It was nice to plant his feet on solid ground, but his speed seemed a little too slow for his liking.

Of the Five Styles, both the ape and bird style could accelerate. Meanwhile, Li Hao rarely practiced the deer style. The tiger and bear styles were suited for attacking, the ape and bird styles for fleeing. Only the deer style was neither here nor there.

It couldn't fly as high as the birds, be as nimble as the apes, or bring as much strength to bear as tigers and bears. According to the New Book of Five Styles, the deer style focused on being light on one's feet.

But could it be as light as the birds?

A variety of thoughts ran through Li Hao's mind. He thought back to what his teacher said of apes and monkeys darting nimbly through the mountain forests, of birds flying without restriction in the sky. The open plains, however, were the domain of the deer. Even ferocious tigers and leopards found it exceedingly difficult to capture deer. As light-footed as a deer wasn't hyperbole—they were faster than some premier hunters when they erupted with full potential.

The deer style centered on being natural and flexible. It drew strength from the waist instead of the legs, a major difference from the other styles.

Logically speaking, shouldn't speed come from the churning of legs? For deer, it came from their waist. They exerted themselves through the stomach to propel their legs.

How interesting! Li Hao suddenly thought through a lot and decided to deploy the style that he normally didn't think much of. Activation through the stomach, lifting his waist, and lightening his body!

He suddenly felt lighter, similar to when he absorbed wind energy. The strength in his legs didn't change, but he was much faster than before.

He sped over the ground like he was the wind. The earth seemed to be the grassy plains that he sped over. Li Hao ran faster and faster; he even wanted to throw his head back to the sky with a howl and vent the agitation clouding his heart!

He'd been subject to attention from all sides after the eight families were exposed, but this kind of life wasn't the one he wanted. He didn't like being followed with interest. He wished to live out his days in peace, not like the ones he experienced now.

His body rose and fell like a buck, gently undulating over the land. Li Hao accelerated the more he strode toward his destination.

Up ahead, Yuan Shuo couldn't help but turn back for a look. Another peculiar expression crossed his face. Nice going, kid!

He'd thought that Li Hao only knew the ape style of the Five Styles and had decided to focus on teaching that style in the future. But judging from this demonstration, perhaps the lad just hadn't been diligent before. He didn't seem like a rookie and also utilized the deer style very well.

Yuan Shuo abruptly paused and waited for Li Hao to catch up to him. He gently bent over, curved his waist, and placed his feet apart from each other. The professor chuckled lowly, "Follow me!" He bounded forward like an elk on a grassy plain, covering more than ten meters in a free and easy manner.

Li Hao fixed his eyes on his teacher's movement, detecting a hint of difference from his own. He slightly corrected his posture and swiftly caught up to his teacher.

An old man and a young man sprinted through the wilderness. Instead of a burning urgency, they exuded a simple effortlessness. They even forgot about the ruins!

“The ruins are just an external object. Martial masters need to rely on themselves!” Teacher and disciple had a pressing need for the ruins because they wished to enhance themselves. Running like this was also training. Whether it was Li Hao or Yuan Shuo, they both knew that this kind of comprehension was worth spending the time to experience.

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Inside the mines.

Hu Hao jerked to alertness and scrambled to his feet. He darted out of a mine entrance and looked into the distance. Chen Jian was close behind and carried a rocket launcher in his hands.

The two had been chatting moments ago. Chen Jian had traveled back for the morning meeting and returned with some food, as well as his blood pearl. He was discussing with Hu Hao if he should take it or not when his supernatural comrade said that someone was coming.

Two black figures shot toward the mountain under the cover of night. They were like leopards on the hunt, their speed so quick that it made Hu Hao’s heart pound with alarm.

“Who is it?” he muttered.

Chen Jian looked on gravely. “I don’t know... Chief didn’t say that someone would be by.”

It wasn’t Liu Long.

Li Hao and Yuan Shuo originally planned to notify the watchers when they reached the foot of the mountain, but the two had long forgotten that in their focus on the deer style and sped toward their destination.

Hu Hao yanked Chen Jian into the air and hid themselves among a backdrop of the gloomy sky. As Chen Jian scanned the ground, he was stunned by what he saw.

“Martial masters!” he muttered. The two were martial masters, not supernaturals. He would think it was Li Hao and Yuan Shuo if one of them was slightly slower, but both were exceedingly fast. It skewed his judgment as he recalled that while Li Hao was ruthless, he was a martial dao rookie and a kid at Slayer of Tens.

Chief would say something if he was planning on swinging by, so who were these two?

Chapter 163: Secrets of the Eight Trigrams (II)

Chen Jian nervously tightened his grip on the rocket launcher and prepared to fire. As he fretted over a decision, the two on the ground suddenly shot up like birds and glided through the air.

The martial master blinked.

“It’s the Five Styles!”

Indeed, it was the Five Styles. Then the two must be related to Yuan Shuo. One of them might be the professor, but who was the other?

Stepping on air, gliding through the void, landing, then leaping upward again...

As a supernatural who didn’t practice martial dao, Hu Hao suddenly found the sight quite aesthetically pleasing. It was so natural, comfortable, and lacking in the slightest sense of ugliness. There was only the beauty of melding into nature.

The two relaxed slightly when they realized it was the Five Styles, but were both confused as to who the second person was. If one of them was Yuan Shuo, was that another disciple?

The professor had more students prior to Li Hao—they were older as they were from earlier on. Li Hao was the only disciple in Silver City at the moment. Had another disciple returned?

As the two in the air brainstormed, the two on the ground pushed up off their feet and jumped ten meters into the air. That put them level with Hu Hao, giving the supernatural a clear view at their faces. The newcomers wore only a black outfit and didn't obscure their faces.

Hu Hao focused his gaze and... nearly fell out of the sky!

It wasn't that his mentality and focus were so poor, but that he was incredibly surprised to find that the other person was Li Hao!

Chen Jian's jaw dropped as well and he nearly lost his grip on the rocket launcher. Li Hao! And here he was wondering which of Yuan Shuo's disciples the other person was! It was the Slayer of Tens, Li Hao!

How was this possible?

"Li Hao..." Chen Jian murmured incredulously. Was that really Li Hao?

So was Hu Hao completely taken aback. Li Hao was a Slayer, wasn't he? Didn't they say that it hadn't been long since he became familiar with martial dao? How was this a Slayer?? Ordinary Sunderers wouldn't be able to catch up to him!

Rounding his jump through the air, Li Hao came back to his senses when he saw shocked gazes cross the two faces in front of him. He'd been too conspicuous.

His earlier state had been so smooth and so comfortable that he couldn't resist the temptation to utilize the Five Styles the entire way. He'd completely forgotten to return to being a Slayer when he reached the mines. How could a Slayer run so fast and jump so high?

He immediately fell down from the sky, somersaulting like a monkey in the air before landing on his feet. He created a small hole in the ground, landing on solid footing without falling over. But... wasn't this a bit inappropriate? Since he'd fallen from such an incredible height, shouldn't he stumble or something like that?

At the same time, they were at the mines. The ground was so dirty, so was it a bad idea to fall over?

Hu Hao landed with Chen Jian as the young man hesitated. The portly man was the first to ask, "Li Hao, how... how can you jump so tall?"

"I broke through to Sunderer tonight!" The young man grinned.

"Huh?" Chen Jian paused, stupefied. He'd yet to reach Sunderer, but Li Hao had managed the deed! Meanwhile, a knowing expression appeared on Hu Hao's face. It was only logical that Li Hao had advanced as he wouldn't be so fast otherwise. Not only had he progressed down his path, but he adeptly employed the Five Styles. It was astounding!

"Teacher gave me a lot of mysterious power and walked me through the process step by step. Thankfully, I managed it in the end," chuckled Li Hao.

"Congratulations..." Chen Jian didn't know what else to say.

A smiling Yuan Shuo walked over. "You guys are almost there as well. You'll all have your chance. It's normal that he improves a bit faster seeing as he's with me."

Alright then, they could only accept this given Yuan Shuo's presence.

“We’ll go inside for a look. You guys stand guard outside,” the professor continued.

Chen Jian quickly bobbed his head while Hu Hao nodded his minutely. The latter couldn’t help another glance at Li Hao. A Sunderer!

His little senior brother in name was apparently only a mundane last month. Now here he was, a Sunderer in the blink of an eye while Hu Hao remained a Darkmoon—and a peak Crescent at that. He wasn’t even a Halfmoon!

Granted, reaching Halfmoon shouldn’t be a problem given all of the mysterious power he’d received from their last mission, but strictly speaking... he and Li Hao were the same level at the moment.

Inadequacy suddenly struck Hu Hao.

“I’m going in then, Brother Hu, Brother Chen.” Li Hao smiled innocently. “If there’s anything nice that all of us can use, I’ll share it with everyone...”

Chen Jian gave an honest chuckle without saying a word, whereas Hu Hao sighed softly.

“No worries, it was yours to begin with. We’ve already received a lot of rewards. Not to mention, you and I are from the same discipline...”

Li Hao blinked. What same discipline? The young man hadn’t been present for Yuan Shuo’s earlier speech.

“I’ve taken Wang Ming, Hu Hao, and Li Meng as three honorary disciples,” Yuan Shuo explained calmly.

“Eh?” It was Li Hao’s turn to be surprised. So this had taken place at some point?

“We can discuss this later!” The professor pressed on before his student could ask further.

Li Hao could only flash an apologetic grin and whisper, “Let’s chat about this when I get back!”

The two on guard watched Li Hao and Yuan Shuo enter the mine. Hu Hao remained quiet, but Chen Jian couldn’t help himself.

“Ole brother Hu, do you think martial masters are better or supernaturals are better?”

The supernatural domain that he’d dreamed about didn’t seem all that impressive anymore.

Hu Hao suppressed an eye roll. I’m a supernatural and you’re a martial master, yet you’re asking me this?

“I thought that martial masters advance really slowly, but... look at Li Hao.”

“Is he the norm?” Hu Hao laughed. “It’s your choice. I’m not familiar with martial dao, so I can’t make a comparison.”

Alright then. Chen Jian suddenly wondered if he shouldn’t be so wholeheartedly devoted to the supernatural as he was. Should he take the blood pearl and ascend to Sunderer instead?

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At the same time.

Li Hao followed Yuan Shuo through various twists and turns around the mine. They passed by an iron door before long, one with what seemed to be ice crystal shards around it.

“Is this the door?”

Was it special? His teacher had mentioned there was a door here.

“You need to get your eyes checked. This is plainly a door they crafted to keep others out. It was embedded with ice crystals before to prevent supernatural presence from leaking.” Yuan Shuo pushed the door open on a spacious karst cave. It was rather large and illuminated by several crystal lamps.

A karst cave inside a mine? Now this was a special scene.

Some daily necessities were scattered around, but many rocks had fallen from overhead. Some more shards resolved themselves as ice crystal shards. Plainly, the Night Watcher barrage from earlier had shaken this area.

Li Hao sensed a faint energy as soon as he set foot inside. Just as his teacher said, it seemed to be a mix of sword and blade energy.

“There’s nothing good here, someone’s taken all of it. Any treasures here were long consumed by Qiao Feilong and his people.” Yuan Shuo was familiar with the area since he’d visited once before. He brought Li Hao further inside.

The cave was large and deep, but it wasn’t rugged or rough. Plainly, the Qiaos had developed this location for a while. Everything that should be here could be found. Li Hao even saw some toiletries and cutlery. It appeared that the three Sunflares would cook here in normal times. They certainly tried hard to make themselves comfortable. Li Hao had no idea how to cook.

Some reliefs appeared on the walls as they followed the cave in. Li Hao took a look at them, but didn't identify anything special. They were just simple reliefs that may have been carved by the ancients since they were hard to make out.

The young man stopped before long. Yuan Shuo sensed his movement and looked back at his student. "It's up ahead!"

"No, I mean... Teacher, come look at this!" Li Hao called out.

Yuan Shuo walked over with a frown and followed his student's gaze, locating a blurry stone carving. It was one of an indistinct person wielding a sword. The image was too unclear to make out, but the item should be a sword as it was very thin and long.

The person seemed to be standing in front of a door. They were about to enter it and had twisted their head to look backward.

Yuan Shuo studied it for a bit, but didn't learn too much.

"It's a person entering a door with a sword. What of it?" He looked at his student. "Do you think it has to do with your sword?"

Li Hao nodded slightly. "Yes, that's what I'm getting."

"It's just an ordinary relief that is no longer clear. Come on, let's continue forward. Perhaps we can find more things up ahead."

Li Hao said nothing else and walked forward with his teacher.

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They seemed to be in another area after walking a bit more—a vast, underground hall. The hall was completely empty; the Qiaos had likely made off with every single treasure. Thus, the first thing they saw was a stone door.

Or, the structure seemed like a stone door. It stood to the fore of the great hall. The energy that teacher and disciple sensed most likely came from behind the stone door.

“Be careful!” Yuan Shuo reminded. “They were camped here most likely to open that door. It’s probably why Qiao Feilong’s wife turned into that state.”

They could vaguely make out scorch marks stemming from explosives and fire. The Qiaos had obviously been trying to open this door all along.

Yuan Shuo walked over and carefully observed it. “Come here!”

Li Hao quickly approached and immediately saw what was different about it. There was a tiny indentation in the door.

“A mechanism?” The young man regarded it curiously. “Will I be able to open the door if I put my family’s sword in it?”

“I’m not sure.” Yuan Shuo looked at it a bit longer. “We can try... but absorb some sword energy first and restore your body. You and I will then take our blood pearls, just in case something unexpected happens and I don’t react in time.”

He was worried of trouble descending if they placed an item inside. They would be done for then. The stone blade in his hand stirred upon sensing the energy. Li Hao’s sword was doing the same, so they might as well heal their injuries first.

“Alright!” Li Hao imitated his teacher and stepped away from the stone door. He sat down cross-legged only when they were a slight distance away. Even here, the sword in his hands seemed quite lively.

The young man brightened after a quick iteration of the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. He didn’t need the jade sword—he could absorb a rush of energy all the same. It was, however, a little different from what was contained inside the sword.

“Teacher, this seems to be a mixture of several types of energy. It’s not just sword energy.”

“Mmhhh.” Yuan Shuo nodded. “I sense it too. There’s blade energy within too. It might be a combination of all eight families. What we should focus on right now is absorbing sword energy to recover from our injuries...”

Chapter 164: Secrets of the Eight Trigrams (III)

Yuan Shuo looked at Li Hao. “Place the sword between us. I can sense that the stone blade is absorbing blade energy via stripping it out from the energy mixture. The sword should be doing the same. The energy mixture seems very strong, but it’s not suited for simply healing wounds.”

Li Hao placed the little sword in the center between teacher and disciple. It trembled as it absorbed a surge of unique energy. Sword energy intensified around them and after some thought, Yuan Shuo relocated the stone blade further away to avoid interference.

Teacher and disciple began operating the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. Yuan Shuo did so primarily to heal his wounds. Meanwhile, Li Hao was less injured. Most of the problems resulting from his overuse of power last night were quickly resolved after absorbing a good deal of sword energy.

Yuan Shuo issued reminders as he trained, “You can operate the Breathing Method of the Five Styles while you absorb the Sunflare blood pearl. Coordinate with the sword energy here to digest it. Just this energy alone makes this trip worthwhile, to say nothing of anything else!”

“Mm.” Li Hao swallowed the blood pearl without another word. His blood boiled the moment it entered his body and he entered the state he attained last time the scarlet shadow invaded his body.

His eyes lost focus as his blood frothed. He seemed to see through the stone ceiling when he raised his head and once more saw the massive diagram of the eight trigrams overshadowing Silver City!

As he was prepared this time, Li Hao wasn’t nervous. He was just curious—what was this diagram?

He took a close look. There were eight strings, of which one ran down and was tied to him. The other seven were, like last time, aggregated in one direction. That direction didn’t look to be in Silver City.

Li Hao widened his eyes, wanting to take a closer look. What did the eight trigrams mean?

He... seemed to catch a vague hint of something. It seemed to be the cosmos, and it seemed not to be. He tried to blink the image into focus and saw a person in the center of the eight trigrams.

A person?

Li Hao paused. He was seeing things, wasn’t he? The figure disappeared when he tried to take another look.

The young man’s heart skipped a beat and he decided to take a closer look at the red thread over his head. He followed it upward. What would he see at the top?

He strained his eyes and actually did see something special. There was a figure at the end of it—a person!

“Hmm...” Li Hao jerked with shock. The person looked similar to the relief that he’d seen outside! It was the person with a sword on his back!

One person, one sword.

The figure seemed to sense something when Li Hao saw it and suddenly looked downward. What kind of gaze did it hold in its eyes?

Arrogance?

The notion that it was unconquerable?

Or was it an act of overlooking the common people?

“The sword is Creative [1] and suppresses monsters!”

The sentence reverberated in Li Hao’s mind. His eyes turned bloodshot as something seemed to stab into them. Blurry vision afforded him the sight of a man wielding a sword and piercing the heavens!

“I can sever immortality with a sword! With life as the sword, I can cut down the heavens, the earth, the self!”

Boom!

Li Hao’s mind seemed to explode. He saw... he saw that person tear through the firmament with one stroke and destroy the cosmos. He saw that person subvert the heavens with that stroke and shatter the stars...

Two streaks of blood trailed from his eyes.

A swordsman!

This was a premier swordsman!

“Pah!” Li Hao spat out a mouthful of blood that welled up in his throat. It came infused with a ray of sword qi that was peerlessly sharp. The resting Yuan Shuo subconsciously raised a hand to prevent blood from splattering him...

Pfft!

The professor went slack jawed with shock as his hand was pierced through!

What?!

A mouthful of blood—and Li Hao’s blood—drove through his aura, broke through his consciousness, and pierced his palm!

“Li Hao!” Yuan Shuo couldn’t stop to think. He exploded into motion and grabbed his student. What was going on?

Li Hao blearily opened his eyes, finding his eyeballs seized with extreme pain and his vision hazy. He coughed weakly with some pain. “Teacher... I saw... a person with a sword... tear through the firmament... and destroy the cosmos...”

“Bulls...” Yuan Shuo was ready to launch into a lecture when he paused with shock. “Where did you see it?”

“In the sky!” Li Hao pointed upward with difficulty. “So scary! It was so scary that I felt they could kill me through a hundred million kilometers. They could kill me even though they’re a ray of sword qi—no, they can kill everyone!”

It’d been petrifying!

Although he’d seen it clearly, the other had plainly been very, very far away from him. So far that they were an incredible distance away. He’d only seen them and not come in contact with them—in fact, he’d only seen an impression instead of the real thing. Even so, that stroke had almost killed him!

Sword intent!

In this moment, he knew what sword intent was.

The little sword placed between them suddenly trembled and emanated faint sword qi. The mouthful of blood that Li Hao had spat out had also touched it.

Blood of sword qi!

Yuan Shuo’s expression was exceedingly grave and he looked up, but didn’t see anything. “Is there more?”

“The... the diagram of the eight trigrams... seems to correspond to some people... There also seemed to be a person in between...” Li Hao coughed blood once more. “He said that his sword could sever the heavens, the earth, and immortality...”

The young man was a bit lost. “Teacher... can humans... really be like as I saw and break through the sky with one stroke? Or was it an illusion?”

That gentle stroke would obliterate Yuan Shuo and Solars alike. It was an unfathomable blow!

Yuan Shuo stilled and said softly after a long while, “I don’t know. Perhaps there really was such an existence in the ancient civilization. And if you’re fine, that person might be... an ancestor of you Lis.”

“An ancestor?” Li Hao paused with surprise, then chuckled ruefully. “No way! If my ancestors were this strong... then my family would rule the lands! No, they’d rule the entire world! Would we be in these straits?”

Of course, no one could say for certain, but that immense strength was burned deep into his brain. He would remember that stroke for the rest of his life. He didn’t know what the person was cutting down, just that the blow severed everything. It would annihilate the strongest enemy, wouldn’t it?

Yuan Shuo didn’t have an answer. “How are you?”

“Awful...” Li Hao suddenly realized something else. “But the blood pearl’s strength seems more pure. I’m absorbing it bit by bit.” He jerked with astonishment and raised his hand for a look. “Teacher, do you think my skin’s gotten paler?”

Yuan Shuo subconsciously followed the young man’s gaze and took a gentle breath in.

“Not paler, but more unadulterated! That ray of sword qi... no, it might not be sword qi. It might be sword intent through the air. Whichever it was, it seems to have further purified your physique.”

What kind of ability was this? Teacher and disciple looked at each other; neither had any idea.

Yuan Shuo looked down at his hand—the bloody hole was slowly starting to close. His rate of healing was exceedingly slow even after absorbing sword energy.

“Teacher, let me heal you...”

“No!” Yuan Shuo shook his head with sudden fervor. “I want to keep this scar and this hole! Indestructible! What kind of strength is this? It feels even stronger than blade energy. Just one droplet of blood dyed with the sword intent ran straight through my hand and punctured everything about me. If that’d hit my head, I would be dead!”

He was a powerhouse who’d slain Solars, but could’ve died to a mouthful of sprayed blood. There would be no place to redress his grievances if he’d truly died. How terrifying!

Yet, it was this kind of terror that excited him.

“This might be a fortuitous opportunity, Li Hao. Our greatest opportunity lies in the road ahead!” Yuan Shuo suddenly had a goal and motivation. This was the direction forward. “One stroke to cleave the heavens and one stroke to sever the firmament...”

He stared at his hands and purposefully prevented the wound from healing. The professor wished to quietly study the ray of sword qi, but there was nothing there. There was no sword qi to begin with, just Li Hao’s mental perception.

This was both astounding and petrifying!

As for Li Hao, he discovered with surprise that after vomiting a few mouthfuls of blood, he could... project internal force from his torso! This was strange. Was he mid Sunderer now?

So easy!

In this moment he felt that this was all there was to mid Sunderer—it was weak. It was incredibly weak compared to even his teacher, to say nothing of the figure he’d seen. Relatively speaking, mid Sunderer wasn’t even a child.

Neither Solar nor Dominator could begin to compare to the scene he'd witnessed. If he could be thus, what need did he have to be to be afraid of Red Moon? He'd hack them apart with one stroke!

"Teacher!" Li Hao exclaimed.

"Hmm?"

"Is my sword a bit bigger?"

Yuan Shuo hastily ducked his head. Indeed, the little sword on the ground had originally been the length of a finger, but now it seemed to be approaching the length of a pair of chopsticks. It'd gotten bigger!

"It absorbed some blood..." Yuan Shuo glanced sharply at his student. "Your blood was tinged with something special, which in return was absorbed by this treasure. It might be partially unsealed. Does this sword look similar to what that person was using?"

Li Hao shook his head, he couldn't be certain of that. All he'd seen was light from the sword and nothing else. It was a good thing that his sword had gotten bigger, but with it approaching the size of a pair of chopsticks, it'd be difficult to hide in the future. He couldn't wear it on his back; this would be a little troublesome to resolve.

The young man picked up the sword and carelessly stuck it into the ground. It soundlessly pierced through the rock below it, stunning both teacher and disciple again.

So sharp!

They didn't have an inkling that it'd become so sharp to the point that it easily stabbed through rock. The hall fell silent. Yuan Shuo suddenly felt that the secrets of Silver City and the eight families were possibly greater than anyone imagined.

Chapter 165: Breaking Through (I)

Li Hao had seen an unrivaled swordsman through the eight trigrams. Through absorbing some of his blood, the seal over Stellaris loosened. While the young man had bled onto the little sword before, this result had never appeared.

Plainly, the unsealing of the little sword might have something to do with that figure. It also enabled Li Hao and Yuan Shuo to realize a possibility—the swordsman really might be a Li ancestor.

A premier powerhouse!

Yuan Shuo tamped down agitation, fear, shock, and a tiny thread of anticipation stirring in his heart. "Let's forget about this for now," his voice was strained. "It's too far removed from us and involves ancient experts. Our most pressing task at hand is to strengthen ourselves!"

He came back to his senses—personal strength was the foundation of everything. The waters of this world ran deep, possibly so deep that the ancient civilization and all of its heritages were submerged. Only some ruins remained, as well as the incredibly debilitated eight families of Silver City.

No, there was only one family left now. Technically speaking, there was only one person.

Li Hao grit his teeth and expelled everything from moments ago out of his mind. He didn't dare dwell on them. Uncontrollable fear and excitement shook him whenever he thought of that stroke...

Was that person still human?

He gingerly picked up the little sword from the ground and suddenly regarded it with new worry. "Teacher, it's... too sharp. Will my own sword be the death of me if I carry it around?"

Yuan Shuo blinked and ventured with difficulty, “Perhaps... supernatural objects should not be viewed through the lens of ordinary rules. Some supernatural objects recognize their owners. Poke yourself with it, maybe it won’t hurt you.”

“.....” Was his teacher being serious? The thing was so sharp! What if it could hurt him and poked him to death?

Fine. Just a light poke shouldn’t result in anything major, right? His teacher’s words could be trusted. Who could he trust if not his teacher?

.....

Seconds later.

Li Hao looked at his arm dripping with blood and then at his teacher. He had no idea what to say.

“Um...” An awkward expression crept across Yuan Shuo’s face and he looked around, conflicted. “It might hurt you because it hasn’t fully accepted you as its master yet. It’ll be fine in the future. Don’t worry, I’ll fashion a scabbard for you when we go back and you can carry it around as a dagger.”

I’ve got nothing else.

Yuan Shuo looked at the stone blade close at hand and slightly rejoiced that it was a curved blade made of stone. It wouldn’t hurt him like the sword even if it was unsealed in the future, right?

Li Hao said nothing more and wiped down his arm. It was just a flesh wound, no big deal! Teacher was right 99% of the time. This was the 1% when he was wrong, so Li Hao shouldn’t form the habit of questioning his teacher. He really shouldn’t, really!

Despite that, Li Hao couldn't help but say, "Teacher, can you think before speaking next time something involves self harm?"

I still really trust you, so don't abuse your creditworthiness like this! It'll make me doubt your omnipotence.

"You little brat!" Yuan Shuo cursed. Who you talking to like that? It's just a little poke! Your mouthful of blood almost killed me just now, did I say anything?

"That's enough of this nonsense. You absorbed some of the blood pearl earlier, didn't you? What are you doing now? Don't waste it!"

Alright, that drove everything else out of Li Hao's mind. Digest energy!

He operated the Breathing Method of the Five Styles—sword energy from the void seemed to surge in faster than before. Yuan Shuo sensed it as well; his eyes lit up. The seal loosening over Stellaris seemed to be having a great effect! They gathered sword energy faster than before!

Yuan Shuo's injuries were much better and the mental energy that he'd consumed for the Incantation of the Blade of Blood was greatly restored. A red pill appeared in his hand—the Solar level blood pearl. It was stronger than the scarlet shadow that Li Hao last killed.

The professor hadn't formed many reflections about Dominator of Thousands after setting foot in this level. He wasn't even sure how to differentiate the various Dominator stages. From that, it was apparent that he'd been talking out of the side of his mouth when he claimed to be peak Dominator. He didn't even know the various stages of this cultivation level and what their characteristics were, so how could he identify which stage he was at?

However, Yuan Shuo was truly on the Dominator path and progressed rapidly at a tremendous pace. It had to do with how much he'd accumulated before and also the scarlet shadow, sword and blade energy.

He started daydreaming as he looked at the red pill in his hand. Can I possibly soar above Dominator after I eat this? Martial dao did not record any cultivation levels above Dominator. What's above it?

Supernaturals are all trash. They go from Sunflare to Solar and then what, Super Sun? They lack culture! Yuan Shuo rolled his eyes and debated if he should name the realm above Dominator. He couldn't just keep calling it "above Dominator".

"Slayer of Tens, Sunderer of Hundreds, Dominator of Thousands..." Yuan Shuo sank into deep thought before brightening, "Slayer, Sunderer, Dominator... what about Vanquisher of Ten Thousands?"

One person quelling ten thousands, how about it?

Lofty sentiments lifted his heart as he thought about it. An army of ten thousand was regarded as a large army in ancient times. Those who liked to boast would upgrade an army of ten thousand to one of eighty thousand. Such an army reduced opponents to gibbering messes through sheer killing intent alone. But martial masters at that level could stand against ten thousand by themselves!

One suppressing ten thousand!

"Not bad, I think that works..." Yuan Shuo was satisfied with his naming acumen. When might he set foot into such an august level? Would any qualitative changes occur?

That was a thought for another day. He swallowed the red pill without further contemplation. The Breathing Method of the Five Styles enabled him to instantaneously absorb the massive power and swiftly digest it. He was starving as he'd exhausted his internal force in the battle with Qiao Feilong and resided in a hollow state since. With sustenance from the red pill, he felt that he could battle a Solar again.

I really want to find another Solar to fight!

Too bad Hao Lianchuan was gone or he would've found an excuse to spar with the man. Going a few rounds with a vastly experienced Solar might enhance understanding of his own strength. Qiao Feilong was a blockhead, Brokensky had fallen to an ambush—Yuan Shuo had never directly fought a veteran Solar.

The professor waded through his fantasies with delight.

.....

At the same time.

Li Hao was also absorbing the scarlet shadow's strength and daydreaming of breaking through to late Sunderer. If I can, I'll count as peak Sunderer because I've grasped a rudimentary aura. Peak Sunderer... what day of the month is it?

The second!

When did I become Slayer of Tens?

...mid of last month. Ah, so it hasn't even been a month. Li Hao was in high spirits and had shoved the memory of that stroke deep into the bottom of his heart. He did not compare himself to that figure. Some people loved to compare themselves to others too far ahead of them and grew more despondent the more they dwelled on it. They crushed their own confidence in the end. Not him, however. He wouldn't follow in their footsteps.

His goal was currently Liu Long. His next goal might be his teacher. The swordsman in the eight trigrams might not be his goal for the next ten years—they were too harrowing.

Teacher and disciple quieted down once more, a different quiet from before. They swiftly absorbed the billowing scared shadow energy, some of which gradually drifted outward. Yuan Shuo's heart suddenly quailed, as did Li Hao's. He reacted a tiny bit slower than his teacher.

Yuan Shuo grabbed his student's head before the young man opened his eyes. Yes, his head, and dragged him out through the karst cave. A massive explosion shook where they'd been sitting the moment they left!

Powerful force ripped through where they'd been. Several dozen meters away, Yuan Shuo roared like a massive bear and flung Li Hao away. The young man slammed into the rock wall and almost vomited blood; his bones felt like they would break.

Yuan Shuo erupted with the aura of the Five Styles. The mental forms of tiger, bear, deer, ape, and bird flared in unison and became one, crashing into a ferocious force. He went flying with a loud bam and hovered in the air, spewing out mouthfuls of blood. A blank look entered Yuan Shuo's eyes as he thought... I need a blood bag.

He'd thrown up too much blood over the past two days, a pitiful state that hadn't caught him even when he fought Solars. Li Hao had just ripped through him and now the energy did so once more. Who knew how much blood he'd lost?

"Teacher..." Li Hao gasped with shock.

"Cough cough cough!" Yuan Shuo looked into the distance as he crashed into the ground, the look in his eyes changing. "I'm not dead!"

Li Hao quickly ran over to help his teacher up. Various expressions flickering through his face, Yuan Shuo panted for a while.

"Red Moon!"

"Hmm?"

“Red Moon might have something to do with the eight families... They created the scarlet shadows and sword energy can neutralize that energy. But once it comes in contact with the mixture of the eight energies, it elicits a violent conflict that results in an energy explosion.”

The seepage of scarlet shadow energy had melded with that of the eight families and caused a gigantic detonation. It'd almost blown up a Dominator! How horrific.

Li Hao blinked. “Do you mean that the power of the eight families and the scarlet shadow are inherently opposed to each other?”

“It's very possible!” Yuan Shuo nodded and spat out another mouthful of blood. “This is good!”

“Huh?” Had his teacher lost too much blood lately and gone insane? How was being blown up like this a good thing? Li Hao brightened as he thought of something the next second. “Yes, this is good!”

“You think so too?” Yuan Shuo looked at his student with surprise.

Li Hao bobbed his head rapidly. “Teacher, we should collect the eight energies! And then get some scarlet shadow power to create a super bomb! If it can send even you flying, it'll blow right through a Solar!”

“.....”

The young man looked raptly at Yuan Shuo. “Teacher, you think so too right, which is why you think this is good?”

Chapter 166: Breaking Through (II)

“.....” Yuan Shuo looked silently at his student. No, that's not it. My mind doesn't work as fast as yours and nowhere am I that blackhearted. Kid, I'm really curious what your heart looks like!

The professor said the interaction between the scarlet shadow energy and eight families was good because they could lure Red Moon powerhouses to this ruin in the future, break their scarlet shadow, and possibly create a very unique situation. Red Moon members would be blown up by themselves.

Fine, that was essentially the same thing. He just hadn't thought that Li Hao would pursue that line of thinking and think of transporting energy out to proactively use as a bomb!

Teacher and disciple shared similar thoughts, but Yuan Shuo felt that he was much more benevolent than the kid. He just wanted to lure people in, but Li Hao wanted to go on the offensive. The kid was seriously combative!

Yuan Shuo said nothing further and simply frowned. "This energy will likely be hard to collect!"

It was a mixture of eight energies and not much exuded. Most of what they could collect was sword and blade energy. It might have something to do with the two weapons physically being on site.

The Qiaos had probably been collecting this energy all along, but found it difficult to amass as well. The ice crystals were unlikely to be effective—Qiao Feilong would've stockpiled mass quantities of energy otherwise.

Li Hao nodded and dropped the subject. "Teacher, let's go out and finish digesting the scarlet shadow energy or we might be blown up any time. That would be a huge loss."

"Hahaha, that's true!" Yuan Shuo's mirth faded into sorrow as he laughed. Damn it, he was so unlucky today! He was a right and proper Dominator, but had almost died on two occasions. This lousy ruin was too dangerous, it felt more perilous than the one the Night Watchers had found. While it looked like there was nothing here, it would easily turn into his grave in a moment of carelessness.

Teacher and disciple didn't dare train further on site. Yuan Shuo picked up sword and blade, carefully following his student out to finish digesting the scarlet shadow energy. Otherwise, if they

accidentally utilized this strength and it spread into the surroundings again, they would meet their doom here tonight.

Both weapons seemed to have absorbed a great deal of energy, so there should be enough for their purposes for now.

.....

The two left the hall and returned to the karst cave. When Li Hao passed by the relief, he looked at it for an extra moment.

“Teacher, the person I saw could be the one in this carving. With the sword on his back, it’s obvious from a quick glance that he’s a stunning powerhouse.”

“Stop looking at him, there’s no point. He’s too far removed from us.” Yuan Shuo grinned. “We need to work hard so that one day, you and I can set foot on this path as well. Remember, this is not an obstacle to your training, but motivation for progress!”

“Understood!”

Teacher and disciple encouraged each other for a bit before returning to absorb scarlet shadow energy in the karst cave. Li Hao could sense internal force forming in his head. It was a very peculiar sensation, somehow slightly numbing like a dog was licking it.

Wait, this isn’t a feeling.

Li Hao was struck speechless when he opened his eyes. Panth? The fuck?? How did the dog get in here?

He hadn’t brought the little black dog when he and Yuan Shuo set out this evening, how did it find this place? And it really was licking him!

“Arf arf!” Panther looked tearily at Li Hao, as if saying how could you bear to leave this doggy behind? It’d sniffed the wonderful fragrance of energy, so it’d run furiously through the night. It was almost completely exhausted by the time it found this place. This had been a lot to ask of it!

Yuan Shuo also opened his eyes and was jarred into laughter when he saw Panther. “The dog’s got some skill to follow us through dozens of kilometers! I underestimated you, huh? I thought that it wasn’t a good idea to let you grow stronger since you’re becoming more than a dog, but look at you chasing after us anyway.”

He’d left Panther behind on purpose. It wasn’t a bad thing for Li Hao’s dog to grow stronger, but a dog was a different species in the end. There were stories from the central region that monster spirits had eaten Solars with one gulp. That was horrifically frightful. This dog knew too much, so what if it turned on Li Hao in the end?

“Arf arf arf!” Panther barked fawningly.

“This is part of your destiny since you’ve come!” Li Hao chuckled. “Looks like I won’t be getting rid of you anytime soon! Absorb as much of the energy that leaks out, I won’t purposefully give any to you.”

“Arf arf!” Panther was satisfied. It didn’t care that it was getting scraps—just scraps were enough.

Li Hao closed his eyes and continued digesting the scarlet shadow’s power. Some energy leaked out from teacher and disciple in the process, or the explosion from earlier wouldn’t have occurred. The young man once more felt a numbing sensation on his head, but it wasn’t from a dog licking him. It was the true circulation of internal force that was affecting his head.

A gaze that crackled with electricity! Li Hao understood the saying when he opened his eyes. Internal force exploded around his eyes, making it seem like electricity ran through them.

Yuan Shuo didn't need to open his eyes to sense what was taking place. "It's very dangerous when internal force enters the head in late Sunderer!" he whispered. "Of course, this danger is only relatively speaking. Everything will be fine if you don't take any foolish action..."

He suddenly cursed and opened his eyes. "Stop! Are you daft?? Aren't you afraid of going blind by directing internal force into your eyes?"

"Aren't we supposed to project it out of us?" Li Hao asked with bafflement.

"You idiot!" Yuan Shuo cursed again then sighed, "Alright, I forgot to remind you because you improve so quickly that you advance before I'm done talking. I don't even have enough time to teach you.

"The eyes are very weak. Although internal force is gentle and not as domineering as mysterious power, you'll go blind all the same if it injures the eyeballs. Everything in due time. Internal force needs to first nurture other tissues, then follow internal systems to gradually meld with the eyes. It is a sign of you having reached late stage Sunderer after it flows into the eyes. Don't be in a rush, take it one step at a time..."

Li Hao shoved internal force into his nose as soon as the professor stopped talking and gave himself a violent nosebleed.

"You focus too much on instant success!" Yuan Shuo frowned.

"Teacher speaks truly, but I wasn't brashly forging onward." Li Hao's nosebleed was so severe that tears streamed out of his eyes. "My thinking is that I possess sword energy that heals any injury so long as it is one that can be recovered from. In that case, I can be appropriately bold. Teacher, it would be a waste of this blood pearl if I don't digest it all today. Who knows when we'll next come across a Sunflare level one?"

"I can't always live under teacher's protection, you have your matters to attend to as well. As teacher's final disciple, I should be rebuffing teacher's various enemies in accordance with

tradition. Take Red Moon, for instance. Custom dictates that I should be in the field since they have trodden on our threshold. I should either kill or cripple them, not hide behind teacher and enjoy days of peace!”

The young man flashed a bashful smile. ““Teacher, do you think my words are right?”

Yuan Shuo suddenly didn’t know what to say. A final disciple... I accepted you not to bolster my side against strong enemies. I just wanted you to inherit my knowledge.

This changed the moment Li Hao set foot onto the path of martial dao. He became Yuan Shuo’s martial disciple!

The professor remained silent for a while before flashing a smile. “That’s right! You are very similar to when I was young. I was just like you when I was a kid, then idled my time away in my middle age. I grew despondent with the rise of the supernatural, so I rather hope that you are always this successful!”

With that, he no longer curtailed Li Hao’s drastic impetus. Perhaps the young man was right. Yuan Shuo could not protect him forever, he needed to shoulder certain responsibilities himself and grow.

Blood continued to flow out of Li Hao’s nose. He’d been very bold and decisive. Of course, this was built on the foundation of sword energy. Otherwise, such a violent impact of energy would lead to severe consequences. On the whole, martial dao was a process of following proper order and advancing gradually.

Nose, ear, mouth...

Li Hao’s internal force began erupting in certain places. His inexperience shone through his first time wielding such power and his internal force rampaged so ferociously that his soft tongue also seeped blood. It hurt the first time and was an ordinary occurrence the next.

Yuan Shuo watched silently as he digested the scarlet shadow's power. The more he assessed his student, the more satisfied he was. Low profile, intelligent, bold, ruthless, and sinister... These were just his own thoughts as he would still say to others that Li Hao was very kind.

As a martial master, how could one not be treacherous? They had to be sinister and cunning, even vicious! Unassuming sweet souls died quite early.

A gaseous layer slowly enveloped Li Hao's face—a sign of internal force about to complete projection from the body. Internal force formed a unique defensive system once it could be projected from the entire body. Martial masters were able to avoid certain ambushes at that stage and attacks could commence from any part of the body. Any body part could be a lethal weapon.

"Hhnnn..." Li Hao grunted softly as he couldn't withstand the enormous pain. Even his tears were blood-red. He furrowed his brows and clenched his teeth against the pain. "Teacher, the eyes are too fragile. I'm not afraid of death, but I am afraid of going blind. Is there a way to avoid that?"

"So you're also afraid at times too, ya little punk?" Yuan Shuo snorted, but quickly smiled. "I told you to study literature, but you wanted to practice martial dao! And it's one thing if you train, but can't you read a few more books? I already told you to utilize your own body system to strengthen the eyes!

"Your tear glands are located in the bone over your eye socket. Do you know what tear glands are?"

"They're used for tears!"

"So you already know!" Yuan Shuo finally found a way to comfort himself. "Cry some and send the power of the scarlet shadow into your tear glands. The same goes for your internal force, don't pressure it into your eyes. That's too dangerous. Just cry, cry as much as you can without fear of wasting your tears. Each tear is a strengthening!"

Cry? Li Hao thought of something. "Can Li Meng's third eye be strengthened in the same way?"

“Yes, but that girl is careless and impetuous—she cannot be taught. If I teach her, you might see a person with a blind third eye tomorrow morning.”

Chapter 167: Breaking Through (III)

Teacher and disciple couldn't help but laugh.

“It's better for Li Meng to take things slow and incrementally improve her strength,” Yuan Shuo chuckled. “I also don't recommend your current course of action, by the way. I'm afraid you won't be able to cry in the future if you produce too many tears now.”

“There's no scientific basis for that, teacher. There is no finite amount of tears, the body continuously produces them...”

“You lil bastard!” Yuan Shuo cursed with a smile. Do you think I don't know? I'm just making a joke.

Li Hao took his teacher's advice and slowly soaked his tear glands with internal force. It was safer than directly incorporating it into his eyes, but still dangerous nonetheless. For those who walked the path of martial dao, however, a bit of danger was mandatory. Even if he ended up ruining his tear glands, he just wouldn't be able to cry in the future.

Bloody tears welled up in his eyes, a particularly horrifying sight!

Yuan Shuo cocked his head and silently watched his student. However much blood you shed today is however much you gain. Li Hao, I hope you understand that the best teacher and most abundant energy is still less than internal strength. And you... are much stronger than I anticipated.

A true powerhouse was never strong on the outside, he was strong when it came to cultivation level. Did those so-called Solars and above necessarily possess the heart of a powerhouse?

The professor thought through a great deal in this moment. He hadn't thought that the normally unassuming and polite Li Hao would be able to endure this kind of suffering and pain.

When the young man's vision was blurry from tears, Yuan Shuo gently broke the silence. "Have you decided what path you'll take in the future?"

"I have." Li Hao smiled through his tears. "My first major goal is that Red Moon must be toppled! My second is to understand what the eight trigrams are. I want to see whatever and whoever's inside. My third is that I want to provide for my elderly teacher and make sure you receive a fitting sendoff..."

The fuck?? Yuan Shuo nearly erupted out loud. Who are you cursing to die?!

"Forget about the third, I can live to at least one hundred after setting foot into Dominator. Send me off after you live to that age. I even want to find a wife for you to respect!"

"...cough! Cough cough cough!" Li Hao nearly choked on his spit. Hey, I mean what I say! A final disciple is supposed to care for their master in their last days and take care of the final arrangements. Isn't that what I'm supposed to do?

Teacher and disciple chatted and laughed, distracting Li Hao from his pain. The young man knew that his teacher was teasing him on purpose to help him forget the suffering from training. He wouldn't breathe a word of his anguish, he would just remember it. He would remember that Red Moon brought him this kind of pain. Yes, Red Moon. He would remember it with every fiber of his being!

After an indeterminate period of time, Li Hao's tears finally stopped flowing when the scarlet shadow's power was almost exhausted. He was almost out of tears as it were—he was severely dehydrated. His tongue and lips were dry to the point of cracking, but his high spirits could not be denied.

Everything seemed to be brighter in front of him. He'd recovered his previous eyesight and could see further and brighter than before!

He closed his eyes, then shot out a ray of killing intent when he opened them. It wasn't the kind that he'd sensed earlier, but a tangible ray of killing intent resulting from internal force!

Bam!

Internal force oscillated through the surroundings and hit Panther. The little black dog turned around to look at Li Hao and wagged its tail. It didn't hurt and was actually slightly comfortable, like a massage. It felt good! What's up?

"This is enough, even if we don't obtain anything else tonight!" Yuan Shuo flashed a thankful smile. His injuries were healed and Li Hao had broken through three levels in a row! The lad had gone through mid Sunderer to late Sunderer and could be considered peak Sunderer since he possessed an aura. This was much faster than he'd anticipated; Yuan Shuo was highly gratified.

"Am I late Sunderer, teacher?" Li Hao frowned. "My killing intent is so weak that it doesn't feel like I've improved. I sensed something different when I was mid Sunderer..."

"It's different!" Yuan Shuo chuckled. "This is only the beginning, what you need to do next is consolidate all of your internal force!" The professor debated how to teach the next lesson.

"Please enlighten me, teacher."

"Use the consciousness to observe form!" Yuan Shuo's voice rang with authority. "This is the prep work for becoming a Dominator. Take me, for instance. My consciousness is as if animals and the aura of the Five Styles. You might sometimes feel that I am a tiger or a bear during battle. That is not a delusion, but the manifestation of my consciousness!

"Liu Long, for example, fashions his after the waves and tidal wave. It is not your imagination either, but an exhibition of his observations.

“You will undergo the same experience in times to come. However, you will not be as Liu Long and directly set foot into Dominator because you are still a ways away. Though he was yet to comprehend the aura before, he’d finished consolidating his internal force and was skilled in his cultivation level. He lacked only the final observation of form.”

Li Hao only seemed to partially understand and quickly asked, “Teacher, do you mean that I need to simulate the form of the earth to consolidate my internal force and then break through to Dominator?”

“Not necessarily.”

The young man blinked. Not necessarily?

“There’s no rule that there must be one kind of aura. For me, the convergence of all five animal auras makes for the Five Styles!” Yuan Shuo explained. “Although the key to your advancement may be to understand the aura of the earth, don’t forget that your heritage may be a family of swordsmen! I think it might be more appropriate for you to meditate upon a sword, like the one you just saw! The sword that slays and can sunder heaven, earth, and immortality!

“Which do you think is stronger, that sword or the earth?”

Li Hao thought deeply for a moment before answering solemnly, “That sword! I think that sword can cut through the earth and annihilate anything that stands in its way!”

“And do you think the earth is more powerful at offense or that sword?”

“The sword, of course!”

“Then you have your answer. Observe the sword if you wish to pursue mighty offense. Of course, you can also meditate upon the earth at the same time. The earth can focus on defense while the

longsword is adept at offense. That will ensure you possess both defense and offense.” The professor displayed an exceedingly high level of knowledge as he shone a light on the way forward.

“I should not let you be distracted at this point as you’ve already grasped an initial understanding of the aura of earth. You should deepen that comprehension. However, this is a rare opportunity. I did not personally witness that stroke, but I can already tell that its power is limitless. Add to that the fact that you own your family’s sword... I cannot bear to have you forgo this opportunity.”

The gaze in Li Hao’s eyes shifted as he didn’t blindly accept everything his teacher said, but Yuan Shuo did indeed make sense. The particulars of that sword were impossible to imagine. If he could deploy the same stroke, would there be a need to fear Ying Hongyue?

“Where should I start, teacher?”

“With the sword in your hand!” Yuan Shuo pointed at the weapon that Li Hao was keeping enclosed. “You should perceive the treasure first and then consider the might of that sword. Have your internal force slowly converge as one and transform into that sword. Not just internal force, but also your aura!

“You will have succeeded when your aura is like a sword. That will be an initial completion of all training that should occur at the Sunderer stage. You can gradually fortify what you know as you officially set foot into Dominator.” Yuan Shuo gave a detailed overview of the training process from Sunderer to Dominator. He worried that he wouldn’t have a second chance to explain as the little fellow improved too quickly.

“A sword...” Li Hao caressed the small sword in his arms. He was familiar with it.

Too familiar.

He’d worn it around his neck for a dozen years and it’d always been with him. He didn’t even need to look at it to know what it looked like.

Perceive it? What was to perceive? Plainly not its shape. Teacher wanted him to sense the killing qi of the sword, its strength, its attacks. But this one... wasn't a threat at all.

The little sword stirred in his hands as his thoughts flitted from idea to idea. A thought struck the young man and he abruptly gripped the sword, blossoming with internal force and thinking back to the scene of the other sword.

To sever heaven and earth!

A mighty sword stroke!

Hummm!

The short sword seemed to cut through the void and faint sword qi hung in the air. Panther was long out of sight before the stroke landed, while Yuan Shuo watched with bright eyes. He knew that his student could do it! And this was just the beginning.

Li Hao burst forth with different might each time he swung the sword. The little sword was only the length of a pair of chopsticks, but deployed longer sword light each time Li Hao slashed with it. This was the effect of internal force melding with the sword.

Once, twice, thrice...

Stroke after stroke followed as Li Hao envisioned the scene he'd seen in the eight trigrams. Not only had he not forgotten the blow, but it was growing clearer in his mind's eye.

Clang!

The little sword rang happily and trembled, emitting a metallic hum. Inspiration struck Li Hao and he turned the sword on his teacher. Experience was the best mentor!

Yuan Shuo smiled and rose, answering with a punch from a prowling tiger.

Teacher and disciple exchanged a furious flurry of blows in the karst cave. Yuan Shuo avoided meeting the weapon head-on as it was too keen. Although he had many ways to eliminate Li Hao, being too brutal was out of the question as this was an exercise in feeding moves to his disciple. A teacher skilled at imparting knowledge could draw a student's strengths out of them, not stymie them with no place to showcase themselves.

"The sword is the gentleman of all weapons. This is not meant for you to be a gentleman, but that you must be quick and ruthless with a sword. Your opponent does not suffer if you kill with one stroke—they die in a quick and straightforward manner. That is the manner of a gentleman..."

Li Hao's jaw dropped and he almost faltered in his movements! Teacher, don't misguide your student! Is that really how one interprets the meaning behind "gentleman of all weapons"? Attacking swiftly, accurately, and decisively to kill the enemy with one stroke so they feel no pain... And isn't the saying to be the lord of all weapons?

Yuan Shuo sent him flying with a punch and frowned. "It's just an analogy. The point to focus on is that you must be swift, accurate, and unrelenting! You need to hit their critical points with one stroke and kill them after one blow! That's how you can understand it. Not inflicting unnecessary pain on your enemies is also the hallmark of a gentleman, do you understand?

"So just think of it in that way. Your goal now is to kill me with one stroke, so bring up your speed!"

Li Hao moved faster without a word, soundlessly stabbing forward with speed, accuracy, and ruthlessness! Every stroke targeted Yuan Shuo's vital points, his internal force projected out of his body and sword qi erupted. The short sword that measured the length of a chopstick blazed with sword light a meter long.

Chapter 168: Breaking Through (IV)

As teacher and disciple sparred over an unknown period of time, Li Hao grew faster and steadier in his movements.

Kill!

There was no need to worry about his teacher's safety as he couldn't possibly harm his teacher. The memory of that stroke reverberated in his mind, as well as the swordsman who'd declared that he would tear heaven and earth asunder. As for the Divine Brokensky that his teacher had killed before... that guy was less than shit!

Internal force abruptly erupted from the young man as he lived the stroke again and a faint sword intent blossomed from his body.

Slash!

Li Hao's speed was unparalleled and he cut through the air with a hum. Yuan Shuo pushed the sword away with his palm, but the sword light grazed his hand. The young man immediately halted his movements and looked at his teacher's palm.

It was slightly wounded; the injury was part of the previous bloody hole.

Yuan Shuo also stopped and looked at his hand, then at his student. He smiled with an incline of his head. "You haven't fully succeeded, but you've greatly improved. If you continue onward, you'll be a true peak Sunderer before long!"

Li Hao beamed radiantly. Worth! Tonight was so worth!

"Let's go, we've pretty much fully digested the scarlet shadow energy. Let's see if we can open the stone door. If not, we'll have the sword and blade absorb more energy," chuckled Yuan Shuo. He didn't have much hope for opening the stone door as he had a hunch that all eight weapons needed

to be present to manage that. Qiao Feilong had tried and failed for so many years, so brute force was plainly not the answer.

.....

Teacher and disciple returned to the great hall. The stone door stood unmoving at the end. Li Hao approached the indentation with his sword, Yuan Shuo with the blade. When the young man placed the little sword into the hollow, he felt that it wasn't a good match. Neither did the stone blade fit.

Yuan Shuo closely studied the indentation for a while and suddenly smiled. "How interesting!"

"Hmm?"

"Qian kun zhen xun, li kan gen dui," Yuan Shuo softly recited the eight trigrams. "The sword of the Lis, blade of the Zhangs, fists of the Zhaos, footwork of the Lius, the big turtle kept by the Wangs...

"We are in the li fire position. Qiao Feilong and his people all received the power of fire, so there must be a weapon among the eight that corresponds to fire! According to the folk song, it's likely to be the turtle shell of the Wangs... But a turtle shell sounds like a defensive treasure and is most likely attributed with earth..."

Yuan Shuo frowned. "Or is it that the turtle shell is a fire supernatural object?"

If it wasn't the turtle shell, was it the mallet of the Hongs or the spear of the Zhous? The professor looked intently at the indentation again.

"Li Hao, what do you think this hollow looks like? A turtle shell or a mallet?"

It was rounded, which meant it had to be a turtle shell or a mallet. It didn't look like the outline of a spear.

“A... mallet?” Li Hao bent his nose to it as well. “Teacher, do you mean...”

“There might be eight doors like these out there!” A strange look gleamed in Yuan Shuo’s eyes. “And they’re all beneath Silver City! Of the eight stone doors, one should be a match for the sword and another for the blade. Perhaps all eight of the doors need to be open for us to successfully access the ruins.”

Eight doors!

“There’s eight places like these?” Li Hao gasped with shock.

“Indeed. I thought there was only one such ruin, but now it looks like that this isn’t the case. Otherwise, the sword and blade should fit. They don’t, so that proves this isn’t the only door. The convergence of all eight doors or their simultaneous opening is the key to accessing the true ruins of the eight families!

“I’ll need to study a map of Silver City when we get back and conduct some secret investigations,” Yuan Shuo laughed. “For now... let’s absorb some energy and get out of here. We can’t open these ruins, but we can seal them away. We can come back when sword energy is exhausted and collect some more. It doesn’t look like much is seeping out.”

“Why don’t I shed some blood, teacher...”

“Hah!” Yuan Shuo snorted. “Forget it. Do you think you’re the only heir? You bled earlier—it would’ve reacted if it was going to. This place is probably going to need all eight weapons to open.”

Eight doors!

Li Hao suddenly thought of something. “Teacher, can we reap more benefits from the other places even if we can’t access them, because the Qiaos haven’t excavated them?”

“Probably!” Yuan Shuo smirked. They might be striking it rich soon. They wouldn’t be extremely wealthy, but they’d definitely come into a small fortune. Of course, the caveat was if they could find the other seven doors. Everything was just speculation for now.

“Heh heh...” Teacher and disciple cackled. It didn’t matter that they couldn’t open this door. If they could locate the other seven sites, they might have unexpected gains. Even Qiao Feilong could rise to Solar and raise three Sunflares. If they found seven more... could they create seven Solars and twenty-one Sunflare?

Hot damn, they’d be able to declare war on the Silver Moon Night Watchers if they wanted to!

“Hurry up and have your sword absorb energy faster. Let’s get out of here as soon as possible. Too many people have their eyes set on us these days, so I want to seal off this area in case anyone discovers anything.”

“Alright!” Li Hao brought out the small sword and began operating the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. Yuan Shuo did the same. They should replenish their weapons before anything else.

As for departing with the energy mixture... Li Hao didn’t have any good ideas. He needed a medium first—that could come later. The energy mixture was a potent killing weapon when combined with scarlet shadow energy.

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Li Hao couldn’t take in any more after a long period of time. There didn’t seem to be enough energy left to absorb, what little that wafted out from the door wasn’t sufficient to be drawn in.

Teacher and disciple decided to call it a day. When Yuan Shuo walked out of the hall with Li Hao, he punched a massive piece of rock down from the wall. The man hauled it up and sealed off the area around the iron door. Just this precaution alone, however, would be insufficient to evade the detection of certain people.

Yuan Shuo stared at his work and clenched his jaw. “Why don’t we blow up this place and collapse the entire mountain...”

“Teacher, it’s not a good idea to cause too big of a disturbance, right?”

“That’s true... Forget it, we’ll think of something when we go back or this will be easily exposed. Granted, it’s not like other people will be able to access it even if they find it.”

The two left without regrets, swiftly departing the karst cave with Panther in tow. Li Hao looked back at the last moment. This place... will be mine one day. No one can take it from me!

What lay behind the door? The swordsman looked to have gone through the door in the relief. Was it this stone door? What a pity that he had no way or strength to explore it.

Red Moon... they might have six of the other eight weapons. The young man increasingly hated the organization the more he thought about it. Not only do they want to kill me, but they also want to steal my family’s treasures! The eight families were one and with the others gone, the treasures of the eight naturally went to him.

Red Moon stealing their treasures was actually stealing his!

When put in these terms, a rage built in Li Hao’s heart. I’ll end you guys sooner or later!

A resigned Yuan Shuo thought his student was loath to leave like this when he saw the young man gnash his teeth. Why is the kid getting greedy at this time? Isn’t it enough that you set foot into peak Sunderer tonight?

What an insatiable kid!

But... I like that!

.....

The two humans and dog felt like they'd been gone for an eternity when they exited the mines. It'd only been a short while, but they'd experienced so much, particularly Li Hao. His vision of that scene from an unknown point in time instantly broadened their worldview.

Hu Hao and Chen Jian were still present outside the mine. They didn't know that teacher and disciple had immensely improved in just a few hours.

It was 3am and Hu Hao immediately approached them when he saw the two walk out.

"Eld—Teacher, the dog barged in earlier. I remembered seeing it with you and Li Hao before, so I didn't..."

Yuan Shuo waved him off. The dog had found them inside the mine, there was nothing to be conflicted about.

Panther wagged its tail appeasingly—it was terrified of the older human.

"You can withdraw from this post," Yuan Shuo said, surprising the two. Hu Hao knew what the ruins entailed, and that a few hours weren't sufficient to excavate them.

Yet they were to leave?

“Teacher Yuan, are we not... exploring them anymore?”

Yuan Shuo smiled. “The Qiaos took nearly everything, there’s nothing left. Even if there are a few areas that haven’t been excavated, they’re not places that we can attempt at the moment. We might be able to in a few years.”

Can’t attempt at the moment? Hu Hao understood. These situations occurred from time to time, such as the ruins they were about to explore next. The Night Watchers had been unable to venture deep into them due to inadequate strength and had to set them aside.

In fact, these situations were common and also represented that the ruins beneath them were uncommon. They could tell just how much of the ruins had been emptied from the fact that Qiao Feilong had set foot into Solar. All of the treasures had been digested into their strength.

“So then we just... leave it, Professor Yuan?” Chen Jian scratched his head. “Isn’t that such a pity?”

These were ruins! Unlike supernaturals who’d explored a ruin or two in their lifetime, he’d never encountered one. All he knew was that there were supposedly treasures inside a ruin. But Li Hao and Yuan Shuo had returned empty-handed... It looked like they hadn’t found anything. Wouldn’t it be a huge pity to give up, just like this?

“Not at all,” Li Hao explained softly. “There’s no point in insisting on explorations at this stage. We can come back when we gain enough strength.”

“I’m worried about other people finding them...”

“Don’t be.” Li Hao smiled. “If even my teacher can’t, will others succeed, Brother Chen? Of course, it’s another story if someone stronger than Solar comes. But if that’s the case, we won’t be able to do anything if they just take it from us.”

The young man made sense!

Both Chen Jian and Hu Hao fell silent. The ruins were Li Hao and Yuan Shuo's battle spoils. If both of them felt there was no need to continue, then there was no need for the two watchers to say anything else.

If they didn't need to guard the spot, then they could retreat.

"None of us drove, why don't I fly back with everyone..." Hu Hao offered.

"Forget it, there's too many of us. That'd be a huge hassle." Yuan Shuo flapped his hand. "Just fly back with the fatty. Li Hao and I will run back."

Flight also consumed mysterious power, Hu Hao would be tired enough flying back with Chen Jian. The fatty was as heavy as teacher and disciple combined.

Chapter 169: The Entire Team Breaks Through (I)

After a few more pleasantries, Li Hao and Yuan Shuo returned the way they came—by running. They were joined by a little black dog this time.

Within the wilderness.

Two humans and one dog sprinted across the land, the first two leaping and bounding like elk. Li Hao detected another increase in his speed; he was faster than before. Peak Sunderer... and he'd barely set foot into this level! What he lacked was a connection between his internal force and aura. Once that was forged, he would shape them into a sword and complete the final consolidation.

Of course, the end product might not be a sword. He wanted to wield both offensive and defensive capabilities if possible. A sword was fine enough, but it would be just as good to form a link to the earth. The young man wasn't in a hurry for this step.

If Li Hao tripped over himself to enter Dominator, he might end up like Liu Long. But if he could build a connection to both sword and earth, then he might turn out like his teacher. The former could only fight initial Sunflare, whereas the latter could kill Solars. The gap between the two was enormous!

A high cultivation level was nice, but that would not be to Li Hao's liking if it was paired with weak battle strength. He had to attain some sort of midpoint. For example, if he couldn't kill Solars like his teacher, he should at least be able to fight peak Sunflare.

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Li Hao sensed the power of the earth as he ran. He closed his eyes, not needing vision to guide the way. He relied on tactile feedback and a burgeoning perception.

Martial masters could call upon their aura when they reached Dominator; it functioned as their eyes. They were able to sense their surroundings even when they closed their eyes. This was what Li Hao needed to practice next. He'd improved so quickly that it caused him to be lacking in many areas. And what of his Five Styles after he progressed to Dominator?

The method's strength would be immensely diminished without its corresponding aura. He would be far less than his teacher, of that there was no doubt. In the same vein, if the Nine Forged Force lacked its aura, it wouldn't matter if it was layered nine times.

Can I utilize Nine Forged Force through the sword? Li Hao wondered as he ran. The Five Styles, aura of the earth, sword intent, and Nine Forged Force. Could all of these methods and secret arts be combined?

The Five Styles had come about through his teacher's painstaking efforts before their aura was fully combined. This was one of the reasons why the method was so formidable. Could he try to do the same in the future?

Too many ideas floated to the fore; they'd made it back to the city at some unknown point in time. Although it was early, there were already denizens out and about. A loud hubbub rose from the

marketplace and mouthwatering fragrances wafted out from breakfast stalls. The city was already coming awake at this hour.

.....

The Inspectorate.

Liu Long inclined his head as he listened to Chen Jian's report. He didn't ask about the ruins. Since Chen Jian and Hu Hao had returned, that demonstrated that the ruins could not be excavated for the time being. He found it a bit regretful as obtaining treasures from a ruin would strengthen both Yuan Shuo and Li Hao at an opportune time. It would also be a good development for him.

"Since Elder Yuan says we can set it aside, we set it aside!" Liu Long declared and turned to Chen Jian. "Are you sure you don't want to cross over to the supernatural, that you want to become a Sunderer?"

Chen Jian hesitated, then nodded resolutely. "Yes! I haven't been able to find the energy that suits me after all this time. I tried absorbing earth energy because I think I'm skilled at defense, but I didn't succeed in crossing over. I'm also worried that being used to defense, I'll struggle to adjust to suddenly gaining healing powers or something like that.

"Not to mention, martial masters aren't weak! Elder Yuan has killed Solars as a Dominator and you have slain Sunflares. Since there is a future ahead for martial masters, why do I not walk that path?

"If it turns out that I can't make it to Dominator, it's not like I can't cross over as a Sunderer. I'll just have to consume more mysterious power." Chen Jian couldn't help a chuckle. "Chief, we're obtaining mysterious power more than one hundred times faster than before. If I remain as a Slayer and can't participate in the next battle, how will I earn more mysterious power then?"

On a whole, the team was much stronger than before. Only he and Wu Chao were still Slayers. They felt it was sufficient before, but now realized that if this continued, they would be rendered sooner or later.

Liu Long inclined his head. “So long as you are willing. Martial masters are not weak at all!” He felt this acutely after setting foot into Dominator. “I may not be as strong as Elder Yuan, but I am sure of one thing after fighting those Sunflares. Regardless of whether or not they are rookies, supernaturals are in no way superior to martial masters of the Dominator level, no matter their special attributes.”

Martial masters were indeed less than their supernatural counterparts prior to Dominator due to the unique abilities of the supernatural domain. Flight and shifting through earth was possible for the latter. When martial masters encountered such supernaturals, they could only passively suffer beatings. But at the same time, that didn’t mean all Sunderers were less than Darkmoon.

Chen Jian quickly bobbed his head up and down.

“Then I’ll take the blood pearl, chief. I wonder if I’ll be a real Sunderer afterward...”

“You shouldn’t have an issue.” Liu Long had asked a similar question of Wang Ming. “Elder Yuan says you can wait a few days to take the blood pearl. There’s no rush.”

“Oh, alright then!” Chen Jian didn’t ask further.

The meeting was over after a few more simple exchanges. They were used to living in the law enforcement building, a habit that carried over even now. Therefore, meetings in the middle of the night could be held at a drop of a hat.

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Li Hao was the same as usual, reporting to work on his rundown bike when the work day began. He wasn’t pretending to be poor, but that he really didn’t have a car to drive. His teacher’s car was gone, his own car was wrecked, and the Inspectorate refused to lend him a car. He could only return to using his bike.

He'd just parked at the Inspectorate front doors when he heard someone calling his name. He could identify them simply through hearing their voice.

"Li Hao!" came a slightly feisty voice. A dashing Chen Na grumbled as soon as she saw the young man turn back. "Alright now, you've forgotten your old friends after being promoted and given a raise, huh!"

Li Hao smiled to see his old colleague. "When did I ever forget an old friend, Sis Na?"

"Dare you say you haven't?" Chen Na knew a few things as the Night Watchers were no longer a secret in the Inspectorate. They were an open secret after a branch was established in Silver City. She even knew that Li Hao seemed to have been promoted to an executive position in the shadowy organization. But... so what?

"Didn't you guys say that you were going to recruit people for your back office? It's a promotion, raise, and an opportunity to see more of the world. Why didn't you ask me?"

"Classified Affairs is a leisurely place..."

"Pfft!" Chen Na rolled her eyes and quickly broke out in giggles. "I hear Little Ming is an executive at your department? Captain Liu is in command while you and Little Ming are his seconds?"

"Sis Na is as well informed as ever." Li Hao smiled and walked inside with the girl. These days, he spent every hour with supernaturals and martial masters. It'd only been a few days since he last saw Chen Na, but suddenly encountering a mundane gave him a different feeling.

The year he'd spent at Classified Affairs seemed so nice in retrospect. No one worried about finding a girlfriend for him anymore when he reported to work each day. He'd found it annoying before, but now he missed it.

Humans. Such complicated creatures.

The two didn't work in the same building anymore, so Chen Na only exchanged a few words before they parted ways at a crossroad. She didn't mean to force Li Hao into promoting her. Li Hao turned for the law enforcement building and headed straight for Liu Yan's office instead of his.

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"A rare visitor has come!" Liu Yan seemed to have just finished her morning exercises. She was wearing a small vest that perfectly displayed her curvaceous body. The only detail that marred the sight was her slightly charred hands.

It'd been a day since the previous battle. Li Hao hadn't been in a hurry to heal Liu Yan due to Hao Lianchuan's presence and a lack of sufficient sword energy. Another key had been Liu Yan's lack of visible pain.

But now that the young man took a closer look, he could see that her scorched hands seemed to be splitting open. Even some yellowed bone was visible—this was after Yun Yao had treated Liu Yan.

Plainly, the woman's wounds were not as lighthearted as she made them out to be.

Li Hao furrowed his brow, then quickly smoothed it out. "Sis, didn't upstairs reward you with a pill? If you take it now, I'll use special internal force to help you digest it. Your hands should heal and you might take another step forward into mid Sunderer."

"Special internal force?" Liu Yan curved her lips into a half smile.

"Yep, my teacher taught me." Li Hao grinned widely. "It's amazing!"

“How amazing?” Liu Yan winked coquettishly.

Li Hao’s lips flattened wordlessly. As expected, he was no match when it came to discussing these sorts of things with a thirty year old woman. Her hands were almost gone, but she had the mindset to wink at him.

Liu Yan dropped her teasing and walked toward Li Hao without bothering to change her clothes. “Little Hao Hao, then big sis will have to trouble you to help heal me.” She drew close to the young man. “When big sis’ hands are healed, I’ll give you a massage as a reward...”

Oh enough of that! I don’t want any.

Li Hao didn’t take her seriously. He gave her a few reminders on how to digest the blood pearl’s energy before he started operating the Breathing Method of the Five Styles. He absorbed a little bit of sword energy to help Liu Yan digest the blood pearl and heal her hands.

As Hou Xiaochen had refined the blood pearl into a pill, one could digest it without the use of sword energy. However, the rate was slow and efficiency very low, leading to severe waste. A Darkmoon level blood pearl was insufficient to help Liu Yan break through to mid Sunderer because half of it would be wasted. But if paired with sword energy, it would be utilized to the greatest degree possible.

This was why Yuan Shuo and Li Hao didn’t want people to be in a hurry to take the blood pearls. Every iota of strength they could wring from the pearls would be one iota more. As for sword energy, these people also knew about this kind of energy.

Li Hao was sometimes quite open-minded. Some secrets had to stay hidden for a reason, but when some others were an open secret, he couldn’t be bothered to continue concealing them. Special internal force was just his way of glossing over the topic.

Inside the office, Liu Yan's face flushed red. The scarlet shadow's energy was quite potent the first time it was absorbed. Her hands healed at a rapid pace, the sensation so numbing and tingling that she couldn't help but groan.

Li Hao didn't mind it as he'd done the same when he and his teacher first absorbed it. However, he'd forgotten that they were in the law enforcement building and that this was Liu Yan's office.

Chapter 170: The Entire Team Breaks Through (II)

Outside the office.

Wang Ming's ears were perked up when he happened to casually pass by Liu Yan's office. Moments later, Hu Hao and Li Meng came down the hallway, deep in discussion with document folders in their hands. They seemed to be working as they passed by.

Seconds after that, Wu Chao and Chen Jian loitered outside the offices as if they had reports to make. After a while, even Yun Yao walked over wearing her special glasses.

Liu Long in a trench coat rounded out the crew. He joined the group and growled, "Do none of you have work to do?"

Wu Chao winked and waggled his eyebrows, tilting his head at the office. "Chief, your girl's being stolen! Vice Captain Liu and Li Hao are too much, doing this in broad daylight!"

"Get outta here!" Liu Long cursed. Your girl's being stolen! But he has a point, this is broad daylight... and Li Hao... is really...

He was too embarrassed to extend his senses into the office. Can't you two consider the impact of this? Doing it right in the office with everyone listening outside... Liu Long was mortified on their behalf!

How shameless!

When Wang Ming passed by again, a gossipy look couldn't help but dawn in his eyes.

"Director Liu, is office romance allowed in our department? Does this count as Li Hao abusing his power for personal gain?" he asked with a hint of glee.

Liu Long didn't know what to say. Are even supernaturals this interested in gossip? All of you have too much spare time on your hands! He suddenly tensed and sprang away.

The office door opened. Liu Long immediately turned like he'd just arrived and roared, "What are all of you doing here? Do you have nothing to do?"

Li Hao looked wordlessly at the scene. Do you think I didn't sense that you were also here earlier, chief? Who would've thought that the coldly arrogant Captain Liu would know to put on this act as well?

Still wearing her cropped vest, a flushed Liu Yan poked her head out to look at everyone. She smiled radiantly. "You're all here, huh?"

"....." Ringing silence answered her.

"Shameless!" Yun Yao couldn't help herself.

Li Hao was going to give himself a seizure from all his eye rolls. He didn't bother explaining. "Brother Chen, Brother Wu, come in!"

"Us?" The two looked at each other with a slightly guilty conscience. What? We didn't say nothing.

Wu Chao was the more guilty of the two as he'd said that Li Hao was stealing the chief's girl. The lad wouldn't take his anger out on him, would he?

“Come in! Does the word of a deputy director hold no weight?”

The two hemmed and hawed, highly reluctant to enter the office. They looked pleadingly at Liu Long a few times, but the man remained noncommittal like he didn't see them. He wasn't going to get involved at all.

Despair crept into their hearts and the two resigned men entered the office. The door shut with a bang, leaving Wang Ming and the others looking at each other. What was going on?

Moments later...

“Ah!” The groaning started again. It was Chen Jian's voice.

Wang Ming's eyes shot wide open and he couldn't help but look at Liu Long, then at Yun Yao. This was astounding! What the heck was this?? Had the Demon Hunters always been this lewd? First Li Hao and Liu Yan, now Chen Jian... Wu Chao was inside as well, would he be moaning later too?

The look in Liu Long's eyes changed and he uttered, “They're training!”

“Oh, okay!” Wang Ming quickly nodded. Who the heck would believe that? He'd never groaned like this when he trained, and with that kind of tone! He'd never seen anyone moan like that, who was Liu Long kidding?

Screaming with agony was more like it!

Cultivating with mysterious power was a very painful affair; it sometimes felt like endless knives scraping through flesh. Wang Ming often heard anguished wails as mysterious power rampaged through the body, but that was plainly not coming from the office. It was obviously cries of pleasure!

Oh heavens!

What an affront and complete decimation of his values!

The three supernaturals from White Moon looked at each other. Was this the key to why the Demon Hunters were so united? They subconsciously took a step away from Liu Long and Yun Yao.

The latter two were quite resigned by this reaction, but they could more or less determine that those inside really were training. Something else might be afoot when it was just Liu Yan and Li Hao, but after Chen Jian and Wu Chao also entered, they were obviously involved in legitimate affairs.

Expectation shone out of Liu Long's eyes when his thoughts turned to the blood pearls... Could Li Hao, or rather, Yuan Shuo, have a way to make it easier to absorb the blood pearls? The ones inside all possessed one, and they were all martial masters!

Wang Ming's scalp turned numb at the look in Liu Long's eyes. Li Meng also sidled up to him and breathed, "Brother Wang, does it look like Director Liu wants to be inside as well?"

Wang Ming nodded his head imperceptibly. It was obvious to see and truly terrifying!

Liu Long's ears twitched. Do those two think I can't hear them? Forget it, I can't be bothered with them. He continued to wait, highly anticipatory of the results.

If Wu Chao and Chen Jian broke through as well, then the entire team might be Sunderers after today. They'd only had one a few days ago—him, and he was now a Dominator!

As small as the team may be, one Dominator and eight Sunderers or Darkmoons were a formidable force no matter where they went. Silver City's defensive capabilities would reach a new peak!

The time spent waiting was quite a torment; Wang Ming and his comrades didn't leave. They first stayed out of an overabundance to learn more gossip, but they gradually knew that something was amiss as well.

Wang Ming's eyes darted around before he looked at Liu Long and lowered his voice, "Director Liu, what are they doing inside?"

"It's our team's unique training method," Liu Long answered without skipping a beat. "We cultivate in the most comfortable way possible. It's a secret, exclusive method that will usually help one through a bottleneck! I dare say that both Wu Chao and Chen Jian will become Sunderers this time."

"How is that possible?" Wang Ming started. His thoughts turned to the blood pearl. Although he'd taken one before to good effect, Wu Chao and the others had received similar ones to him. The effects weren't so swift!

Not to mention, he hadn't moaned like this when he digested the blood pearl!

A blood pearl without the supplement of sword energy wasn't that agreeable to the cultivator. The effects were middling and one had to endure the eruption of scarlet shadow energy. To be frank, it wasn't a pleasant experience. Thus, Wang Ming highly suspected Liu Long of lying to him!

After roughly another hour, the door to the office swung open again. Wu Chao and Chen Jian were both flushed and exceedingly animated. Chen Jian ignored the fact that he was dripping with sweat and excitedly swung his fist. Faint internal force emanated from it.

"Chief!" Chen Jian hollered energetically. "I'm a Sunderer!"

It used to be that people were dejected when they broke through, not sure if they should be happy or regretful. But after Liu Long set foot into Dominator, the team's craving for the supernatural was greatly extinguished. Breaking through to Sunderer was massive progress!

Wu Chao laughed spookily. “Me too!”

Behind them, Liu Yan had thrown on an inspector’s uniform that hid her curves. “I’ve also improved slightly.” She smiled faintly. “I can project internal force from my four limbs. I’m not yet mid Sunderer, but I’m almost there.”

Wu Chao and Chen Jian could only just begin to project their internal force whereas she’d taken a step forward. Liu Yan was a hair away from mid Sunderer.

Wang Ming and the others gaped with shock! This was real! All of them had advanced!

“Does this mean...” Hu Hao raised. “That every single Silver City Night Watcher is either a Darkmoon or Sunderer?”

“Li Hao...” Wang Ming wanted to say that Li Hao wasn’t when the young man interrupted him bashfully.

“Ole Wang, I advanced last night too.”

“.....” Silence.

Wang Ming’s eyes shot wide open and he looked at Liu Long and the others, too flabbergasted for words. “The entire team... has broken through!”

One Dominator, eight Darkmoons or Sunderers. This level of strength outstripped the other Night Watcher branches and placed Silver City second to only White Moon and Flare City! Flare City was the second largest city of the province. It had several Sunflares and more than a dozen Darkmoon in residence, making it stronger than Silver City.

Other cities that boasted of Night Watcher branches typically had one Sunflare, a few Darkmoons, and several Starlight. Some weaker ones didn't even have a Sunflare.

Silver City had been the weakest as it was newly established, but it'd vaulted to number three within the province in the blink of an eye. If they counted Yuan Shuo who was out of the system... that gave them a fighting chance with headquarters!

"I need a moment..." Wang Ming found it difficult to accept what he saw. "But this is impossible! I know about blood pearls and that they're very useful for martial masters to advance to Slayer or for Slayers to continue improving. Their effects shouldn't be this good, should they?"

These effects were too good!

"Of course not, but don't forget who my teacher is," chuckled Li Hao. "A master of martial dao, he naturally brings about different results with the addition of some unique methods. Not only that, but if we can get our hands on more blood pearls, these items may not be as useless to supernaturals either..."

"What?!" Wang Ming gasped. "They work for supernaturals too?"

"Yes!" Li Hao grinned. "Supernaturals absorb mysterious power to strengthen themselves. But if blood pearls are combined with mysterious power and my teacher's exclusive method, they are effective for supernaturals as well! Brother Wang, for example, is adept with the metal attribute and abilities. If equipped with a blood pearl and a few other things, you'll absorb metal energy at a faster rate and grow stronger. I think you'll soon set foot into the Plenilune stage or even Sunflare!"

Wang Ming lit up! Did he mean that?

Li Meng and Hu Hao were also slightly tempted. Hu Hao couldn't help himself and asked, "Um, I'm... I'm a flight..."

“That has to do with the wind element. You normally absorb wind energy, right?”

Hu Hao nodded. Flight did indeed have to do with the wind; it was a kind of mutation. Not all wind supernaturals could fly.

“What about me?” Li Meng asked urgently. “It’s so hard for my third eye to improve. If I could absorb energy whenever I wished to, I would’ve advanced a long time ago. I can only absorb some unattributed power to strengthen myself, but it’s not a good match for me...”

None of the three supernaturals from White Moon could sit still, not when they watched the martial masters in front of them improve at such a rapid pace. They remained rooted in the same position while the rest of the team advanced. People said that it was hard for martial masters to improve—much harder than supernaturals—but why did they suddenly feel that it was the supernatural that was hard and martial masters had it quite easy?

“Alright, don’t think so much for now since we’re out of blood pearls,” Liu Long brought up. “Both Wu Chao and Chen Jian have made progress today... oh, and Li Hao.”