

# Ultrogene Warlord

## #Chapter 21: Catch Me If You Can - Read Ultrogene Warlord Chapter 21: Catch Me If You Can

### Chapter 21: Catch Me If You Can

Of course, this mysterious man in black was Zhang Lie.

In truth, even Zhang Lie hadn't expected that the six clans would have been so interested in the venombane glade or the superior-grade venombane scorpion. Neither had he expected that their confrontation would be so hostile.

From his perspective, however, any commotion was a good thing. Only when the gathered hunters stumbled over each other would he have the opportunity to steal the kill. If they had united or reached an agreement among themselves, Zhang Lie would have left immediately.

The six most important clans in the Blacksteel settlement had all gathered at the glade. Compared to them, the Zhang Lie of the present was nothing.

Just exposing himself—let alone attempting to steal the superior-grade scorpion's gene fragments and soulshard—could land him in big trouble. But no reward came without risk. Superior gene fragments and the superior-grade venombane-scorpion soulshard were both excellent spoils.

And since Zhang Lie had the opportunity to obtain both, he wouldn't give up so easily. He kept scattering more of his acid-green powder into the waterfall, until the surface of the pond began to froth violently. Then, he snuck toward the cave like a dark shadow.

By this time, the battlefield had been divided into two factions. The first comprised the Yun and Chu elites, and the second the Qin, Zhou, Li, and Zhao elites.

The two factions guarded against each other as they hunted for the superior-grade scorpion. The abilities that it had demonstrated were far too enticing to give up. No hunter present failed to grasp the worth of its soulshard.

A tremendous stealth ability, an exceedingly dangerous beam attack, and lightning speed. No matter whether the soulshard ended up being attack-type, augmentation-type, or illusion-type, the hunter who claimed that soulshard would receive a significant boost.

After all, once hunters had filled up all their genes to capacity, what would differentiate them would be the quality and quantity of their soulshards.

Furthermore, the gathered crowd of hunters still needed more superior gene fragments: the stronger a hunter was before ascending to a higher realm, the more the hunter would benefit from the ascension.

As a result, they all wanted the superior-grade scorpion for themselves.

Suddenly, a drop of dark purple blood dripped down from the ceiling. The sound should have been easily drowned out by the hunters, but it seemed almost as loud as a cymbal amidst the tense atmosphere.

A purple dot flashed past a Qin elite.

"It's here!" Almost immediately as he spoke, a whip of thunder crashed down beside him.

A violent purple light erupted as it struck the scorpion's carapace, blinding the hunters. When they blinked, the scorpion had vanished once again.

Of course, the hunter who had struck, with such speed and strength, was none other than Qin Xiao. When he saw the scorpion try to run away even after being struck by his whip of lightning, an electrifying storm of genetic energy swirled around him.

"[Thunder God's Domain]!" Blue lightning shot out of Qin Xiao's body in a hundred-meter radius around him. They were as fine and dense as silken threads, illuminating everything in sight.

The moment the technique activated, Qin Xiao shot toward the southwest. There, he had seen the outline of a violet scorpion skittering away!

"Attack!" Just as Qin Xiao thought himself about to defeat the elusive prey, a shout shocked the gathered hunters into action.

Propelled by a torrent of wind, an impenetrable cloud of mist was descending on him.

"[Raiment of Lightning]! Chu Feng, you bastard! [Thunderburst]!"

"[Hymn of Wind]!"

As the wind- and lightning-attuned genetic energy clashed with each other, a cloud of billowing dust smothered the cave. The hunters from each clan began to fight with each other amidst the hordes of scorpions.

As Qin Xiao took on Chu Feng, gold, red, and black flashes emerged from within the cloudy mist. Yun Bing was being stalled by the combined might of the three corporations. Not only were Zhou Qian, Li Jin, and Zhao Jia the heads of the three

corporations, they were also the top ten hunters in the Blacksteel settlement. The three of them, working together, could certainly counter Yun Bing.

As the six clans began to fight among each other, the superior-grade scorpion avoided death once again. Threatened, it no longer dared to remain in the heart of the battlefield, and it shot toward the empty cave tunnel like a beam of purple light.

As it chittered, the tunnel began to fill with a horde of regular- and mutated-grade scorpions, ready to defend its leader.

"Stop fighting! It's going to get away! Chase after it!"

The six clans immediately halted their fight and rushed toward the cave entrance.

However, just as the six clans began to act, the superior-grade scorpion that had just rushed into the cave let out a despairing cry. It had been trapped within a white, sticky, translucent ball of some strange matter.

As he crushed a mutated-grade venombane-scorpion soulshard, Zhang Lie struck the scorpion with [Three-Wave Crescendo], successfully killing the battered superior-grade scorpion. A royal-purple soulshard condensed on its carapace, and Zhang Lie heard the will of the world once more.

[You successfully killed a superior-grade venombane scorpion and obtained its soulshard.]

Zhang Lie: a mortal lifeform

Framework: Foundation, Lv. MAX, Ninecarp Transformation, First Form: Carp

Genes: Basic, 140; Mutated, 90, Superior, 10

Soulshards: White Grub (superior), Galewolf (mutated), Blood Ant (mutated), Potbellied Toad (mutated), Venombane Scorpion (superior)

"Success!"

In the dark cave, as he heard the will of the world's voice, Zhang Lie's heart began to palpitate. He grabbed the scorpion's carcass, stuffed it into his potbellied-toad pouch, and began to flee. He certainly wasn't about to stay and wait for the six most influential clans of the Blacksteel settlement to catch him!

A kill-stealer! The leaders of the Yun, Chu, Qin, Zhou, Li, and Zhao teams were all dumbstruck by what had happened.

The moment the superior-grade scorpion had rushed to the cave entrance, a burst of genetic energy had emanated from the cave.

And with that burst went the life of the superior-grade scorpion.

How could they fail to understand what had happened?

Honestly, if others were to know about what had happened here, all six clans would immediately become laughingstocks. They had gathered together to hunt rare prey, and despite their strength, that prey had ultimately been captured by a lone hunter... Their reputation would be in shambles!

No, they had to catch that thief and retrieve the soulshard he had stolen!

It was this galvanizing force that caused the six clans to miraculously cooperate. Their leaders immediately stopped fighting and shot toward the fleeing thief.

Chu Feng, his wings flapping behind him, flew over the scorpion hordes and into the cave like an eagle darting after its prey. The cave was exceptionally dark, and Zhang Lie was clad entirely in black. Chu Feng couldn't even see the barest silhouette of his body, but he could hear his footsteps.

They were both moving extremely quickly, but Chu Feng had more superior gene fragments and higher-quality techniques than Zhang Lie, so he was naturally faster.

The distance between the two hunters was quickly decreasing. The waterfall was right ahead of them, but Chu Feng was accelerating faster and faster.

Twenty meters... ten... five...! Zhang Lie barely made it out of the cave, despite the howling wind behind him, and tossed a deep blue bead into the waterfall as he did so.

"Release!" The bead burst apart as soon as it touched the water, freezing the waterfall and blocking the exit to the cave.

Moments later, the frozen waterfall exploded. Chu Feng rushed out of the waterfall, waving shards of ice out of his hair, but there was no one in sight.

Despite the deaths of many of his elites, the superior-grade scorpion that he was hunting had been stolen by someone else! How could Chu Feng give up the chase so easily?

He soared up into the night sky. Peering carefully below him, he dashed toward the barest hint of movement: a tremble of a tree branch. As he did so, flying above the Moonlit Pond, a sudden fear enveloped him.

Beneath him, the Moonlit Pond started to froth, as though a lifeform was about to emerge from its depths.

Recalling the legend of the Moonlit Pond, Chu Feng widened his eyes as he instinctively flung himself to one side. Blood spurted from his arm as a thin beam of water shot out from the pond, skirted by Chu Feng's left arm, and left a deep scar in the mountain behind him.

The next moment, under Chu Feng's disbelieving gaze, a pure-white wyrm emerged from the pond. Its scales gleamed like white jade, and a small horn protruded from its forehead. It seemed like a cross between a dragon and a snake, with a grace inherent to neither species.

This—this was the legendary moonlight wyrm!

Chu Feng reared back in shock.

The moonlight wyrm was a creature of rumor and myth, so named by a hunter from the Blacksteel settlement. Even the reincarnated Zhang Lie had no idea what manner of lifeform it really was.

However, none of that was important. All Zhang Lie needed to know was how to lure it out from the depths of the pond, as well as how strong it was.

By the waterfall, Yun Bing and Qin Xiao had just rushed out of the cave. They both sucked in a deep breath as they saw the wyrm emerging from the water. The genetic energy swirling around the wyrm was enough to shock them to stillness—especially Qin Xiao, who had once attempted to lure the creature out from the pond.

Glancing at it now, he was thankful he didn't do so, or he would have undoubtedly perished for his stupidity.

We have to flee! The same thought filled the heads of the three top hunters of the Blacksteel settlement. Their desire to catch the fleeing thief had been dashed completely upon seeing the wyrm's head peeking out of the pond's surface.

They immediately rushed back into the cave. However, right as they were about to head in, Zhou Qian rushed out, blocking their path forward with the rest of his team. "What's the matter? Why aren't you chasing the thief?"

"..."

## **Chapter 22: Righteousness**

Another arrow of water shot out of the pond with deceptively little sound. It moved so quickly that the gathered hunters had barely seen the skill activate before it reached

them. The concentrated beam emanated such potent ice-attuned genetic energy that they recoiled in fear, and even Zhou Qian went silent.

After all, they were all in the top ten of the gene leaderboard, and their senses were developed enough to understand the potency of the attack. Zhou Qian now knew the reason for Chu Feng, Qin Xiao, and Yun Bing's sudden retreat.

However, just because the hunters realized what was happening didn't mean that they were able to react in time. After all, the beam was so sudden that Zhou Qian was still thinking about how to give chase to the mysterious thief.

Chu Feng and Yun Bing only hesitated momentarily before pushing him aside and rushing through the cave. As for Qin Xiao, instead of pushing him aside, he pushed him out.

By the time Zhou Qian figured out what was going on, the orb of water was right before his eyes.

"[Shield of Gold], [Gate to Oblivion], [Adamantine Armor]!" With barely any hesitation, three defensive skills activated before him. But despite the triple-layered shield, Zhou Qian's body burst into a bloody mist.

The orb of water, about as wide as a thumb, emerged from the mist and shot into the tunnel.

"Help me, or we'll all perish!" Qin Xiao yelled. "[Lightning Spear]!"

"[Blade of the Mists]!"

"[Reaping Wind]!"

Yun Bing and Chu Feng had both begun to turn back by the time he shouted, and they all struck the orb with their fastest attacks. The best offense was also the best defense. They all saw what had happened to Zhou Qian, and none of them wanted to end up like him.

With a gigantic tremor, the cave—and even the entire mountain—began to collapse under the combined force of the water orb and the three elemental attacks. Yun Bing, Chu Feng, Qin Xiao, and even Li Jin and Zhao Jia, who had just rushed into the cave, were all buried in the aftermath.

"..." From within the forest, Zhang Lie couldn't help shaking his head in amazement as he fled.

It seemed as though this supposed moonlight wyrm was the strongest and most mysterious existence in the first realm, apart from the disaster-grade lifeform that would soon somehow make its way to the first realm.

Based on Zhang Lie's judgment, this moonlight wyrm had likely broken past the limits of a superior-grade lifeform and had advanced to a peak-grade lifeform. How shocking that the will of the world hadn't forced it to ascend! It looked as though he would have to add it to his list of future targets. As he rushed back to the settlement, he made a few changes to his upcoming plans.

Back in the pond, after the mountain's collapse, the wyrm ignored the fleeing ant-like existences that were now buried under tons of rock. It surveyed the boundary of the pond, sneezed in annoyance, and dove back into the depths amidst a chain of bubbles.

After the wyrm left the scene, all sorts of cries began to emerge from the rock heap. As their subordinates watched on in shock, a massive rumble accompanied a sudden rockslide, and five battered silhouettes emerged from the rocks: Yun Bing, Chu Feng, Qin Xiao, Li Jin, and Zhao Jia.

"Master!"

"Mistress!"

"Head!"

As they emerged, their subordinates hurriedly rushed toward them. It was only close up that they saw just how battered the five of them were—especially Qin Xiao, covered in blood from head to toe, his left arm all but smashed to pieces.

He stumbled, as though he would be unable to support his own weight and fall at any moment, causing his subordinates to gape in shock. Even Yun Bing and Chu Feng were bleeding from their mouths, as though they too had suffered grievous injuries.

Despite not knowing what had happened, their subordinates immediately swarmed and protected them. The Zhou hunters, concerned about the disappearance of their leader, hurriedly crowded Li Jin and Zhao Jia's parties, asking for the whereabouts of Zhou Qian.

Unfortunately, neither Li Jin nor Zhao Jia knew what was going on. They had just rushed into the cave when it exploded, and they had been buried alive with the others without knowing why or how.

"Qin Xiao, what happened back there? Where's Zhou Qian?"

Given their temporary alliance, the first person Li Jin asked about the situation was Qin Xiao.

Qin Xiao's body trembled. After a momentary silence, he pointed toward Chu Feng and Yun Bing. "He's dead, the Zhou corporation head is dead! All because of them...!"

"Qin Xiao, don't you dare malign me!" Qin Xiao's intentions were clear, and Chu Feng wasn't about to take the blame for Zhou Qian's death.

"Chu Feng, it was all your fault! You and Yun Bing pushed the Zhou clan head out of the tunnel, and he died from the moonlight wyrm's attack!" Qin Xiao's features had settled into a righteous rage as he pointed a finger at Chu Feng.

Even a dozen Chu Fengs and Yun Bings would be no opponent for Qin Xiao's shamelessness. Not only had he tried to shift the blame, he had done so with such conviction!

Yun Bing gaped as Chu Feng began to summon his last reserves of genetic energy. "You're the one who pushed him out! If you're going to keep twisting the truth, I'll kill you now!"

"Haha, Chu Feng, now that I've exposed the truth, you're trying to kill me? Li Jin, Zhao Jia, we were all attacked by a particularly dangerous lifeform in the tunnel, and these two pushed Zhou Qian out to cushion the attack and save their lives!

"I, Qin Xiao, gave my arm to save him, to no avail! What a tragedy it is that Zhou Qian's corpse was completely destroyed by the attack! If not for my life-threatening injuries, I'd duel scum like you to the death right now!"

"...you were the one who pushed him out to save your sorry life!" Chu Feng was astounded at Qin Xiao's thick-skinned behavior. But before Chu Feng could argue with him, Qin Xiao suddenly coughed up a mouthful of blood and 'fainted'.

"Qin Xiao, you damn bastard, I know you're faking it!" Chu Feng's mouth twitched as he howled at his old rival. He tried to be gentlemanly in all things, and it was a testament to Qin Xiao's behavior that Qin Xiao had managed to enrage him to such an extent.

On the other hand, by his side, Yun Bing quickly recovered from her initial bout of shock.

Qin Xiao's description of events had Li Jin, Zhao Jia, and the rest of the Zhou hunters looking toward Chu Feng and Yun Bing.

Li Jin frowned and asked, "Yun Bing, Chu Feng, don't you think you owe us an explanation for what happened tonight?"

Chu Feng was about to pull his hair out when Yun Bing, who had been silent, spoke up.



"Li Jin, Zhao Jia, as corporation heads, I'm sure you must be able to judge matters for yourselves, and I'm sure you understand what Qin Xiao's personality is like. Need I explain further?"

"First, I, Yun Bing, swear by my name that Zhou Qian's death had nothing to do with either of us."

"As for the reason of death, Qin Xiao has already made an allegation against us. I won't refute it now, in case you think that I'm taking advantage of an 'unconscious' person to shift all the blame onto him."

"Furthermore, if you do intend to blame us for Zhou Qian's death, then I, on behalf of the Yun clan, will take all of you on. However, I caution the two of you to tread carefully: to preserve your own autonomy, and not to be manipulated into a rash decision by someone else here."

"I, Chu Feng, agree with Yun Bing! The Yun and Chu clans will fight together." After Yun Bing had finished, Chu Feng, who had finally calmed down, immediately voiced his agreement.

Li Jin and Zhao Jia glanced at each other. In the end, Li Jin spoke up. "We three corporations will keep your words in mind. That being said, if our investigation reveals that Zhou Qian's death was caused by the two of you, we won't stop at anything to avenge Zhou Qian!"

Yun Bing smiled. "I hope your investigation goes smoothly. I don't mind a challenge, but I don't intend to take the blame for someone else's actions. The moonlight wyrm we fought has likely exceeded the boundaries of a superior-grade lifeform, so I caution you to be wary as you leave."

Her final words caused a hush to descend among the gathered hunters. Beyond superior-grade? Didn't that mean... that the moonlight wyrm was a peak-grade lifeform?

How could that be? Hadn't the world federation indicated that the highest-grade lifeform in the first realm would only be superior-grade? How could a peak-grade lifeform exist here? Danger and opportunity, all rolled up into one package...

No wonder even the top hunters like Yun Bing, Chu Feng, and Qin Xiao would have ended up in such a battered state, and no wonder Zhou Qian had lost his life.

"Thank you for the information, Yun Bing." Li Jin's eyes sparkled with greed, clearly having been enticed by the prospect of hunting a peak-grade lifeform.

"Li Jin, let me reiterate: do not provoke that wyrm! No number of elites will be enough to close the gap between it and us! I bid you farewell." Yun Bing, who had felt the terror of the wyrm's attack, couldn't help trying to dissuade Li Jin from his foolishness.

She turned to leave with Chu Feng and their troops.

"Please, wait! I have a question for Chu Feng." Zhao Jia, standing by Li Jin's side, suddenly yelled out after the two clans had taken a few steps.

Instead of turning around, Chu Feng spoke with some frustration, "Apologies, Zhao Jia, I can't answer your question. That thief was far too sly, and I couldn't even make out his appearance!"

His words shocked the gathered hunters. Not only had this mysterious hunter stolen the prey from under the six clans' noses, no one had even seen his appearance! Who would believe something so ridiculous?

Regardless of who believed it or not, that was the truth. Zhao Jia was certain that Chu Feng wouldn't lie about this: after all, it was too embarrassing—the six most influential clans of the Blacksteel settlement, losing to a lone hunter!

Not only had they failed to obtain much of value, all the leaders had sustained some degree of injury, and quite a few of their subordinates had died to the superior-grade venombane scorpion's attack.

That was the darkest night that the six clans had experienced ever since entering the dimensional world. Each leader cursed the mysterious hunter who had stolen the fruits of their labor. If they ever found out who he was, they would make him suffer for what he had done!

## **Chapter 23: Full Haul**

Zhang Lie was certain that the six clans would try to take revenge, but he wasn't worried at all. Under ordinary circumstances, he wouldn't even appear on their lists of suspects. No one would believe that someone with his reputation would be able to snatch superior-grade soulshard from the six great clans, let alone to do it unseen.

As for Zhang Lie, he had finally finished with that night's errands. The outcome had been perfect for him, but for the six clans, on the other hand...

As they were silently retreating, they encountered the horde of hunters that was heading toward the scene from the Blacksteel settlement. The hunters were rushing to the Moonlit Pond overnight, hoping to get the best rewards before anyone else got there, but the six clans had monopolized everything!

Naturally, there would be some hostility between the six clans and the horde of hunters—but that was trivial to deal with; what they couldn't risk was angering the wyrm slumbering at the bottom of the pond. As a result, the six clans had no choice but to resort to a peaceful settlement of affairs, as far away from the pond as possible.

Of course, none of this had anything to do with Zhang Lie anymore. He had already returned safely to the settlement, so why would he care about what the other hunters were up to?

He rented a room in the Blackgold Inn of the Blacksteel settlement.

Whereas the Blacksteel Inn was governed by the artificial intelligence itself and was the safest inn in the settlement, the Blackgold Inn was privately owned. Because of Wang Xiaohua's occupancy in the Blacksteel Inn, there were far too many hunters lurking about its vicinity, and Zhang Lie naturally wouldn't choose to live there.

The Blackgold Inn was constructed jointly by the three corporations, and its interior was lavishly decorated. It was widely regarded as the best inn in the settlement. Of course, such a lavish hotel would charge an exorbitant fee, but this was nothing to Zhang Lie now.

His thirty-thousand point bet on himself had earned him a shocking 3.6 million points, and he was now among the richest hunters of the settlement. He certainly had the wherewithal to let loose.

After having a long, relaxing bath, he began to look over his spoils. What he had earned over the last five days was worth hundreds of times what he had obtained over the past three months. Even excluding the profits from the bet, he had made a killing.

Qin Xiaotian and his team had provided Zhang Lie with over thirty soulshards. Zhang Lie wasn't interested in most of them, and had listed them up for trade. Then, he had harvested quite a few rare herbs from the venombane glade, and he had even stolen the kill on the superior-grade venombane scorpion present there.

There were over a hundred sprigs of herbs. The most important one was a main ingredient for Potion #2, and a few others could be used to brew potions that were direct counters to certain genetic lifeforms. He had no choice but to bring forward his plans for brewing Potion #2, because that particular ingredient was extremely difficult to store.

After sorting through the gathered herbs, Zhang Lie finally retrieved the superior-grade scorpion carcass. It really wasn't very large, and could fit entirely on Zhang Lie's palm. However, its crystalline exoskeleton was quite unique.

Of course, the reason he brought it out was in order to prepare it for consumption, so he could finally get more superior gene fragments. Luckily, his luxurious suite came with a well-furnished kitchen.

Scorpion-type lifeforms weren't too uncommon in the dimensional world, and most people would consume it deep-fried. Following this trend, Zhang Lie began to prepare a meal of sumptuous deep-fried scorpion.

However, the venombane scorpion was so poisonous that he would have to start by removing its poison sac, then counteract the remnants of the poison with certain herbal ingredients. Otherwise, Zhang Lie might well become the first hunter to die of poisoning himself while trying to extract gene fragments from a superior-grade lifeform.

Of course, having been a fourth-realm hunter in the past, all of this was easily handled with Zhang Lie's experience. With surprising deftness, he extracted the poison sac from the scorpion, marinated it with a specialized herbal concoction, and began deep-frying it.

As the oil sizzled, Zhang Lie probed the superior-grade soulshard in his soul space to discover its effects. The soulshard was a deep, mysterious purple, and he could see the outline of a sword deep within it. As expected, it was a weapon-type soulshard!

His Galewind wasn't too bad against mutated-grade lifeforms, but it would be ineffective against superior-grade lifeforms. This sword would greatly enhance his ability to damage superior-grade lifeforms, and would remove one of his shortcomings.

Very quickly, the fragrant deep-fried scorpion was ready to be consumed. Deep-fried scorpion tasted far better than he had expected: much like lobster or crab meat, with a unique texture of its own.

As he digested the meat, the will of the world announced:

[For consuming the flesh of a superior-grade venombane scorpion, you received one superior gene fragment. Current total: 11]

[For consuming the flesh of a superior-grade venombane scorpion, you received one superior gene fragment. Current total: 12]

[...one superior gene fragment. Current total: 18]

As Zhang Lie consumed the last scorpion leg, he found himself with eight additional superior gene fragments.

The only thing left on the table was a dismembered scorpion exoskeleton. Even so, Zhang Lie wasn't finished. After preparing a few more herbs, he made a soup with the scorpion's carapace as its main ingredient.

After drinking it all, Zhang Lie obtained one additional gene fragment, for nineteen in all.

An individual lifeform would provide at most ten gene fragments when consumed. However, it was rare that a superior-grade lifeform could be consumed in its entirety. In most circumstances, it was thus impossible for a hunter to get ten superior gene fragments from a superior-grade lifeform.

For example, after draining the blood and removing the poison sac of this venombane scorpion, it could hardly be expected to provide more than nine superior gene fragments.

Zhang Lie rinsed and dried the scorpion's carapace, then returned it to his potbellied-toad pouch. It was still a treasure, after all: even after being deep-fried and boiled, it still maintained impressive structural integrity, and it was tough and resilient. Even though he only had a palm's worth of material, it would still be invaluable for forging purposes.

After packing up the scorpion carapace and cleaning everything up, Zhang Lie couldn't wait to activate the superior-grade venombane-scorpion shard in his soulspace.

A shortsword with a faintly purple sheen appeared in Zhang Lie's right palm. Whereas a regular longsword would have a meter-long blade, this scorpion shortsword only had a blade about seventy centimeters long. It wasn't particularly long, but it wasn't all that short, either.

The hilt was a deep purple, and the crossguard's design was that of a venombane scorpion with its stinger raised high, poised to strike. Zhang Lie immediately felt a strange power emanating from the shortsword in his hand.

When he activated it, Zhang Lie's body disappeared from sight.

This ability had already been demonstrated by the venombane scorpion when it was fleeing for its life: it felt as though he had become one with his environment. Even a gust of wind seemed to pass through him without impediment.

As long as he didn't make any sudden movement, even a hunter skilled in perception like Chu Feng would be unable to detect his presence.

Not only did this shortsword possess a stealth ability superior to that from a mutated-grade venombane-scorpion soulshard, the blade was naturally covered in the potent venombane poison.

Of course, as its owner, Zhang Lie would be forever immune to this sort of poison, and it would even grant him partial immunity to the effects of most other poisons. After all, venombane scorpions could consume all sorts of poisons, and he could even use the blade to suck up any poison present in other hunters' bodies.

Zhang Lie naturally christened this shortsword Venombane.

After dealing with his spoils, Zhang Lie slumped into bed and fell asleep immediately. He had done quite a lot that night, and he was tired after all his exertion. Fortunately, all his struggles had been worth it, and he was very pleased with what he had accomplished.

On the other hand, others were having a nightmare—Qin Xiao, Wang Xiaohua, and the Zhou clan.

Qin Xiao, who had fortuitously escaped a confrontation with Chu Feng and then with the gathered hunters from the Blacksteel settlement by 'fainting', was now so enraged that he almost actually fainted.

While the six clans were surrounded by Blacksteel hunters, he had overheard some hunters murmuring about how Zhang Lie had exposed Wang Xiaohua's misdeeds. The fiasco unfolding on the forum suggested that it was far more likely that Qin Xiaotian had died at Wang Xiaohua's hands, not Zhang Lie's.

Furthermore, his act of pushing Zhou Qian out of the cave to save his own life had landed him and the entire Qin clan in dire straits.

"What? What did you say? You didn't manage to find Xiaotian's corpse?!" Qin Xiao glared at Qin Feng, his eyes red with rage.

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"Yes, Master," Qin Feng replied. "We combed that mound in and out, but we didn't even find a scrap of clothing, let alone a corpse! Wang Xiaohua had to have lied to you!"

"Wang Xiaohua!" Her seemingly gentle face flashed by Qin Xiao's mind, his anger burgeoning.

Qin Xiao felt as though he understood it all now. This was all a trap, one set up by the Wang clan.

First, Wang Xiaohua would entice Qin Xiaotian with her looks, then deliberately induce a confrontation between Xiaotian and a third party. Using this confrontation, she would lure Xiaotian into a trap, steal his soulshards, and then place the blame on that third party: the unfortunate Zhang Lie.

Not only that, she would even embroil the other five clans in the conflict. She had planned for them to all head to the venombane glade, hired a hunter to snatch away the fruits of their labor, and even lure out the moonlight wyrm to kill him!

What a malicious plan! She had been targeting the Qin clan—and even the entire Blacksteel settlement—all along!

## **Chapter 24: Inevitable Ruination**

"Wang Xiaohua... ?what a cunning actress, what a malicious plan! To think that I, Qin Xiao, would be stymied by this slip of a girl!

Once we return to the Blacksteel settlement, keep Wang Xiaohua under heavy guard. Immediately send someone to the city of Ning and have them start surveillance on the Wang clan's every action!"

"Yes, Captain!"

Qin Xiao immediately focused his attention on the Wang clan, ignoring powerless actors like Zhang Lie in this whole affair. Oh, they would pay dearly for the loss of his arm!

With the current advancement of technology, it would be possible for him to recover the use of his tattered arm, but the process would require at least a month of intensive care. This implied that Qin Xiao wouldn't be able to hunt superior-grade lifeforms for the next month, and it could well impact his chances for the Void Cup in three months.

If this really were the case, then it would be a lethal blow to Qin Xiao.

At this moment, Qin Xiao's hatred toward Wang Xiaohua and the entire Wang clan at large surged to unimaginable capacities.

Of course, Qin Xiao wasn't the only one angered by the Wang clan. The three corporations and the Yun and Chu clans had all quickly connected Wang Xiaohua with the Wang clan. Wang Xiaohua was nothing more than a rich, spoiled heiress, but the Wang clan was a big name in Ning.

There were hundreds of settlements in the dimensional world, and the Blacksteel settlement was only one of many. Although the Wang clan might not be famous within the Blacksteel settlement, they were one of the top clans of the Bronzetooth settlement in the extreme south of the dimensional world.

With the Void Cup about to occur, the major powers of each settlement were entering the last stages of their preparation for the Cup, and it was inevitable that some hunters would try to sabotage their opponents.

After all, this was something that had occurred during previous iterations of the Void Cup as well.

In the past, the Blacksteel settlement hadn't been a major power. This time around, however, Yun Bing, Chu Feng, and Qin Xiao were upcoming stars that could well pose a threat to those from other settlements.

It wouldn't be strange for others to try to get rid of their opponents.

Most importantly, she was the instigator of the entire affair at the venombane glade, so it was natural that suspicion would be directed at her, especially given her inextricable link to the main branch of the Wang clan.

In truth, there were many hunters in the Blacksteel settlement who felt the same way as Qin Xiao. They focused all their attention on Wang Xiaohua and the Wang clan, and failed to notice Zhang Lie, who had vanished from the gene leaderboard quite a while back.

As a result, Zhang Lie had precious uninterrupted time for strengthening and advancing himself.

That night, representatives from all six clans rushed to the Blacksteel Inn to confront Wang Xiaohua. However, by the time they reached the inn, Wang Xiaohua had already rushed back to Earth. Her sudden disappearance confirmed everyone's suspicions that she had instigated the entire event.

After all, she was the one who had claimed that Qin Xiaotian's corpse would be buried within the venombane glade, and the truth of her words were easy to determine.

They had gone to the venombane glade and returned without Qin Xiaotian's corpse, battered by a whole slew of injuries, without the prize that they had been hunting all night. And now that they tried to confront her, they found that she had vanished!

What other explanation could there be?

All six clans began to surveil the Wang clan. Even the older-generation clan heads had begun to make their moves upon hearing about the news.

Back in Wang Jianxin's house in Ning, Wang Xiaohua was pitifully eyeing her raging father as though she were a convict waiting for judgment.

"Xiaohua, you've really been far too rash! I told you not to mess with him, didn't I? And now look at what you've done! Tell me the truth: did Qin Xiaotian's death have anything to do with you?"

Wang Jianxin frowned, having realized the importance of the matter. He scrutinized his daughter with his gaze, not daring to miss even the slightest detail. As an old hand, he had sensed the latent danger in this conundrum, something he hadn't felt for years.

Wang Xiaohua, tears streaking down her face, cried out, "Dad, Xiaotian's my boyfriend! How could I kill him? Don't you believe your own daughter? I'm telling you, Zhang Lie was the mastermind behind everything! He killed Xiaotian, he killed everyone! And then he stole our soulshards!

"Except for me and him, everyone else who entered the venombane glade is dead! He didn't leave me alive because he pitied me—he's using me as a scapegoat!

"And he even found someone to post an anonymous thread on the forum saying that he saw me scheme against Xiaotian and the rest of them, and they keep besmirching my



name! I've tried to argue against them for hours on end, but no one in the settlement believes me!

"Dad, I need your help. Please, I feel like the Qin clan is going to try to kill me otherwise!"

Despite Wang Xiaohua's melodramatic behavior, Wang Jianxin let out a breath. "Are you finally afraid now? You make me clean up your mess every single time—what's going to happen when I'm not around anymore?"

"If you truly didn't hurt Qin Xiaotian, then what do you have to worry about? As for the Qin clan, you don't have to worry about that either. As long as you didn't kill Qin Xiaotian, I can guarantee that you'll be safe.

"As for clearing up your name, forget it. The moment you and Zhang Lie returned to the settlement together, you lost whatever chance you had at that. The more you try to defend yourself, the more they'll accuse you: you're from the Wang clan, but Zhang Lie's a nobody. Your connections and wealth make you a target."

Upon hearing her father's words, Wang Xiaohua calmed down a little. "Dad, in that case, what should we do? I was the one who buried Xiaotian's corpse myself! I told everyone that, as long as they find the corpse, it'll be clear that I'm not lying. Can't that clear my name?"

"Xiaohua, you're still far too naive. I've just told you that you'll never be able to clear your name as long as you're alive, and people will always be much more suspicious of you than they would Zhang Lie. Don't you know why? Who would believe that a supposed weakling like Zhang Lie would be able to overcome you and Qin Xiaotian on his own?"

"But you don't have to be too worried either: at any rate, you're still a member of the Wang clan. Even if you really had committed the murder, just the Qin clan alone wouldn't be able to do anything to you.

"And while I might not have much standing in the main household, at the very least, I'm still a member of the clan, and our clan certainly won't let us be bullied like this. Let me call your third uncle and ask him to speak to the other clans on your behalf. This should resolve the problem."

Wang Xiaohua was overjoyed. "Really? That would really be a weight off my shoulders! Dad, won't you call him now? Qin Xiao's too frightening, and those hunters from the Blacksteel settlement are still keeping guard outside my hotel room! I don't even dare step outside! They're all so annoying!"

Wang Jianxin could think of no better way of resolving the current dilemma. However, just as he was about to call the current head of the Wang household, Wang Han, the holographic display lit up.

Wang Han was contacting them!

Wang Jianxin couldn't help but think that something was amiss, but he didn't dare refuse a call from the head of the household himself. He immediately accepted the call.

The next moment, the holographic projector showed the cold mien of a middle-aged man.

"Wang Jianxin, you bastard, are you trying to ruin the Wang clan?! The elders of the clan are going to arrive within ten minutes to take Wang Xiaohua away. Hand her to them immediately!" Wang Jianxin and Wang Xiaohua greeted him respectfully, but Wang Han ignored the customary greetings and began yelling at them the moment the call connected.

Wang Jianxin had to reevaluate the importance of this entire affair. "Wang Han, what's going on? Xiaohua's my only child, and I would be fine entrusting her to your care, but why the urgency?"

He was so indulgent of his only daughter that he still intended to protect her even at this critical juncture.

"What's the matter? You're asking me what's the matter? Don't you think that's something I should be asking the two of you?!" Wang Han's roar clearly conveyed his rage.

"Just now, Qin Zongming, Zhou Tianqi, Yun Yi, Chu Tiannan, Li Qing, and Zhao You all called me, 'congratulating' me for my accomplishment! They praised how devious a certain hunter from our Wang household was, stealing the kill of a superior-grade lifeform, killing Zhou Qian, crippling one of Qin Xiao's arms, and causing the entire Blacksteel settlement to erupt in chaos!

"How should I know what's going on?! Tell Wang Xiaohua to pack up and head straight to the Wang manor to explain herself. Otherwise, even the Wang household won't be able to protect her. The six clans have already started surveilling the Wang estate."

Wang Jianxin and Wang Xiaohua gaped at Wang Han's words. Before Wang Jianxin could react, Wang Han had cut the connection. Clearly, he was telling them that the only way for Wang Xiaohua to remain protected was for them to stay where they were.

By now, even Wang Jianxin was starting to panic. "Xiaohua, tell me what's going on!"

"Dad, I don't know! I don't know anything! I don't know anything about stealing a superior-grade lifeform, killing Zhou Qian, and crippling Qin Xiao! I only told them how to head to the venombane glade!

"It wasn't me—do you think someone like me could do any of this? You know how I am! It has to be Zhang Lie, right, it can't be anyone but him! He's taking revenge on us, and he wants to kill us both! It has to be him!"

Wang Xiaohua's pride and arrogance had crumbled away, replaced by overwhelming, unrelenting despair. It was too late, far too late for her. Even if Wang Xiaohua were to remain alive, her future was doomed to bleakness.

## **Chapter 25: Bleak Outcome**

Wang Jianxin thundered, "So what if it were him? Do you have any proof? Would others believe you? Zhang Lie's famous in your settlement for being useless, a fool who spent three months killing white grubs!

"Do you think that the six clans, or even the Blacksteel hunters, would believe that all their plans were waylaid by a fool?! They wouldn't! It's impossible! Even if Zhang Lie were to step out now and claim that he planned everything, no one would believe him!

"From the very moment you stepped back into the Blacksteel settlement, you fell into his trap! There's no way out for you now. Escape! Run away now! You won't be able to withstand the household's punishment, and once you admit to the crime, our whole clan will be sentenced to death. Before the elders get here, escape while you can, as far away as possible!

"I'll do my best to delay them, and I'll help you find a way out of this mess. If possible, head to Zhang Lie's place first—getting to that crippled sister of his will be your only hope. What are you waiting for? Leave, run, flee!"

"Dad, but—where would I go?" Wang Xiaohua blinked at him with tear-stained eyes.

Wang Jianxin pushed a few point cards into her hands. "Leave Ning, and don't head toward any city controlled by the six clans. Go anywhere else you want! Remember, within the next three months, don't attempt to contact me, and don't attempt to contact any of your friends. Do you understand?"

With his hands firmly on Wang Xiaohua's shoulders, Wang Jianxin pushed Wang Xiaohua out of his house.

"Dad, I'm scared!"

"Don't worry. With me around, everything will be resolved eventually. But you have to leave now!"

Wang Xiaohua's heart was filled with dread as to what she would have to endure.

After consoling Wang Xiaohua, Wang Jianxin stuffed her into his hovercar. Not five minutes after Wang Xiaohua left, three imposing middle-aged men rushed into the Wang estate. But Wang Xiaohua had already left, so they couldn't get what they came for. In the end, they had no choice but to take Wang Jianxin into custody instead.

In a mansion in Ning, Wang Han stared at his brother in disappointment. "Have you thought about the consequences of letting your daughter go free?"

Wang Jianxin replied, "Of course I have, but how can I bear to see my daughter be punished for something she hasn't done? She's innocent! Why should she have to be the scapegoat?! You know they'd kill her!"

Wang Han shook his head. "No, the Wang clan wouldn't let her be killed. We need Xiaohua here in order to reveal the truth behind the entire affair, in order to reclaim justice for our clan!

"But now? Now that you've sent her away, if anything happens to her, we won't have any means of refuting the claims leveled against us! Look at this report. I told you how important this matter was, and the other clans aren't going to stop until they've hunted her down!

"Call her back immediately. If she gets caught, if she gets killed—that'll be the end of our clan."

Wang Jianxin looked over the report, his face darkening as he flipped through its pages. What a nasty, vicious plan! It was clearly meant to destroy Wang Xiaohua, and even the rest of the Wang clan as well.

Over the course of a single night, the entire Blacksteel settlement, including its six most influential clans, had become enemies of the Wang clan. The Zhou, Qin, and Chu clans, who had suffered most, even claimed the Wang clan as their sworn enemy.

Unless the Wang clan could provide irrefutable evidence that Wang Xiaohua played no role in the affair, none of the three clans would let matters rest so easily.

"Justice? Brother, don't lie to me. I'm not like Xiaohua, and I don't believe in some supposed justice! It's too hard to recover the truth. I've asked Xiaohua and she doesn't know anything—the other party has made sure that there's no way out for her!" Wang Jianxin's face was pale, as though he were a beached fish.

"Regardless, you had better call Xiaohua back. With her around, we can at least explain that we're investigating what happened, but if she vanishes, we'll be tacitly accepting responsibility for what has happened!"

"I'll call her back, but you have to promise, as the head of the household, that you won't throw her out to the wolves, or you'll have to kill me first!"

Despite having been expelled from the main household, Wang Jianxin couldn't turn his back from it completely, and he eventually relented after proposing his own condition.

Wang Han shook his head in exasperation. "Alright, I promise you I'll do my utmost best to protect her from retribution. Send for her!"

"Your best isn't enough—you have to promise you won't hand her over!"

Wang Han inclined his head and fisted his hair in frustration. "Fine. I promise I won't hand her over. Send her back!"

Wang Jianxin gave his brother a piercing glance before activating the transceiver on his wristwatch, a specialized communication tool between father and daughter.

However, Wang Xiaohua rejected the call. When he tried calling her again, the call was blocked completely. It was only then that Wang Jianxin remembered that he had warned Wang Xiaohua not to try to communicate with him, or with any of her friends.

She likely thought that the Wang clan was trying to find her through Wang Jianxin, so she had blocked all calls.

"Quick, head to this location!" Wang Jianxin, panicking, immediately showed Wang Han's subordinates the coordinates listed on his wristwatch.

"Brother, if something were to happen to the Wang clan, you realize you'll be held solely responsible for the clan's downfall?! How are you going to explain this to Father?!" Wang Han was barely able to keep himself from screaming.

"There's nothing I can do about it now, is there? Quick, send someone to Zhang Lie's house. As long as we have Zhang Hanxiang in custody, we might be able to salvage the situation."

"Zhang Lie, Zhang Hanxiang? Zhang Yi's two children? Are you certain that he was the one responsible for all this?" Wang Han was a little skeptical: who would believe that someone as young as Zhang Lie could come up with such a devious plan?

After the incident, he had reviewed what little information he had on Zhang Lie: by all reports a mediocre, useless hunter who amounted to nothing. How could someone like him have offended all six clans, killed Zhou Qian, and crippled Qin Xiao within a single night? The very thought was ludicrous!

Wang Jianxin's face turned even paler. Gritting his teeth, he said, "Even if it wasn't him, he's clearly connected to this entire affair!"

"Wang Bin, I want you to personally head to the Zhang house and to take both of them into custody. Make sure you don't alert any security guards along the way. The Void Cup's about to start, and we can't have anyone getting disqualified now!"

"Yes, Head!" One of Wang Han's subordinates strode forward, bowed, and rushed out.

"Why in the world would you provoke someone like him? As far as I understand, that brat's a useless hunter. If he weren't provoked, why would he risk his life to create all this trouble?"

"You've been blinded by money, Brother! No matter how many treasures that Zhang Yi had, he was only ever a peak second-realm hunter. He wouldn't have had anything of true value! If the Wang clan were to suffer because of this incident, even I won't be able to protect you and your daughter."

"I know full well what I did! If things come to that, hand me over. I'll bear responsibility for everything! Give the other clans some benefits as compensation, and count it as my debt to the clan. I have no choice but to repay it in my next life, don't I?"

Wang Jianxin would even sacrifice himself to protect his daughter, and no amount of criticism on Wang Han's part would change anything. Instead, Wang Han only sighed. If Wang Xiaohua couldn't be found, then the six clans' grudges wouldn't be resolved satisfactorily. In that case, they would take it out on the Wang clan.

In truth, they had already begun taking action against the Wang clan upon receiving the news that Wang Jianxin had been summoned to the Wang headquarters. All manner of incidents were suddenly happening to the businesses owned by the Wang clan.

Nasty rumors and gossip about the Wang clan abounded. In a matter of minutes, the Wang clan's assets had dropped by over a hundred million, and that number was surely just going to keep increasing.

Worst of all, of these six clans, the Yun and Chu clans were even more powerful than the Wang clan, and if they had set their mind to it, they could have ruined the Wang clan instantly. It was because of that potential threat that the Wang clan could do nothing but suffer their losses in silence.

Meanwhile, Wang Xiaohua had finally made her way—after quite a number of twists and detours—to Zhang Lie's house. However, she only dared to look at it from afar, because she could see Zhang Lie making breakfast through an open window.

By now, Wang Xiaohua thought of Zhang Lie as a demon. She didn't dare to appear in front of him, let alone provoke him.

Zhang Lie didn't notice her presence, but he was certain that the mess that he had inadvertently created would only grow larger with time. His sister, Hanxiang, would therefore end up in danger.

As a result, after his restful sleep in the dimensional world's inn, he immediately headed back home. After having breakfast, Zhang Lie immediately brought Zhang Hanxiang to an inspection bureau.

The inspection bureau was a government organization responsible for testing and recording the quantity and quality of a hunter's genetic energy, constitution, and strength in order to categorize that hunter as a certain class of citizen.

Given Zhang Lie's current numbers, he was quite confident that he could be tested as a first-class citizen. And as a first-class citizen, one of his direct relatives would be able to benefit from all that his status conferred. In particular, he would be able to send his sister to a specialized high school for further education.

Once she entered the school, she would be protected. Because of the stellar and spatial warfare that had led to extreme casualties at the start of the century, there had been extremely heavy emphasis placed on cultivating the talents of the next generation.

Part of this emphasis manifested in the form of extreme protection and an absolute ban on violence on campus grounds. As long as Hanxiang was properly enrolled as a student, even the Wang clan would be powerless to act against her.