

Star Gate 171

Chapter 171: The Entire Team Breaks Through (III)

Liu Long knew that Li Hao had advanced a long time ago, but since the kid insisted that he'd done so last night, the director wouldn't bother to expose his lie.

"This is wonderful news! Add to that the demise of the Qiaos, Liu Yan having her vengeance... we'll get the remaining half sooner or later!" Liu Long flashed a rare grin. "My treat tonight!"

Answering smiles appeared on everyone's faces. Li Hao wanted to speak when the director continued, "We'll eat at Li Hao's and save ourselves the trouble of going out. Remember to order, Li Hao!"

The young man looked on wordlessly. Seriously? And it's your treat? How is this your treat?? Chief is treating me with less and less respect these days!

Liu Long walked off merrily; his spirits hadn't been so high even when he became a Dominator. No one had died in the team lately and everyone was improving. This was wonderful!

Li Hao didn't say anything as he watched the man leave. He walked over to Yun Yao instead. The team doctor seemed to have gotten steadily more depressed after she crossed over as a water supernatural.

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Yun Yao smiled calmly at the young man. "Congratulations!"

"Sis Yun, can you make your glasses smaller?" Li Hao brought up the topic of the glasses instead of anything else.

“I’ve been experimenting lately.” Yun Yao nodded. “I can shrink them, but some things remain very difficult to see in them. I want to keep adjusting the glasses to see if I can bring those into focus.”

“When you’re done, Sis Yun, could I have a pair?”

“You want this?”

Li Hao nodded. He didn’t want them, his teacher wanted them. His teacher planned to hunt Red Moon powerhouses, but he couldn’t see scarlet shadows. He could slightly sense them, but not in a clear sense. If the glasses could reveal red dots to him, he could pair that with his perception to immediately identify the scarlet shadows.

Yun Yao’s glasses were exceedingly important. The team wasn’t placing enough importance on them yet. If they were presented to their superiors, especially someone of Hou Xiaochen’s level who was aware of Red Moon, they would highly value the invention. The strength of the scarlet shadows lay in their invisibility. Once everyone could see red dots through the glasses, these entities would be rendered much less effective.

“Sis Yun, if you present your glasses to upstairs, I’m afraid...”

Yun Yao interrupted him. “I won’t be doing so in the short term. They haven’t been fine-tuned yet. I know what you’re getting at.” She suddenly sniffed disdainfully. “But it’s not certain whether they can be used effectively against Red Moon. It might expose the glasses ahead of time instead and tip the organization off.”

Li Hao blinked.

“You must know that the Night Watchers aren’t a solid whole,” Yun Yao said softly. “Things are better in Silver Moon, but the Night Watchers are splintered in other regions. The glasses aren’t important in Silver Moon because Red Moon isn’t strong in our province. Where they’ll be truly useful is where Red Moon powerhouses abound, but that’s where the situation is also most chaotic. Little Hao, sometimes it’s not a good thing to just offer up any treasure that you come across. And, are you sure that no one else has a way of discovering those things?”

Li Hao sank into deep contemplation. Was there no other way?

There was!

He knew that the Night Watchers had taken away anyone who could see the scarlet shadows. Where had those people gone? Why could they see the shadow?

He still knew too little of the circumstances. It was rather Yun Yao who knew more than him. Liu Long had mentioned that every one of the Demon Hunters had their own story, but no one pried unless someone volunteered their story. That was how Li Hao knew Liu Yan's background.

What story did Yun Yao have?

"I'll give you a pair when I'm done optimizing them." Yun Yao didn't ask too many questions and was perfectly willing to satisfy Li Hao's request.

The young man nodded. "Sis Yun, I'll ask my teacher to help you advance when we get more treasures later..."

"No worries, there's no rush," Yun Yao laughed softly. "I'm a doctor, it's fine if I'm weaker."

Li Hao said nothing more. He wished for the entire team to be strong. Silver City was his home and there were many secrets here. Powerhouses would descend on the city sooner or later, whereas Night Watcher sentiment had not changed. They might still wish to abandon Silver City and defend only the larger cities.

He could discern this from Hao Lianchuan's desire to explore the ruins at the end of the month. The director prioritized it so heavily that everything else could be set aside. It was plain to see that they

highly valued the defensive origin weapon. His teacher said that it could be the turtle shell of the Wangs.

Wasn't that in Red Moon hands, however? Li Hao was confused. Just how many weapons did the organization possess?

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Someone flung their arm around his shoulder as the young man contemplated the situation. Wang Ming held him warmly and grinning widely. "Li Hao, do you know that we're fellow junior brothers?"

A wordless Li Hao was jarred out of his musings. I know, I just learned about that yesterday. And technically speaking, I'm your senior brother.

"Remember to bring me along next time there's something good to be had! We're all on the same side here and actually closer than you and the Demon Hunters!" Wang Ming pushed hard for the relationship and his grin turned ever more radiant. "I'm going to see if I can get some blood pearls from White Moon... Can you really help me advance?"

"It's hard to say, you're so strong that one Darkmoon level blood pearl may not be enough."

Wang Ming creased his forehead. That was true.

"Then... two?"

"Maybe."

Wang Ming was wracked by conflict. This would be difficult to pull off. Those items were meant to nurture rookies.

“Do you know where these things originate from?” Li Hao asked softly.

“I don’t.”

“I do,” Li Hao continued gently. “Teacher knows too. He says that they’re a special product that Darkmoon level Red Moon members carry on them. You should’ve felt it last time too, the intangible thing that harmed the director. They are extracted through special methods...”

The look in Wang Ming’s eyes shifted from shock to a bright gleam. Red Moon!

“Killing one Darkmoon nets us one to be made into a blood pearl. That’s where the blood pearls come from!”

“Hiss!” Wang Ming sucked in a sharp breath and swallowed hard. “Really?”

“One hundred percent. We’re fellow junior brothers, so why would I lie to you?”

“Then... I’ll have a chance to ascend to Plenilune if we kill two of them?”

“Yep, but the precursor to that is that there’s someone to help extract them. Teacher can do it, I can’t. So if you have something in mind, it’s better for you to act with us. Not everyone can draw them out—only teacher and Director Hou can do so in all of Silver Moon.”

“I see!” Wang Ming gasped with astonishment. “Our teacher really is an absolute savant!”

He suddenly felt that it was well worth being Yuan Shuo's honorary disciple. Thank goodness for that development!

The handsome young man suddenly clenched his jaw. "The evil organization that is Red Moon ought to be exterminated! We'll kill whatever Red Moon member we come across next, no questions asked!"

Li Hao laughed. That was more like it. If he had everyone fight Red Moon for him, there might be differences in opinion at the end even if everyone was willing. But if it was for their collective benefit? Shouldn't it be a foregone conclusion that they should kill Red Moon members?

That's what was called a win-win situation!

"You have a wide network to collect more information," Li Hao lowered his voice. "Where might their strongholds and powerhouses be? It's tough for us in Silver City to gather intel, but you should have your ways in White Moon City."

"I do!" Wang Ming affirmed enthusiastically. "Leave this to me, don't worry about it. I say, Li Hao, don't think that I only know how to take advantage of you. I'm a genius in White Moon, after all! That's part of it, the other part is that my family commands authority and power in the city. I wouldn't have received sufficient mysterious power to advance so quickly otherwise."

"Let me put it this way. My family elders do not serve in the Night Watchers because we are primarily rooted in the Silver Moon army. Li Hao, I won't speak to you like I would an outsider because we're fellow junior brothers. When you arrive in White Moon City in the future, you've got a brother in me who can deploy troops of less than one thousand at any time, to say nothing of anything else!"

"What, is that allowed?" Li Hao frowned slightly. "Is White Moon that chaotic?"

Deploying the army for private purposes!

“All regions are in turmoil with the rise of the supernatural!” Wang Ming curled his lip. “What do you think? Silver Moon is in better straits since it at least listens to orders from the central region. But the province is fractured internally. Thankfully, the factions all work together to withstand enemies.

“I can only mobilize groups of less than one thousand. Any larger contingents are beyond me.”

That was already impressive enough! Li Hao could imagine that the Wangs must be very powerful and have family members serving as army executives. Wang Ming wouldn’t have the right to command the troops otherwise.

“How big of an army is stationed in Silver Moon?”

“Roughly three hundred thousand, it’s not that much. Apart from the Night Watchers, the army, Inspectorate, and city council all have a few supernaturals in their ranks, but the Night Watchers have the most. They have more than the army, which is why they are the government’s only supernatural organization.”

Li Hao nodded, adding more to his general knowledge. This unexpected junior brother of his may actually be of some help in the future. The army may seem feeble compared to supernaturals, but that was under the guise of few people. When numbers swelled and everyone was equipped with a gun, plus a few large scale weapons, even Solars might die when the two sides met in the while and artillery pounded the field.

The two young men chatted for a while, with Li Meng joining not too long after. The White Moon supernaturals would never bring up the matter of being honorary disciples in the past, but now they wanted nothing more than for the entire world to know that they were one family.

Li Hao suppressed his laughter. He hadn’t asked his teacher why he’d taken honorary disciples; it went without saying that it must have been an amusing process. His teacher might’ve forced them to acknowledge him as their teacher—that was highly likely.

The entire law enforcement building was filled with joy this day. Those who broke through exulted and those who didn't saw the light of hope. All of them were highly agitated and burned to eliminate Red Moon right this very second.

Chapter 172: Going or Not? (I)

Peace returned to Silver City once more.

The Night Watchers focused on training diligently after they broke through. As they weren't short on mysterious power, everyone's goal was to further consolidate their cultivation. Even the swiftly progressing Li Hao had room for improvement. There was much of his teacher's power of the five elements that he'd yet to utilize.

Although he wouldn't advance again in the short term, he could focus on strengthening his organs. That would prove very useful to him after he became a Dominator.

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While Silver City fell silent, all was not calm in the outside world. A massive canyon could be found to the south of Silver City, roughly one thousand kilometers away. Locals gave it the name Rift Canyon twenty years ago as it split the province into two.

With Rift Canyon as the marker, Silver Moon was divided into a northern and southern section. Silver City was to the north, White Moon City to the south. The province name was taken from the two major cities in the north and south back in the day, with Silver City in front.

One had to cross Rift Canyon to travel from White Moon City to Silver City. It was inaccessible by cars and used to hold a suspension bridge. No one built more bridges after it was damaged. This was why Huang Yun and other powerhouses elected to fly if they needed to travel through Rift Canyon.

This didn't mean that mundanes couldn't pass—they just needed to follow a winding path into the canyon, traverse it, then follow the path back up. The less straightforward process added a few dozen kilometers to the journey.

Rift Canyon was exceedingly long and frightfully wide. Though it was called a canyon, it was more like a basin. It spanned more than thirty kilometers at its widest portion; powerhouses didn't choose to fly through that area either as it was too wide.

On this day, a few tents marked the usually empty Rift Canyon. They were found to the north of the geological structure. More tents were being erected around the canyon, each of them separate from another. Some were placed close together whereas others were several hundred or thousands of meters apart.

A dozen tents were erected in the northernmost tip. If Li Hao and the others were here, they'd recognize one of the people milling about. It was the speedy Sunflare, Huang Yun.

The supernatural acted as a supervisor as several Starlight raised tents. He frowned as he watched them work and looked in a certain direction. A figure landed from the sky moments later. It was tall, hulking, and appeared more like a demon god. Extremely thick leather boots clad their feet; they fractured the earth with a single stomp.

The Night Watchers assembling tents in the surroundings snapped to solemn attention and quickly gathered together. Huang Yun stepped forward as well.

"Hu Po, what are you doing here?"

The stocky man swept a slightly dismissive glance over the Night Watcher. "Step aside, we wish to set up camp here!" he intoned.

"Yama's campgrounds are not here." Huang Yun frowned. "According to our previous agreement, your territory is three thousand meters in that direction..."

"I will set up camp here today!" The man named Hu Po speared Huang Yun with a frosty look. "To put it plainly, I want this place! Its feng shui is good, I like it!"

“Hu Po!” An angry expression crossed Huang Yun’s face as fires of fury burned in his heart.

Hu Po was the resident Yama powerhouse in Silver City. The three great organizations had branches in Silver Moon province as well. Their structure was similar to the Night Watchers, perhaps even stronger.

There was a Yama court master holding down the fort in Silver Moon. According to Night Watcher intelligence, the leader of the Yama organization called himself the favored son of Yama—the Yama King. There were ten court masters below him. The one in Silver Moon was the tenth court master, one who called himself the Revolution King. [1] He was a Solar, and this Hu Po was one of his heavyweights.

The Revolution King was low ranked in the Yama organization. He was the weakest of the ten court masters, but only relatively speaking compared to the rest of the organization. In Silver Moon, a Solar was heaven.

This time, the Night Watchers partnered with various major organizations to jointly explore the ruins. As the location site was known ahead of time, these people were here to set up camp in advance and await their main force.

Hu Po was the Yama powerhouse in charge of their campground. He was a formidable Sunflare who might even be slightly stronger than Huang Yun.

All sides had settled on where everyone would pitch their tents, so it was the last thing on Huang Yun’s mind that Yama would trespass. Hu Po was plainly doing this on purpose and not as a brash impulse! This was premeditated; the Night Watcher could even sense some strange gazes in the vicinity paying attention to them. It might be those from other organizations.

Why is this happening? Huang Yun thought quickly. Did they think the Night Watcher site was better or held certain secrets? Or did they just want to probe the government’s supernatural organization?

Numerous possibilities flashed through his mind, but Huang Yun knew that there was no backing down from this. Once he gave way, the Night Watchers would be caught on the back foot before the expedition even commenced. Hao Lianchuan would take him to task then!

“Hu Po!” he snapped back. “Is this your intention or the Revolution King’s intention? Or does this come from other Yama powerhouses, or even other supernatural organizations?”

“I already told you, it’s because I like this place!” Hu Po looked coolly at him. “Wind Demon, don’t think you’re on equal footing with me just because you can run fast. You will either step aside or see what true strength is today!”

Huang Yun cursed inwardly, his ire rising.

“So you wish to challenge me?”

“And what if I do?” Hu Po sneered. “I can snap your tiny arms and legs with a quick slap. But I won’t kill you, since you’re a Night Watcher. The Night Watchers are so... impressive!”

Huang Yun could sense collective fury behind him and knew that if the situation continued, the general public would be disappointed in the Night Watchers. He cut the talk and coalesced a sword of gale wind in his hand.

“Hu Po, I will help you along since you insist on courting death. You have been wanted by the Night Watchers ever since you committed murder in Silver City. We would’ve killed you long ago if it wasn’t for the Revolution King stopping us. You’ve got some nerve to come shooting your mouth off today...”

“Hahaha!!” Hu Po threw his head back with laughter. “Wanted? The Night Watchers have a wanted notice out for me? I’m so scared, so very very scared!”

He flung a punch at his opponent, one as domineering as Mount Tai! A mountain seemed to descend upon Huang Yun—the power of earth, and not of the defensive sort. Each ability might map to its origin element, but that didn't mean there weren't differences between abilities.

Earth could defend and attack. A large mountain bore down on Huang Yun. He shouted and waved a baleful wind into existence, sending it churning through the land.

Two Sunflares thus clashed in battle.

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Off in the distance, people watched the battle. Figures flashed in and out of sight on a cliff face, each of them wearing a ghostly face mask. This was the trademark characteristic of Red Moon.

“Hu Po has improved extremely rapidly since setting foot into Sunflare, but the guy's very cocky.”

“He has a right to be. It's only been roughly five years since he joined Yama? But he's already a Sunflare and can get the upper hand against a veteran supernatural like Huang Yun. He has the right to be arrogant.”

“I hear that Hu Po comes from Silver City?”

“Mmhmm. Liu Long of the Silver City Inspectorate—no, Night Watchers now, has an old feud with him. Hu Po seems to have killed his girl's man...”

“Hahaha, then isn't he Liu Long's savior? How is that a feud? Liu Long should pour tea and wine for Hu Po!” Several Ghostfaces laughed jeeringly. They didn't have a good impression of Silver City. Divine Brokensky had died there and upstairs bided their time out of consideration for the greater picture. But Red Moon had become a supernatural tyrant starting twenty years ago, how could its members endure such humiliation?

If it wasn't for them being strictly forbidden from action and a Yuan Shuo who could kill Solars, these people would've long rushed over and razed the city.

After more ridicule, another Ghostface asked, "Will Hu Po be able to swap out his campground?"

Hu Po's actions naturally came with a reason—an unspoken accord between the three great organizations. They would not give what the Night Watchers wanted, that was the right and proper order of things.

Due to a lack of knowledge about the ruins, the organizations didn't know whether the Night Watchers had randomly picked a spot or purposefully chosen their campground. Regardless, they would shatter the Night Watchers' plans.

None of the three great organizations were fools. They'd clashed with the Night Watchers over these ruins many times. That the agency had abruptly voluntarily given way didn't necessarily bode well. Perhaps they wanted to use the three great organizations as scouts and cannon fodder.

This was a possibility that everyone understood, but also felt that there was no reason not to partake in a feast that'd been delivered to their doorstep. Not only did the three great organizations wish to be involved, they wanted all of the mid and small sized organizations in Silver Moon to be a part of it. There was safety in numbers, and it was up to individual strength as to whether or not an organization would have any share of the pickings.

The battle in the distance intensified as the Ghostfaces spoke. Winds howled and cut through the earth like knives, ringing with metallic collisions when they collided with opposing energy. But it was apparent from the flow of battle that Huang Yun was suppressed. A large mountain bore down on him, crushing the winds out of existence.

Even the Ghostfaces were surprised. So it would seem that regular Sunflare really couldn't withstand Hu Po's Mountain Suppression technique! Huang Yun was a veteran supernatural of more than ten years—that was a very long tenure in the supernatural domain. His battle experience was rich and varied, yet it was a lack of strength that created his losing position.

“Hu Po displays the style of a martial master...” someone raised.

“That’s normal, he was a martial master in the beginning. As a Slayer, he was once the captain of a security detail for a Silver City corporation. How would he keep the situation under control if he didn’t have some strength to his name? I have to say, martial masters do indeed possess better physique than ordinary supernaturals after they cross over. Martial masters advanced on the battlefield back in the day, so they have real strength to their name.”

Even though martial masters had declined, their battle experience remained valuable. All of them were valuable assets in the field. Many premier supernaturals were conversions from martial masters.

A loud explosion traveled from the distance as Red Moon conversed. Huang Yun howled and raised gale winds, surrounding the mountain. He was bringing his full strength to bear!

Mysterious power exploded and sent countless rock fragments flying. It was at this moment that the mountain exploded, making room for Hu Po to stride through the air.

“This is called your full strength?” he snorted. “Wind Demon, you’re too weak! Forget it, this bores me. Night Watcher Solars will be along for my head if I kill you, hahaha!”

With that, he left through the sky, leaving behind a Huang Yun with blood welling from his mouth.

Chapter 173: Going or Not? (II)

“Chief Commissioner Huang!” A group of rookie Night Watchers rushed up behind Huang Yun, each of them worried and conflicted.

Huang Yun had been defeated.

Although their opponent voluntarily retreated in the end, Huang Yun was injured and his opponent unscathed. Plainly, Huang Yun had lost the battle. Battle ended only because the other didn't wish to cause additional trouble.

An unpleasant expression hung on the wind supernatural's face. He'd lost! And to a newly ascended Hu Po! Huang Yun had three years under his belt as a Sunflare, whereas Hu Po had ascended only at the beginning of this year. That made for roughly half a year, or at the very least, less than a year.

Yet, a veteran Sunflare such as him had lost!

Losing in battle was not a horrifying outcome as geniuses abounded in the world. Losing to a wanted criminal, however, and at a time like this was too much of a blow to Night Watcher confidence.

Huang Yun looked in the direction that Hu Po had left in, his teeth clenched with fury. This was a probing maneuver from the three great organizations and he had not responded with a demonstration of strength! On the contrary, he displayed Night Watcher weakness, showing that this was all there was to Night Watcher Sunflares.

If he'd struck back with domineering force or even imitated Yuan Shuo and killed his opponent, that would strike fear into the hearts of the various organizations. It wasn't the three great organizations that were the crux of this expedition, but the mid and small organizations that were involved.

What was termed mid-sized were organizations active within a province and lacking any existences beyond Solar. Those who lacked any beyond Sunflare were a small organization. Those whose strongest were Darkmoon didn't even count as a supernatural organization. Darkmoon was the most basic supernatural level. These days, Starlight was regarded as a quick springboard to Darkmoon.

Silver Moon counted a few mid and small organizations among its ranks. Apart from the three great organizations, there were two mid sized and a dozen small sized organizations involved with the excavation. Mid sized organizations, in particular, were not any weaker within the confines of a province than the three great organizations.

The three great organizations were spread out across the land and their powerhouses pulled in many directions. They might have one or two Solars in residence in a province, with two or three at most. That was the limit of their capabilities as they didn't dare put everything on the line all at once.

Mid sized organizations, on the other hand, might send their leaders for these expeditions—Solars. One possible side effect of this battle with Hu Po was that the other organizations would see how weak the Night Watchers were and decide to swear fealty to the three great organizations. It would then be the three great organizations calling the shots for the entire supernatural side.

Overwhelming regret seized Huang Yun! He regretted his impulsiveness—Hu Po might not have attacked had he not made a move. But at the same time, he'd judged that he had a chance of overcoming the other since he had three years of experience as a Sunflare.

Unfortunately, he'd overestimated himself and underestimated Hu Po. Three years as a Sunflare was not a short time considering it'd only been twenty years since the supernatural world developed, but he'd lost all the same!

Night Watcher rookies behind him ground their teeth, while those with more experience understood the factors at play.

"Chief Commissioner Huang did not properly demonstrate his strength just now!" the latter shouted lowly. "That was direct frontal combat, whereas the chief commissioner is more adept at speed! He didn't utilize his abilities because he wanted to protect us!"

"That's right!"

"So what of the three great organizations? The Night Watchers are the only legitimate, orthodox organization! Don't forget that Red Moon lost a Heaven Favored when they invaded the miniscule Silver City. That Heaven Favored was a Solar, and it was a Dominator who killed him!"

"Professor Yuan is coming this time too! Let's see who dares throw their weight around when he's here!"

Some said this to raise morale, others said it because they truly believed their words. Yuan Shuo was a known factor to many as he'd often partnered with the Night Watchers to explore ruins. Much of the group's fear dissipated when they thought of the professor.

Indeed, so what if Yuan Shuo wasn't a Night Watcher? To the Night Watchers, Yuan Shuo was one of them and he'd killed a Solar! This was the first Solar to die in Silver Moon—the first publicly known one, at the very least. Hou Xiaochen had killed one too, or he wouldn't have obtained a Solar level blood pearl. But he hadn't spoken of it in order to keep the peace with the three great organizations.

Huang Yun gradually recovered his calm. "Alright now, I was no match for him," he rumbled. "I'm old, after all, and my potential is limited compared to a youngster's. You all are the future of the Night Watchers. Take vengeance for my loss in the future—a fist is afraid of youth! You guys are younger than him, and it's you who I wish to see win.

"I hear that Wang Ming has killed a Darkmoon in Silver City. All of you are in the same cohort as him, so I hope that none of you are not left behind."

"Brother Wang's killed someone?"

"And a Darkmoon? I hear that he was almost beaten to death by one when he carried out his mission in Silver City last time. So he's redeemed himself?"

"....." The hearts of the young were not as convoluted. They immediately shook off their earlier despondency at the change in topic.

Huang Yun didn't say anything and let them discuss as they would. He walked into a tent in the rear, falling silent for a while when he was alone. He took out a crystal monitor that exuded faint mysterious power. Moments later, Hou Xiaochen's face appeared on the screen.

The image shook, as did the director's voice. "Signal is weak near the ruins... be quick with whatever you need to say..."

"Director, Hu Po taunted us just now and I... I met him in battle in an impetuous moment. I failed! Hu Po is the same as I—a Sunflare. I may even be peak Sunflare whereas he is only initial Sunflare, but I... I was defeated."

"Hu Po?" It took Hou Xiaochen a brief moment to recall the person. "It's that wanted criminal, the hired gun that the Qiaos of Silver City once employed?"

"It's him."

"I see!" Hou Xiaochen was still calm. "That's fine, this is normal. You're a wind type and not skilled at offense. He's an earth type, right? And further specializing in heavy earth. Although his attribute is officially that of earth, there's some gravity mixed in with it. If you don't run or outmaneuver him with speed, your only outcome is to be suppressed by him."

Although the director hadn't been present for the fight, he instantly drew the correct conclusion.

"Next time you run into him, run circles around him with your speed! Don't be worried about anything else," Hou Xiaochen chuckled. "Those of the heavy earth attribute are very strong in offense, but their drawback is that they pause for a split second when they shift between deploying a move and defense. It's easy to kill him if you identify that timing!"

The director didn't berate Huang Yun, but the latter was still mortified.

"Director, powerhouses from all organizations were observing that battle, but I..."

"It's of no matter!" the director laughed. "Do you think those guys will decide who to throw in their lot with from one battle alone? If they decide to stand with the three great organizations, that means they decided to do so a long time ago. You don't matter."

Huang Yun was first reassured, then let down by this response. I... don't matter?

Hou Xiaochen also seemed to realize this wasn't an optimal way of putting things. "It's not that you don't matter, but that Sunflares aren't important..."

That hurt even more!

The director coughed awkwardly. "This isn't the most pleasing to the ear, but it's the truth. Battles between Solars draw attention in Silver Moon, while it has to be ones above Solar that are paid attention in the central region.

"Hao Lianchuan and I are present among the Night Watchers here, so these guys will think it through carefully. Yuan Shuo will also be attending this time. Although I won't be there myself, the various organizations will thoroughly debate how best to make their moves so they won't be exterminated.

"Although the mid and small organizations are weaker, that doesn't mean they're fools. If they brashly enter our struggle with the three great organizations, it's just us that go down if they get the better of us. That might draw powerhouses from the central region in retaliation—none of them will make it home alive if that happens."

Huang Yun was much assuaged after this exchange.

"Then director, I..."

"Just direct operations at the site with peace of mind. They won't do anything now and Hao Lianchuan will be there in a few days." Hou Xiaochen thought for a bit, "Hu Po... if Hu Po's gone... I see!"

He hung up, his face vanishing from the screen, leaving Huang Yun speechless. What do you see? Regardless, he was much more at ease after the call. It was good that this wouldn't affect anything. He seemed to have overestimated himself.

This was just as well! The director really knew how to comfort people. If It'd been Deputy Director Hao, he would've laid about with curses.

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At the same time.

White Moon City.

Hou Xiaochen knocked his fingers against his desk and thought for a bit before pressing a button. The limber Manager Yu walked in before long.

“Director.”

“What have you learned from investigating the Qiaos?”

“There aren't many clues, but based on the defection of their security detail captain to Yama, the Qiaos may have some dealings with that organization. It's been too long, so we're unable to confirm Qiao Feilong's history before he returned to Silver City.

“At the same time, that doesn't mean we've come up empty. Qiao Feilong may be hiding his strength or raising powerhouses in secret. Some merchants went missing or died in Silver City a few years ago—they all clashed with Qiao Feilong in matters of business. One of the ones that died had a Sunderer among their ranks!”

“How long ago was this?”

“Five years ago.”

Five years! The Qiaos had been able to kill a Sunderer five years ago. Hou Xiaochen rapidly considered the implications.

“Have Inspector General Mu Sen tell Liu Long that Yama has sent a Sunflare on the expedition. They are a heavy earth expert called Hu Po—their true name is Li Dahu. He defeated Huang Yun moments ago and his true strength is unfathomable!”

“Understood, director.” Manager Yu nodded. “Will there be anything else?”

Hou Xiaochen briefly hesitated, then said, “Also tell Mu Sen to let Yuan Shuo know that a Red Moon powerhouse has gone missing from the central region. Their whereabouts are unknown.”

Chapter 174: Going or Not? (III)

“Has this Red Moon powerhouse come to Silver Moon?” Manager Yu’s expression shifted slightly.

“Possibly.” Hou Xiaochen nodded. “Just relay my words in full and tell Yuan Shuo that he might know this vanished person. They’re a martial master who left Silver Moon twenty years ago—Qimei Staff King Sun Yifei! [1] Based on what we know, he should be a late Solar now.”

Manager Yu’s eyes widened with dismay. “Late Solar?”

“Yuan Shuo has already killed a Heaven Favored that was initial Solar,” Hou Xiaochen said calmly. “Do you think Red Moon will send a mid Solar to just barely suppress him? They most certainly want to kill him. If they want to kill him, they’ll send a late Solar!”

“Even if it was just an accident or ambush that Yuan Shuo killed Brokensky, Ying Hongyue knows better than us how sinister and insidious Yuan Shuo can be. They’ll absolutely send a late Solar. If it wasn’t for the demands of battle, Ying Hongyue would come in person since he knows that Yuan Shuo has broken through Dominator!”

A late Solar quite surprised the manager, but she wanted to laugh after hearing the director’s assessment. Sinister and insidious? Was this the director’s impression of Yuan Shuo? And judging from his words, it was an opinion shared by the leader of Red Moon—a powerhouse greater than Solar.

“Director... can the central region not... stop them?”

“Stop them?” Hou Xiaochen chuckled. “It is a tense situation over there and they’d rather prefer that the pressure was alleviated with one less late Solar. It’s fine that Red Moon sends people to Silver Moon, they can’t wait for that to happen. I’m here with the origin weapon. No matter how that missing guy causes trouble, he won’t do anything of note. This shifts some of the burden off their shoulders and they’ll actually see it as me coming to their aid. So you tell me, will they hinder Red Moon’s movements?”

“But...” Manager Yu objected angrily.

“Enough!” Hou Xiaochen waved her off. “Just pass on my messages. It will be enough that Yuan Shuo knows about Sun Yifei. He’ll have time to make his preparations, and it’s up to him if he can actually handle the man.”

There was nothing for Manager Yu to do but leave the office and relay the information.

Hou Xiaochen sank into deep thought when she left. Sun Yifei, a late Solar. Silver City was a small place with only one million denizens. It was unlikely enough that they’d given rise to a singular Yuan Shuo. He was a Dominator of Thousands who’d killed one Solar, could he kill a second?

No, could he kill a third?

Indeed, a third.

If he could kill Sun Yifei, then Red Moon would incur heavy losses this time.

And that Liu Long, had he also become a Dominator as well?

Various thoughts flickered through Hou Xiaochen's mind as he made his plans. He pushed another button after a while, summoning Hao Lianchuan.

"You wanted to see me, Director?"

"Come with me!" Hou Xiaochen led his subordinate into the depths of his office; there was a suite there.

Hao Lianchuan was confused. Go in there? Why? The suite adjoining the director's office was his personal resting quarters and he didn't normally receive guests there. Although questions swirled, he followed his superior nonetheless.

He jerked with shock at what greeted him inside. A spear was unceremoniously tossed onto the coffee table. Flaming red, Hao Lianchuan's eyes shot open with surprise when he sensed it!

It was real! It was the origin weapon that kept this region under control, the most important treasure in Silver Moon—the Flaming Phoenix Spear!

"Familiarize yourself with it." Hou Xiaochen lazily reclined on the couch. He pointed at the spear. "Spend the next few days acclimating to it."

"Director, this... isn't appropriate, is it?" Hao Lianchuan said hesitantly. "I won't be able to hold down the fort here if you leave! Why don't... you have upstairs send someone else in your stead?"

Hou Xiaochen started, then looked at the man. It took a second for him to understand what his subordinate meant.

“You... can’t wait for me to leave, huh?”

“Not at all!” Hao Lianchuan protested innocently. How would he?

“Do you want to be the director instead?”

“Absolutely not!”

“It’s a futile wish even if you wish to be.” Hou Xiaochen flicked a glance at him. “I didn’t say that I’m leaving. I’ll probably be here long after you.”

“Then... the origin weapon...”

“Take it to the ruins!” Hou Xiaochen said softly. “There might be several Solars in attendance this time, with more people coming as reinforcement from other regions. Take the Flaming Phoenix Spear with you to ensure that nothing goes wrong.”

“That won’t do, Director. If I lose this treasure, we have no hope of nurturing a new generation...”

“Cut the crap!” Hou Xiaochen asserted. “Do as I say. You happen to be a fire type. You’ll be able to use it quickly after getting used to it. That’s the end of the matter. Leave with the spear.”

“But...” Hao Lianchuan really was apprehensive. This wasn’t something for him to just take! They would be in enormous trouble if it was lost and stolen. The Silver Moon Night Watchers only had one origin weapon—so many eyeballs rested on it!

Hou Xiaochen couldn’t be bothered with him; he impatiently flapped his hand at his subordinate.

After a brief struggle, Hao Lianchuan picked up the weapon. He seemed to see a phoenix spit out flames that seared the air as soon as he touched the Flaming Phoenix Spear. How terrifying that such a change had occurred the second he grasped it!

The conflicted vice director left with the origin weapon. If he didn’t, the director would physically throw him out of the office.

.....

What took place at Rift Canyon and White Moon City heralded the dangers in the upcoming expedition. Li Hao’s side swiftly received word as well.

Liu Long’s office.

Only Li Hao and Liu Long were present. Typically not a smoker, Liu Long had lit a cigarette and quietly puffed on it. The young man waited silently for a long while until the chief gave a long exhale.

“There’s two pieces of news. First, Red Moon has sent a powerhouse from the central region—late Solar Sun Yifei. I know this person, he was once called the Qimei Staff King. He’s got quite a reputation and reached peak Sunderer on the path of martial dao. Your teacher must know that he might appear at the ruins!”

Li Hao nodded without surprise. There was nothing to say, it was one of his teacher’s enemies.

“The second is that Li Dahu was seen around the ruins.”

“Li Dahu?”

“The guy who killed Liu Yan’s husband. He defeated Huang Yun today—you know that supernatural.”

Li Hao frowned as he looked at Liu Long.

“I’m debating what to do,” the man continued evenly. “I’m going to the ruins and will find a way to kill this guy. What I’m debating is whether or not I should take Liu Yan with me. What say you?”

“Chief... I... why are you asking me this?” Li Hao struggled with a response. What was he supposed to say?

“What’s wrong with that?” Liu Long barked with laughter. “You’re a deputy director, isn’t it normal that I ask your opinion? I want to let Liu Yan kill the guy herself, but I’m afraid of her dying there! You’re sinister and insidious, kid, so give me some ideas.”

Oh what the hell? You’re the sinister and insidious guy around here! Why does chief have such a huge misunderstanding of me?

“We should ask Sis Liu.” Li Hao thought for a bit. “Of course she’ll want to go, we don’t need to ask her that. Chief is not conflicted whether or not we should bring her, but whether or not we can kill Li Dahu. We’ll feel worse if we can’t, right?”

Liu Long inclined his head. Indeed, he wasn’t confident. Although he’d already killed Sunflares, the opponent was very strong if they could defeat Huang Yun. Not to mention, it was a group operation this time, not a solo killing.

There were powerhouses from Yama present. Under the circumstances, how to kill Li Dahu was the real question.

Of course, there was also the possibility that the team would die instead.

“Let’s do it, I’m going as well!” Li Hao continued. “My teacher will be there. I think ruins that can be accessed are worth fighting for. They are both danger and opportunity. Sis Liu isn’t a child, she’s very aware of everything. Sometimes, we don’t need to think too much, chief.”

“Ai!” Liu Long sighed without saying anything else. Think too much? Not at all, he’d just become a bit indecisive after losing so many brothers and sisters on the battlefield. This was especially true when it came to the Demon Hunters. It’d been so difficult for them to survive to this point.

“Chief, does the news come from White Moon City?”

“Yes.” Liu Long nodded. “From Mu Sen.”

Li Hao furrowed his brows with thought. “They made a point of telling us... Chief, do you think that upstairs knows something?”

“What?” Liu Long jerked with surprise. “That I’ve broken through?”

“Possibly!” Why else would they tell Liu Long something they didn’t need to bring up?

“So what if they know? I haven’t broken any laws and I’m the director of a Night Watcher branch. So what?” Liu Long suddenly laughed as he thought about it. “Alright, I’ll think about what to do with Liu Yan. Your teacher’s issue is the real trouble. Sun Yifei is probably actually here for him. If I remember correctly, your teacher shares some grudges with him.”

Li Hao was used to it. His teacher had too many enemies! Ying Hongyue might only be the strongest, there was possibly a horde of enemies behind him!

More likely than not, it would be very difficult for his teacher to take on a late Solar. An initial Solar had been difficult enough—a Solar level blood pearl wouldn't immediately place him on par with a late Solar.

They had to think of a plan.

Li Hao was also coming to terms with the dawning realization that things were much more than they seemed for the expedition. Who knew, maybe existences above Solar would appear! That would make things even more dangerous.

The young man walked out of the office with some worries on his mind. He was also concerned about the tone at the top from White Moon. Did they want his teacher to go or not by sharing this information? It would be very normal for his teacher to cancel his participation if a late Solar was present.

"Hou Xiaochen..." Li Hao murmured, uncertain of this person's character and temperament. He wanted to learn more about the man as the director was his true supervisor.

Chapter 175: The Sweet Thrills of Fighting (I)

Li Hao placed more importance on the expedition now that he knew multiple powerhouses would be attending it.

The Yuan residence.

There was nothing else the young man could do after bringing word to his teacher. He could only throw himself into studying and training so he could advance to Dominator of Thousands as soon as possible. Only then would he have the right to join some of the battles involving heavyweights.

Li Hao continued down his path of cultivation in the yard. His internal force was slowly coalescing into a sword. It was a painfully slow process, at least for him. A few months were required regardless in normal times. It was but a transitory period to most Sunderers, so they went about their business without another thought. They would be peak Sunderer in just a few months, what were they in a rush for?

Li Hao was in a rush.

Yuan Shuo sat on a nearby wicker chair, creaking back and forth as he contemplated something. He shouted when some thoughts connected in his mind, “Sun Yifei, Qimei Staff King, adept at staff techniques and dominated Silver Moon with the Qimei staff back in his day. There was almost no one who could stand against him!

“There were the Seven Swordsmen of Silver Moon, the Three Spears, the North and South Fists, and only the Qimei Staff King for those who practiced the staff!

“It takes one month to learn the staff, one year to learn the blade, and one lifetime to learn the spear. The staff is easy to pick up, but hard to master! Qimei Staff King Sun Yifei attained the acme of perfection with his skill. While he wasn’t a Dominator, he was indeed fearsome as a Sunderer!”

Li Hao continued running through his boxing routine as he listened quietly to his teacher. His teacher rarely talked about the past, so he wanted to listen to the sudden inspiration that’d blossomed.

“Sun Yifei and I did not share any grudges back in the day—we didn’t feud with each other. I was younger than him and he had a disciple roughly my age.

“Who among martial masters wasn’t a brash, impetuous youngster? His disciple and I argued over trivial matters one day and I was in a period of fast growth. My blows landed too hard when we fought and I killed him with three blows,” Yuan Shuo sighed with emotion.

“It’s common for martial masters to end up killing their opponent when they fight. It’s why the government banned violence—they were right to do so. And so, Sun Yifei and I established a blood

feud. We agreed to battle at Rift Canyon—there was still a Rift Bridge then. We settled on dueling on the bridge and that whoever left the bridge was the vanquished.

“Sun Yifei was roughly ten years older than me then. However, the heaviest fist cowers in front of youth. I happened to be in my prime and took the upper hand as soon as battle began. I used the tiger style to break his arms and snap his Qimei staff. Sun Yifei was unable to bear the humiliation and jumped off the bridge.

“Rift Bridge was several hundred meters above the canyon, so I thought he died.” Here, Yuan Shuo sighed. “But to think that he’d join Red Moon! It looks like after Ying Hongyue lost to me and founded Red Moon, he reached out to martial masters that I’d defeated.”

“Teacher, Ying Hongyue was weaker than you then.” Li Hao couldn’t help his curiosity. “How could he establish such a massive organization like Red Moon?”

The man had been far inferior to his teacher twenty years ago!

“I’m not sure, we crossed paths roughly twenty-five years ago. I was almost fifty then and the fellow a little younger than me. He probably thought I was in decline and wanted to build his reputation off of my back. But I’d already comprehended the auras of the Five Styles, I just hadn’t consolidated them yet. Despite that, I still beat him into complete submission...”

“Teacher, you always fully exterminate the enemy, why didn’t you kill him?” This was what Li Hao found the strangest of all. Why were so many of his teacher’s enemies still running around in good health?

“I don’t kill just anyone!” Yuan Shuo rolled his eyes. “You make me sound like a demon. I only kill people in the heat of battle, when I lose control. It’s either they’re too weak, they’re too strong, or we’re evenly matched...”

And that was when he killed people.

Li Hao's jaw dropped when he turned over his teacher's words. So his teacher killed weaklings, people stronger than him, and peers who were evenly matched. He killed them all, so er... didn't that make him a demon?

"People like Ying Hongyue survive for various reasons. Either they recognize the inevitable outcome of battle and surrender when they're about to lose, or we're both heavily injured and continued fighting would lead to a pyrrhic victory. Another possibility is that they have such a strong backer that I can't afford to kill them."

Yuan Shuo chuckled. "Ying Hongyue numbered among the latter. He had someone behind him—I didn't know who—but I could feel someone locking onto me as we fought. Now that I think about it again... they must've been a peak Sunderer or Dominator!

"I was no fool and realized that the mysterious person might intend to temper and train Ying Hongyue. I would be in trouble if I really beat him to death."

Alright then, Li Hao understood. His teacher had thought Sun Yifei was dead after the man jumped off the bridge. Ying Hongyue had someone backing him up, so his teacher didn't dare beat the man to death.

The young man returned his attention to the sword, shaking his internal force and layering it four times to break through the air!

"Don't make a sound." Yuan Shuo frowned. "Do you think that's cool? When you're up against powerhouses, it's easy for them to lock on to where you are if you audibly rip through the air. You'll have to dominate them with sheer strength, or you'll lose as soon as you make a sound!"

It was easy to attack with sound and very difficult to attack silently. Strong internal force broke through drag in the air when it erupted. The split second of acceleration from a sword stab would break through the sound barrier and naturally create some noise.

This could be avoided only if one maintained this speed and continuously broke the sound barrier, ensuring that the stroke was over when sound finally arrived. Therefore, one either needed to be extremely fast or extremely slow in order to be soundless.

Li Hao struck again—there was still sound. He tried a straightforward stab without internal force. The attack was silent, but so incredibly weak.

The young man furrowed his brow. It was... so hard to be quiet when attacking!

“I’m not versed in the sword,” Yuan Shuo said. “But whether it is the fist or the sword, the logic is the same. Either the punch is so fast that I am already done by the time you hear it, or it is so slow that I hit you before you can sense it.”

Li Hao nodded, these were part of his considerations.

“Teacher, I am a little ways from breaking the sound barrier...”

“Then be slower!”

Li Hao moved slowly—it felt so awkward.

“Not that kind of slow,” Yuan Shuo said with resignation. “You know how I normally deploy the Five Styles?”

“Yes, they’re more like exercise to stay in good health. But teacher is very, very fast when battling, not slow.” Li Hao still didn’t understand.

“You don’t get it. Whether fast or slow, one does not need to stand in place,” the professor explained. “I move slowly, but I erupt with great speed! Take our current positions, I am five meters

away from you. I will attack very slowly for the first four meters, so slow that you don't care. But when I'm only one meter away..."

He rose and leisurely brought a soundless fist toward Li Hao. When he was less than one meter away, a fist suddenly blurred beyond the capabilities of the eye. The young man's hair flew up as Yuan Shuo's fist broke numerous strands of hair.

"Do you see that?"

Bam!

A sonic boom ripped through the air.

"Sparring and battle is a process of creating killing opportunities!" Yuan Shuo said solemnly. "We do not pursue beautiful styles through battle. We only have one goal—kill our opponent!"

"Or rather, we can say that all battle leads to that final stroke or fist! Everything before that is a process that paves the way for that opportunity. You achieve your goal in the last moment and deliver that fatal blow! That is battle!"

This was a real martial master, the real way to kill someone! Based on Yuan Shuo's words, everything that took place in a fight was just preparatory work leading up to the final strike. One needed to deliver the fist or sword to its intended position during this process, erupting at the last possible second and completing the deed.

Whether it was secret arts or supernatural techniques, their ultimate goal was to kill.

"Remember this, Li Hao. The final aim of all battle is to kill! There is no such thing as sparring, do you understand? No such thing as stopping at first contact! From the moment martial techniques were invented and the second that the supernatural domain appeared, the strength of a superhuman is used to kill!"

Li Hao nodded.

“Training to strengthen the body or to be healthy is all bullshit. All that rot about the supernatural benefiting society is also bullshit. Is there no way to benefit society without supernatural strength? No way to grow stronger? Therefore, there is only one goal for superhuman strength—to kill!”

Li Hao nodded solemnly once again.

“You will most certainly see blood on this expedition!” Yuan Shuo growled. “This will be a different trip from before. You could hide behind me in the past and maybe even employ a few tricks on others. But this time, you must fight and face danger alone. I have many enemies and too many who wish to kill me. Your life might even be in danger before you enter the ruins proper.”

“They’ll attack before we go inside?” Li Hao questioned.

“It’s hard to say,” Yuan Shuo postulated. “It depends. Everyone knows you’re my final disciple. If we face a martial master who insists on doing things by the book, then you might have to fight for me. You may not face them, but rather, their student, disciple, or heir.

“Although martial dao has declined after the rise of the supernatural, some customs still have to be adhered to if martial masters insist. We can ignore them if no one else is around, but we must follow the rules if there’s an audience.

“I don’t actually want you to go, but I’ll worry about your safety in Silver City if you don’t. Why don’t I send you to White Moon City?”

Not only would this be a dangerous trip for Yuan Shuo, but it would also be a dangerous undertaking for Li Hao. The professor could break the rules when no one was around, but if there were others—and possibly stronger than him—one had to observe custom. When that was the case, the rules would actually be protecting him.

Chapter 176: The Sweet Thrills of Fighting (II)

Li Hao shook his head in the face of Yuan Shuo's obvious resignation. The professor knew that his student wouldn't stay behind, but he had to try. He would not bring it up again after Li Hao refused.

"Alright then, keep training. Try to consolidate your internal force before we set off. You'll be a true peak Sunderer if you achieve that..."

But there might not be enough time. Yuan Shuo spoke again when his thoughts traveled here.

"I know you too well. Those who are too much stronger than you might not be able to give you the stimulus you need. You should go find Liu Long and commence practical battle! Tell him to do whatever he likes as long as he doesn't kill you."

Li Hao sucked in a sharp breath. Chief? The chief would really make things hurt.

"Teacher..."

"Cut the crap and go! Additionally, I'll give you a basic overview of the ruins when you come back the next couple of nights. You need to collect some rudimentary intelligence for the Night Watchers as well. To know the enemy is to know thineself. When that is attained, one can fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat."

"Understood!" Li Hao said no more. If I go to chief, I'll have to expose my full strength. It looks like I can't keep it a secret anymore.

Indeed, even the heavens went against someone who wished to keep a low profile.

.....

The law enforcement building.

Busy with his matters, Liu Long's hands stilled when he heard Li Hao. "You want to spar with me?"

"No." Li Hao shook his head solemnly. "I'd like to ask chief for pointers!"

Spar? How can I possibly spar with a Dominator? I can only ask for a pointer or two.

"I'm busy!" Liu Long answered curtly. "Don't you have eyes? I'm very busy! Pick anyone you want from the team if you want to spar with someone. Any of them will do!"

You're just an initial Sunderer, everyone's stronger than you! Granted, the kid had taken the blood pearl, so maybe he was a mid Sunderer now? Was he getting too big for his britches? But so what if he was a mid Sunderer? Would Liu Yan not do? Even if she wasn't a mid Sunderer yet, she was so highly experienced that she would be quite a handful for him to handle!

And if she wouldn't do, he could go to Wang Ming!

"Go find Wang Ming," Liu Long said when his thoughts traveled here. "You can also increase your experience fighting supernaturals. You won't always come across martial masters and you know too little of supernaturals."

"He's not a good choice!"

"Why not?" Liu Long asked curiously.

"He's..." Li Hao searched for the right words. "He won't give me enough pressure to improve. He has too little battle experience."

Damn! Liu Long was taken aback. The lad looked down on Wang Ming for insufficient battle experience? That supernatural had conducted numerous missions, at the very least, and killed people. He'd even killed a Sunflare earlier...

Although they kept saying that Wang Ming lacked experience, that was compared to veteran martial masters. If viewed in the context of the supernatural domain, he was in a solid position. Wang Ming was second only to those who lived on a knife's edge, yet Li Hao spurned him!

"I don't have time..."

Li Hao had to pull out his trump card when the chief declined once again. "Chief, my teacher sent me."

"....."

Very well then, Liu Long had risen to Dominator thanks to Yuan Shuo. There was nothing he could do once Li Hao brought out his teacher, but he really was very busy.

Kid, you insist on coming to me when I tell you to go for someone else. Today, I'll help you know why the flowers are red! [1] He'd give Li Hao such a thorough beating that he wouldn't dare come to Liu Long again!

"Very well, then let's do it now. I need to get back to my business when we're done and you can go do whatever you should be doing."

Li Hao smiled, this was great!

"Let's go to the basement, chief. I don't want to damage our surroundings..."

“Sure!” Liu Long agreed readily. Just you wait. This will be over in a jiffy—I’ll defeat you in a split second and have you know that you won’t be able to gain any experience with me. It’s completely useless to spar with me.

Both Night Watchers headed to the basement together.

.....

The basement.

Only Yun Yao was present, no one else was here. She usually spent her days in the basement, no one knew what she busied herself with. Li Hao wanted to ask her to go on a walk, but she didn’t even look at them. Yun Yao ducked into her room as soon as she saw the two, attending to unknown affairs.

Liu Long didn’t intend to send her away, he wanted to finish this as quickly as possible.

“Let’s begin!” He didn’t even take his trench coat off.

“.....” Li Hao was beginning to feel humiliated. Chief, you should take your trench coat off, at least. Forget it, it’s on me since I’m a weakling.

“Is it alright if you suffer some scrapes and bruises?” Liu Long asked before the young man could finish comforting himself. “Your teacher won’t say anything, will he?”

What the... he really sees me as a prodigal young master!

Li Hao didn’t know what to say. He walked to the side and selected a sword. His own might be too sharp, so he shouldn’t use it carelessly.

“Chief, I’ll use a sword!” He hefted the longsword.

“Whatever you want!” Liu Long really didn’t care. Was there a difference between a sword or a fist? It would all be over in one move.

Li Hao took a deep breath. Seeing as his opponent was a Dominator, it was to be expected that Liu Long would look down on him. He wasn’t mad at all, just debating how to take advantage of his opponent underestimating him.

Of course, he might receive a worse beating after taking advantage of the stronger Liu Long—but that may be what his teacher wished to see. How would the young man improve if he wasn’t serious about things?

“Be careful, chief!” Li Hao unsheathed the sword and broke through the air with his first move.

Liu Long glanced at it casually. Not bad, he’s got some proper form. But… that’s all there is to him. The director simply called upon his internal force; he didn’t use his aura or the Nine Forged Force. It would be too strong against Li Hao and he might end up beating the kid to death.

A simple fist on the level! No flourishes, embellishments, or anything special. He would call it a day after knocking Li Hao out with one punch.

The young man’s sword arrived, but he abruptly retracted before it reached its target.

Liu Long’s fist had almost connected with Li Hao’s sword. He teetered off balance when Li Hao abruptly pulled his blow. He’d taken his opponent far too lightly.

Li Hao struck again, stabbing forward extremely slowly while his feet moved nimbly like a monkey’s. He evaded his opponent’s fist and gently shifted the sword forward.

He didn't make a sound, and the hairs stood up on the back of Liu Long's neck when the longsword approached him! The young man's glacial pace spontaneously sped up like lightning and the sword jabbed straight at his throat.

Li Hao wasn't trying to kill—he knew that it was difficult to slay a Dominator. He just wanted the chief to know that it was wrong to underestimate him. It was wrong to think lightly of anyone!

Danger somehow pricked at Liu Long in this moment. His indifferent attitude immediately shifted and he roared, instantly returning the blow. His right arm trembled with a layer of a wave. It connected with a loud roar as he swiftly backed away.

Internal force erupted from Li Hao and he layered it over the sword. Layer after layer until it reached four layers in the blink of an eye.

Clang!

Liu Long was a Dominator, after all. His reaction time was so timely that he raised a metallic clang as he punched the longsword.

There was no time to celebrate,—Li Hao was still waving the longsword around. The young man sent a shudder through the earth with a stomp. Liu Long was as immovable as a mountain, but he swayed ever so slightly with the trembling of the earth.

Astonished, the man shifted his fist into a claw and grabbed the sword, wanting to drag Li Hao over. Such an ordinary sword wouldn't hurt him. However, the young man gave up the sword just as Liu Long yanked on it. His hand was also curved like a claw and he followed momentum to grab Liu Long's arm. Internal force burst out of Li Hao's fingers on his right hand and he dug into Liu Long's arm, scratching five bloody holes out of it.

Pain twinged in Liu Long's arm and he erupted with internal force, projecting it out of his limb. He bounced off Li Hao's fingers with a bang, whereupon the young man threw himself forward in a tiger prowl. Black Tiger Heart Gouge made straight for Liu Long's heart.

The man was hesitated over whether he should let loose with his aura and Nine Forged Force when Li Hao's gaze suddenly sharpened. He glared at Liu Long and slightly opened his mouth, emitting a tiger roar that shook the four corners!

"Roar!!" A sound wave exploded with a rumble; Liu Long was shocked beyond belief by the glare. It wasn't that Li Hao was too strong, but that there was internal force inside his eyes. This was a sign of a late Sunderer! That tiger roar also came at the perfect timing. The director had to set everything out of his mind at this moment because Li Hao... had reached perfection!

No, half step perfection.

The young man had comprehended a rudimentary aura and was just a hair's breadth away from success because his internal force was yet to be consolidated as one. But a Li Hao in this state could not be taken as lightly like before.

Liu Long fully called upon the Nine Forged Force, and not just through his arms. Waves undulated through his chest as he projected his internal force. Enormous waves built upon each other until his internal force explosively collided with Li Hao's palm!

The tremendous internal force shook the young man's palm to the point of blood spraying out, but it was like he didn't feel a thing. He stomped his foot again and sent the ground trembling.

Feet and fists in unison!

Liu Long was actually forced back a half step, but he still wasn't using his full strength. Despite that, it was astounding that someone of his experience and strength was forced back a step, even if he'd belittled his opponent.

“You won’t do, chief!” Li Hao suddenly jeered. Liu Long wanted to say something, but another massive roar interrupted him when he opened his mouth. “Roar!!”

The man grunted with irritation and flung out a punch almost too swift to be seen, connecting with the hand that Li Hao had just flung over. A loud slap sounded as he split skin apart!

Liu Long regretted his reaction as soon as he made it. He’d punched subconsciously and employed too much strength! He wanted to stop immediately, but Li Hao threw out his other hand and ripped through the director’s trench coat, digging into his arm again. Five more bloody holes appeared that turned into five bloody trails!

Liu Long went slack jawed with shock and rapidly shot backward, evading Li Hao’s next attack.

“Perfection...” he muttered incredulously. Peak Sunderer! The fuck!? Am I crazy, or is Li Hao crazy?!

“Again, chief!” Li Hao ignored him and sent the longsword flying into the air with a stomp. He grabbed it with one hand and thought back to the stroke in his mind’s eye. The stroke that ended heaven and earth!

Slash!

Fast!

This time, he wanted to be so fast that the enemy had no place to run to when he attacked. And yet, the weapon shattered before he had a chance to deploy it. The young man paused, frowning at his empty hand.

Chapter 177: The Sweet Thrills of Fighting (III)

Across the way, the hairs on the back of Liu Long’s neck stood up again.

“Stop!” He couldn’t help himself and looked at Li Hao with shock. “You wanted to deploy your sword... what kind of technique was it?”

The young man shattered his longsword before he had a chance to execute his move! Granted, it was just an ordinary sword, but its quality was still up to par if it could be stored here. It seemed to have completely shattered when it couldn’t contain the killing intent it was being infused with.

“My teacher taught me,” Li Hao answered with resignation. “That’s why he wants me to fight you, chief. He wants me to consolidate my internal force so that I can shape it into a sword.”

“Wait... wait!” Liu Long shook his head. “Aren’t you comprehending the aura of the earth?”

I’m so confused. Why are you fashioning your internal force into a sword?

“I need to attack and defend!”

Liu Long both understood and was surprised at the same time. The lad wanted to combine two auras! The man looked down at his arms, at where nine bloody holes gaped out of them from the two times that Li Hao had grabbed him. His trench coat was ripped and the young man’s first stroke had been quite a surprise. It’d left a tiny mark on his chest.

Liu Long was at a complete loss for words!

He looked at Li Hao—the lad seemed better off as only his palm had split open. That a Dominator had been forced to these straits... It didn’t matter that he’d underestimated his opponent so much before that he didn’t even care about the young man.

“I thought too little of you!” Liu Long sighed with emotion and returned to seriousness. “And I wondered why you were so insistent on training with me. I see—you want me to force you into consolidating your internal force, don’t you?”

“That’s right!”

“You should’ve said so earlier, I wouldn’t have made light of you so much...”

“I was thinking that chief might not have believed me if I said something!” Li Hao laughed innocently.

Oh for... Liu Long found himself at a loss for words. But it was true, that was highly likely. Would he have believed Li Hao if the lad said that he needed Liu Long to help him consolidate his internal force?

He’d sooner believe that pigs fly!

The director was about to respond when Yun Yao suddenly spoke from the depths of the basement. “Fight if you will, stop roaring. You’re being too noisy!”

She returned to her room, but shock reared in her heart. Li Hao... had forced their Dominator captain into retreat! Although she knew that it was chief who’d underestimated the young man, who was Li Hao?

He’d been a mundane a month ago, someone that Chen Jian sent flying with one slap. But now, he could match their captain in the blink of an eye!

“A genius? Perverse talent? Or is the bloodline of the eight families that stunning?” Yun Yao found it difficult to regain calm after she returned to her room. She thought of many things, things that were sealed by the past. Could this little team really come into its own? Could it be strong enough to reach that moment?

It hadn’t seemed possible before. After three years since formation, there were more than twenty dead and their strongest was Sunderer—the rest were Slayers.

Too weak!

This level of strength was fine in Silver City, but it would be the smallest scale team in White Moon City. And in the central region... it would be the local guard for a village.

Indeed, even villages in the central region could field this level of strength. In times of war, any village that managed to survive would have a local guard stronger than the Demon Hunters of old.

The team's strength underwent an astounding change less than a month after Li Hao joined. Yun Yao... was lost.

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Outside.

Li Hao scratched his head awkwardly. Were the roars too loud? Fine, he won't roar later. It was useless to roar at a prepared opponent anyway. He put Yun Yao's complaint out of his mind.

"Chief, show me your real skill! How are you going to force me into full effort with just this?"

"Okay!" Liu Long grinned. "I expected too little from you before. Li Hao, you're more... frightening than I imagined!"

Not in terms of strength, but in rate of improvement.

In that case, I really won't hold back. I'll have you know that a Dominator is far beyond a Sunderer!

Waves reared to the heavens with his next punch. Liu Long even deployed his aura!

Li Hao suddenly felt that his opponent had locked onto him; an aura bore down on him. But having endured his teacher's aura before, this little bit of aura wouldn't keep him down. He kept his feet planted and flared the aura of the earth. Internal force and blood qi erupted as well, taking the shape of a dragon. The young man stomped his foot and remained as unmoving as a mountain.

After stabilizing his figure, he launched himself upward and pounced on Liu Long. Two sets of fists from four hands rapidly collided with each other. Li Hao was opting for a frontal attack!

Taken aback once again, Liu Long's jaw dropped. A front attack? This is how you respond when I'm a Dominator?

Currently, however, Li Hao did not unleash the power of the Five Styles. Rather, there seemed to be sword qi shimmering over his fist. When the longsword shattered, it gave him the inspiration of using his body as a sword. His body was incredibly durable; his punch was as if a sharp sword being unsheathed.

Skin and muscle split with a soft sound—white bone gleamed out of Li Hao's knuckles. At the same time, Liu Long was also injured by the keen fists—indeed, the fists were sharp! Both of his hands were bleeding after the clash and the bones of his hand could also be vaguely glimpsed.

"A sword?" The man grew more and more astonished. What kind of secret art was this?? It was so destructive! Not only that, but it emanated a suffocating feeling! Did Yuan Shuo know this kind of sword method? He'd never heard about it before!

"Break!" Liu Long grunted and waved his fists again. He kicked out at the same time and raised an immense wave.

Li Hao continued waving punches around like he would a sword. Fists shot straight at waves and he abruptly shifted them into claws. He wanted to imitate his teacher and sink his hands into a direct hold on Liu Long's aura.

“How dare you!” Liu Long laughed from sheer anger. I’m a Dominator! You’ve got balls of steel to attempt this!

The wave exploded in Li Hao’s hands and erupted with domineering internal force instead. It turned his palms into sieves; blood dripped onto the ground. The young man finally experienced the strength of a Dominator, and he was quite gleeful! It wasn’t that he was brash and impetuous, but that he wanted to see how strong a Dominator and their aura were.

And now, he knew. They were very strong!

The scene he’d seen that day once more floated to the fore. To sever the heavens, earth, and immortality! All auras were obliterated beneath that stroke.

Sword intent rose in his eyes and internal force bloomed, condensing into a sword outside Li Hao’s body. He slashed it forward!

Humm!

The sword qi had already been deployed when the resulting sound wave arrived. It slashed into the dragon made of towering waves—the attack that’d just lacerated Li Hao’s palms was completely annihilated by a stroke of internal force.

The waves were extinguished. Meanwhile, Li Hao took advantage of a sudden favorable situation and tightened his grip on the sword infused with internal force. He wanted to slash forward again when a fist connected solidly with his weapon.

The sword exploded into tiny fragments and Li Hao vomited blood!

Liu Long did not follow up on the move. Instead, he looked quietly at where a new bloody mark had appeared on his palm. He regarded the young man for a long moment.

“You will practice one hour with me everyday, starting from today! Forget everything—your fists, your Five Styles. Use the sword of internal force to practice with me!”

“One hour?” Li Hao blinked.

“Is that too much?” Liu Long frowned. “It’s not. If you can persist for one hour everyday, I believe that you’ll officially reach the realm of perfection at the end of the month and fully consolidate your internal force!”

One hour was indeed a very long time to martial masters. Battle was usually over in a few minutes. Li Hao, however, started laughing.

“Chief, why don’t we... fight until we’re exhausted? What do you think?”

“Are you sure?” Liu Long ran through some calculations. For a peak Sunderer to fight until he was exhausted... that would be roughly an hour. Thus, he nodded. “It’s all the same!”

Li Hao smiled radiantly. You’re the one who agreed to it! How was it possible that he’d be exhausted? Sword energy was invincible! I’ll be able to fight forever if I absorb sword energy at the same time. A Dominator as a free sparring partner? How sweet!

“Then let’s start now, chief!”

“Now? Can you still fight?”

“Of course!”

“Alright!” Liu Long didn’t mind either way. His business could wait. It was much more important to help Li Hao set foot into peak Sunderer.

The two started exchanging blows again. Li Hao flew out with a bang moments later, unable to move from his prone position on the ground. Liu Long relaxed slightly. He’d depleted some stamina, but it was acceptable at roughly twenty to thirty percent of his capacity. All the same, fighting for too long would tire him out—he’d finally beaten the kid into exhaustion.

He was about to relax when the prostrate Li Hao suddenly sprang to his feet. One heartbeat later, the young man marshaled high spirits and flung himself at the director!

Liu Long blinked...

There was no time for his jaw to drop. Li Hao’s attacks were crazed and each blow gave Liu Long the feeling that if he was fighting the lad with his pre-Dominator condition, he could die to any of Li Hao’s strokes!

It was the fact that he was a Dominator that he couldn’t meet the young man with full strength. He might easily beat Li Hao to death. However, it was very tiring having to constantly pull his punches.

Liu Long sent Li Hao flying again after an indeterminate period of time—there were new bloody marks on his own body. They’d all come from Li Hao, but the young man was much more heavily injured.

But he sprang up again in less than a minute!

“Let’s continue, chief!”

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Again and again, it was like Li Hao had discovered a whole new world. He was jubilant at having found a Dominator sparring partner. He didn't need to be concerned about anything other than fighting as hard as he could. There was no worry of him killing Liu Long!

Bang bang bang!

Collisions rang out from the basement from 1pm to 5pm, to 6pm, 7pm...

It wasn't until Yun Yao walked out that they stopped.

"Are you still not done yet today? Are you not going to eat? Are you not going to rest??" she demanded irritably. "You've been fighting since 1pm, it's been seven hours!"

"Hoo..." Liu Long heaved for breath. While he was a Dominator, it was tiring to fight someone for seven hours.

Li Hao also panted heavily and looked around blearily. "Seven... seven hours?"

So fast! I thought it was only one or two!

Chapter 178: The Sweet Thrills of Fighting (IV)

Yun Yao looked wordlessly at two figures covered in blood. Li Hao was one thing, but Liu Long's trench coat was ripped to shreds, leaving him only in his boxers. She didn't know what to make of the situation.

Chief was a Dominator... how was he in these straits? There were numerous bloody marks on Liu Long's body, many of them still bleeding.

“How about we stop here for today?” Liu Long panted a few times. He needed to rest! There was something very, seriously, absolutely wrong with Li Hao. Seven hours straight of battle for a normal Sunderer would incapacitate them to the point of being unable to fart, much less bring internal force to bear!

But Li Hao? It felt like he could still fight!

Li Hao nodded with a parched mouth. “Alright... let’s continue tomorrow... Chief, do you... need to recover from your injuries? Will you be back to full health tomorrow?”

“That’s not an issue!”

“That’s good...” Li Hao heaved for breath and stuck his thumb up. “Chief, you’re... amazing!”

Liu Long smiled faintly, his smile rather rueful. That’s it? Just amazing? I’m crazy to agree to fight you everyday!

“I’ll come by earlier tomorrow morning, chief. Let’s say 6am. We can fight for the entire day, today wasn’t enough...” With that, Li Hao turned and walked outside.

When Yun Yao saw Liu Yan standing outside the door after Li Hao opened it, she remarked faintly, “Are you happy to be not wearing much and having that shameless woman take advantage of you?”

By the door, Liu Yan crossed her arms and assessed the young man coming toward her. “He’s not bad, just bleeding. Otherwise, it should be nice to feel him up considering how fair and tender he looks!” She smiled craftily.

Li Hao looked wordlessly at the woman. He didn’t feel the slightest bit shy—look if you will, I still have boxers on! He turned around to put on a new outfit.

Liu Yan watched silently from the door before returning to a serious expression. She considered Liu Long. “Chief, if you’re done sparring with him, spar with me next!”

“.....”

Go to hell! Scowling blackly, Liu Long stomped off to change clothes. Spar your ass!

Plainly, Liu Yan was prompted to action by the scene. Anyone could tell from Liu Long’s condition that Li Hao was far stronger than they estimated. She said nothing as she walked in to assess the basement’s status. Many places were shattered or dented. Liu Yan’s heart quailed as she made a quick evaluation.

So strong!

She glanced at Yun Yao and walked over, keeping her voice down. “What level is he?”

“Perfection!” Yun Yao flicked a sideways glance at her before returning to her room, leaving behind a stunned Liu Yan.

Perfection! Peak Sunderer!

She’d thought that Li Hao wouldn’t improve so quickly after setting foot into Sunderer, but he was now a peak Sunderer!

Abrupt dejection assailed her, as well as envy and jealousy. She barreled into Yun Yao’s room and grit her teeth. “You and I will fight tonight! I’m a peak initial Sunderer and you’re a Crescent Darkmoon. We’re evenly matched. Do you want to improve yourself?”

“Absorbing mysterious power through normal ways is too slow,” Liu Yan talked over whatever Yun Yao wanted to say. “Only when we beat each other half to death can we absorb it quickly! I haven’t

been able to stand the sight of you for a very long time now, so I think I can land painful blows if I go against you!”

“Same!” Yun Yao wanted to refuse, yet found herself agreeing after thinking back to the events of the day. She snorted softly, “I’ll kick your ass!”

Liu Yan thrust her chest out with a sniff. “I think I might actually beat some growth into you instead! Let’s do it!”

Flashes and shadows from weapons flickered in the tiny room.

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Li Hao ran off as soon as he finished changing. He was starving and felt like he could eat a cow!

No, wait, the cow could be saved for another day. He needed to go back and eat the five elements. Absorbing another one hundred cubes seemed completely doable tonight! He would eat himself silly and report to the Inspectorate tomorrow morning for another day of fighting with the chief.

Damn, this was nice! Li Hao quite loved the sensation of every punch connecting with solid flesh—it was such a thrilling way to fight! So this was what fighting was like; this was so much better than pulling a dirty trick on someone!

Not only that, but Li Hao felt that it might only take a few days to fully consolidate his internal force if the situation continued like this. It would take a few months under normal circumstances; no one could be like him and remain in peak condition after fighting for seven hours straight. His sparring partner had matched his every move within the seven hours. This was an opponent that regular people would find it impossible to find!

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At this moment.

A suddenly worried Liu Long sneezed in the law enforcement building. Were they really going to fight until they set out for the ruins? What if he couldn't hold up?

Dominators were only human in the end...

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Time passed through days of endless sparring. Li Hao's typical schedule was fighting, absorbing sword energy, digesting the five elements, sleep, and more fighting...

It was a continuous cycle and he loved it. However, Liu Long was just as unhappy as the young man was delighted. This was exhausting!

He couldn't erupt with full force in case he accidentally killed Li Hao. He couldn't be too careless lest the young man counterattacked in a moment of his carelessness and inflicted a myriad of wounds.

At the same time, happiness tinged Liu Long's struggle. He could clearly see Li Hao's level of strength and rejoiced that it was increasing at a speed visible to the naked eye. The young man was growing stronger by the day and making noticeable progress toward consolidating his internal force.

All Silver City Night Watchers immersed themselves in the joy of cultivating.

Liu Yan and Yun Yao sparred for half a day starting at night. They beat each other black and blue until their faces were swollen and refused to see anyone the second day. After spending daylight hours resting in their rooms, they continued to fight the next evening.

Once Wu Chao and Chen Jian learned that the captain sparred daily with Li Hao, and Liu Yan with Yun Yao, they faced off against each other as well. They'd both just ascended to Sunderer and were evenly matched.

And so, the law enforcement building became quite lively internally. It was very closed off to outsiders; there was no movement from it other than a bit of disturbance on the agency's day of formation. The Night Watchers didn't even leave their office building.

It was a very nonsensical sight to those who were paying attention to this new government agency. Were Liu Long and the others not working? Apart from Li Hao clocking in and out as usual, only the White Moon transfers were occasionally seen out and about. Those Night Watchers sometimes showed themselves in strict calls of leisure. Indeed, Li Meng was once followed out to a shopping trip.

She really was shopping!

Their watchers were extremely frustrated. What was with this group of people??

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The law enforcement building.

Wang Ming had a lot of time on his hands these days. There was nothing in particular he needed to do and no one scrutinized his movements. Liu Long was busy practice sparring with Li Hao and didn't have energy to care about anyone else when he was done.

He was wandering around the first floor lobby when his eyes lit up at seeing someone come in. "Li Hao!" He quickly walked up to welcome his colleague.

“Ole Wang!” Li Hao was in fine spirits and beamed widely. He’d just ridden over from home. “Do you need me for something?” He was in a hurry to go to the basement.

His internal force felt ever more taking shape as a sword these days. He seemed on the brink of success and might finish consolidating his internal force any day now. When internal force combined with aura, he would be a true peak Sunderer!

Wang Ming wasn’t in a hurry to explain his purpose. He sized up the other first. “Director Liu looks like he’s putting his life on the line and has crazy dark circles everyday from lack of sleep. How come you’re alright?”

“Li Hao, seeing as you’ve just become a Sunderer, you shouldn’t be gaining much from your practice sessions with Director Liu, right?” He could understand it if his colleague fought anyone else, but he didn’t understand Li Hao practicing with Liu Long. To be honest, he wouldn’t gain much himself if he sparred with Sunflares, so what was the meaning behind Li Hao’s actions?

It was ever more mystifying considering that Liu Long was perfectly willing to keep the young man company.

“It’s alright!” Li Hao was surprised to see Wang Ming follow him upstairs. “What are you coming upstairs with me for? Do you need something? You can also spar with Hu Hao and Li Meng...”

“What would I spar with them for?” Wang Ming shook his head. “Hu Hao is a flight supernatural and Li Meng possesses the eye of reality. I focus on the offensive. No one’s of the same system, so we can’t practice with each other. It’s different compared to martial masters.”

He wasn’t being lazy, but that there truly wasn’t a point to sparring with his White Moon fellows. If he fought Hu Hao, what was he supposed to do if Hu Hao flew into the sky? Just look up at the man from the ground? Fire off a sword from the ground and try to shoot Hu Hao down?

What a joke.

“At our current level, we supernaturals focus on absorbing mysterious power. It’s alright—I’ve still made progress recently. We were allotted a lot of mysterious power before. I think I’ll be a Plenilune after absorbing it all.”

He was currently a Fullmoon. Supernaturals did not need coordination from the aura when they progressed from Fullmoon to Plenilune, nor did they need to understand the aura. Even Sunflares didn’t really command an aura.

The two cultivation systems were different. Rising to Sunflare wouldn’t be so much easier otherwise.

Li Hao had some knowledge of the supernatural system, but he wasn’t too familiar with it.

“Then I congratulate you in advance!” He smiled.

“Don’t congratulate me so quickly!” Wang Ming quickly said. “Remember when you said that we would absorb mysterious power at a faster rate with the aid of a blood pearl? Did you mean it?”

“What, you don’t believe me?”

“It’s not that...” Wang Ming explained. “The Night Watchers don’t have many blood pearls left. If it really works, then I can pay the hefty price and obtain some for a try. But if they’re ineffective, won’t I be wasting them? I’ve asked around and learned that the Night Watchers only have one Sunflare and three Darkmoon pearls left. That’s it!”

Only four blood pearls! There’d been nine to begin with, but half of them had been awarded to Silver City.

Li Hao was a bit startled by the situation, but quickly understood. So Director Hou hadn’t killed Red Moon members for a while.

“You’ve got some ability alright, to learn even that.”

“That’s normal!” Wang Ming chuckled. “I’m a genius, after all. I’m recorded in the White Moon register. Upstairs won’t keep it from me if I ask how many blood pearls are left and how I can trade for one. It’s not like they’re origin weapons to be kept a secret from me.”

Chapter 179: Peak Sunderer

Li Hao had always nursed a question in his heart. He couldn’t help but voice it when Wang Ming mentioned the topic again at this time.

“Ole Wang, you keep saying that you’re a genius. How do supernaturals define what a genius is?” He was very curious about this.

Did fast progress make for a genius? Some possessed a lot of mysterious power, some very little. It depended on one’s family background—those with power or money could obtain a lot of mysterious power. Absorbing a vast sum of energy resulted in a speedy rate of improvement. Was that a genius?

Didn’t that make for a sloppy definition of a genius?

“Are you doubting me?” Wang Ming grew anxious.

“No, I’m genuinely curious.”

The handsome young man snorted, visibly dissatisfied. But knowing that Li Hao was truly in the dark, he explained, “Supernatural geniuses are determined by several different dimensions. First, the efficacy of mysterious power absorption. For example, I can retain 0.7 cube of one cube of metal mysterious power. Only 0.3 cube will dissipate as waste.”

Li Hao raised an eyebrow at the detail. Efficacy of absorption! A seventy percent conversion rate was quite impressive. Mysterious power tended to drift away and disappear in its natural state. Li

Hao's absorption rate was high due to the addition of sword energy. Without it, he would retain only fifty or sixty percent when trying to absorb mysterious power by itself, even in conjunction with the Breathing Method of the Five Styles.

Other people would retain even less due to lacking the breathing method. Liu Yan and the others usually only absorbed twenty or thirty percent.

That Wang Ming could convert seventy truly made him a genius from this point alone! Of course, he counted as a genius only in terms of potential.

"That's one facet," Wang Ming continued. "The second is the number of supernatural locks one locates!"

Li Hao plastered an attentive expression on his face. He really didn't know any of this.

"All humans have supernatural locks inside their bodies, even the Heaven Favored!" Wang Ming lectured. "The Heaven Favored just have theirs open from birth—but not all of the locks. According to current supernatural knowledge, there are nine locks in our bodies! You are Heaven Favored if one of them is opened when you are born. That indicates you innately possess the strength to be Starlight, that you don't face any obstacles setting foot into this level.

"Two supernatural locks open at birth means you can ascend to Darkmoon without any difficulty. You'll instantaneously set foot into that level the second you absorb enough mysterious power. And so on and so forth for the rest of the levels. Three open locks means you'll directly set foot into Sunflare..." Wang Ming waxed eloquent with envy. "That makes for the Heaven Favored! So far, the strongest we know had three locks open at birth. His starting point was Sunflare... Sunflare! The final destination for many, but only the beginning for him!"

Li Hao nodded, that was very awe-inspiring. A connate Sunflare! Setting aside their future and potential, their starting point was everyone's end. This was an existence that many would never catch up to, even if that Heaven Favored didn't improve for the rest of their lives.

The Heaven Favored... were well deserving of their name.

“People like us can only slowly explore on our own,” Wang Ming commented. “Not all supernatural locks are apparent from the start. Each supernatural needs to gradually locate and unearth their locks. Some can discover three or four locks when they’re Starlight. Being able to find so many means that they have the potential to be Sunflare or Solar!”

“If people still don’t pinpoint their fourth lock by the time they reach Sunflare, it means that Solar is likely out of reach for them. They aren’t able to open the fourth lock because they don’t even know where it is!”

One was unable to break the confines of the body, even as a peak Sunflare, due to an inability to open the next lock. It wasn’t that it was too difficult to do so, but that one didn’t have the potential to do so because one couldn’t unearth the fourth lock.

Li Hao understood his colleague’s overview and asked, “How many locks have you discovered?”

Wang Ming was a Darkmoon, so that meant he’d opened two locks. Had the guy found three, or maybe four?

“Five!” the handsome young man answered proudly. “Impressive, right?”

“Very!” Li Hao laughed with a nod. “But Ole Wang, supernatural locks are located inside my own body. Doesn’t that mean I’ve discovered however many I say that I’ve discovered? No one can overrule me. How would anyone know that I haven’t really found one hundred locks?”

“You think too lightly of supernatural methods!” Wang Ming shook his head. “It’s not that simple! Of course, it’s hard for regular methods to detect the truth. The Night Watchers, however, have a test for rookies. Rookies need to pass the origin weapon’s inspection—the origin weapon can confirm how many locks you’ve discovered.”

“Oh?” That piqued Li Hao’s interest. “How?”

“What do you need to know this for? You’re not a supernatural.”

“Maybe I’ll be one in the future?” Li Hao chuckled. “Besides, I feel like I have at least ten supernatural locks in me!”

Wang Ming flashed a polite and uninterested smile. Nice bullshitting! Keep at it!

While Li Hao talked like he was joking, he really wasn’t. Ten supernatural locks? He felt he had more than that! His supernatural locks materialized during some of his training sessions and he’d sensed roughly ten around his organs alone. There were locks around his head and they seem present around his limbs as well.

He had a ton!

They twined and wrapped around him as thickly as stalks in a field. Sometimes, he suspected it was the heavens themselves that didn’t want him to ascend to the supernatural domain. Li Hao had thought that he needed to open all of the locks, but now it seemed that breaking just one was enough.

Should I give it a try?

Nah!

He recalled his teacher’s admonishment that he shouldn’t consider joining the supernatural in the near term.

Li Hao didn’t explain further, even though he could tell that Wang Ming didn’t believe him. “Ole Wang, where does it place you among the Night Watchers that you’ve discovered five?” he asked curiously.

“It makes me a premier genius!” Wang Ming answered proudly. “Three locks indicate Sunflare, four locks point to Solar, five mean that I have the potential to be greater than Solar!”

“What about nine?” Li Hao smiled. “Since you mention the extent of supernatural knowledge is nine total locks, there must be someone who’s discovered all nine before. If one lock equates one cultivation level, then nine... must be unfathomable!”

Wang Ming shook his head. “A Heaven Favored in the central region discovered all nine—he’s a veteran who’s rumored to be greater than Solar. Based on what we’ve heard from him, supernatural locks become harder to break the more we’ve already opened. This is a normal phenomenon.

“In the same vein, the more locks we’ve opened, the more dangerous it is to open even more. Unanticipated danger often strikes! I believe only up to five locks have been broken thus far. I’m not definitively sure if someone’s opened a sixth lock and entered yet another level higher than Solar!

“But it’s only a matter of time!” the handsome young man added. “The supernatural domain is developing at a fast pace. There were only Starlight at the beginning twenty years ago. Darkmoon appeared in less than a year and Sunflare less than three. When I asked around, I learned that Solar have been around for more than ten years! Also, existences above Solar were present in the central region five years ago!”

Five cultivation levels had appeared in a scant two decades. It’d been five years since the last level appeared. Based on this rate of development, it was highly likely that a sixth cultivation level would appear in the near future.

Li Hao inwardly reeled with shock. This truly was monumental speed! Perhaps there would be powerhouses of the ninth level at the end.

“Are there many heavyweights greater than Solar in the central region?”

“Tons!” Wang Ming responded casually without explaining further. “Now do you know why I’m a genius? I absorb mysterious power fast and at a high efficacy, and I have tremendous potential! Hu Hao and Li Meng are also well off in the Night Watchers, but they’ve only discovered three locks. It means they have a path to Sunflare, but no future beyond that.”

He raised himself up and in the process, lowered his compatriots down a notch.

How shameless!

It was already a worthy feat to locate three locks. Some people never found their third and could only ponder over the path to Sunflare while dallying as a Darkmoon. Supernatural locks were the barrier to progress in this domain.

“So does this mean you just need to break your third lock to immediately ascend to Sunflare? You won’t encounter any major bottlenecks?”

“That’s right!” Wang Ming chuckled merrily. “That’s why I want to use the mysterious power we were awarded with last time to set foot into Plenilune. And then, I want to borrow the strength of a blood pearl. If it’s really as you say and can enhance the effects of mysterious power, then it might help me open the third lock and set foot into Sunflare!

“And if that’s the case, then my rate of improvement isn’t any slower than the Heaven Favored!” he said excitedly. “So Li Hao, don’t be playing me. I want to put in a request to headquarters for the Sunflare blood pearl. I’ll be in trouble if this doesn’t work.”

“You can request something like that?”

“Of course!” Wang Ming nodded. “The Night Watchers are all about deeds of merit. Treasures are there to be traded for. Director Hou says that treasures and resources have value only when they circulate. Not many trade for the blood pearls because they’re useful for rookies, but rookies didn’t want to pay the hefty price for it. Thus, some are left in storage and people don’t pay attention to them. If you’re certain of what you say, I’ll find a way to request it.”

“How much does it cost?” Li Hao was curious. “What’s the price tag for the Sunflare level blood pearl?”

“It’s not just price!” Wang Ming explained. “It also requires the appropriate grade in the Inspectorate system! Sunflares are open only to chief commissioners. I’m just a commissioner inspector, so logically speaking I can’t request one. But I know many chief commissioners and our director is one too, so I can ask them to trade it for me.”

Chapter 180: Peak Sunderer (II)

“And the price?”

“Two hundred cubes of mysterious power!”

“That cheap?” Li Hao blinked. “My teacher spent three hundred cubes to buy the one off our director, and Director Hao said he couldn’t sell it!”

Cheap?? Wang Ming was at a loss for words. This reaction and tone... was so damned arrogant!

But to tell someone whose teacher had killed two Solars that two hundred cubes was very expensive... Forget it, this guy didn’t know jack!

“It’s different!” Wang Ming doggedly explained. “There’s a limit to the number of treasures we can trade for, or else everyone would be sending in requests to upstairs. Treasures that are traded for are relatively cheaper because there’s restrictions placed on them. There’s no such limitations on rewards. Opportunities like this one are quite rare for most people.”

Fine then, but being one hundred cubes more expensive than the going price doesn’t make it cheap.

On the other hand, two to three hundred cubes of mysterious power could be extracted from Sunflare powerhouses. It was a similar estimate for scarlet shadows, so the price was reasonable.

Any higher would mean that one might as well cultivate with mysterious power. That energy was more convenient for supernaturals than the scarlet shadow.

Wang Ming should be able to afford two hundred cubes. He'd been allotted one hundred cubes from the earlier operation and his family was wealthy and powerful. That sum should be no problem for him. But judging from the looks of things, the guy seemed quite conflicted and highly concerned that it'd prove ineffective. So... two hundred cubes appeared to be a massive sum for him.

Li Hao grasped a deeper understanding of the supernatural domain now, but was rather surprised that Wang Ming said he had the potential to be greater than Solar.

"Go ahead and put in your request. If you don't want it, I'll buy it off you for three hundred cubes. You'll actually turn a profit. Does that work?"

"Really?" Wang Ming brightened. Was such a lovely deal just falling into his lap? He'd be benefiting even if he sold it instead of using it. This was gifting him money!

Otherwise, Liu Long should be willing to put in a request for Li Hao if the young man went to the director. Even if the limitation was that he could only ever trade once for it, Liu Long most likely wouldn't care if he used his only chance for Li Hao.

Li Hao nodded. Would this be a loss to him?

Not at all. Not to mention, he couldn't find a suitable person to trade for a blood pearl. While he didn't know if such a trading opportunity was important or not, the chief might need this chance in the future since he'd just set foot into Dominator. They were scheduled to excavate the ruins next, so anything might be on the table then.

"Don't ask chief to help you, you have your own path to walk, so you should resolve this yourself!"

Wang Ming nodded. He was just voicing possibilities, he hadn't planned on actually asking Liu Long for help.

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The two continued heading downstairs. Li Hao was truly surprised to see Wang Ming still walking by his side. I've said everything I want to say, so trade for the blood pearl if you want. What are you still following me for?

"You..."

"I want to see how you and Director Liu fight. Is it open to spectators?" Wang Ming explained himself. "I'm also practicing the Five Styles lately, right? But teacher gave us nothing else apart from a booklet. I don't really feel at liberty to ask him either, I can only fumble around on my own. I feel like I've improved, but not really either. Li Hao, can I watch how you fight?"

He, too, was interested in martial dao these days and was studying the Five Styles. Sadly, Yuan Shuo had only given his honorary disciples the secret method and regular breathing technique. Thus, Wang Ming felt that progress was out of reach.

"I've been using the Five Styles less these days," Li Hao answered honestly. He focused on comprehending aura and the sword more, so their sparring did not center on the Five Styles.

"Very well, I can take a hint. Look at you being so mysterious! Next time I spar with someone, you can watch however you like!"

Li Hao smiled without a word. He might reach perfection over the next couple of days and not to mention, it was better to keep a low profile. Too many people knew about his strength now. While Wang Ming was a decent person, he was too connected to White Moon City. It would hardly be ideal if Li Hao's secrets were leaked... This guy talked too much—plainly put, he was too naive. He answered whatever anyone asked of him!

A lot of what Li Hao asked was confidential, but the guy answered without second thought. If Li Hao was Hou Xiaochen, he wouldn't say a second word to a guy like Wang Ming and also forbid him from speaking to others!

The guy even gave a thorough overview of origin weapons! If it wasn't for Wang Ming not knowing the particulars, Li Hao believed that the young man would spill the beans if he delved into that as well.

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Li Hao and Wang Ming parted ways. The supernatural turned back to look at Li Hao entering the basement and curled his lip with amusement.

"You must really think I'm a fool, heh. The guy's very possibly entered mid Sunderer. Damn, that's terrifying!" Wang Ming was very proud of himself! My guess must be right—look at Li Hao trying to hide it from me!

So fast!

He bumped into Li Meng before long and sighed with emotion, "Work harder, Li Meng. Li Hao's going to leave you behind in the dust if you don't enter Halfmoon soon. He seems to be a mid Sunderer now!"

Li Meng's heart clenched with surprise. So fast? The buns that she'd just bought spontaneously lost their allure.

It wasn't long before the White Moon trio learned that Li Hao was possibly a mid Sunderer. Hu Hao was also quite nervous when he became aware.

Li Hao had guessed correctly. Wang Ming was willing to say anything to someone he thought was a good person. He was willing to voice even speculations.

.....

At the same time.

In the basement.

Liu Long took a deep breath and looked at Li Hao.

“I feel that you’re almost there! I’m going to act differently today—I’ll be primarily using my aura for today’s fights! You know the aura as well. I’ve only used it in passing before and never employed my consciousness to pressure you. But now that you’re almost there and you recover impossibly fast... I won’t be worried about hurting you.”

He’d discovered Li Hao’s perverse characteristic a few days ago. In that case, it was time to push the young man harder. Perhaps he could even let the young man experience what true life and death were!

Yuan Shuo was correct—Liu Long was sometimes daring enough to really bring his full strength to bear.

“Let’s do it, chief.” Li Hao nodded uncaringly. “I also want to see the true strength of a Dominator! After all, I might run into Dominator or Sunflare level powerhouses anytime when I reach perfection. Experiencing their full strength ahead of time will let me know how to better handle them in the future...”

“Alright!”

Immediate pressure bore down on Li Hao as he finished talking and the young man sank a few millimeters into the floor! Liu Long held nothing back—apart from not using the Nine Forged

Force. If he utilized that, he would no longer be a typical Dominator. That was a method that he assessed could break the defenses of a Solar.

His consciousness was on full display!

A hatchet appeared in Liu Long's hands to cut through all obstacles, cleaving through Li Hao's aura of the earth. When they first exchanged blows a few days ago, Liu Long ended the day with lacerated fists. After that, the two opted for weapons as they thought.

He hacked forward with the hatchet and nearly split the ground with a boom!

Li Hao finally experienced the real might of a Dominator of Thousands; the world teetered beneath him. He roared viciously and stomped his foot.

Rumble!

The entire basement trembled. With how fractured the floor already was, it sank in slightly. Li Hao planted himself firmly with one stop, brandishing a longsword that his teacher had given him. Although it wasn't a supernatural object, it was much more formidable than the ordinary longsword he'd used before.

A mighty slash cut through the air—sword and hatchet clashed into each other with a clang!

The exchanges were no longer an even match. Overwhelming pressure crashed down on Li Hao and the longsword spun out backward. The part of his hand between index finger and thumb split open, but the young man didn't have time to react before the hatchet came for his head.

Li Hao hastily stumbled backward, sensing tremendous waves circulating around him. They seemed to have locked onto him. Despite tilting his head to the side and bending sideways, he was unable to avoid Liu Long's descending hatchet. The sharp blade sliced through his shoulder until it hit bone.

Incredible pain wracked Li Hao to the point that it didn't feel like his right arm belonged to him anymore!

Hesitation dawned in Liu Long's eyes, but it quickly vanished. The young man was fine! Yes, the injury was severe, but Li Hao could recover from it. Liu Long had accidentally broken a few of Li Hao's bones a few days ago, but the young man quickly recovered as well. While the wound ran deeper this time, Liu Long trusted that Li Hao was fine.

At the same time, this kind of sparring ran outside the confines of other people's imagination. Liu Long applied more pressure to the buried hatchet, giving the impression that he really did want to split Li Hao apart with one stroke.

It was true that the director wasn't keeping much strength back. The stimulus of life and death... Well, this was stimulus enough, wasn't it?

"AHH!!" Li Hao roared with extreme pain. He reached his left hand toward the hatchet to grab it away from his opponent, whereupon Liu Long yanked it out and swung it at the young man's left hand.

Defeat was certain for Li Hao! He didn't have room to maneuver for a response as they were too close to each other. Liu Long fully suppressed him. But when the hatchet sliced forward, Li Hao did not withdraw his left hand. Liu Long's eyes widened with shock—this would sever the young man's arm!

However, the hairs on the back of the man's neck suddenly rose. A third hand had appeared near his crotch and it came with a tendril of sword qi!

"Be careful, chief!" Li Hao grabbed for his target before he finished speaking. The Hand That Brings Back Life! You're the one who hacked at me first, so don't mind if I do.

Cold horror pinpricked Liu Long's neck. A third hand?? How is he doing it?? He hadn't realized that Li Hao had swung a fake left hand over. He'd fought the young man in close quarters so many

times, yet hadn't discovered where Li Hao kept his third hand. Or had the lad worn a prosthetic on his left hand the entire time?

That prosthetic was too real if that was the case!

Liu Long rapidly backed up, but still felt a stinging pain as sword intent had split his pants. He quickly shuffled a few more steps back before steadying himself.

Meanwhile, Li Hao didn't care about this. He circulated sword energy for a full revolution inside his body, greatly alleviating the agony. His next sword stroke was much stronger than before!

An explosion of sword intent!

A stroke soundlessly stabbed forward, running through the hatchet with a soft plink. Liu Long's throat lay exposed behind it!