

## Star Gate 121

### Chapter 121: Undercurrents in Silver City (III)

“We have nothing to hide,” said the vice principal with white hair. “We didn’t report ourselves previously because there was no requirement to be entered in the official records. Since that is now in effect, I’ll have Captain Chen from the protection detail come over. You can talk to him directly.”

Li Hao nodded, he was familiar with Captain Chen. But since the young man was here on official business, he needed to officially present himself to the Veteris Institute.

The vice principal pulled out his communicator, summoning a hulking bear—hulking man before long. The newcomer smiled faintly at Li Hao and frowned slightly at Wang Ming.

“Captain Chen!” Li Hao grinned in return. “My apologies for the disturbance. We’re here because Silver City is forming its own Night Watcher branch and thus needs to register the superhuman characters within the city. We also want to invite all superhuman personnel to attend our ribbon-cutting ceremony in three days!

“This is our first stop because I’m most familiar with the Institute,” chuckled the young man. “I trust that with Captain Chen present, our work will go smoothly!”

“Of course!” The captain inclined his head, then glanced at Wang Ming. “And this is...?”

“A person of note from White Moon City, Director Wang Ming!”

Wang Ming stared stonily ahead. Do you really have to introduce me this way, Li Hao? A person of note from White Moon... It’s like you’re afraid people don’t know what a big deal I am!

“It’s an honor!” Captain Chen didn’t offer to shake hands. It was best that powerhouses maintained a bit of a distance. He gave a candid overview after some pleasantries. “The Institute’s protection

detail is a modest size of forty people, with only seven true Slayers. Counting me makes for eight...”

“Has the captain not reached Sunderer?” Li Hao scribbled down some notes.

“No, I fall just a little short,” the captain said with regret. “I’m similar to your Vice Captain Liu of old, but I hear she’s broken through to Sunderer lately? Is that true?”

“Yes.”

“How wonderful!” the captain said wistfully. He was rather envious as he held high hopes for Sunderer since the crossover was impossible for him. Unfortunately, he’d continuously failed to ascend.

Peak Slayer wasn’t a weak level, but Li Hao still asked, “Does our Institute not have a single supernatural?”

“How should I put it...” the captain considered his words carefully. “We do, and he’s a Darkmoon! This is also why our Institute is relatively safe. But that one is not in residence lately, he’s gone to visit other places.”

Li Hao nodded and didn’t ask further. He visited the protection detail’s station with Captain Chen, made a cursory overview, then quickly left the Veteris Institute.

.....

On the road.

“Li Hao, is such a simple inspection enough?” Wang Ming frowned. His counterpart was so perfunctory that he was being negligent! The kid simply scanned the premises, made a few notes, and called it a day. That’s it?

There were no additional measures or detailed proving. Were they supposed to discover more secrets this way? Ferret out supernaturals?

What a joke!

“It’s not easy to investigate them since they’re all martial masters,” Li Hao responded casually. “Am I supposed to fight them?”

“We should at least bring a supernatural probe with us. Who knows if they’re hiding anything if we don’t even have that?”

“My teacher’s there?” Li Hao replied blankly. “Teacher’s senses are very strong after breaking through to Dominator. He’ll be the first to discover anything amiss at the Institute.”

It was only then that Wang Ming recalled this character. He instantly ran out of things to say. What Li Hao left unsaid was that he wished for his inspection style to quickly become common knowledge. It would be best if everyone thought he was just going through the motions and didn’t think much of his task. If that was the case, then supernaturals wouldn’t feel compelled to immediately go into hiding.

They wouldn’t be able to hide from his eyes so long as they remained in place!

.....

As expected, several factions received word as soon as Li Hao and Wang Ming left the Veteris Institute. The two Night Watchers were very perfunctory in their visits and didn’t bother looking into things. It was a routine that was over after a few lines were entered into the public record.

.....

Inside a massive office of the Qiao Mining Industries.

The white-haired president of the corporation smiled faintly and looked at his son standing in front of him. “The process looks to be just a formality. Welcome them if they visit later and register our people. Don’t give them excuses. Everyone who should be entered from the Qiao Mining Industries should be entered! Make sure they know all about our Slayers and two Starlight!”

“I understand, father.” Qiao Peng nodded with a smile. “Do I need to cultivate more of a relationship with Li Hao?”

“An appropriate one. Don’t get too close as there are too many keeping an eye on him these days.”

“Understood!”

“Are you sure... there’s no problem with Liu Yan?” asked the president after some thought.

“Most probably!” Qiao Peng replied lowly. “We handled it very quickly, so I trust that the guy didn’t have a chance or time to say anything to Liu Yan. I’ve been testing her these years and while she’s very annoyed toward me, she shows no sign of bone-deep hate. She’s been keeping an eye on Yama instead!”

“That’s good!” President Qiao didn’t want to deal with Liu Yan either, not unless he had to. She was the vice captain of the Inspectorate’s law enforcement team and shared an ambiguous relationship with Liu Long. It wouldn’t be good if the situation snowballed out of control.

It was one thing if something happened to a regular inspector, but Liu Yan was different. She was a commissioner inspector. A dead commissioner inspector would involve the Night Watchers, even if they were spread thin.

When Liu Yan's husband died, it was a different matter compared to a commissioner inspector's death. The Night Watchers couldn't be bothered to involve themselves in her grudge against Yama, so putting out an arrest warrant was the best they could do.

"Father," Qiao Peng whispered when the man fell silent. "More and more people are paying attention to Silver City these days. Has anyone come from... over there? I'm also worried about exposure because our rate of progress is very slow."

"Take a deep breath!" His father smiled. "Being overly hasty only leads to failure. We've put our down roots for many years—no one can measure up to that. Additionally, don't take further action over there for the time being. I don't want to raise attention. Let's maintain a holding pattern."

"Understood!" Qiao Peng nodded.

His father regarded him for a bit. "It's fine if you act a little dumber and more foolish in front of others, but don't be a real fool in critical moments. Yama's grandson... Now that was a real fool! He let all the flattery and fawning get to his head, which was why he grew so bold as to show off that kind of treasure outside. His head wasn't screwed on right! It's one thing that he's dead, but he's dragged all of Yama into the swamp. Don't imitate him!"

"Don't worry, father!" Qiao Peng promised solemnly.

"Mmhmm!" Qiao Senior nodded. "Good. Also, don't resent me for suppressing your crossover all these years. It's only been twenty years since the supernatural world's development and the situation wasn't as stable as before. But now... it may be. You can make the crossover after this matter is over. You'll be more than a Darkmoon when you succeed."

Joy dawned on Qiao Peng's face and he rapidly bobbed his head. This was what he'd been looking forward to all this time! He hadn't ascended during these years partially because he didn't dare to be too flamboyant, and also because his father forbade him from it.

"Father, then... once I cross over, can I take a few things from..." he couldn't help himself.

“Shut up!” Qiao Senior’s face darkened. “Did you already forget my reminder?! Idiot! Forget about that and everything else! Remember that we are only a corporation, a legitimate corporation! We mine for ore and that’s it! Forget about everything else!”

“Understood!” Qiao Peng barked out solemnly. He didn’t dare say anything else, but he was expectant, excited, and a bit reluctant. After so many years of effort, was father really going to offer that up on a silver platter?

Of course, they couldn’t afford to provoke Yama, but would the organization know about everything they discovered? The central region occupied too much of Yama’s resources. If that wasn’t the case, true powerhouses would’ve long arrived in Silver City from both Yama and Red Moon. The secrets of the eight families were more mysterious than they thought.

As a local mover and shaker with many years of history, the Qiaos held a fair bit of intelligence. They might know as much as Red Moon and they’d also concealed a fair bit.

Qiao Peng slowly backed out of the office with various thoughts running through his mind.

Inside the office, Qiao Senior looked silently out of the window. “You be careful,” he suddenly said. “Get close to Li Hao and see if there’s anything special about him. Don’t let him discover you. We might need his blood to open that place.”

““There are too many watching him!” Someone responded softly from the shadows.

“I know, so you can only surreptitiously observe him when he comes. There’s no need to take action right now,” Qiao Senior said tiredly. “I, too, am unwilling to just let things go after a dozen years, but I know it’d be pulling chestnuts out of a fire if I really took any action. Don’t forget that it’s only been twenty years since the supernatural domain appeared! There’s still a chance to catch up! I wouldn’t nurse any other thoughts if it’d been a few hundred years.”

Supernatural organizations constantly rotated throughout these twenty years. Some were established today and toppled tomorrow. Nothing was set in stone! Not even the three great organizations were secure in their position. Everything was possible.

Qiao Senior wasn't so ambitious as to want to set himself against the three greats—he just hoped that his side would measure up to the effort of a dozen years.

“Understood!” The voice in the shadows vanished.

Qiao Senior lounged on a chair, continuing to look outside. The eight great families... Silver City!

It was becoming apparent that everyone had overlooked Silver City and the eight families. From what bits and pieces he'd obtained, the eight families had been beyond imagination in the ancient civilization! Silver City might've been the heart of the continent then!

It might be up to this chance to determine whether or not the Qiaos could rise.

## Chapter 122: The Qiaos (I)

Li Hao visited a number of places over the course of an afternoon, simply observing formalities at nearly all of them. He greeted those in charge, notified them of his duties, and went through the motions even at locations that seemed to require more of an investigation.

Wang Ming was almost popping with rage!

This is it?? And you told me you wanted to accomplish something grand! What happened to locating the strongholds of the three great organizations?

He now strongly suspected that Li Hao only wanted the position for its kickbacks and presents.

Indeed, while the young man didn't carry out his responsibilities with any inkling of competency, he accepted quite a few packages. Nothing was precious or valuable, just corporation products or dojo specialities, but the guy took whatever was offered to him!

He took receipt of everything!

In the car.

The next stop was their last of the day—Qiao Mining Industries.

Wang Ming looked coolly ahead. He didn't like Li Hao's style and became more silent the more stops they made. Meanwhile, the young man kept trying to have a conversation.

"Don't be mad, Ole Wang. The last place gave us really nice tea. I'll split it with you when we get back!"

"No!" Wang Ming snapped back. He was a right and proper Fullmoon; he accompanied Li Hao on this trip not for tea leaves. He wanted to win honor for a deed of merit, unlike his counterpart who wanted to use the Night Watcher name for unpalatable practices!

I might respect you if you actually embezzled a few dozen or hundred cubes of mysterious power, but all you want are tea leaves, fruit, and whatever? Can you be any more embarrassing??"

"You don't understand," Li Hao chuckled. "It's accepted practice to take their gifts. They would feel uncomfortable if we didn't. Silver City is a small place and we'll bump into everyone often. This is no big deal and nothing to cause unpleasantness over. This is how the rank and file work."

"Bullshit!" Wang Ming was irate. "Remember that you're not a third rank inspector anymore, you're a commissioner inspector! You're the deputy director of the Night Watchers in Silver City, the senior level of this city! There are fewer than five people more highly ranked than you in all of Silver City! I'm embarrassed for you acting like trash and you should be too!"

“It’s one thing at the Veteris Institute, that’s where your teacher works. It’s a place of learning, a palace of knowledge! It’s fine to treat them with kid gloves. But the small dojos, companies, and corporations? What the hell are they? They’re nothing to the Night Watchers!”

“You can’t put it that way,” Liu Yan chuckled. “We can’t look down on mundanes even if we become supernatural.”

“Leave me alone! I don’t want to talk to you!” Wang Ming drove in huffy silence; he was in a very poor mood.

“Don’t misunderstand,” Li Hao continued chuckling and lowered his voice. “I’m doing this to relax their guard so we can gain more clues.”

“Hah!” sneered Wang Ming. “And what have you discovered? Tell me about it!”

Li Hao sighed and took out his notebook. “We went to the Institute, six dojos, and one major corporation this afternoon. We registered one Sunderer, twenty-four Slayers, and two Starlight at these eight places, correct?”

They’d registered twenty-seven superhumans this afternoon. There were eight Slayers at the Institute; the remaining nineteen were from a corporation called Galaxy Inc. Galaxy was a large corporation that rivaled Qiao Mining. Their primary business was car manufacturing and the Silver City location was just a branch. The presence of a Sunderer at a minor locale was ample demonstration of how abundant this corporation’s resources were.

Sunderer of Hundreds was still very strong.

“These are the ones we registered.” Wang Ming nodded, still highly dissatisfied. “But are you sure that’s all of it? Take Galaxy, if we set all the others aside. They’re ranked in the upper echelon of Silver Moon corporations. I don’t believe there’s not a single Darkmoon at one of their branches. Do you believe they only have two Starlight?”

He didn't!

Darkmoons were strong and even the Night Watchers had sent three Darkmoons to Silver City. For a large corporation like Galaxy with deep pockets and a vast network, how could they only have two Starlight at their Silver City branch?! Money wasn't effective in small quantities, but the corporation possessed enough to communicate with the gods. They even partnered with Night Watcher headquarters at times!

There was no way that Wang Ming believed that had been a full accounting of Galaxy's personnel! Not to mention, Li Hao hadn't bothered making a detailed sweep. Wang Ming had proposed looking around and even bringing out the supernatural probe, but the other turned him down without discussion.

Wang Ming was fit to explode, this was a complete farce! While he didn't fully agree with Liu Long's arrangements since it didn't seem good to plumb the depths of each faction, they should fully carry out the task since the course of action was agreed upon!

What a righteous guy! Li Hao laughed to himself and kept a calm expression on his face. "Don't worry, you don't get it. We're just the vanguard to attract their attention! We have other arrangements in the works—someone else is conducting the concrete investigation while we distract them."

"Really?" Wang Ming looked skeptical. "You're lying!"

Don't try to fool me! I haven't sensed anything out of the ordinary. Besides, no one on the team—not even Liu Long—could investigate these corporations while keeping everyone in the dark. Many of these corporations had installed supernatural probes. While the instruments wouldn't pick up martial masters, martial dao was much more limited. Martial masters couldn't fly through earth or sky like supernaturals. Slightly heightened security was all that it took to deter martial masters.

"It's true!" Li Hao nodded seriously. "Of course, this is a secret. I'm telling you only because you won't stop complaining. This actually has nothing to do with you as it doesn't fall under your jurisdiction."

“Since I have to tell you, this makes you the third person to know about this. If you breathe a hint of this to anyone else... you’ll be a traitor, Wang Ming!”

The handsome young man’s heart skipped a beat and he asked uncertainly, “What does that mean?”

“There’s actually a tenth person on our team!”

A tenth person?

Wang Ming blinked.

“We look like we only have nine in the branch, but there’s another high level expert hidden in the shadows. I can’t reveal their identity. All you need to know is that they exist.

“Really?” Wang Ming wasn’t too certain of what he was hearing and neither was he that easy to fool. “I’m a deputy director, how come I don’t know about this?”

“You can determine that yourself!” Li Hao answered evenly. “I’m speaking of this here and only today. I won’t admit to anything after we leave! I’ll play dumb even if you tell other people that you heard it from me—I’ll be a sinner otherwise! The tenth person is very special and not at liberty to show themselves. However, they’re infinitely resourceful and a good hand at collecting intelligence.

“Based on their examination, some factions did indeed conceal certain things today. Galaxy, for instance, has more than one Darkmoon. They have three!”

“Are you sure?!” Wang Ming’s face snapped with shock and he lowered his voice. “How are you guys in contact? I haven’t sensed anything. Are you lying to me, Li Hao?”

“It’s true!” Li Hao nodded seriously. “I can’t tell you how we communicate with each other, we naturally have our ways. You’re not part of the inner circle yet as you arrived only a few days ago. I’m already breaking the rules by telling you so much!”

Wang Ming understood—a Demon Hunter concealed agent! But... how were they this strong?

He didn’t quite believe it and frowned intently at Li Hao until the latter reminded, “Focus on the road!”

Wang Ming instantly returned to his senses and refocused on the steering wheel. “Do you mean it,” he asked incredulously. “Are there really three hidden Darkmoons at Galaxy? There are a decent number of Darkmoons these days, but they’re concentrated in the major organizations. Not that many wander unattached. It would seem normal if they have one, but three...?”

“It’s true!” Li Hao thought for a bit. “One of them seems to be on your level.”

He based that off a similar size of light halo. He’d discovered that he was able to see balls of light as long as they weren’t too far away. Supernaturals of varying strength could be seen at different distances.

Solars, for instance, could be observed from thousands of meters away. Even now, Li Hao recalled the massive ball of light approaching through the terrain. Sunflares could be seen within one thousand meters, and Darkmoons at a much more modest one hundred meters. If Starlight... he might have to be up close and personal to see a tiny twinkling of starlight, as feeble as sparks from a fire.

Thus, most supernaturals did not escape his eye. There were indeed three Darkmoon at Galaxy and one of them was a Fullmoon.

Wang Ming’s frown deepened. He no longer felt that Li Hao was pulling his leg. They were possibly really drawing attention to create opportunities for that hidden tenth person.

There was still one thing he didn't understand. "What level of strength is this person that they can swiftly assess the enemy without alarming them? Are they an investigative supernatural? They have to be at least a Darkmoon!"

At the very least!

When could the Demon Hunters come in contact with such a supernatural? These kinds were very important and a hot commodity for many organizations.

Offensive type supernaturals were not that valued as there were too many of them. Those with unique abilities were much more in demand. Li Meng and Hu Hao, for instance, received more attention than others. Although their ranks were less than Wang Ming, they were also young geniuses of the Night Watchers. They wouldn't have been assigned to protect someone like Yuan Shuo otherwise.

Li Meng had her third eye of the sky and could see through many things that others couldn't. Hu Hao was a flight supernatural. While his importance would severely decline after the Sunflare level, he was an important combat resource before then.

### Chapter 123: The Qiaos (II)

Most supernaturals could fly after they reached Sunflare. Not too far, of course. The limitation in distance was mitigated only after reaching Solar. With sufficient mysterious power, there was no difficulty in flight.

Wang Ming naturally placed high importance on a supernatural adept in clandestine operations and investigations. This might be a presence that not even his superiors were aware of! At the same time, he felt a bit uncomfortable.

Li Hao was... such an honest boy. He talked freely about everything. He would be in enormous trouble if Liu Long learned of this. But naturally, Wang Ming wasn't the type to waggle his tongue.

“I can’t tell you specifics,” Li Hao murmured. “I just know that this person can supply a lot of intelligence for us! Don’t ask too much, Ole Wang. I told you this only because we’re friends and you’re a warrior of justice. I’ll be in hot water if you let this get out.”

“Don’t worry!” Wang Ming nodded, but was still uncertain. “Are you sure about the accuracy of this intelligence?”

“One hundred percent!”

“Fuck!” Wang Ming took a deep breath. Just one Galaxy Inc. was hiding three Darkmoons, and one of them a Fullmoon! What the hell!

When Huang Yun sent him to Silver City and said that there might be a bit of trouble, Wang Ming dismissed the notion. Now, however, the city suddenly seemed very dangerous.

“Sunflares are senior executives at all of the major factions and won’t take unnecessary risks! Plenilunes are preoccupied with rising to Sunflare, so the strongest of active powerhouses these days is Fullmoon!” He quickly brought Li Hao up to speed on the supernatural landscape. “If there really is a Fullmoon among them, then there is much more to Galaxy than meets the eye! They only need one Darkmoon if they’re concerned with protection. No one would attack a company with a Darkmoon in residence!”

Li Hao nodded his understanding. Wang Ming finally fell silent and Li Hao said nothing else as well. Their car rolled to a stop as they’d arrived at the Qiao Mining headquarters.

.....

Reception.

In order to prevent Li Hao being denied entrance, a phone call from the receptionist quickly brought Qiao Peng and a few employees downstairs.

“Commissioner Inspector Li!” Appearing to be in his thirties, Qiao Peng didn’t look too old. If one ignored how bedraggled he’d been when handcuffed yesterday, he rather seemed to be a promising, young person.

He wore a suit on his tall and muscular frame, greeting Li Hao with a smile. He turned pleasantly toward Wang Ming. “Might I know this officer’s august surname?”

“Director Wang!” Li Hao answered brusquely without the affable manner he’d shown at his previous stops. “Person of note from White Moon City! VP Qiao, surely Qiao Mining already knows given the extensive intelligence network you have!”

Wang Ming was slightly surprised. Li Hao was a friendly person and had been very polite at their previous locations. He hadn’t expressed anything even when Galaxy Inc. concealed the truth. Why was he suddenly being so unpleasant?”

Qiao Peng didn’t mind the curtness. “Commissioner Inspector Li, Qiao Mining has foundations only in Silver City. White Moon is a large city and we are run-of-the-mill there. How could we know much about a supernatural organization like the Night Watchers? You think too highly of us.

“There’s a misunderstanding between me and Commissioner Inspector Li,” he quickly explained when he saw that Wang Ming was perplexed. “It has to do with Vice Captain Liu. I’m in my thirties and my father keeps pushing me to find someone to marry. I have... slightly high standards and to be honest, only the vice captain catches my eye in all of Silver City. But while dropping flowers pine for love, the heartless brook babbles on! She expressed some dissatisfaction toward me yesterday and the commissioner inspector probably thinks I’m an irritating pest. It’s all a bit embarrassing, really.”

Wang Ming understood certain things after the candid recounting. Liu Yan and Li Hao... There’d seemed to be something unusual between the two at dinner yesterday. Liu Yan often spoke in a suggestive manner that led one down ambiguous paths. He could understand why Li Hao seemed out of sorts.

Li Hao, ah Li Hao. Heh, you're really something eh? Liu Yan's at least thirty and you're only twenty... That's some kinda appetite! But yeah, that's what men like. Young married women are the best.

"No worries, VP Qiao!" Wang Ming smiled knowingly, having grasped the crux of the issue. "So long as your courtship is standard and sensible. Of course, I'm sure that VP Qiao won't do anything inappropriate. Vice Captain Liu is the prettiest flower of the Inspectorate and we won't let things rest easy if anything over the line occurs!"

He pushed his colleague gently. That was enough!

Li Hao was still put out with the situation. "Alright, that's between you and Sis Liu, I won't involve myself with it! But I warn you, don't give yourself airs just because you're the vice president of Qiao Mining. We're all well aware that this is no longer an era in which cash is king. Make sure you behave yourself!"

"Now we really have a misunderstanding." Qiao Peng spread out his hands with resignation. "Of course, if the commissioner inspector finds it inappropriate... I can withdraw? But... but this wouldn't be the thing to do, would it? I feel that equitable competition is most ideal when it comes to love."

"Who's engaging in equitable competition with you?" Li Hao replied frostily. "I'll show you no mercy if you keep blathering nonsense!"

"Then take it as pure nonsense, don't be angry!" Qiao Peng chuckled. "Commissioner Inspector Li has already attained great achievements in your youth and we're all of Silver City. There's no need to have strained relations between us. If there's anything I've done wrong, let me take you out when you have time. There's nothing that can't be discussed over a drink!"

"We'll talk about that later!" Li Hao barked. "I want to register all superhumans at Qiao Mining—all martial masters and supernaturals. You're a massive corporation, don't you dare say you have none! I'm also going to make a round of all of your storefronts, mines, and offices! I've already called for a supernatural probe, so don't think you'll get away with hiding anything!"

“Everyone needs to be registered and anyone not will be viewed as a criminal!”

“.....” Qiao Peng cursed inwardly. You’re using a chicken feather as a warrant to issue orders! I know about your previous stops! Those were just formalities, but now you want to make rounds at my place and even brought in a supernatural probe!

Granted, this also seemed normal for a hot-blooded young man who’d come into power overnight. And there was the complication of Liu Yan!

As to be expected, young men like these found it hardest to withstand mature women like Liu Yan. Perhaps the sordid duo had already taken each other to bed! How tawdry!

This kid doesn’t have an ounce of cunning to him! It’s written all over his face! But people like him are the easiest to handle.

On the other hand, Qiao Peng would be unsettled if Li Hao showed him a smiling face today and forgot their previous scuffle. As a man, he was all too familiar with his own gender. If another man pursued his woman and didn’t know how to take a hint... He wouldn’t be friendly to them either!

The more Li Hao was thus, the more at ease Qiao Peng could be and the more it demonstrated that Liu Yan really didn’t know anything. If she did, she would’ve long talked to Li Hao about not butting heads with Qiao Peng, that making moves in the dark was the way to go.

None of his thoughts reflected in Qiao Peng’s expression—only slight resignation crossed his face. “There’s no need to be thus, Commissioner Inspector Li. We’re from the same roots and I hear that when you visited Galaxy...”

“Galaxy is Galaxy, Qiao Mining is Qiao Mining!” Li Hao cut him off. “VP Qiao, I have reason to suspect that you are harboring fugitives after your continued excuses! As a local, I am all too familiar with mines. Being underground for years and a closed community, places like mines are a perfect shelter for criminals!

“If you keep running your mouth, I’ll immediately place Qiao Mining under close surveillance!”

Since he now grasped the reins of power, Li Hao showed open hostility to even someone who was the heir to a massive corporation.

Qiao Peng was familiar with intelligence regarding the young man and couldn’t help but curse inwardly. He’s turned into a bully because of the authority that comes with his position! This kid was dumbly honest before, but a different side comes out as soon as he sniffs a hint of power. He’s actually a dog, isn’t he!

“Very well, as you wish!” Qiao Peng displayed the barest hint of dissatisfaction that could barely be detected. “But I also want to remind the commissioner inspector that Silver City is not a place where one person calls the shots. Don’t tarnish the Night Watcher reputation!”

Li Hao snorted contemptuously and headed for the elevator without another word.

“Director Wang, keep an eye on things down here and don’t let anyone leave! I’m going to sweep each floor with the supernatural probe. We’ll go through their headquarters first, then probe their mines and storefronts!” Li Hao turned to Qiao Peng. “You’re with me!”

The man frowned, but didn’t say anything. He waved his men into the elevator.

Qiao Mining’s headquarters stood at thirty stories tall, making it one of the tallest buildings in Silver City. There weren’t that many skyscrapers in the city; buildings of five to six stories were the norm.

They rode straight to the top floor. Li Hao took out a bulky supernatural probe that was bigger than a watermelon. Red dots would appear on its display panel if supernatural ripples were detected.

Li Hao flicked it on—the probe consumed mysterious power during operation and wasn't easily activated under normal circumstances. He frowned as soon as it whirled to life. "It's giving a reading!"

"Commissioner Inspector Li," Qiao Peng said with resignation. "We didn't say that we don't have any supernaturals. We do, and more than one. We have three Starlight—I wasn't going to conceal that. You just didn't want to listen to me."

Li Hao accepted these words awkwardly, but quickly regained his cool. "What are you so worked up for? I only said that a reading." He furrowed his brows when he looked at the display screen. "Three Starlight, did you say?"

"Yes!"

"But there's eight dots on here..."

"Do you think I don't know anything, commissioner inspector?" Qiao Peng burst out laughing. "This probe can only sense ripples within its range of detection, it's not so accurate as to pinpoint how many supernaturals there are. What eight dots, are you seeing things?"

"And what do you know?!" Li Hao lost his temper. "This is the Night Watcher's latest supernatural probe! If I say there's eight, then there's eight! Stop laughing and joking, Qiao Peng, I've got my eye on you!"

Chapter 124: The Qiaos (III)

"Whatever you say then!"

The elevator stopped at the top floor. There were only two large offices here—Qiao Peng and his father's. Li Hao made a beeline for Qiao Senior's office.

"That's my father's office." Qiao Peng frowned. "He's in a meeting right now. Don't go too overboard, Li Hao..."

“Shut up!” the young man brayed with the arrogance of a small man intoxicated with success. He growled, “Qiao Peng, you and I originally had no grudge with each other, but you put a foot wrong when you harassed Sis Liu! I have nothing to say about her husband dying in your mines, but you set your sights on Sis Liu after killing her husband! We’ll see about that!”

Qiao Peng cursed inwardly again and frowned deeply. “You can’t go around saying stuff like that, Li Hao. Don’t you dirty me with that! It was an accident and the Inspectorate closed the books on it a long time ago!”

“Hmph!” Li Hao pushed open the door. An old man inside raised his head to look at his visitor, glancing questioningly at Qiao Peng.

The latter quickly stepped forward and whispered a few sentences. The elder rose to his feet with a chuckle.

“Hello, Commissioner Inspector Li! You have achieved so much in your youth! I am familiar with your teacher Professor Yuan. Who would’ve thought that I’d bump into the professor’s prized pupil here!”

“You are too kind!” Li Hao grunted and walked around with the probe, declining further pleasantries. Smiling benignly, the old man didn’t stop him. Waves of shock rose in the young man’s heart!

He didn’t detect anything outside, other than there were powerhouses at the Qiao Mining Industries. He’d realized that as soon as he set foot through the front doors. The supernatural was very bold as he stayed close to Qiao Peng. He was a Darkmoon and seemed to be a bit stronger than Wang Ming. He might be a Plenilune.

Even so, that wasn’t enough to push Li Hao into losing his composure. But now, he was having trouble keeping a straight face. Thankfully, he could mask it through grimacing as he walked around with the probe.

What he didn't detect and startled him so much was the elderly man in front of him, Qiao Peng's father! A legendary figure of Silver City's merchant scene, Qiao Feilong was more than seventy years old and built his commercial empire from scratch.

Li Hao was in perfect control even before he pushed open the door, but cold sweat soaked his back when he saw the other. A bright ball of light!

Indeed, a ball of light that couldn't be seen through the door. The young man was almost blinded when he opened the door.

Fucking hell!

The ball of light seemed slightly weaker than Divine Brokensky, but only just. A Solar? Or peak Sunflare?

Why hadn't he sensed anything outside? One had to know that this ball of light wasn't something that could be obstructed by matter. It was the seepage of energy that Li Hao could see through. But he hadn't seen anything earlier!

What did this mean?

It meant that the elder in front of him could completely conceal the ripples of his energy. It wasn't until Li Hao saw the man with his own eyes that he could see the manifestation of energy within the body. It was perfectly contained as well—a control and concealment of energy that'd reached the martial master level!

A martial master's energy stemmed from personal training, so it was normal and expected that it was inconspicuous. However, a supernatural's energy originated from outside sources. What was absorbed from other places could not be so perfectly concealed, unless it was obscured by an extremely potent supernatural item!

Qiao Feilong is a peak Sunflare or Solar powerhouse!

Incredible! Li Hao truly hadn't considered this possibility. He'd thought that Qiao Feilong was just reaping wealth through any means possible since Qiao Mining Industries was a Yama fringe organization. But it would seem the truth was not as simple as it was depicted. Would a peak Sunflare or even Solar be a simple tool for fleecing money? And he'd hidden himself so masterfully!

Li Hao continued waving the supernatural probe around while debating himself, shocked at his findings.

There's another Plenilune apart from Qiao Feilong. The three Starlight are their supernaturals on the surface, and this is just the headquarters. What about the other places?

The Qiaos were much stronger than they anticipated! Based on his previous speculations, it would already be out of the ordinary if they possessed a Darkmoon. That peak Plenilune might be their biggest trump card, but there was nothing he was afraid of because Yuan Shuo resided in Silver City.

"Are you done here, Commissioner Inspector Li?" Qiao Peng demanded impatiently. It would be too fake if he remained unmoved in the face of such provocation.

"What are you in a hurry for!" Li Hao huffed back and turned to Qiao Feilong. "President Qiao, I should not be this brazen as I am your junior, but I feel that such a legendary figure of Silver City might have been too busy with his business to oversee his children's education!"

"What makes you say that?" Qiao Feilong smiled warmly. "Please feel free to speak frankly, commissioner inspector."

"This Qiao Peng!" Li Hao jabbed his finger at his subject's nose. "He's got some nerve! Liu Yan is the team captain of the Night Watcher field mission team, a senior officer of the commissioner

inspector grade! This Qiao Peng acted frivolously toward her on multiple occasions in broad daylight!

“Is there any honor to be had in bullying a widow?! The Night Watcher branch has indeed just been established, but it would take absolutely no effort to ruin the Qiaos! With the rise of the supernatural and the indiscreet style of your vast family and business, I feel that it’s only a matter of time before this person brings disaster to your house!”

Qiao Feilong calmly inclined his head after a while. “You speak truly! Qiao Peng has indeed been a bit overly pampered. So this is the matter at hand. Rest easy, Commissioner Inspector Li, he will not pester Vice Captain Liu anymore!”

“Dad!” Qiao Peng complained loudly.

“You’re more than thirty years old, yet have no sense of propriety! The commissioner inspector is young, but his words make extreme sense! You do not focus on how to cross over after the rise of the supernatural, but instigate endless trouble with women day in and day out!” Qiao Feilong turned to Li Hao. “There will be no end to enmity if it is not settled amicably. Qiao Peng lacked decorum in his actions and Vice Captain Liu may not be willing to see me. Please tell her I apologize on my son’s behalf. Additionally, I offer her a small token of my sentiments...”

“Forget it, that’s not needed!” Li Hao waved the man off.

“Please make a decision after you hear me out.” Qiao Feilong smiled. “The Qiaos are a local corporation, after all. The establishment of a Night Watcher branch in Silver City is another layer of protection for us locals! I know a detail or two about Vice Captain Liu’s matter. Her husband died in an accident, but he was still a member of the Qiao Mining Industries. I feel quite apologetic for his undeserved death.

“I know Vice Captain Liu has been seeking to break through and make the crossover. We do not know much about this domain and are deeply regretful that we cannot help her in this regard! But we collected ten cubes of mysterious power from White Moon City recently. I was going to give them to Qiao Peng in pursuit of the supernatural, but now I worry he’ll cause greater trouble after

ascension due to his lack of restraint. Why don't I make a gift out of them and present it to the vice captain? Please treat it as a token of my sentiments!"

Li Hao wanted to refuse him outright, but stopped awkwardly and huffed, "Ten cubes? Isn't... isn't that too precious?"

"A life is more important than the heavens themselves!" sighed Qiao Feilong. "This will also help me sleep better at night. It's just what little I can do!"

"Well... Sis Liu might not want it..." Li Hao was conflicted.

"That's alright. If Vice Captain Liu doesn't want it... just throw them away!" Qiao Feilong sighed again. "The Qiaos can afford to gift or lose something like this. I only hope that the vice captain can be more at ease, in which I can look at myself in the mirror."

Li Hao's internal struggle was evident; Qiao Feilong gestured to his men. Someone quickly walked up with a box.

"This box is an energy storage box from the central region! It can hold mysterious power as ice crystals are embedded within its structure. All ten cubes are inside, but they're all of the fire attribute. I'm not sure if they suit Captain Liu."

Li Hao subconsciously accepted the box. It wasn't heavy, but he still tightly clenched his arms around it.

"Then... I accept?" Reluctance warred with struggle. "I'll... bring this back to you if Sis Liu doesn't want it?"

"That's alright, throw it away if she doesn't want it!"

Li Hao grimaced with reluctance and concluded with embarrassment, “Then... then I’ll take this... and throw it away if she doesn’t want it...”

“Whatever you wish!”

“My apologies for the disturbance and breach of etiquette, President Qiao is truly my idol!” Liu Yan immediately broke out into smiles. “There will be many areas in which I’ll have to rely on the president as I carry out my duties in Silver City. As long as Qiao Peng no longer harasses Sis Liu, I will not make things difficult for the Qiaos. I hadn’t wanted to in the first place, but Qiao Peng was simply too out of line!”

Qiao Peng couldn’t stop cursing to himself. How was I out of line? You little bastard, you care for nothing but money! Look at all the excuses you’ve made for a woman! Now that you’ve received our token, you still act like I’m the one who stirred up trouble first. Holy fuck this sucks!

The young man was a deft hand at bureaucracy at a young age. As expected of a student from the Veteris Institute! Li Hao had a trove of slick responses that he could quickly trot out for any occasion.

Qiao Feilong murmured his agreement with a smile.

“Um... I do still have to make a round of the mines,” Li Hao continued awkwardly. “But rest assured, President Qiao, it’s just a formality. Qiao Peng will be with me, I’ll just take a look from the outside. I must carry out my orders to the letter! We can leave the supernatural probe, I’m sure that there will be no trouble.”

“But of course!” Qiao Feilong smiled. “Commissioner Inspector Li is a fine person. Please visit whenever you have time, you are always welcome!”

“Then I thank you for your hospitality!” Li Hao merrily walked toward the door. “Qiao Peng, you should learn more from your father. I’ll be waiting downstairs. Don’t lecture him too harshly, sir.”

“Hahaha, I hear you. I’ll give him a good talking to!” Qiao Feilong laughed heartily. His smile didn’t drop until the elevator doors closed on Li Hao and the Night Watcher started his descent. He furrowed his brow at his son. “You should keep your act to an appropriate level! You know that Li Hao has intentions toward Liu Yan, but you insist on getting involved! Isn’t that blatantly giving offense? Go on, accompany him to the mines, but remember not to let him walk around. The same goes for you too!”

“Understood!”

“Go on, then!”

#### Chapter 125: The Qiaos (IV)

Qiao Peng swiftly headed outside without further word. Qiao Feilong mulled over the situation after his son left and addressed a corner of his office.

“Did you sense anything special?”

“No, he’s very ordinary, but he looks to have absorbed mysterious power. I can sense that his physique is quite decent and his skin’s tenacity is very good. He might be a Slayer of Tens.”

“That is to be expected!” Qiao Feilong dismissed the assessment. “He’s Yuan Shuo’s student and has absorbed mysterious power. With the New Book of Five Styles in hand and supposedly wielding its breathing method as well, setting foot into Slayer of Tens is only a matter of time!”

“Then does the boss think...” the person in the shadows lowered his voice. “Is there anything special about his blood?”

“It may not be as simple as just his blood. The so-called bloodline may need to be distilled from the blood. Mere blood flow will not do!” Qiao Feilong waved the conversation to a close. “Alright, let’s set this aside for now. Do not incite trouble as the city is unstable at the moment. Wait for the right moment to act!”

“Understood.”

The discussion was over.

.....

At the same time.

Wreathed in smiles, Li Hao reached the first floor still reeling from shock. Was Qiao Feilong a Solar? Could his teacher kill a Solar now without the sword's help? Would they reap large amounts of mysterious power if they killed this Solar? What kind of supernatural was the corporation president?

Scattered thoughts ran through his mind. To think that this old guy would hide himself so deeply!

He must carry a treasure on him!

Qiao Feilong wouldn't conceal his energy ripples so perfectly otherwise. There was nothing to sense and in fact, it appeared that he held them completely within his body.

Got us a big one!

This was definitely a large catch, one that was staying put in Silver City. Logically speaking, even Heaven Favored found it difficult to break through if they didn't do battle or see the rest of the world. Yuan Shuo had commenced his fair share of wandering when he was young, which enabled his eventual breakthrough to Dominator.

No one could absorb mysterious power and passively make their way to Sunflare or Solar.

Can it be that... they've taken something from my ancestral tomb? The possibility suddenly occurred to Li Hao, alongside deep anguish. Bastards! The guy must've dug into and robbed my ancestors' graves! That's how he's able to ascend in Silver City and become peak Sunflare or even a Solar. Damn it, he stole from me!

It was highly likely and a given that something was afoot at the Qiao mines. What a pity that they could not afford to alert the enemy at this time! But the trip had not been made in vain. He'd discovered Qiao Feilong's strength and obtained ten cubes of mysterious power. The latter was an unexpected gain, but these two together were enough.

"Li Hao!" Wang Ming glanced at his colleague and took note of the box in his hand. "An energy storage box?"

"You recognize it?"

"Of course!" Wang Ming furrowed his brows. "You accepted more presents?"

It was one thing to take small gifts, but this was mysterious power! He'd already forgotten how he derided Li Hao for his small worldview. One should either not accept gifts, or take only dozens or one hundred cubes of mysterious power!

"It's not for me, it's for Sis Liu," Li Hao muttered. "She lacks this and it's her compensation. You don't understand, this is blood money!"

"You're making the decision on Liu Yan's behalf?" Wang Ming was startled that the young man dared accept this.

Li Hao leered. "It's fine! It's our loss if we don't take it!"

Will Sis Liu want it?

Not under normal circumstances, but Li Hao felt that Sis Liu would want it if he put in a few words. Using the enemy's gift to strengthen oneself and then kill the enemy in return... Why not accept something like this!

Well well, their relationship really extends beyond the norm! Wang Ming sniffed. Li Hao appeared to be an honest boy—he really kept his tendencies well under wraps.

They needed to carry out their duties well after accepting a present. The group quickly arrived at the mines outside the city. Li Hao didn't even walk inside. He took a look from the entrance and quickly left in merry delight. He seemed to be in a hurry to return to headquarters—well, of course as he carried a box of mysterious power. He didn't set it down once.

Qiao Peng suddenly spat on the ground when Li Hao and Wang Ming disappeared from view.

“Eyes of a rat that can only see an inch of light!” he cursed at Li Hao. The kid had been so upright and righteous before, but look at him after receiving a gift! He was worried about dirtying his shoes at the mine inspection and decided on taking a look from the outside before running off.

“The Night Watchers are blind to let this guy be the deputy director!” he spat. But this was just as well, it would save him a lot of effort.

.....

At the same time.

In the car.

Li Hao's smile slowly withered and he looked at Wang Ming. “Ole Wang, are Sunflare real powerhouses?”

“No shit!” Wang Ming rolled his eyes. “Do you know how many Night Watcher Sunflares there are in all of Silver Moon? Sunflare is the equivalent of Dominator—one against a thousand! Which one of them isn’t a heavyweight?”

Li Hao nodded silently. Really? Well, fuck! I saw three balls of light in the depths of the mines! If Qiao Feilong is thrown into the mix, then there might be one Solar and three Sunflares at Qiao Mining! And you say that Sunflares are apex powerhouses that are rarely seen? Who are you kidding??

I’ve only been at it for a few days and have seen a ton of Solars! Hao Lianchuan, Brokensky, and now possibly Qiao Feilong! There’s the Sunflare that died last time, Huang Yun, and the one hidden in the shadows of the Qiao office... That makes for three Sunflares!

The Qiaos!

A reeling Li Hao once more questioned if the Qiaos were just a money-making machine in the mundane world for Yama.

Hells no!

If Yama was that powerful, then Red Moon and the Night Watchers paled far in comparison. Who would assign so many powerhouses to a mundane fringe group designed to fund the organization?

It must be something from the eight families that’s propelled them forward. It’s got to be! One hundred percent!

Li Hao was certain that there was much more behind the Qiao curtain. They must’ve discovered something and possibly stashed it away for their own use. They wouldn’t be so powerful otherwise. Wasn’t that belittling the Night Watchers, to produce so many powerhouses in a family corporation from a fringe city like Silver City?

If Wang Ming said Sunflares were powerhouses, then they were powerhouses. It just pained Li Hao that the Qiaos was making use of some treasures. Had they emptied the ruins? Liu Yan's husband had been dead for many years. With these years of excavation, perhaps they really had made off with plenty of loot.

The Qiaos bide their time and there's no movement from Yama—I haven't heard of any major disturbance in Silver City. Are the two in cahoots or not? Or are the Qiaos conducting some secret operations behind Yama's back?

He nursed some suspicions—there should be more than Qiao Feilong on the scene. There might be other Solars from Yama, waiting in the shadows to reap their harvest. They would at least place checks on each other!

I need to go to teacher! Li Hao was both frightened and excited. Perhaps they'd make out like bandits this time, if they didn't die in the attempt.

Off to the side, Wang Ming looked strangely at his counterpart. Just look at his expression change! What, was he a chameleon? Was he this excited to receive mysterious power? Was there a lot in that box?

Impulses stirred in Wang Ming, but he quickly dismissed the notion. I'm not Li Hao. This guy's vision for the future is so meager that he accepts bribes! I'm going to report him one day!

Of course, if he was given some... Bah! I, Wang Ming, will never share his loot!

Wang Ming stomped on the accelerator as various thoughts ran through his head.

.....

Veteris Institute of Silver City.

It hadn't been long since Li Hao's departure, but he hadn't visited Yuan Shuo last time; he'd gone directly to the principal's building. This time, he set course for his teacher's residence.

Wang Ming wasn't with him out of a decreased desire to run around. He waited outside with the car; Li Hao let him be.

.....

Inside the yard.

Yuan Shuo was facing off against a dog. He found it fun to educate Panther on a daily basis. Li Hao didn't know where a screw had gotten loose in his teacher's mind. He'd matched wits and valor with the dog for almost half a month!

"Teacher!" Li Hao waved a greeting. Panther howled and barrelled out, rearing up on Li Hao's thigh.

"Aouuuu! Arf arf! Meow meow!"

Li Hao blinked. What were those cries?

"Panth, what are you imitating a cat for?"

"Aouuu, aouuuu," Panther answered frantically. It didn't want to either, but that terrifying old man said that he might not be a dog, that he might be a mixed breed and could possibly climb a tree like a cat, bite like a wolf, and plow the fields like a cow...

Panther wallowed in an abyss of misery! This was too painful, so when it finally saw Li Hao, it itched to immediately run off with the young man. It didn't want to spend a single second more with the old human!

"You're here, eh?" Yuan Shuo looked much younger together. He casually wiped off his hands, ignoring the dog. "Don't randomly run around on errands when you've got free time. You should take advantage of the opening to practice martial techniques. That Little Wang you work with is here too, right?"

"Correct, we're here on official business and didn't want to disturb teacher."

"It's fine." Yuan Shuo didn't mind and didn't ask why Wang Ming wasn't present. It was normal, the kid was too embarrassed to come.

"This dog is quite nice!" the professor chuckled. However, Panther was so frightened it nearly shook.

"Did you hit it, teacher?" Li Hao asked helplessly.

"Hit it?" Yuan Shuo grinned. "How would I? I'm an academic sort and rarely punish humans or dogs. Tell me, have I ever punished you?"

"That's... true. You haven't." Li Hao found it odd. What was Panther afraid of if it wasn't being beaten?

Chapter 126: Teacher and Disciple Plot Again (I)

"Arf arf arf!" Panther immediately barked.

“So the dog is telling on me, hmm?” Yuan Shuo chuckled. “I haven’t beaten it, really. I just used blade energy to stimulate it a few times and then mysterious power. I gotta tell you, this dog has a really great constitution!”

Li Hao suddenly understood and didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. This was worse than being beaten! He was all too familiar with the impact of mysterious power and blade energy. Without the sword to neutralize the two... it was such a... bone-deep sensation. It would be a marvelously pleasant feeling if the sword was on hand to neutralize them, but without... he could easily imagine the desperate straits that Panther found itself in.

Of course, it was pain intermixed with happiness.

“You should treasure what teacher is giving you.” Li Hao patted the little black dog’s head. “These treasures can’t be bought for any sum of money! You should understand their value if you want to be a mighty dog spirit. So many people died last time because they wanted these things!”

Tears welled up in Panther’s eyes. This dog knows. But... you don’t know that this pervert takes turns using these energies on me! He says he wants to test where my limits are. These days have been worse than death!

Li Hao ignored Panth. This was an incredible opportunity! His teacher couldn’t be bothered with ordinary people, the dog was failing to appreciate what happiness really was!

With that, he bucked the pleading dog off his leg. It was hanging on so tightly that its sharp claws were digging into his skin.

“Teacher, I’m here for a reason.”

“You wouldn’t be without one.” Yuan Shuo was too familiar with Li Hao and couldn’t be bothered with saying more. He busied himself with his own affairs inside the house; there was nothing the young man could do but follow behind. The professor wanted to be the first to speak. “We’re going to the ruins at the end of August!”

“Me too?” asked Li Hao.

“I don’t know and can’t make a decision!” Yuan Shuo replied uncertainly after some thought. “The ruins are both danger and opportunity. The one I discovered might have something to do with the eight families, but they also might not!”

The eight families again! Li Hao furrowed his brows.

“Teacher, the eight families are rooted in Silver City. Are there any of their historical remains around the city? You’re an expert in this field, have you discovered any signs or clues over the years?”

“Silver City...” Yuan Shuo poured a cup of tea for himself and walked back out. “I’ve scanned the city—its feng shui is ordinary. This doesn’t speak to a grand burial, but the ruins may not be a tomb. It could be a sunken ancient city sealed beneath the ground, but few items speaking to this have appeared in Silver City. I’ve investigated them all and didn’t find any traces.”

He was an expert!

Li Hao frowned, not even his teacher had uncovered anything?

“Teacher, there might really be some in Silver City!”

“Oh?” Yuan Shuo paused solemnly. “It would be... normal for there to be some. The legends of the eight families start from Silver City and I spent the past couple of days deducing that if any exist, they’ll be located in the directions of the eight trigrams!

“They won’t be regular ruins either, and they might be sealed. People will easily die there!” He looked at Li Hao. “Have you found one?”

“Wait a moment, teacher...” Li Hao entered the house to take out pen and paper. He swiftly sketched an outline of Silver City—it resembled an eight trigram!

He hadn’t paid much attention to it before because many cities were laid out in this manner. The eight trigram diagram wasn’t very special. One could even view it as a circle.

But when Li Hao saw the diagram in the sky... he couldn’t unsee it. It might require blue rain for him to see it with his eyes once more. Thus far, he’d only seen it when the scarlet shadow entered his body and his blood frothed. While he’d absorbed scarlet shadows after that, the diagram didn’t show itself again. Regardless, he committed everything to memory and swiftly sketched the diagram.

It was both a map of Silver City and an eight trigram diagram. He drew a dot of red in a particular zone.

“Dead north.” Yuan Shuo raised a brow when he took a look. “The li position of the eight trigrams. Li corresponds to fire and this is situated in the outskirts of Silver City. There should... be a mine here. I believe it belongs to Qiao Mining Industries?”

The li position of fire! Li Hao suddenly recalled how Qiao Feilong had given him fire mysterious power. Perhaps it was a coincidence, but he did indeed subconsciously think of this.

“Are there ruins there?” the young man asked.

Yuan Shuo looked strangely at his student and answered before Li Hao could explain himself, “I’ve been to this place before and didn’t discover anything. There are no clues to any ruins. I only went because the Qiaos invited me after it caved in, hoping that I could identify a new mine for them...”

As a professor of ancient studies, he was also one of feng shui and tomb raiding—ahem, prospecting. It was quite normal for someone to request his skills in reopening a mine.

“This is it!” Li Hao said firmly. “I don’t know what the specifics are, but I’m not guessing randomly. Teacher, do you know the background of Silver City’s Qiao Mining Industries?”

“The Qiaos... Qiao Feilong...” Yuan Shuo rummaged through his memories. “Qiao Feilong is a Silver City native and left home at a young age to seek his fortunes elsewhere. He returned to Silver City when he was forty, having built quite a commercial empire.

“He founded Qiao Mining Industries after that. It’s been about thirty years.”

Not twenty, but thirty marked his return to Silver City. Thus, while most would think of Red Moon’s preparations a dozen years ago, few would connect a corporation of thirty years to the eight families. This held true even when the uniqueness of the eight families started becoming more widely known.

Did this guy come in contact with Yama later on, or did Yama start laying its plans thirty years ago? Li Hao wavered between the two possibilities. The supernatural domain hadn’t even manifested then!

“Qiao Feilong used to practice martial dao, but didn’t attain high accomplishments with it. He stopped training after reaching Slayer of Tens, and he only set foot into this level to be able to protect himself. Once Qiao Mining expanded in scope and he had sufficient funds to hire martial masters for bodyguards, he no longer walked the path of martial dao.

“He is secretly a vicious and cruel person. There’s been no end of unsavory matters conducted in secret for his corporation to reach its current heights. Conflicts are common in the mining industry and there was no lack of underhanded mines back in the day. He took over them all!”

Yuan Shuo pointed at where Li Hao had dotted the map. “There used to be a lot of secret mines here before Qiao Mining moved in. Not long after that, the other mine owners started dying or became crippled. Some voluntarily sold their mines to him at a low price. Silver City turned a blind eye to all of this as none of these mine owners were anything good. It was a den of snakes turning on each other!

“Of course, Qiao Feilong is a significant entrepreneur and philanthropist on the surface. He’s donated a lot to both Silver City and the Veteris Institute. There’s a Feilong Lab building at the Institute that was built with his donations.”

Li Hao nodded—he’d had classes in that building once, but forgot that it came from Qiao Feilong’s donation.

Yuan Shuo looked at his student when he was finished, awaiting information. The Qiaos were plainly involved since the young man had suddenly mentioned the family. Were there ruins in the Qiao mines?

“Teacher, you’ve met Qiao Feilong.” Li Hao smiled. “Do you think he’s a supernatural?”

“Yes!” Yuan Shuo responded indifferently. “He is.”

“You know?” The young man started.

“Nope.” Yuan Shuo remained just as composed, then burst out laughing. “If I say no after you’ve said all this, am I the fool or are you?”

He’d realized as soon as his student asked him. Li Hao looked on wordlessly.

“So he’s a supernatural?” Yuan Shuo frowned. “To be honest, I just saw him. He’s either so weak that I can’t sense it, or so strong that I can’t sense it!”

Those were the only two possibilities!

“Someone who can hide themselves from me and earns a special visit from you... Can he be a premier powerhouse? Sunflare? Solar?”

Darkmoon didn't count as a powerhouse!

"If it's related to the ruins, then can it be that there's a ruin of the eight families inside the mines? That's how he soundlessly became a powerhouse, because he discovered some treasures from it? And he's been flying under the radar because he's plotting something?"

"So Silver City does indeed have ruins... and I didn't discover them. What a pity. I might've become a Sunderer long ago if I had," Yuan Shuo sighed, completely ignoring his student's desire to talk.

"A Solar, is it?" he murmured. "If Qiao Feilong is a Solar, he won't be in charge of excavating the ruins. He must have helpers. Does he have Sunflare working for him?"

The professor stroked his beardless chin. "He'd be worried about his man running off with the goods if there was only one, so there must be at least two?"

Two Sunflares could keep each other in check!

Trust was a limited commodity for someone like Qiao Feilong. He wouldn't trust anyone without reservation. Being a successful businessman, he possessed sufficient resources and money to nurture a flock of supernaturals.

"Silver City is a small place, but it's really not a peaceful locale!" Yuan Shuo sighed with emotion. "Little Hao, I'd say stay away from them if you don't care about the ancestral tombs of the eight families or your ancestral land. They're not people to run afoul of!"

Li Hao tilted his head wordlessly. I haven't said anything, but teacher's already determined everything and that they have more than one powerhouse. The elderly are more wise and experienced alright!

“Teacher, there’s one Qiao Feilong who might be a Solar, three definite Sunflares, and one Plenilune...”

“Damn!” Yuan Shuo sucked in a sharp breath. “They’re really not people to offend! Little Hao, a rack of old bones like me can’t suffer through something like this!” With that, he looked at the young man. “You want to take the ruins back, don’t you?”

#### Chapter 127: Teacher and Disciple Plot Again (II)

“I’m, I’m just thinking about it...” Li Hao said sheepishly.

“That’s normal, you’re the only heir left of the eight families, after all. Technically speaking, all of their ruins belong to you. What’s yours is mine, so this means that Qiao Feilong is occupying our stuff, isn’t he!”

Li Hao quickly bobbed his head.

“Also, the ruins of the eight families might require your weapons or bloodlines to open,” Yuan Shuo continued. “Even if he’s accessed it, he’s just cracked it open at most. There’s no way he’s thrown the doors wide open! Therefore, he certainly has designs on you. Does this mean we have a new enemy?”

Li Hao nodded again. Everything his teacher said was right.

“He who strikes first, prevails. He who strikes late, fails!” Yuan Shuo arched a brow. “We either don’t take any action, or we hit them where it hurts and go for the kill!”

“But they’re a Yama pawn...”

Yuan Shuo brusquely interrupted his student before the young man finished. “Not to worry, he must be keeping this from Yama! I know people like Qiao Feilong all too well! Whatever he’s found will be completely taken away if he tells Yama, so he’ll never tell them!

“All we need to do is tear out the weeds by the roots—kill Qiao Feilong, kill all of his men, kill his son, and kill everyone who excavated the ruins for him. That way, Yama won’t know that they really found any ruins, even if they have an inkling of the truth.”

Li Hao opened and shut his mouth. He only held his suspicions, but his teacher spoke with surety, as if he was very familiar with Qiao Feilong!

“Stop gaping, this is normal and expected!” Yuan Shuo suddenly grinned. “I’m like this as well, I’ve just been compelled otherwise by circumstances. Do you think I’m a minion for the Night Watchers by choice? Their tool to explore ruins with? I have no choice! I’d take it all for myself if I could!”

He truly wasn’t a kind soul, only Li Hao found him a good person. This was what Yuan Shuo would do if he was Qiao Feilong. Such was the personality of the old guard of martial masters. Arrogant, unyielding, selfish, and greedy.

The professor possessed all of these traits; he’d just cultivated his moral character and behaved ethically over the years. Death stared at him in the face then and the way forward was severed. It was when he lost all hope that he accepted Li Hao and crafted the image of a benevolent teacher.

The truth of the matter was, Yuan Shuo was Old Demon Yuan. As someone from the same line of thinking, how would he not understand Qiao Feilong? Thus, he called for complete extermination of anyone related to Qiao Senior as soon as he formed the idea!

Not only that, but Yuan Shuo further narrowed his eyes. “We need to massacre them and we need to do so without fanfare. We can’t let too many people know that Qiao Feilong is a powerhouse! He can be a Darkmoon, but he can’t be a Sunflare or Solar! That will make people wonder why he stayed in Silver City for so many years.

“It’s fine if he’s a Darkmoon. A rich Yama tool for fleecing sheep—what’s noteworthy of him being a Darkmoon? The only thing he can’t be is a Sunflare or Solar, understood?”

“Teacher, do you mean...” Li Hao couldn’t quite keep up with his teacher’s pace. “That you’re going to go after him right now?”

That was precisely Yuan Shuo’s intention. No hesitation! He started plotting how to do away with all possible witnesses as soon as Li Hao finished talking. This efficiency, this decisiveness, this ruthlessness... No wonder he was Old Demon Yuan!

“Indecision inevitably leads to trouble!” Yuan Shuo snorted. “We know he’s the enemy, so we must pull him up by the roots! I showed mercy back in the day and didn’t kill Ying Hongyue. I let him live and it forced me to hide for the next twenty years instead. Don’t follow my lead!”

Either they did nothing at all, or they did their worst!

Yuan Shuo looked in the direction of Qiao Mining’s headquarters, falling silent for a brief moment.

“I can utilize my killing move again and take out Qiao Feilong, but those three Sunflares... won’t be easy to handle! I can’t take them on myself and we need to act fast. Are they at the mines?”

“Yes!”

“Then we need to split up!” Yuan Shuo intoned. “I’ll go for Qiao Feilong. We need to find another for the three Sunflares. There are also other supernaturals to consider, as well as his son. We need to encompass all of them! This isn’t something that one or two people can handle.

“We either stay put, or we take them all out at once in quick battle so no one gets away. Silver City only seems peaceful and quiet on the surface. Who knows how many pairs of eyes are watching us from the shadows?

“We better make sure that not a word of this gets out, or people might suspect the mines as soon as Qiao Feilong dies. Or we kill them with the excuse that they’re communicating with Red Moon! If that, then we can borrow the Night Watchers to seize Qiao Mining by legal authority!”

Li Hao scratched his head and ran through the possibilities. “Does our branch stand a chance against a Sunflare if all of us attack at the same time?”

“Pretty much!”

And that was it. Joint action from Liu Long’s old team and Wang Ming’s new fellows might be barely enough for a Sunflare. It was apparent from this just how strong this level of supernatural was.

The enemy possessed three Sunflares, more supernaturals, and also martial masters! They also had a security team in the mines. While that was mostly comprised of mundanes, they were vicious, heartless people that carried hot weapons.

Hot weapons were permitted as Qiao Mining held the appropriate gun permits and also operated a security company under their umbrella.

“Then let’s pretend we don’t know anything.” Li Hao’s head was starting to ache. “There’s nothing we can do to them in the short run. In fact, it’s more likely that we make a big mistake instead. Whether if some get away, this turns into a big deal, or it turns into a big deal after they’re all dead, or if we do kill them all... None of those outcomes are what I want to see.”

The young man leaned toward quietly eliminating his opponents and collecting the benefits with none the wiser. He didn’t want situations to turn into entanglements that everyone was aware of. It didn’t matter how precious the treasure was if everyone knew about it. He didn’t want to be hunted throughout the world!

Look at the chaos that’d engulfed the central region for the sake of one precious treasure. Solars and above were fighting for it! Li Hao didn’t want to be the next target!

“We can’t wait!” Yuan Shuo refuted solemnly. “You can, they won’t! Qiao Feilong is no fool. He knows that Silver City has become a target of note after a Red Moon Solar died here. The only reason why no powerhouses have come is because they’re all preoccupied in the central region!

“But once war slightly abates there, we’ll see heavyweights rush here. Therefore, he’s playing for time. He must be looking for an opportunity to fully open the ruins or kill you for the sword or bloodline...”

“He doesn’t know I still have the sword.”

“Then he wants your blood!” Yuan Shuo concluded dismissively. “Do you think he only wants the sword? His goal isn’t necessarily the same as Red Moon’s. What they want might have to do with the trigram in the sky, but Qiao Feilong cares more about the here and now. Thus, he’ll want to open the ruins with your blood more.”

Li Hao nodded, this was very true. Qiao Feilong might not care about the eight trigrams, and he still might not after learning about them. With Red Moon attention in the area, he probably wanted to wring all he could out of this opportunity once and for all.

“So this means that he isn’t willing to wait even if I am?” Li Hao sighed with resignation. “I met him today—he was quite enthusiastic and polite. Or was that because he thinks I’m a dead man walking?”

“Pretty much.” Yuan Shuo smiled. “Not bad, you. Did you let anything slip when you met him? Did you pee your pants when you read his strength?”

“How could I!” Li Hao grinned as well. “Could I lose face for my teacher like that? Who the hell is Qiao Feilong? My teacher’s killed Solars! Teacher will kill him all the same if he’s one!”

He hadn’t peed his pants, but it’d been a close call.

“Enough of that empty talk, there’s no point to it.” Yuan Shuo frowned. “We should think about how to handle this trouble. It’s going to be quite difficult to eliminate them all with minimum fuss.”

“The Night Watchers?” Li Hao asked lowly.

“Don’t even think about it!” Yuan Shuo shook his head. “Not unless their Solars come! It would take either Hao Lianchuan or Hou Xiaochen... or both of them to ensure the operation is carried out with none the wiser. Hou Xiaochen doesn’t leave White Moon and Hao Lianchuan...”

The professor frowned when he reached this point. “Don’t trust them too much, who knows if they have other plans in mind? I’m not too familiar with Hao Lianchuan. We know of each other, but differences in opinion easily crop up when secrets are at stake. He has a strong backer behind him—the Night Watchers!”

Those with a substantial backer did not make for easy partners. There was nothing Yuan Shuo and his student could do against the agency if Hao Lianchuan decided to renege on their agreement or break off partnership ties.

“Ai!”

“Ai!” Teacher and disciple sighed in unison. Yuan Shuo looked at Li Hao, Li Hao looked at Yuan Shuo. Both wore gloomy expressions. They were in a pickle!

“Teacher, don’t you have a few good friends after your years in the martial world?” Li Hao asked with such an expression of exasperated disappointment that Yuan Shuo’s eyebrows quivered. “The Sunderers of your era would be Sunflares if they made the crossover at the beginning. After so many years, they might even be Solars. Are all of your old friends dead?”

“Nope, Ying Hongyue’s still alive.” Yuan Shuo’s simple response stoppered the rest of the young man’s words.

Let's just pretend I didn't say anything!

Ying Hongyue might be stronger than Solar—more than likely. He was one of the leaders of the three great organizations. His teacher really knew how to choose his friends.

“Of course I still have a few old friends...” Yuan Shuo chuckled, then quickly shook his head. “But it's because we're old friends that I don't want to use profit and gain to test our relationship. It's normal for brothers to turn on each other if division of spoils is uneven, not to mention friends. To put it bluntly, old friends can endure life and death together, but rarely can they share wealth!”

He had friends, and some rather strong ones. But he didn't want to use this to test their bonds. It would be fine if it was just an ordinary ruin, but this one involved the eight great families and Li Hao. His student was at the heart of the excavation, and slaughtering him might be required to access the ruin. Then... his friends were not the ones to call upon.

#### Chapter 128: Teacher and Disciple Plot Again (III)

What if accessing the ruins required Li Hao's blood, and not just a small bloodletting? Yuan Shuo could resist the urge to kill his student, but his old friends?

What was a dead Li Hao worth to them??

Some things didn't require further explanation to the young man. His old friends might not commit such actions, but Yuan Shuo still had to be on his guard.

Teacher and disciple sighed again!

“If we have no other option, we can go to Hao Lianchuan!” Yuan Shuo suddenly said after a long while.

Li Hao blinked. Hadn't they just said they wouldn't go to the Night Watchers?

“This is the backup of backup plans. The Night Watchers are a legitimate organization of the government so they need to follow their own processes. They won’t seek to kill you straight off the bat. They’ll at least discuss the situation and see if they can offer some sort of payment. They’re a bit pedantic!” Yuan Shuo laughed at them for being fussy, then self-deprecated in the next breath. “It’s because of this obsession with detail that you can look to them if you really run into trouble. They’re the best out of a pool of mediocrity! The Night Watchers are more reliable than others when it really comes down to it.”

That was the key—they had no other options!

“As opposed to creating a full blown mess and attracting the attention of Yama and the other great organizations, we might as well pay a price and have the Night Watchers take action!” Yuan Shuo determined. “Even if they take the ruin in the end, they won’t kill you to open it. They’ll at least think of a way...”

“So my death is necessary?” Li Hao scratched his head.

“It’s hard to say,” Yuan Shuo laughed. “Of Course it’s best if you don’t have to die. The Night Watchers probably won’t do anything to you if they claim it. Think about it, kid. Do you want the Night Watchers to help, or shall we risk it ourselves?”

A dangerous look glinted in his eyes. “I can try ambushing Qiao Feilong. If I’m successful, I’ll have enough strength left to deal with those Sunflares at the mines and the rest of the superhumans...”

That was exceedingly risky! Li Hao didn’t need to think further before shaking his head. “Then we might as well ask the Night Watchers for help.... Right, teacher, can I... can I give some sword energy to Captain Liu? Maybe he’ll be able to break through to Dominator?”

What if Liu Long also became a Dominator? That would place him on par with some Sunflares, or even make him stronger. Martial masters were hard pressed to triumph over their supernatural counterparts when they were below Sunderer of Hundreds. But once they reached this level and commanded the consciousness, it was Sunflares who often fell short.

“He doesn’t know the aura yet!” Yuan Shuo frowned. “If he does and you share the sword energy with him, he might stand a chance of breaking through before it’s exhausted. The key thing is, the guy hasn’t grasped enough aura!”

Liu Long was more reliable than Hao Lianchuan, relatively speaking. Sadly, he was weaker.

A pensive expression crossed Li Hao’s face. “Aura... I wonder if the chief understood anything after I spoke to him. Things will be much easier if he can sense the aura, absorb sword energy, and rise to Dominator!” The young man heaved a sigh. “Teacher, I’ll probe the chief’s intentions. If the circumstances still aren’t guaranteed after the chief breaks through, we can grab Director Hao.

“Regardless, we can expose some of our aces if it means we can eliminate the Qiaos. We can give up the ruins if it comes to that!”

Li Hao held quite an open mind about treasure and loot. It wasn’t his style to pursue wealth at the cost of his own life. The Qiaos very likely had their eye on him. His identity as the heir to the eight families had been exposed after the rains. Perhaps only Red Moon had certain methods to lock onto him prior to that; the Qiaos hadn’t known anything.

Yuan Shuo nodded. “Little Hao, outsiders are outsiders in the end. Do not let anything impede your cultivation! I’m trading for mysterious power of the five elements. When I collect them all, you must focus on training and break through as fast as possible!”

Li Hao’s rate of improvement was speedy and he would soon set foot into Sunderer of Hundreds. But overall, his development lagged behind others by a few years. The earliest supernaturals had been training for twenty. It was very difficult for the young man to catch up. Yuan Shuo and Li Hao needed to employ all methods available to facilitate breakthroughs at the fastest possible rate. Only then would the young man find his footing in this increasingly turbulent world.

“Don’t worry, teacher.” Li Hao smiled. “I’ve been absorbing the scarlet shadow’s power over the past couple of days and have improved some. I can now project my internal force without having to rely on Twice Forged! I can do so through all four limbs, my hands, and I’m still improving!”

He'd neither slacked off nor delayed his cultivation despite recent events. Initial Sunderer was to project one's internal force through the four limbs. He'd already extended that to his two hands, thanks to the scarlet shadow.

However, he'd pretty much consumed that energy. If Li Hao wished to continue improving rapidly, he needed more resources and treasures. Who knew how long it'd take for his teacher to trade for mysterious power?

"Both hands and arms?" Yuan Shuo clucked his tongue. That was fast! Although the lad looked to be initial Sunderer, and not even peak initial, he could already freely project his internal force. It'd only been a few days! The kid might be able to evenly project from all four limbs in half a month if there was sufficient scarlet shadow energy!

"So long as you haven't stepped off the gas pedal!" Yuan Shuo nodded. "You can practice the Nine Forged Force more before you make further significant improvements. You're only Thrice Forged currently, aren't you?"

"Yep."

"Trash!" the professor cursed. "That dog of yours can manage Thrice Forged! Sunderers need to start at four times!"

Li Hao had nothing to say. Teacher, you sound like you're insulting me and calling me the dog.

Panther suddenly raised its paw at Li Hao when it heard the old human mention its name. Whether it was to brag or to demonstrate its abilities, it clawed three layers of force in the air! Not only that, but even a fourth shimmered on the edge of existence.

The young man started. The hell?! Almost four times??

"Teacher, is Panther peak Slayer?"

Slayer of Tens could at most support three layers, it would take a Sunderer of Hundreds to employ more. Was the dog... growing stronger?

“Pretty much!” Yuan Shuo nodded happily. “I think this dog is almost a Sunderer! But its rate of improvement will slow down after it enters that level. You idiot, you gave it the first brew! The sword’s first instance of energy must be the best after being sealed for so many years. It might even have had some special properties, but you gave it all to the dog!”

The professor couldn’t help cursing as the jade sword’s energy must have been highly potent when it was first released. Sadly, Panther claimed all of it and Li Hao only downed the second brewing.

“It’s different, teacher!” The young man was in good spirits. “I wouldn’t have realized any of this if it wasn’t for Panth’s discovery! Perhaps I still wouldn’t understand the uniqueness of the sword. Teacher would still be a Sunderer, I would still be mundane. We might both already be dead to Red Moon’s attack.”

Li Hao would never plumb the sword’s secrets without Panther. Yuan Shuo also wouldn’t teach him the Breathing Method of the Five Styles as it would be a complete waste on someone not a Slayer. If that was the case, the professor wouldn’t make it to Dominator either...

Every bite and every sip was preordained. Seen through this lens, who was the one who’d benefitted handsomely?

Panther proudly raised its head, as if showing off that it was the one that’d discovered the unique properties of Stellaris. Hurry up and praise this dog!

Li Hao grinned and aped a kick. “Hurry up and become a Sunderer! A Slayer isn’t good for anything. I was looking forward to you helping me, but you’re of no use whatsoever.”

“Aouuu!” The little black dog’s head drooped. It was very strong, but Li Hao’s enemies were becoming stronger and stronger. There was nothing it could do.

Li Hao left quickly after exchanging a few more words with his teacher and confirming that they would make the first move. Time to chat with the chief! Hopefully he could use the excuse of the Qiaos colluding with Yama to quietly uproot the family without anyone catching on. As for whether or not the Qiaos had plans against him... who cares!

The young man didn't think too much. Concealed supernaturals hidden from the public record... Qiao Feilong wasn't a good guy at all. He could die!

.....

Yuan Shuo's smile faded away after his student left, replaced by a heavy sigh.

Oh my word! I'm a Dominator and can fight Solars, but the kid's attracting bigger and bigger fish. I can't improve much in Silver City anymore, it looks like I have to go to the central region.

Martial masters would eventually disappear into the crowd if they didn't evolve through battle. He'd been able to rise to Dominator because he'd swept the four lands as a Sunderer and battled countless opponents.

But now, his foundations were empty.

"Silver City is not a place to stay for long... Even in the battle to come, the strongest there will only be a Solar..."

Those above Solar!

Yuan Shuo craved to witness this level. Not only that, he wished to visit the central region and visit other martial masters. He was first in the Silver Moon martial dao domain, but that didn't mean there weren't formidable martial masters elsewhere.

He'd reigned supreme only in Silver Moon when he was a Sunderer. There had already been Dominators outside the province in his time. Were they still alive and did they yet roam the world?

It was highly likely they were still alive! Dominators rivaled Sunflare. When the supernatural domain rose, it threatened Sunderers, but not Dominators. In fact, the latter group might have walked further down the path of martial dao since they could absorb mysterious power.

"I should leave after taking care of this matter!" Yuan Shuo sighed, worrying about Li Hao. If he holed up here, he would only grow steadily weaker. The supernatural was developing too quickly.

Yuan Shuo's battle intent abruptly flared! Let's start with the Qiaos!

"I've underestimated you, Qiao Feeling!" The image of that smiling tiger rose in his mind. The inwardly cruel man's strength really hadn't been detectable before.

.....

The Law Enforcement building.

Li Hao and Wang Ming swiftly made their way to Liu Long's office when they returned to headquarters. It was time to report in.

.....

Inside the office.

Liu Long leaned back on the chair with a frown, his thoughts inscrutable. He called out when he heard a disturbance, “Come in!”

The two pushed open the door.

“Are you done?” A distracted Liu Long asked in a muffled voice.

“We visited half of the dojos,” Wang Ming swiftly responded. “The Veteris Institute, Galaxy Group, and Qiao Mining Industries. There’s a few we’ll visit tomorrow because it’s too late tonight.”

Chapter 129: The Commonalities of Martial Masters (I)

Liu Long inclined his head. “Were there any supernaturals not on the list?”

Supernaturals and martial masters hadn’t been given complete free rein in Silver City before the formation of the Night Watcher branch. Liu Long had a list from the Inspectorate. This mission was to register those not on the list.

“Yes!” Li Hao responded. “The ones we visited today have some extra martial masters and supernaturals. Their strength is all mediocre at Slayer of Tens and Starlight.”

As for the Sunderer at Galaxy Group, he was on the list too. He didn’t count as an under-the-table superhuman.

Qiao Mining Industries had only registered three Starlight, no more. No one under Sunderer or Darkmoon was worthy of mention. Liu Long would scan the updates himself later on.

“Hmph!” snorted the chief. “I hardly believe that with the advancement of the supernatural, these factions don’t have a single Darkmoon? This particular supernatural level has exploded in number across the land!”

The situation wasn't what it'd been ten years ago! Or rather, Darkmoons had been rare even three years ago. But with the arrival of war in the central region, the supernatural had developed swiftly. Darkmoons were a common sight now. As small as Silver City was, the various corporations didn't lack money. Even superhumans sometimes worked for others on behalf of money. How could these groups not have recruited a single Darkmoon?

Who did they think they were fooling?

"Do they think these are still the years of old?" Liu Long sniffed coldly. He was a haughty individual—he wouldn't have been dissatisfied with Li Hao reaching out to Yuan Shuo instead of the law enforcement team otherwise. That had been their first meeting!

In Liu Long's eyes, the dignity of the Inspectorate was to be maintained. These people plainly didn't show him face! They weren't willing to register their people even with the establishment of a Night Watcher branch. How dare they play sleight of hand like this!

Wang Ming was more charitable than the new director, or it might be more accurate to say that he'd seen his fair share of such action in White Moon.

"Director," he consoled. "This is normal! Blatant lies happen all the time even in White Moon. I think it's tolerable so long as they don't cause trouble..."

"Which is why White Moon Night Watchers don't exercise a single shred of authority in the entire province!" Liu Long snapped. "Why else would people dare misbehave when facing supernaturals?"

Wang Ming fell awkwardly silent. There were some things that he could not speak further on. Not to mention, the Night Watchers struggled under their share of difficulties. He belabored under this suffering in normal times, and there was nothing he could do but remain quiet when Liu Yan burst out with this criticism.

"Chief!" Li Hao interjected. "It can't be helped. The Night Watchers are spread thin in the central region, so we need to keep a lower profile in a fringe province. This is normal! Otherwise, no one will have our back if anything happens. I bet this is what upstairs is considering as well."

“Li Hao!” Liu Long’s jaw dropped. How are you spouting the same drivel as upstairs after becoming a senior officer? You weren’t like this before!

A general air of discontent circulated when the team previously spoke of the Night Watchers, finding the agency to be less than helpful. They didn’t do much when such big affairs occurred in Silver City. So the lad betrayed them as soon as he was promoted?

Even Wang Ming regarded his counterpart with contempt. This guy turns whichever way the wind is blowing! How shameless!

“Chief, did you forget that we’re Night Watchers?” Li Hao grinned. Insulting the agency now was to insult themselves! “Since we’re real Night Watchers now, we should maintain their dignity like it is ours. Cursing at them everyday is self denial. If that’s the case, why establish a branch in Silver City?”

Liu Long started, his thoughts straining to catch up. He’d grown too used to his previous life and it was a struggle to adapt to new circumstances. Li Hao was right, they were Night Watchers now. If he continued to sneer at their incompetence, he was sneering at himself. If he didn’t take pride in his position, he wouldn’t meld with the Night Watcher system. How would he help the agency stand with upheld heads and win fear and respect?

“That’s right... we’re Night Watchers now!” Liu Long sighed emotionally, suddenly disinterested in the proceedings. He waved his hand, indicating their dismissal.

Wang Ming turned on his heel without a word, turning back with surprise when he found that Li Hao didn’t move.

“I have some other things to report,” whispered the young man. He winked knowingly.

Wang Ming understood! The tenth member! It looked like Li Hao wanted to make this report alone. He couldn’t get involved.

Forget it, he wouldn't ask any questions in case he accidentally betrayed the kid.

Wang Ming left without another word, the very picture of cooperation.

.....

Liu Long's forehead creased into a frown as soon as they were alone. "Is there something else?"

"Chief, there's some hidden supernaturals among the places we visited."

"You discovered them?" Liu Long was taken aback.

"No, Wang Ming and I discovered them together. He has a special ability..."

Liu Long looked skeptically at the young man. Seriously? Then why isn't he here making the report himself?

"He doesn't want to say anything because he's too full of it. He thinks someone as great as a White Moon native shouldn't have to consort with bumpkins like the chief!"

"....." Liu Long continued to regard Li Hao with skepticism. "You're not making this up, are you?"

Li Hao sometimes seemed like a walking bag of ulterior motives and nothing good, but sometimes was simple, honest, and dependable. He was very complicated and very perverted.

Li Hao leered without a word.

The kid's definitely making this up! Liu Long cursed.

“Speak.”

“Chief, let me first ask—do we eliminate strongholds of the three great organizations if we find them in the city?”

“Of course!” Liu Long barked. “They’re not all bad, but any in Silver City at the moment are bad! Have you forgotten the Demon Hunter motto of punishing the wicked and eliminating evil?”

How could Li Hao question this?!

“To safeguard justice!” Li Hao nodded with a solemn expression. “To uphold justice, maintain peace, and eliminate evil. The Demon Hunter spirit will never be extinguished!”

“Go on then,” said a mollified Liu Long. “Have you discovered traces of the three great organizations?”

“Yes.” Li Hao nodded. “A Yama branch!”

“Not Red Moon?”

“No, it’s Yama. Sis Liu confirmed it, the Qiaos!”

Liu Long's eyes darted around as he took a minute to collect his thoughts. Being aware of his deputy's situation, he'd guessed it would have something to do with Liu Yan as soon as Li Hao mentioned the Qiaos.

"Are you sure?" The man frowned. "Liu Yan had her suspicions before, even I did, but there was no evidence to support or refute it either way. You must know that we are justice, but that doesn't mean we can execute without a crime!"

Justice still resided in his heart. They needed basic evidence and logic to kill someone—if the absence of such, they could not take action. If they did, they would be no different from supernaturals that butcher innocents.

Thus, even though Liu Yan once said there might be something afoot at the Qiaos, which resulted in his own investigation, he gave up when he returned empty-handed. Liu Long even snuck into the Qiao residence and stood right next to Qiao Senior, quietly observing the other for a few days. Only when he was certain nothing was amiss with them did he give up the chase.

The death of Liu Yan's husband could only be categorized as an accident. Of course, the killer remained on their wanted list.

"No evidence is needed." Li Hao smiled. "Just one point—Qiao Feilong is a powerhouse and sheltering several others. Is that enough?"

"You're joking!!" Liu Long snorted. "If a Slayer... no, a Slayer who hasn't trained in many years counts as a powerhouse, then I cannot refute what you say. I'm too familiar with Qiao Feilong!"

"Are you close to him, chief?"

"Of course!" Liu Long smirked. "Let's put it this way, I've seen every inch of his body!"

"....." Li Hao's jaw dropped! You... you guys have... Can I say this or not?

“I once stood at the foot of his bed in the dark and stared at him for several days...”

“Chief!” The shocked young man understood. “It’s amazing that you’re still alive!”

Oh my god.

You followed a Solar and stood at the foot of their bed for several days. This can only mean one thing—Qiao Feilong laid there for you to watch because he wanted to remain hidden.

Otherwise, he would’ve slapped you dead at the beginning. A Sunderer standing right next to a Solar for days and even watching him pee... You’re seriously perverted.

“What do you mean?” Liu Long frowned. “You mean he’s concealed his strength? Impossible!” Being no fool, he grasped the implications. “He had no supernatural ripples and while it’s difficult to visibly identify a martial master’s level, you can tell a thing or two from the skin’s toughness and luster. It’s not as specific, but some conclusions can be drawn.”

He trusted his judgment.

“A Solar!” Li Hao intoned.

“.....” Liu Long froze and stared dumbly at Li Hao. “What?”

“A Solar!”

“Ah...” Liu Long fought to process the revelation. He stood up in a daze, looking back at Li Hao. He wanted to say something, but stopped himself.

“My teacher’s sure of it!” Li Hao swiftly answered, knowing what the captain wanted to know.

With Yuan Shuo endorsing the identification, Liu Long understood that this was true. He could doubt Li Hao, but there was no need to suspect Yuan Shuo. If Yuan Shuo said so, then it must be so.

A Solar! Liu Long blinked dazedly. Silver City had a Solar in residence, and one of its own! Indeed, if Qiao Feilong was a Solar, then he was the strongest in the city.

Liu Long had been worried that Silver City was slated for migration and how they’d find it impossible to gain footing without any powerhouses. But now, the city had one!

What a pity that their powerhouse hadn’t stepped forward when the city was in danger. He was absent when Red Moon attacked and he was absent when the other supernatural cases occurred.

Qiao Feilong!

A Solar who concealed his identity and even permitted Liu Long to keep him under surveillance without revealing anything amiss. The death of Liu Yan’s husband absolutely had something to do with the Qiaos.

## Chapter 130: The Commonalities of Martial Masters (II)

“And here I always thought I was the strongest in Silver City,” Liu Long took a self-deprecating breath. “But first it was Yuan Shuo, now it’s him... how laughable.”

“My teacher is different!” Li Hao declared. “I promise that my teacher only just broke through a few days ago—when I entered Slayer of Tens. He didn’t hide it on purpose!”

Liu Long’s eyes widened. Really? He’d thought that Yuan Shuo had broken through a long time before and was just hiding his strength all this time.

“Teacher was probably weaker than chief before this!” Li Hao was aware of the knot in Liu Long’s heart. The chief even suspected that Yuan Shuo had been aware of Little Yuan’s death and just hadn’t bothered to care. The professor only became involved when Li Hao was dragged in.

But this wasn’t the case!

“I would never hide something like this!” Li Hao said solemnly. “If teacher was a Dominator and did nothing when Little Yuan died.... I would not have this kind of relationship with him! I would hate him, not admire him! I admire him because if teacher was a Dominator then, he would’ve killed whoever was attacking Little Yuan! Do you believe me, chief?”

“I do!” Liu Long nodded and took a deep breath, recovering his calm. “A Solar eh... interesting. And Yama having something to do with this.

“I’ll report this and see if I can get Director Hao to come to us. Director Hou won’t be able to leave White Moon City. Since these guys dare conceal their identities, I have both personal and official reasons to uproot them!”

And that was the response from the branch director of the Silver City Night Watchers. Whether it was Liu Long or Yuan Shuo, martial masters were sometimes quite diabolic and vicious. They didn’t need evidence or other arguments. The moment that Li Hao identified the other as a Solar in concealment, their first thought was to strike first, strike fast, and strike them dead. Everything could wait until after the enemy was dead—they wouldn’t be wrong, in any case!

And if they did happen to be wrong... Well, that was the other side’s fault for concealing their strength. An expert that was of no help whatsoever to Silver City, one that didn’t lend a hand or even inquire after the city when danger descended, was worth just as much dead. Liu Long and the others wouldn’t regret killing a character like that.

“If we can kill him ourselves, teacher won’t want any of the thousand cubes of mysterious power that will result from a Solar,” Li Hao said after thinking for a while. “That can all go to the team, including the three Sunflares!”

Liu Long's eyes shot wide open! He suddenly understood multiple things. One, the other side had an additional three Sunflares. Two, Li Hao had discussed this with Yuan Shuo. They wanted to take care of this under the table and share none of the benefits with anyone else!

Of course, this couldn't be all there was to it. Other factors had to be in play. Liu Long's thoughts raced rapidly...

"Qiao Feilong has a ruin under his control!" Li Hao muttered before the man had a chance to think things through. "Or possibly a ruin! Whatever it is, it likely belongs to my clan, so teacher and I want only that and we can't have too many people learning of it."

"But you can tell me??" Liu Long's temples throbbed. He knew something was wrong when the kid mentioned doing the deed by themselves! He hadn't thought Li Hao would be so forthright as to just say the reason why.

A ruin!

A ruin that belonged to the eight families... now he understood what the young man meant.

"Chief is trustworthy! I trust teacher the most in Silver City, then chief!" Li Hao nodded.

"Hah!" Liu Long sneered. "Forget it, I don't need that. Have fun yourself, don't drag me into your games. I want to live a few years longer. What level am I? A Sunderer! It's one thing if there's one Solar, but you say there's another three Sunflares?? Li Hao, are you getting too full of yourself?"

The kid seriously had!

Kill those guys by ourselves? And you want me to work with your teacher? BAH! I'm cannon fodder!

“Cannon fire!” Li Hao thought for a moment. “We can fire cannons at the mountains in the outskirts, that won’t affect anything. I’ve also thought about the issue of the three Sunflare. So long as we’re willing, we can just throw weapons of mass destruction at them!”

“The justification is simple—collusion with Red Moon! We won’t mention Yama at all. We’ve offended Red Moon as it is, so what’s a little more offense? Yama will never admit that they’ve got people in Silver City, so they can only suffer in silence.

“Chief, can hot weapons kill Sunflare?”

Liu Long sank into contemplation. “It’s... possible if they’re caught off guard. But Sunflares wield a little bit of aura too. Aura is a concept hard to explain, so let’s just put it as they have a sense of danger.

“They’re so fast that if they possess any other supernatural abilities, such as the ability to move through earth, they’ll escape in the blink of an eye. Cannon fire will have limited effect. Of course, they’ll be heavily injured all the same if they suffer a direct hit. They might not die, however.”

Sunflares were highly perceptive; cannons weren’t so fast to the point that this level of supernatural couldn’t react. Such was one of the limitations of hot weapons.

If weapons of mass destruction that could cover a dozen kilometers at once were deployed, then even Sunflares would find it difficult to survive. This scale of weapon only appeared on battlefields in which both sides were gravely wounded and mutual destruction was an option. It wasn’t a good outcome for either side if not.

Take the central region, the Night Watchers had utilized a city annihilation weapon in one such conflict and level a soaring mountain into flat terrain. That was the kind of suitable territory. If fired within a city, countless people would accompany the destruction of buildings and property.

Li Hao brainstormed briefly. “Chief, would you be able to cope with the three Sunflares if you broke through to Dominator?”

“It depends on their strength, if they’re mid Sunflare or whatever. If we martial masters are all as strong as your teacher, then of course we can take them on. The key thing is that not everyone’s like your teacher.”

Liu Long didn’t think he’d be greater than Yuan Shuo even if he did break through to Dominator, not to mention that he couldn’t.

“Chief, have you comprehended the aura?”

“Not yet... but I’m beginning to!” Liu Long furrowed his brows. “I used too much force last time and injured my arms. I haven’t had the chance to give it a try and my blood qi is slightly depleted. I’ll need some time to recover.”

He agitated his blood the entire night when facing the scarlet shadow, and he’d relied on his strength as a Sunderer to ignore his wounds. Otherwise, he would’ve long been crippled. Li Hao didn’t even know that the chief was gravely injured because Liu Long didn’t permit his condition to show.

Thus, he spoke up when he saw that the young man planned for him to join this operation. It would be the gravest trouble if Li Hao suffered from a misjudgment due to lack of information. Liu Long could stand against regular Sunderers, but he would most likely lose against Fullmoons or Plenilunes.

“You’re beginning to?” was all that Li Hao cared about.

Liu Long inclined his head. “I looked into the origins of the Nine Forged Force. The key to the nine layers resides in each layer being stronger than the previous! Their origin is quite clear—the waves!” He didn’t keep anything to himself since he’d taught the Nine Forged Force to Li Hao. “Have you ever seen the sea?”

Li Hao shook his head. Silver City was an inland city!

“Then you need to go take a look. There’s a sea shore near White Moon, so I’ve seen the sea.” Liu Long took a trip down memory lane. “When waves churn over the sea’s surface, they start off as small spray that is propelled forward by waves to the rear. Each wave moves in roughly the same way, yet when two waves are layered over each other, they erupt with stronger force! A tidal wave can result when sufficient waves are layered, such is the might of the heavens!”

The man recounted the rest with some fear. “I once saw an enormous wave that was over one hundred meters tall! It started off as a regular wave, but when compelled by the wind, it was like internal force building upon each other in our blood flow. A series of waves stacked on top of each other to raise one that was over hundred meters tall! It pounded a large boulder to pieces and swept through the beach!

“I was a Slayer then, but still felt that I couldn’t survive in such an environment,” Liu Long sighed. “When your teacher spoke of aura, I immediately thought of that day! White-crested waves surging and leaping to the sky, bearing an aura to destroy everything! I want to imitate the layering of waves and smash onto my target as if splitting bamboo, but my body doesn’t allow me to do so!”

He shook his head. “I’ve never used Nine Forged because my body didn’t let me, but now I wonder if I could comprehend the aura of the method if I tried? It’s a pity that I understood it too late,” he sighed again. “But I still want to try. Maybe I can use mysterious power to help me recover after resting for a while. Remember, Li Hao, you better go see the real sea when you can layer your force nine times. Observe the true waves! Speaking of, are you capable of Twice Forged now?”

He’d never asked because he didn’t think it likely. It hadn’t been long since Li Hao came in contact with the method.

“I am!” Li Hao grinned.

“Seriously?” Liu Long started.

Li Hao punched without another word, erupting with a second layer of force at almost the same time. He didn’t project his internal force, just simply moved his arm.

Bam!

Liu Long also reached forward and grabbed the young man's fist, shaking slightly as he did so.

"You've learned it??" he asked in disbelief. The lad really had learned Twice Forged? That was too fast!

He didn't mind the dog that'd quickly grasped Thrice Forged. A dog that could become more than it was was a very perverse existence. Li Hao, on the other hand, was just a human! He'd learned it so quickly?

Li Hao's grin brooded. I know Thrice Forged too, want me to show you?

Nah, that'd probably scare the chief out of his wits.

The addition of another Sunderer who knew Thrice Forged wouldn't affect the battle situation much at this point. The young man would come clean otherwise. Since it wouldn't, there was no purpose in saying anything.

"Genius!" Liu Long complimented from the bottom of his heart. "You can deploy Twice Forged! This means you're in the mid-latter stage of Slayer of Tens. That's so fast!"

A Slayer could deploy Thrice Forged at most. Since Li Hao could manage Twice Forged without much pressure, he'd plainly entered mid to late stage of this level.

"This isn't important, chief."

“It’s very important!”

“It’s really not,” Li Hao insisted. “Chief, my teacher has a treasure that can heal others with special effect. Do you stand a chance of breaking through to Dominator if your wounds are fully healed?”

“My injuries aren’t the typical type...” Liu Long frowned.

“Can they be worse than my teacher’s? His heart was almost pierced through.”