

# Ultragene Warlord

## Chapter 6: Advancement Plan

Zhang Lie was surprised that he had already received an offer for the three fire-attuned techniques that he had uploaded onto the trading post.

After finding a cheap inn in which he could access the Internet, Zhang Lie hissed through his teeth at the terrible offer he had received. The other party had offered to trade one water-attuned technique for all three of his! Was he crazy?

"Don't you understand the rules of the trading post? I'll take three water-attuned techniques for my three fire-attuned ones, no more and no less!"

The other party was apparently also online, because he received a response quickly. "Your three techniques are too inferior! The technique I'm offering you is worth all three of yours."

"Ha! Who'd believe you?"

"Water-attuned techniques aren't all that rare, but trying to obtain three at once is a tall order."

"You're only offering one technique because you don't have three, aren't you?"

"Well, you're half-right. I only have two water-attuned techniques on hand, but one of my techniques is worth three of yours."

"Show me why."

The other party sent over a holographic recording of a palm-based technique, [Three-Wave Crescendo].

Each palm strike was akin to a wave, and each would be stronger than the last. Such a technique, simple and destructive in execution, was likely one of the best high-grade techniques that could be obtained in the first realm.

"It's quite good, but not enough to be exchanged for three of my own."

After all, it wasn't even a legendary-grade technique. On the other hand, both [Soulfire Blade] and [The Burning Pyres] were high-grade techniques, so Zhang Lie would be reluctant to trade one for two, let alone one for three.

"And the second technique?"

The other party sent another holographic recording over. This time, it was a movement technique: [Rippling Walk].

It wasn't a particularly advanced technique, but agility-enhancing movement techniques were generally thought to be more important in the dimensional world than either attack and defense techniques. After all, hunters only had one life; they had to be prepared to flee at any moment.

"I'll trade you my three techniques for both of yours, as well as 50 grams of S-gold alloy."

"Weren't we going to do a one-for-three trade?"

"I'd be crazy to trade all three of my techniques for one of yours! Neither of your techniques are legendary-grade. Your first technique is worth one of mine, your second is comparable to my [Flameburst Step], and you'll have to give me 50 grams of S-gold alloy for my [Scorching Fist]."

Being too polite on the trading post would make the other party treat him like a doormat.

"Nonsense! At the very least, [Three-Wave Crescendo] is worth two of your techniques—it'll even be able to damage superior-grade lifeforms with all three blows! And [Rippling Walk] lasts longer than your [Flameburst Step]."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "Don't treat me like a newbie. I've seen countless hunters like you preying on the clueless. It's true that your [Three-Wave Crescendo] can boast significant power, but it also requires hitting the same area with all three strikes. This is a clear flaw with the technique."

His past life's experience made it trivial to identify the strengths and weaknesses of any given technique. He continued, "As a water-attuned technique, [Rippling Walk] is longer-lasting by nature, whereas [Flameburst Step] provides a more instant, explosive advantage. Their strengths are in different areas, and their value is equivalent."

"Damn, what's someone like you doing pretending to be a newbie? You find this sort of thing funny?"

The other party was clearly quite shocked by Zhang Lie's reasoned rebuttal; after all, this was his first post on the trading post, and he had intended on scamming him—only to find that he wasn't an easy mark.

"Actually, yes."

"Shameless bastard!"

"Well, are you going to trade? Two techniques and 50 grams of S-gold alloy."

"Of course I will, but 50 grams is too much. 10 grams at most."

"30 grams is the lowest I'll go."

"...fine."

After successfully completing the trade, Zhang Lie left his room and rented a training chamber for a day with 50 points, in which he began to practice [Three-Wave Crescendo].

This was a water-attuned technique that took the nature of water in a completely different direction compared to [Calm Waters]. The crux to [Three-Wave Crescendo] was the multiplicative effect of each strike. Instead of treating all three strikes as one attack, it would be more appropriate to practice each strike separately before trying to combine them into one.

At first, his actions weren't particularly quick. There was a significant delay between each palm strike, but the more Zhang Lie practiced, the less the delay. In the end, Zhang Lie produced what seemed like a casual palm strike.

Pa! Pa! Pa! It seemed as though that one strike had three separate afterimages. But, in truth, Zhang Lie had struck thrice in that one moment.

It had taken Zhang Lie half a day of concerted effort to obtain a rudimentary grasp of [Three-Wave Crescendo]. Subsequently, he chose to rest rather than to study [Rippling Walk].

It would take some time for his brain and body to adjust to engraving a technique on his genetic core, and taking appropriate breaks would be more beneficial for his overall growth. Resting was an integral part of training, after all.

After his break, Zhang Lie continued browsing the trading post.

Techniques were knowledge-based and could be uploaded directly to the trading post, but physical items like the S-gold alloy would need to be manually retrieved. Transactions involving parties from different settlements would require the use of teleportation devices, which incurred a small handling fee.

Zhang Lie headed to the branch of the trading post in the Blacksteel settlement, where he inputted his transaction ID and password for robotic retrieval of the S-gold alloy, a grayish-black substance about the size of his thumb.

Despite its unassuming appearance, the alloy actually commanded a jaw-dropping price, and even then was quickly snapped up by interested buyers. It was a particularly rare and valuable crafting material for weapons, affording significant penetrating power even for superior-grade lifeforms.

With his newly acquired S-gold alloy and the mutated-grade galewolf's backbone in hand, Zhang Lie headed for the settlement's forging apparatus. To be precise, this "forging apparatus" was a robot enhanced with artificial intelligence.

He handed over the mutated-grade galewolf's backbone and designated the S-gold alloy as a supplementary material, and was told that the forging process would cost 300 points and take a few hours.

After transferring the requisite points, Zhang Lie returned to the training chamber and began studying [Rippling Walk]. [Rippling Walk] was a little unique in that it required certain environmental effects to be used. Luckily, the chamber he had rented provided access to different terrain—given a modest expenditure of points, of course.

After transforming the floorboards of the training chamber into lapping waves, Zhang Lie began to practice his [Rippling Walk], working specifically on his speed and control. In three short hours, he quickly grew as accustomed to the water as a surfer.

He left the training chamber and headed back to the forging apparatus to retrieve his new weapon. The sword shone silver. Given the use of a galewolf's backbone as the primary crafting ingredient, its pommel and hilt had been fashioned with a moon motif. The blade was balanced, light, and aesthetically pleasing.

Zhang Lie was very satisfied with the sword. As he gingerly touched its edge to determine its keenness, he murmured, "I suppose I'll name you Galewind."

Compared to the previous shabby blade that Zhang Lie had been using, Galewind was far better. If the other blade had a combined stat value of 5, then Galewind would have a combined stat value of at least 50.

Zhang Lie couldn't wait to test out his new blade.

Now that he was well-equipped, he would be able to move on to the next stage in his advancement plan: picking herbs.

As he strode out of the settlement, however, Zhang Lie again found himself beset by Wang Xiaohua.

"Zhang Lie, you coward! You're finally back out again!" Wang Xiaohua, surrounded by her four teammates, tapped her foot impatiently, her mouth curled into an expression of distaste.

## **Chapter 7: Harvesting Herbs**

"Wang Xiaohua, what's wrong with you? Haven't you learned your lesson after what happened yesterday? And you've brought your teammates with you this time, I see."

"Zhang Lie, you've been getting quite cocky lately, haven't you? How dare you attack one of our teammates?"

"To think that even a weakling like you would dare to bully our Xiaohua!"

"If we weren't here to protect her, wouldn't you keep attacking her again and again?"

Wang Xiaohua's teammates began taunting him, but Zhang Lie was indifferent to the verbal assault. "Perhaps you should all stop her from harassing others instead, no?"

"Eh, you dare talk back to us? Xiaohua was giving you face by waiting for you so patiently outside the settlement gates, but you disregarded that and even beat her up! Don't you think you should compensate her for her troubles?"

Wang Xiaohua was Qin Xiaotian's girlfriend, and Qiu Changming, the leader of her team, would naturally defer to her demands to get into Qin Xiaotian's good books.

"I heard you've killed a large number of white grubs recently, haven't you? You must have quite a few of their cores stored up, then. Hand all those points over, and I'll show you mercy and let you leave."

Zhang Lie scoffed. "Are you hunters or bandits?"

"So what if we want to rob you? We're showing interest in you, you understand? You should be kneeling on the ground and thanking us for our attention!"

Qiu Changming's arrogance quickly attracted a crowd of onlookers.

"Haha, the king of the dumps is dead for sure this time. Remember how he dared to fight back against Wang Xiaohua yesterday? All hunters work in teams, except for useless trash like him that no one wants—and after he attacked Wang Xiaohua, of course she would retaliate with her entire team."

"All her teammates have their mutated gene capacity maxed out, don't they? They're ranked in the hundreds on the gene leaderboard, so surely Zhang Lie's dead meat now."

Zhang Lie narrowed his eyes. "Scram."

"Oho? You're really asking for a beating, aren't you?!"

Qiu Changming rubbed his thumb and index finger together, as though Zhang Lie was an ant that he could crush effortlessly. However, just as he spoke, Zhang Lie made his move. Given the power disparity between him and Qiu Changming, no one had expected him to do so.

Pa! Pa! Pa! [Three-Wave Crescendo]!

Three palm strikes landed on Qiu Changming's chest, as fast as lightning, he force so great that it flung his body into the air.

"Captain!" Wang Xiaohua's other teammates snarled as they surrounded Zhang Lie.

However, Zhang Lie was already getting ready to leave. He bent his knees slightly, and genetic energy coalesced into waves beneath his feet—[Rippling Walk].

With the additional speed from his mutated-grade galewolf soulshard, in the blink of an eye, his silhouette became nothing more than a tiny dot in the distance. No one would be able to catch him given his current speed.

Wang Xiaohua clutched her hair and screamed. "Zhang Lie! Are you going to run off like a coward? Turn around and face me like a man!"

Zhang Lie wasn't an idiot; why would he waste his time with these fools? In the end, he vanished from sight.

But was Zhang Lie afraid of them? Of course not. Given the gene fragments he currently had, along with his combat experience, it would have been a piece of cake for him to take them all down. However, he had no intention of revealing his true strength just yet.

His earlier attack had more or less demonstrated some level of competency, but it wasn't anything too shocking. The next stages of his plan required secrecy, so he didn't want to attract attention. It made sense for him to hide his strength.

Clad in translucent white armor, Zhang Lie rushed toward his first herb-collecting locale.

Herbs were the basic ingredient for spiritual pills and potions. In the wide expanse of the dimensional world grew not only all sorts of strange lifeforms, but also a multitude of plants with unique capabilities. These plants were native to the dimensional world, and their flowers, fruits, and stems all possessed near-miraculous properties.

It had been just about a century since the dimensional world was discovered, and although mankind's understanding of this mysterious region was improving day by day, dimensional herblore was still in its infancy.

It would be at least a decade before the rise of the first pillmasters. The development of strength- and vitality-enhancing potions would take another decade, not to mention the invaluable limit-breaking potions.

Past the first realm of the dimensional world was the second realm, the third realm... in order to improve their chances of survival in ever more dangerous environments, hunters would have to be very familiar with concocting pills and potions.

As a reincarnator, Zhang Lie's most valuable assets were potion recipes. In order to produce these potions, he would need to collect all manner of herbs and other ingredients. The first location to which Zhang Lie was headed was the Bloodcrystal Valley.

The valley was home to an enormous colony of blood ants, a type of mutated-grade lifeform. Blood-ant soulshards would enrage their users, enhancing all their physical capabilities for a short period of time.

Zhang Lie needed to obtain a superior-grade blood-ant soulshard, because it was one of the rare few means by which he could damage disaster-grade lifeforms. His eventual goal in the first realm of the dimensional world was to hunt down a disaster-grade lifeform that had somehow made its way down to the first realm in the future, having been weakened greatly in the process.

Of course, given his current skill level, Zhang Lie had no intention of challenging any superior-grade lifeforms, let alone disaster-grade lifeforms. With only ten superior gene fragments, challenging a superior-grade lifeform at this stage was akin to committing suicide.

The superior-grade white grub that he had risked his life to kill was an abnormally weak existence for superior-grade lifeforms, and Zhang Lie would certainly be unable to defeat stronger ones at the moment.

Superior-grade blood ants tended to hide deep within the valley, and Zhang Lie would avoid them if at all possible.

His primary goal for entering the valley was to collect herbs. Of course, if everything were to go smoothly, he'd also collect a number of gene fragments, and ideally also the soulshard of a mutated blood ant.

The Bloodcrystal Valley was composed of a number of hill-like structures formed by gigantic red crystals, hence its name. Caves of all sizes were distributed around each hill. By the roof of each cave were a number of red, root-like protrusions, the precise herbs that Zhang Lie was here to collect.

Known as blood whiskers, they looked more like red icicles than plants. In truth, they were a highly potent herb, as well as one of the main ingredients for Zhang Lie's Potion #1.

To date, there were two reasons this herb's properties had yet to be discovered, which were the two problems that Zhang Lie would have to resolve.



First, those cave entrances led into the blood ants' anthills, and he would be attacked as soon as he got close to them. Second, blood ants were highly territorial and pack-based lifeforms, and an individual blood ant could quickly summon the entire colony to its aid.

Individually, these blood ants were about the size of small dogs, but they had a surprising ability to jump. Their pincers were stronger than steel.

In a prolonged battle, they could even enrage themselves with a specialized genetic technique: [Bloodbath]. It would temporarily inhibit their sense of pain and cause them to swarm any nearby attackers, not stopping until one or the other party was dead. It was this characteristic behavior that gave them the name of 'blood ant'.

For dealing with such pesky lifeforms, hunters would try to lure one or two isolated ants out from near the boundary of the hill; none would dare to enter. Most hunters would simply avoid the region entirely.

If Zhang Lie were to attack by force, he would receive nothing more than a quick death, but of course he had a plan. Rather than entering the valley directly, he climbed up a tall hill neighboring the valley.

From the top of the hill, Zhang Lie suddenly spread his arms wide, morphed his suit of armor into a glider, activated his galewolf soulshard, then jumped down. Wind swirled around him, boosting the speed of his descent.

With Zhang Lie's innate sense of proprioception, as well as the skeins of amorphous matter he could shoot out from his hand to control and orient his descent, Zhang Lie glided toward a large crystal hill, as agile as a bird.

And as he descended, he reached out into the caves and tore out quite a few blood whiskers. Of course, as he did so, he was subject to a number of scattered attacks, all of which were blocked by his armor.

Without activating [Bloodbath], it would be very difficult for blood ants to penetrate his armor. But after their failed attacks, they immediately began to chitter away, sending the whole valley abuzz. A veritable sea of ants began pouring out of each cave in a red flood.

Luckily, Zhang Lie had anticipated such a situation, and he began dashing out of the valley the moment he touched down. Blood ants were highly territorial, and the horde of ants chasing after him immediately retreated outside the valley itself.

Of course, the few blood ants that had managed to land on Zhang Lie during his descent failed to make it back, having died at his hand. Unfortunately, none of his kills generated a soulshard.



As he stored the blood whiskers he had grabbed, Zhang Lie again climbed up the neighboring hill. That he had managed to collect almost thirty stalks of the herb demonstrated the viability of his technique.

However, the cohesion of the blood ants rather surprised him: he had only expected ants to emerge from a single anthill, not the entire valley.

Given these unexpected circumstances, Zhang Lie didn't dare to repeat his maneuver immediately. Instead, he closely scrutinized the behavior of the blood ants.

After expelling the intruder, they had quickly returned to their individual anthills. And by the time half an hour or so had passed, the entire valley was as peaceful as it had initially been.

Zhang Lie stood up, stretched, and prepared for his second descent. His first time through, his harvesting technique left much to be desired. This time around, given his past experience, he would surely be able to collect more blood whiskers.

1. A very imaginative name...

2. Hello, Peter Parker.

## **Chapter 8: Bountiful Harvest**

Amidst the howling winds, Zhang Lie again leapt down from the hill. This time, by the time Zhang Lie escaped from the valley, he had over a hundred stalks of blood whiskers in his backpack.

Zhang Lie had spent a significant amount of time preparing for this collection attempt, so he would obviously grab everything he could.

Because the properties of the blood whiskers had yet to be discovered, and because no one had figured out how to efficiently harvest them, there had to be over ten thousand stalks in this valley alone.

Given Zhang Lie's current harvesting rate, even if he collected a hundred stalks each time, it would take over a hundred glides for him to collect them all. Zhang Lie gave himself a week to do all this.

It seemed as though the backpack he was using wouldn't be sufficient anymore. Once he returned to the settlement, he would have to take a short detour to the nearby swamplands to hunt some potbellied toads for their soulshards.

These blood whiskers were a necessary ingredient for Zhang Lie, so he had even devised a series of backup plans if his original harvesting method had failed.

Unfortunately, there would always be variables he couldn't account for. On his tenth descent, a vibrating chitter reverberated through the valley.

The next moment, a blood-red shadow rushed out from its depths. Its body was as large as a carriage, its pincers the size of polearms, its transparent wings criss-crossed with bloody streaks of red, and its huge eyes colored a deep crimson.

"A superior-grade blood ant!"

Zhang Lie's face turned pale. He activated his galewolf soulshard immediately, then rushed toward the valley exit. He was fast, but the superior-grade blood ant's attack was even faster!

A blood-red arrow shot toward Zhang Lie, so quickly he couldn't react in time! The moment the arrow had shot out, Zhang Lie had had a premonition of danger and had tried to shift to dodge the blow. However, by the time his body began to move, the arrow had already exploded upon impact with his left shoulder, careening him into the distance.

Luckily, Zhang Lie was able to adapt to the shock almost immediately. With both [Rippling Walk] and his galewolf soulshard activated, he twisted in mid-air and used the momentum of the explosion to launch himself toward the valley's exit.

"Ka, kaka!"

The superior-grade blood ant glanced around the valley. When it discovered that its target had vanished, it clicked its mandibles a few times, emanated a deep, vibrating chitter, and then retreated back into the depths of the valley.

Deep within a nearby forest, Zhang Lie let out a sigh of relief after hearing the deep chitter. That was far too dangerous—he'd only been collecting a few blood whiskers, but somehow a superior-grade blood ant had appeared!

And it even attacked Zhang Lie immediately.

He glanced at the crystallizing wound on his left shoulder, chuckling bitterly to himself. How hostile, to have shot a blood arrow at him right after its appearance! If not for his white-grub armor, he'd have been dead by now.

Zhang Lie began to circulate his genetic energy to prevent the spread of the blood ant's peculiar strain of genetic energy.

The blood arrow that the superior-grade blood ant had shot at him was a long-ranged attack that would gradually cause the blood in the affected region—and then his whole body, if untreated—to crystallize, turning him into a sculpture of blood.

It took him a whole hour to localize the blood ant's genetic energy and stop the spread of the crystallization. If not for his armor and the boost to his constitution from his ten superior gene fragments, he would surely have died then and there.

The appearance of the superior-grade blood ant marked an end to Zhang Lie's harvest.

Instead of retreating back into its anthill as Zhang Lie had expected, it instead stood guard at the top of the largest of the crystal hills in the Bloodcrystal Valley, leaving Zhang Lie no choice but to retreat.

Of course, his retreat would only be temporary. Once the superior-grade blood ant returned to its anthill, Zhang Lie would certainly continue harvesting these blood whiskers. Without risk, there was no reward. These blood whiskers would be a second source of wealth for him, and he wasn't about to give up on them so easily.

Since he wasn't able to gather more blood whiskers at the moment, Zhang Lie headed toward the swamplands.

During this period of time, he collected a few herbs that were easily found all over the region and hunted a few more lifeforms to fill up his gene capacity.

A giant swamp, shaped somewhat like a prayer mat, lay at the heart of the swamplands. It was the natural habitat of the potbellied toads, regular-grade lifeforms beloved by most hunters. Their soulshards were particularly useful, and almost every hunter who entered the dimensional world would get their hands on a few.

Zhang Lie immediately spotted a potbellied toad peeking its black head out of the surface of the swamp. Although the toads were commonplace, their soulshards were particularly difficult to obtain, for two reasons.

First, regular-grade lifeforms didn't have a high probability of condensing soulshards. Second, the swamp was a very difficult terrain to fight in, and there were quite a number of other lifeforms around—some mutated-grade, and a few even superior-grade.

Even those hunters who had reached their mutated gene threshold wouldn't dare to charge straight in.

Hunting the swamp's potbellied toads required more than brute strength. For others, this might have been a problem, but for the reincarnated Zhang Lie, this was a trivial issue to solve.

While travelling to the region, Zhang Lie had already worked out a plan. He started a small fire by a clearing near the swamp, where he began to roast a one-eyed pheasant that he had caught not too far from the area.

A salivating scent spread throughout the swamp, and all the potbellied toads began to croak as they smelled it. Unfortunately, they quieted down the moment they swam to the edge of the swamp, as if forcing themselves to resist the temptation.

Zhang Lie had expected this. He retrieved what looked like a four-leaf clover from his backpack, crushed it, then spread the pieces over the roasting pheasant. When crushed and roasted, this plant would release a curious smoke that would attract all frog-type lifeforms close by.

A blue fog, barely visible to the naked eye, spread out from the fire and into the swamp. When it reached the potbellied toads, they immediately rushed out of the swamp toward the direction of the scent. They were surprisingly large, about half the size of an adult male.

As soon as the potbellied toad at the very front saw the smoke wafting from the one-eyed pheasant, it immediately opened its mouth, attempting to snare the pheasant with its tongue.

Of course, Zhang Lie would stop it from doing so. With a few waves of his sword, all the potbellied toads that had tried to stick their tongues out found them severed.

The next moment, Zhang Lie activated his galewolf soulshard and charged toward them.

[Three-Wave Crescendo]—each palm strike struck with the force of a tidal wave, and the potbellied toads that were unfortunate enough to be caught in the attack all collapsed.

The toads' only real danger came from their long, sticky tongues, as well as their ability to stuff just about anything down their throat. However, given the large disparity between their strength and Zhang Lie's, he had nothing to fear.

As the smoke continued wafting around the swamp, more and more toads began to surface. In a flurry of blows, Zhang Lie swept through the toads like a sickle through wheat. It took a dozen kills, and as many shattered soulshards with relatively useless capabilities, before Zhang Lie finally obtained his first potbellied-toad soulshard.

[Soulshard designation: storage-type (spatial).]

Upon activating the soulshard, a miniature pouch appeared in Zhang Lie's hand. The pouch possessed the property of spatial miniaturization; although it wasn't much larger than his hand, it could store up to a truckload's worth of space.

However, even that wasn't enough: the pouch would fill up after storing a dozen toad carcasses. Zhang Lie couldn't be satisfied with just one such pouch. Since he was at the swamp already, he might as well get a full dozen.

The blue smoke continued attracting toads, and Zhang Lie began his slaughter in earnest, wishing that he had a multi-target offensive technique. With his palm attack and his blade, another dozen toads lost their lives, producing one more soulshard.

Just as Zhang Lie was about to pocket the soulshard, however, a mutated-grade potbellied toad, about twice the size of a regular one, appeared from the swamp. Zhang Lie was hoping for exactly such an opportunity: after all, it meant that he would soon be able to have a mutated-grade potbellied-toad soulshard.

The resulting mutated pouch would be at least thrice the size of a regular one. If he could obtain multiple copies of it, he wouldn't have to worry about storage space ever again.

He activated [Calm Waters], flung a few toad carcasses toward the mutated toad, and followed up with a blow from Galewind. As he circulated his genetic energy, his blade took on a pale blue sheen, and he reached the toad in an instant.

He had obstructed the mutated toad's vision with the carcasses of the regular-grade toads, and that momentary distraction was sufficient for Zhang Lie to approach. By the time it sensed danger, a pale blue longsword had already impaled its head. The mutated-grade potbellied toad slumped in death, without even having time to croak.

As Zhang Lie smashed a regular-grade potbellied-toad soulshard to pieces, a soulshard condensed over the mutated-grade toad's carcass. He'd acquired its soulshard!

With that soulshard in hand, Zhang Lie began slaughtering the other toads even more quickly. Countless toads that jumped out of the swamp fell to his blade.

After another ten minutes, when the smoke finally dissipated, the potbellied toads stopped splashing out of the swamp. During the ten-minute bonanza, Zhang Lie had obtained thirteen regular-grade and two mutated-grade soulshards, a large haul by any standard.

## **Chapter 9: Limit-Breaking Potion**

Even ignoring the profit that the regular-grade potbellied-toad soulshards would bring in, the two mutated-grade toad carcasses would easily be worth the trip on their own. Their tongues could be used to make high-quality bowstrings. Their meat was a particular delicacy, and could be consumed for mutated gene fragments.

After the battle, Zhang Lie, with two mutated-toad pouches tied to his waist, began to scour the battlefield for his spoils. Within five minutes, except for an extinguished fire and bits of blood and offal, nothing remained on the scene.

Zhang Lie then headed to a secluded cave, where he began to butcher the mutated toad carcasses in earnest. After slicing off their long, elastic tongue, and removing them of their innards, he skewered and seasoned their legs, then began cooking it over a fire.

The intense fight had consumed a significant chunk of Zhang Lie's stamina. With such a delicacy in front of him, it was natural for him to want to dig in. The meat of the potbellied toad was surprisingly tender. It took only ten minutes or so for the meat to brown, and they were giving off a mouthwatering scent.

Zhang Lie grabbed a skewer, opened his mouth wide, and began to eat.

Minutes later, as he patted his bursting tummy in satisfaction, Zhang Lie had successfully obtained twenty mutated gene fragments. His stats were incomparable to what they had been before.

Zhang Lie: a mortal lifeform

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

Techniques: Rippling Walk (novice), Three-Wave Crescendo (novice)

Genes: Basic, 110; Mutated, 60; Superior, 10

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

His basic gene capacity had even reached an unimaginable hundred and ten fragments. Before the revelation that there could be a breakthrough with the foundational framework, everyone's basic gene capacity was at a hundred fragments exactly.

After reaching that limit, no matter how much flesh hunters consumed from regular-grade lifeforms, they wouldn't be able to exceed that limit. Only with a breakthrough in their foundational framework could they finally increase that limit by ten fragments.

And although ten basic gene fragments didn't seem like much, the fact that they were past the usual limit meant that they were more beneficial to a hunter's constitution than even ten mutated gene fragments.

There were three conditions required to experience a breakthrough with one's foundational framework, and the third condition was something that Zhang Lie had only gotten a handle on after his reincarnation.

The first, and most basic, condition was to raise one's foundational framework to its tenth stage and to not have progressed to a more advanced framework.

The second condition was to have consumed sufficiently many white grub cores, or the growth factors extracted from their flesh.

The third condition was that their body had to be flooded with adrenaline.

Each of the three conditions was difficult to satisfy individually, and to meet all three requirements would require an exceedingly unusual string of coincidences—or foreknowledge.

In truth, the past Zhang Lie had missed this opportunity to expand his basic gene capacity.

It was widely known that there were only ten stages to the standard foundational framework, and that reaching the tenth stage would grant access to a more advanced framework and genetic techniques.

Most hunters would have prepared such a framework as soon as they reached the ninth stage of their foundational framework. Why would anyone behave like Zhang Lie, refusing to study a more advanced framework before experiencing a breakthrough with his foundational one?

The second condition seemed even stranger: why would anyone consume so many white-grub cores? The white-grub cave had been more or less deserted, even of beginner hunters hunting for their first gene fragments.

The third condition sounded simple, but was actually the hardest to achieve in practice. Even Zhang Lie didn't know about its specifics. Kissing would increase the concentration of adrenaline in one's body, as would life-or-death struggles, but it was hardly easy to quantify what the required concentration was.

In the past, it had taken seven more years before someone unintentionally satisfied all three conditions and experienced a breakthrough. Given how unusual these conditions were, Zhang Lie was certain that he was now the first hunter to exceed a capacity of a hundred basic gene fragments.

And not only that, he would soon exceed a basic capacity of a hundred and ten—even a hundred and fifty!—gene fragments, because he was right about to concoct Potion #1.

With the main ingredient, blood whiskers, in hand, he now only needed to acquire a few supplementary ingredients that were relatively easy to harvest.

After returning to the settlement, he sold off the remainder of the toad carcasses, acquiring 31,000 points and catapulting him into fiscal freedom. He stored the herbs he had harvested in the warehouse. Subsequently, he logged into the trading post and anonymously listed five regular-grade potbellied-toad soulshards. Finally, he spent a



thousand points to rent the best laboratory the settlement had to offer and began to concoct the limit-breaking potion.

The recipe was particularly complicated, and it had been years since Zhang Lie last made this potion, so there was a significant amount of trial and error involved. It took seventeen long hours of work and three failed attempts before Zhang Lie finally succeeded.

The blood-red potion before him raised Zhang Lie's spirits. Without a doubt, this was the first Potion #1 to be made in the entire world.

Zhang Lie inclined his head and downed the potion in one fell swoop. Fire burned his throat and body, a scorching baptism.

He felt as though he was experiencing the blood ants' [Bloodbath]. As the potent effects of the blood whiskers surged through his body, a scorching heat enveloped him from head to toe, as though he had immersed his entire body in a vat of chili peppers.

Zhang Lie could clearly sense how, under the dominating effects of this potion, his cells were developing in overdrive, his pores seeming to breathe out fire. His muscles began to contract, becoming even tougher and more resilient. His arteries, veins, and capillaries thickened. His body began to evolve at its most fundamental, genetic, level.

Sweat poured down his back. Zhang Lie felt as though he had been running laps in the rain, his body wet and damp all over. Along with the sweat were expunged small black impurities, and a curious stench filled the air.

With his body purged and cleansed, Zhang Lie gained a little resistance to the potent heat of the potion. He mastered his body and began circulating his genetic energy according to his [Ninecarp Transformation].

After ten full cycles, the genetic core in Zhang Lie's dantian grew to twice its size, and began to take on an opalescent sheen. The pale pink carp in his core seemed to come alive.

The gene fragments that augmented his body seemed to have been converted in their entirety to pure genetic energy. Zhang Lie directed all that energy toward the [Ninecarp Transformation] engraved on his genetic core.

The entire process lasted three hours. Under the combination of potent medicine and a seemingly inexhaustible vein of genetic energy, Zhang Lie evolved his genetic framework from early first-stage to mid first-stage.

Zhang Lie's body had thinned, as though he had just survived a major illness, but he had actually grown several times stronger than before. His stomach began to rumble, and Zhang Lie immediately ordered a sumptuous meal.

Now that he was rich and able to generate points efficiently, he could certainly afford to spend ten points on such a meal. A robot brought it to him without much delay.

After consuming Potion #1, not only did his genetic framework evolve, so too did his body, and he was now able to make use of his strength much more efficiently. More importantly, his basic gene capacity had advanced by another fifty points: Zhang Lie could now have a shocking hundred and sixty basic gene fragments.

If all his other genes were at capacity, the additional sixty fragments would bring him a decisive, dominating advantage.

Potion #1 was just the first step in his advancement plan; not too long into the future, he would be able to concoct Potion #2, which would increase his mutated gene capacity, as well as Potion #3, for his superior gene capacity. Eventually, he would even be able to target Potion #4, which had been incredibly scarce even in the past.

Of course, with his current strength, Potion #1 was the limit. He knew where to find the herbs required for Potion #2, but would be unable to harvest them without growing stronger first. And he didn't even dare think about Potion #3.

After his meal, Zhang Lie went back to concocting more potions. Potion #1 would surely revolutionize the world.

It took the remainder of the day for Zhang Lie to exhaust his entire supply of blood whiskers, producing five copies of Potion #1. He wouldn't release them into the market yet, not before he grew strong enough to avoid being a target. If they were to be revealed now, given his current level of strength, he would likely be caught by one corporation or another.

After packing and storing the potions, Zhang Lie cleaned up the laboratory and left, then exchanged 20,000 points for cash. Because of the magnitude of the transaction, Zhang Lie was given the currency in the form of an unassuming black card. The black card, like the checks of the past, could be redeemed for two million dollars at any bank sponsored by the world federation.

It was past time to resolve his housing issues. Zhang Lie returned to the real world via the teleportation apparatus.

His sister was overjoyed to see him returning, and she almost fell off her wheelchair in her impatience to reach him. Zhang Lie rushed forward and supported his sister before she could fall.

Hanxiang was far too lonely: she had no friends, and her only blood relative spent most of his time within the dimensional world, without being able to accompany her. She had always been understanding and sensitive, and had barely brought the matter up to

Zhang Lie, but he couldn't help but think that her loneliness was one of the reasons she had grown up so enamored with books.

"Ah, be more careful!"

"Hehe." Instead of speaking, Zhang Hanxiang hugged her brother tightly and smiled in satisfaction.

"How long have I been gone?"

"Exactly three days. Brother, if you haven't gotten any money, don't worry. We still have some time, and if worse comes to worst, we can always move out. As long as we're together, I don't care where we live!"

Zhang Lie patted his chest. "I can handle the money issue. Tomorrow, I'll head to the Wangs' place and fix the problem."

"Really? Have you managed to make a lot of money in the dimensional world, Brother?"

"Of course! When have I ever lied to you? You haven't eaten yet, have you? Shall we eat out together?"

"Ah, a restaurant! It's been so long since I've been outside... but, won't it cost a lot? I... we'd better not go..."

## **Chapter 10: Inflated Price**

The indecisive Hanxiang was eventually pushed out of the door by her older brother, and the two of them had a delicious meal in a relatively high-class restaurant. Of course, Zhang Lie, who had just eaten within the dimensional world, mostly just watched his sister eat in joy.

After the two of them returned home, Zhang Lie contacted a lawyer.

If he were going to confront Uncle Wang directly, he had to be well-prepared. In front of his holographic screen, Zhang Lie quickly took care of the paperwork. The lawyer he had contacted helped him draft an agreement for change of ownership; as long as Uncle Wang was willing to sign, and once he had the contract notarized, the proceedings would be complete.

Early the next day, by the time Zhang Lie went to get breakfast, Hanxiang was already sitting in front of the television. After breakfast, Zhang Lie took a hovercraft to the Wang estate. Since the relationship between the two families had once been congenial, he used to frequent the Wang estate, and obviously knew where it was.

The Wang estate was rather large—not as large as those of famous moguls, but certainly enough to indicate significant wealth. Wang Xiaohua's father was a special-class citizen, a hunter who had reached even his superior gene capacity.

When Zhang Lie pressed the doorbell, the one who answered the door was Wang Xiaohua. "Ah, you've actually come back," he remarked.

It wasn't particularly surprising: one day in the real world corresponded to ten in the dimensional world, and it had only been one or two real-world days since he had defeated Wang Xiaohua's group by the settlement gates.

When Wang Xiaohua saw Zhang Lie, her initial shock turned into a malevolent scowl. "And what do you think you're doing here?!"

Zhang Lie chuckled. "What's wrong with that? We're on Earth, after all. Are you planning on calling your teammates and surrounding me here, too?"

The clash between the two of them was noticed by the other occupants of the estate. A middle-aged voice called out, "Xiaohua, what's the matter?"

"It's just a beggar!" Wang Xiaohua called back.

"I'm here to resolve the issue with the house." Zhang Lie ignored Wang Xiaohua.

Wang Xiaohua scoffed. "Are you here to beg me for mercy after being unable to come up with the cash? Well, I'm feeling pretty good today, so I'll give you a chance."

Zhang Lie frowned: Wang Xiaohua's sudden kindness was as unbelievable as a flying pig. She certainly had been demanding enough the day she barged into Zhang Lie's house.

"Kneel down and lick my shoes clean, and I'll consider giving you a few more days' leniency."

Zhang Lie looked at her as though he were looking at an invalid. "You must be overthinking things. I don't need any sort of leniency from you; I've prepared the money."

Wang Xiaohua held her hands on her hips and began to laugh. "It might be a rundown house, but it's still worth at least one and half million dollars. How could someone like you have been able to afford it within a matter of days? Are you crazy?"

"Do you think I'd come over here and claim that I had the money if I didn't?"

"Who knows how your brain functions? After all, you've spent the last three months hunting white grubs!"

"I have the money," Zhang Lie repeated.

Wang Xiaohua was clearly still incredulous. "One and a half million, you understand, not a hundred thousand! Even my team would take two months to earn so much money, let alone someone like you. And I still haven't settled matters with you regarding what happened in the dimensional world! Go on, scram! Pack up and get ready to move out. I'm feeling faint just with your presence here, polluting the air around my house..."

Not wanting to hear Wang Xiaohua's endless prattle any longer, Zhang Lie pulled out his black card.

"A black card!" Wang Xiaohua was stupefied. "No, that's impossible! This has to be fake!"

"You realize counterfeiting is a crime? Would I be stupid enough to try to trick you with a fake card?"

Even Wang Xiaohua understood that counterfeiting was all but impossible in this time and age.

"I've brought the contract here as well. Call your father over and have him sign it." Zhang Lie also retrieved a sheaf of papers from his backpack.

"Look at you, all prepared, as if you think everything will go your way!" Wang Xiaohua mocked.

"Sorry, the stench of money coming from your place is so strong that I don't want to stay a moment longer than I have to."

The middle-aged male voice called out again from within the manor, "Xiaohua, who're you talking to?"

"Don't worry, Dad!" Wang Xiaohua replied.

"You're my daughter, and this is my house. How can I not care about what you're doing? What sort of beggar's keeping you outside for so long?" He ambled toward Wang Xiaohua, eyes brightening when he saw Zhang Lie.

"Ah, Zhang Lie! What are you doing outside? Quick, come in, come in."

"Good morning, Uncle Wang. If you don't mind, I won't step inside; I'm afraid someone will get upset." Zhang Lie glanced toward Wang Xiaohua's cool features.

"And who would dare get upset in my house?"

Zhang Lie refused once more. "Uncle Wang, I appreciate the offer, but a destitute weakling like me can't afford to enter such a place."

Uncle Wang frowned. "What's the matter, Zhang Lie?"

Wang Xiaohua stepped in front of her father. "Dad, this guy's crazy! Ignore him!"

Uncle Wang glared at Wang Xiaohua. "How can you speak to Zhang Lie in this manner? If not for his father, I wouldn't be alive now!"

Wang Xiaohua snorted. "How many years has it been? Forget about that already!"

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Uncle Wang, snorting in anger, raised a palm as if to strike down his ungrateful daughter.

Zhang Lie interrupted impatiently, "That's enough, Uncle Wang! Don't bother putting on a show for me; I don't have time for that. I'm here today to purchase my house."

"To purchase your house?" Uncle Wang seemed incredulous.

"You're really a talented actor, Uncle Wang. Don't you know what's going on?"

Wang Xiaohua's face flushed in anger. "Zhang Lie, haven't you had enough?!"

Uncle Wang pushed Wang Xiaohua aside as he turned to Zhang Lie. "Zhang Lie, tell me what's going on."

"Don't listen to his nonsense!" Wang Xiaohua tugged on her father's arm to no avail.

Zhang Lie chuckled derisively: it looked as though Wang Xiaohua had been acting on her own accord.

Without saying anything more, he handed the contract over to Uncle Wang. "Is something wrong? Why are you suddenly asking to buy the property now?"

"Your darling daughter forced me to, of course. She came over with the rental agreement not too long ago, stating that the agreement would be invalidated in half a month, and that we would be evicted."

Uncle Wang turned toward his daughter and asked coldly, "Is this true?!"

"Dad, I'm just enforcing the contract's stipulations!" Wang Xiaohua defended herself.

Uncle Wang thundered in rage, one palm slamming against the doorframe. "Who told you to do this?! Who gave you the right? That's my property, one that I gave to the family who saved my life! Who are you to try to reclaim it?!"

"It's what the contract said, Dad!"

"What the contract states is my business, not yours."

Wang Xiaohua hung her face, aggrieved.

"Well? Apologize to Zhang Lie!" Uncle Wang continued.

"Dad, I'm not apologizing to someone like him! He embarrassed me in the dimensional world, and I'm already showing him courtesy by not attacking him outright."

"If you won't apologize, then there's no place in this house for you."

Wang Xiaohua took a step back, tears flooding from her eyes. "I'm your daughter, aren't I? You're going to side with an outsider over me?!"

"Are you going to apologize, or not?"

Zhang Lie interrupted the artificial act. "Uncle Wang, it's fine. Someone like me can't bear the burden of an apology from Miss Wang here."

He wasn't an idiot, and his life experience from the past had taught him an important lesson indeed: not to believe everything he heard.

Wang Xiaohua's personality was clearly the product of an indulgent upbringing, so it certainly was jarring to see Uncle Wang behave so sternly now.

In his past life, Uncle Wang had spent quite some time trying to help him hunt down his parents, but he deeply remembered how cold this Uncle Wang had been before he had made a name for himself in the dimensional world.

"It's good that you know your place." Wang Xiaohua folded her arms in front of her chest, smiling gleefully.

However, Uncle Wang didn't intend on letting matters rest. After giving her a shake, he pressed down her head. "Zhang Lie, don't blame my daughter. I've clearly indulged her far too much."

Wang Xiaohua screamed in outrage. "Dad! You're making me apologize to a piece of trash like him?!"



Zhang Lie interrupted impatiently once again, "Uncle Wang, please sign the contract. I've spent too long here already, and my sister's waiting for me at home."

Uncle Wang chuckled. "Zhang Lie, what are you saying? This property's a gift for you. The only reason there was a contract in the first place was because your father was so stubborn he refused to accept it from me otherwise. Ignore the contract—stay there as long as you want. No one will dare chase you out."

No matter how much Uncle Wang wanted to pretend to be generous, his actions would speak louder than his words.

No matter how Wang Xiaohua had come across this contract, the conclusion was that she had ended up with it in her possession.

Uncle Wang had been lying from the very beginning. If he had truly intended to gift the property to Zhang Lie's father, he would have destroyed the rental agreement, instead of letting it land in his daughter's hands.

"Uncle Wang, I'm calling you Uncle here out of deference for you and for my father. Now that my father's missing and I'm an adult, I hope you'll respect my wishes. Please sign this contract so that I can be at peace.

"My father has always taught me to repay gratitude with gratitude. I'm thankful for your help all these years, and I'm willing to purchase this property from you at an inflated price of two million dollars. It's a generous offer for you; for me, I won't ever have to worry about someone chasing us away from our house again.

"Selling the property to me would save me significant trouble, and annul the life debt between you and my family. Doesn't that sound like a win-win situation for both of us?"

Zhang Lie presented his argument tactfully and seriously. Purchasing the property would cut the ties between their families, and it would resolve all their problems for good.