

Star Gate 20

Chapter 20: Decision (II)

Li Hao's eyes widened at her speed and lack of sound. Everyone on the small team looked run-of-the-mill, but they were all very strong. After spending time with them in close quarters, he was starting to see a faint sheen of starlight outside their bodies.

It was so faint that Li Hao only saw it when they were close at hand, but it was definitely the same as the sword's starry energy that he couldn't fully digest.

Are they... demi supernaturals?

The entire group had likely conducted mysterious powers into themselves before, but they failed to officially cross over. Liu Long had done well to nurture several powerful helpers out of the enforcement team!

"So it's confirmed, the water from the jade sword is mysterious power! Liu Long and the others want to set foot into that domain through killing supernaturals, but I don't have to! My jade sword supplies me with energy and I also have the blade of the Zhangs now. I wonder if the blade can do the same thing?"

The rumbling noises grew louder as fire leapt and danced in the night air. Flames quickly swallowed the Zhang family home while Li Hao looked on, not regretting any decision made tonight. He'd gained more information than he ever imagined he would possess. Even though it meant exposing some of his own secrets, that didn't matter. Was the scarlet shadow faction truly oblivious that he was the beholder of the sword of the Lis?

Not necessarily, given their attention. They hadn't taken action simply because they had other plans in mind. If they were his parents' killers, how would they not know that his surname was the Li of the folk song?!

It would be self deceiving to think otherwise.

“They probably won’t show themselves given this huge disturbance.” Li Hao tugged his shirt straight and nudged Panther. “C’mon, let’s go home!”

He left without a word to Liu Long, using the burning house as his cover.

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“Chief!” Several people were gathered around Liu Long. Liu Yan looked at their leader with a quizzical look, then watched Li Hao depart in the dark.

“Chief, do you really want him to join us?” she whispered.

“The chief has his own thoughts and plans in mind!” chuckled Wu Chao; he was as thin as a rail. “Li Hao has quite a backer! While Yuan Shuo isn’t supernatural, he’s not too shabby with his New Book of Five Styles. He’s got to have a little something if the Night Watchers keep wanting to work with him. It’s not necessarily a bad thing to recruit Li Hao.”

“But not necessarily a good thing either!” grumped a fatty whose eyes had disappeared amid folds of flesh. “Yuan Shuo is a proud and stubborn person. Chief sent out feelers to him before, wanting him to join our hunts. He couldn’t be bothered to give us the time of the day! Making Li Hao one of us might result in Night Watcher attention...”

Liu Long cut him off before he could finish. “The Night Watchers? Do you really think they don’t know about us? How would they possibly not know that the Inspectorate has killed more than one supernatural?”

He continued in a more placating tone, “So what if they do? We kill only those with criminal records! Besides, this way of killing supernaturals, stripping them of their mysterious energy, and using their powers to ascend comes from the Night Watchers themselves! Heh, haha!”

Derision and indifference filled the deputy chief's eyes as he laughed coldly.

"They leaked this method so that cannon fodder who want to become supernatural will alleviate some of the pressure on them! They have a heavy caseload and not enough time, but any crime that extends beyond the ordinary will turn into incredible trouble if it's not dealt with. The Night Watchers are spread too thin and it's too dangerous for mortals to take the field. That organization gets along the best they can. Who's actually willing to offend the supernaturals?"

"Yet, somehow, word spreads that repeated induction of their mysterious powers will enhance one's chance of crossing over. What kind of result do you guys think these words lead to?"

The group fell silent. What kind of result? Anyone who wasn't willing to live a mundane life would put their life on the line for this chance!

It gave rise to struggles of life and death! When properly equipped with the proper methods, weapons, and brains, it was entirely possible that one could defy a supernatural. The team was the best example of that!

And was such a phenomenon unique to Silver City?

Most likely not!

The Night Watchers had shared this information because they wanted to borrow the hand of those unwilling to flounder in monotony for the rest of their lives. The latter was cannon fodder that also happened to reduce the organization's problems.

"The Night Watchers have got this all planned out! Tell me, where would we go if we really became supernatural?"

"To them!" Liu Yan smiled. Everyone nodded in agreement. They were part of the Inspectorate, what else would they join if not a sister organization?

“Damn, nice plotting,” Fatty took a large breath. “They don’t have to spend a single iota of mysterious energy and might gain new blood from other people’s efforts. They can also get rid of some supernatural troublemakers!”

Killing two birds with one stone!

The Night Watchers only needed to reveal some information to ensure that any inspector who crossed over would join them. They were the legitimate, orthodox way. Few were those who would opt for the shadows after growing used to walking in the light.

“It’s just an overt conspiracy,” Liu Long replied calmly. “I don’t know about others, but those who fail the recruitment drive will never be satisfied with being commonplace. We once set foot into their domain, but were kicked back. None of us accept that! People like us are the core strength of the various Inspectorate branches. We have power, authority, and sufficient confidence to fight for a chance!

“The Night Watchers don’t need to pay any price to have us fight for them and can also choose whichever promising talents they want. So why not??”

The rest of the team fully understood by now. Only some had grasped the implications prior to Liu Long laying it out so clearly. Fatty, for instance, was more focused on the Night Watchers discovering that they were secretly harvesting mysterious energy. Everything was much more clear after the captain’s explanation!

“Chief, will it be helpful for Li Hao to join us?” Fatty asked.

“It will!” Liu Long offered no explanation.

The team sank into deep thought and asked no further. As for whether or not Li Hao would join, did that bear questioning?

Of course he would!

No one would turn down the chief's invitation after learning about the supernatural domain. Setting aside the one percent chance of success with the Night Watchers, the key point was that Li Hao probably wasn't even qualified to enter the screening process.

Many were those who knew about supernatural power in the vast Silver City, and they were all members of the upper echelon! They ardently wished that they, or their descendants, could become extraordinary. Li Hao barely stood a chance. Even if his teacher put in words for him, he most likely wouldn't even be considered for a candidate.

As long as he understood how difficult that process was, he would also know that joining the enforcement team was the only option available to him.

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Nighttime was always charming. Li Hao maintained constant vigilance as he walked home in silence. Zhang Yuan's house wasn't too far from his and he mused over many things along the way. Eventually, he decided to give his teacher a call.

Ring ring ring...

The communicator quickly picked up. Yuan Shuo had likely waited all night long instead of going to sleep.

"Teacher!"

"Is everything taken care of?"

“Yes. Captain Liu Long arrived with his men. I’m already on my way home.” Li Hao considered something before raising, “Teacher, the captain says that I might be in danger. Whoever killed Little Yuan might be coming for me too.”

“Don’t worry!” Yuan Shuo seemed to have already guessed it as he wasn’t too phased. “You will move to the Veteris Institute tomorrow morning. Not the dorms, but my place, and don’t go back out! Things will be fine after you lay low for a year or two.”

As easily as his teacher spoke, Li Hao could tell that Yuan Shuo was betting himself. He was betting that the Night Watchers wouldn’t hang the esteemed professor out to dry.

Unless the scarlet shadow’s side was extremely strong, they wouldn’t want to provoke the Night Watchers either. However, the young man knew that they wouldn’t give up like this. Not to mention, he didn’t want to hide for such a long period of time.

“Teacher, I’d like to stay at the Inspectorate.”

“You’re as stubborn as a mule!” Yuan Shuo snapped. “You know the dangers, but still want to stay. You’re being foolish, not brave!”

“Teacher... I want to join the law enforcement team! Captain Liu invited me tonight and says he can ensure my safety.”

“The law enforcement team?”

“Yes, and he says that joining them might... lead to another domain.”

“Hmph!” A derisive snort echoed from the communicator. “So Liu Long still hasn’t given up! Is it that easy? If it is, everyone would have magical powers! I know what he’s doing and he does indeed possess perseverance and boldness.”

After that approval, Yuan Shuo continued, “But there’s some things you don’t understand. He must have painted a very simplistic picture for you. The reality is that one, killing those people is always a brush with death! Second, conducting the energy into yourself is ninety percent safe with the Night Watchers. Even if you don’t succeed, at least you won’t die. But Liu Long’s method has a fifty percent casualty rate!”

Li Hao’s eyes widened. Liu Long had indeed left this detail out.

“And do you think they’re the only foolhardy ones on the enforcement team? Heh, Liu Long recruited dozens at first, but how many stand with him now? Some died over the course of their hunts, others died when they tried to absorb the energy.” Yuan Shuo sighed. “If you really want to walk this path, perhaps I can put in a request for you and see...”

The professor was hesitant at first, but quickly grew resolute. However, Li Hao could sense how difficult it would be for his teacher. This matter was far more than it seemed. He came to certain conclusions after thinking over what Liu Long had said about the Night Watchers never permitting his mentor to succeed.

“That’s alright, teacher, there’s no need for that!”

“Very good.” Yuan Shuo didn’t insist and dropped the subject. If Li Hao went, he might become part of the ten percent casualty rate! He himself was the ninety percent that failed and lived, but the young man was only his student. It was highly likely that something would happen to him.

He didn’t want to say anything else after his thoughts traveled here.

Li Hao was more at ease after confirming that his teacher knew what Liu Long and the others were attempting. “Teacher, then I’m going to join the enforcement team. I might not try that method, I just want revenge!”

“You and your temper...” Yuan Shuo shook his head. “Fine, fine, as you wish! Your personality is just like mine. Since you’ve made up your mind, there is no reason to give up. But come by when you have time. I can’t help you, but I can tell you more about what you should expect. This isn’t an easy path to walk!”

The professor suddenly chuckled. “It might be a good thing if you actually succeed. Then we can undertake certain things together and not have to be at the whims of another. Some fellows want nothing more than for me to fail. Heh, I’ll throw them away sooner or later!”

Li Hao seemed to understand, but he didn’t ask for further clarification. If his teacher wanted to talk about it, he would explain in great detail. Plainly, he had some other reservations in consideration.

That was it then, he would join the law enforcement team! Since his teacher didn’t try to persuade him otherwise, it meant he understood certain things. Liu Long might have various schemes in play, but for the moment, Li Hao should be safe!

“Scarlet shadow... mysterious powers... I’m coming!”

It’s been a year, let me see what’s so unfathomable and strong about you guys!