

U. Warlord 101

Chapter 101: Zhang Lie Steps Forth

"Brother's the best!"

"Haha! I told you Chu Feng could win! That Zhou Hong might look imposing, but that's all just a facade!"

"Che! You can say that in hindsight, of course, but who was the one who predicted that Chu Feng would lose because wind was weak against fire?"

The praise and murmurs from the nearby onlookers left Chu Feng preening, and he returned to the Chu delegation with a smile.

In truth, Zhou Hong and Chu Feng were equals in terms of strength, but compared to Chu Feng, Zhou Hong didn't expend much effort on hunting; he would do just enough to qualify for gene fragments from the kill. His team did much of the work, whereas he sat back and reaped the rewards.

On the other hand, Chu Feng was very interested in hunting, and he often tried to defeat relatively strong lifeforms alone, with his team used only as backup. The two hunters differed not in terms of their techniques, framework, or gene fragments, but rather in terms of their experience in life-or-death situations.

Zhou Hong scurried back to his delegation, defeated.

"Haha! As expected of a scion of the Chu family! I'll be sure to report on your successful match against Zhou Hong to your father, and you'll be richly rewarded for your efforts."

Chu Zhennan was very pleased that Chu Feng had defeated his counterpart in the Zhou clan. Although Chu Feng wasn't his son, he would be the successor of the Chu clan. The stronger Chu Feng was, the prouder he would be.

The Zhou elder's face darkened. He was the one who had proposed staking the Eclipse Sage's inheritance on these matches, but his representative had lost the first match! They would surely have to win the next two matches in order for him to safeguard his reputation, so he was going to be very careful about choosing the candidate for the next fight.

Opposite him, Zhang Lie refused Yun Bing's offer to step forward and walked into the arena instead. He did so to guarantee that he would win the next match; given his current strength, he was all but peerless among those hunters of the same generation.

Of course, this assumed that his opponent didn't have any underhanded tricks up his sleeve—if his opponent were to bring out something like the orb of primality, then he couldn't be certain of his victory.

Although Zhang Lie looked rather relaxed as he stepped forward, he was still carefully inspecting those hunters around him.

The three major clans conferred for a moment before dispatching Zhang Quan, from the ministry of ruins. Zhang Quan was only 25. He was in the same generation as Zhang Lie, and he was also still in the first realm of the dimensional world.

He didn't know why the Yun and Chu clans were so protective of Zhang Lie, but he knew that, if he were able to defeat Zhang Lie, then he would have more authority with regards to matters involving the two clans.

"I shall be the representative for this match!" Zhang Quan announced, fully confident of his success against an unknown hunter like Zhang Lie.

The elders from the three clans wore relaxed expressions on their faces. After all, Zhang Lie wasn't a famous hunter, and the events of the Blacksteel settlement hadn't spread much beyond it. There were few hunters who knew that he was the mastermind behind the affairs at the venombane glade, and he was easily underestimated as a result.

Most importantly, Zhang Quan had an earth-attuned framework, which would counter Zhang Lie's obvious water attunement—there was a cloud of mist surrounding him. If they were at equal strength, Zhang Quan would easily overwhelm his opponent.

As for Zhang Lie, however, he didn't care just who showed up, or his opponent's elemental attunement, because he was absolutely confident that he would be able to dominate them in terms of stats alone. After all, he had surpassed the usual limit for basic and mutated gene fragments, and even filled his superior gene fragments to capacity.

"Hey, who on earth is this fellow? Just what are the Yun and Chu clans trying to do?"

"They're fielding a weakling and throwing the match, of course—either they get a lucky win, or they lose quickly and take out a far stronger opponent. Either outcome would benefit them."

"Ah, really? Zhang Quan's really quite strong, so he should make short work of that other fellow."

"But that other guy's facing a steep elemental disadvantage, isn't he? Is there any chance of him winning at all? If it were me, I'd just admit defeat immediately!"

As usual, Zhang Lie ignored the comments of those around him.

Zhang Quan, standing opposite him and feeling supremely confident about winning, finally noticed something amiss. He had been preparing for battle, but Zhang Lie had done nothing after sauntering forward. His insouciant expression made it seem as though he didn't care for his opponent at all.

That indifference infuriated Zhang Quan. After all, Zhang Quan was an official in the ministry of ruins, whereas Zhang Lie was just a nameless hunter! Shouldn't he be the one looking down on his opponent?

"You're asking for it!" Zhang Quan shouted, then shoved a palm forward, activating the genetic energy that had been surging throughout his body. "[Burial Palm]!"

The ground beneath his feet churned, and his genetic energy manifested in the form of an earthen hand taller than he was. The buildings nearby, already half-destroyed by the explosion from the previous match, crumbled under the force of the attack.

Zhang Quan was indeed a very strong earth-attuned hunter! Most hunters present didn't think they would be able to survive a direct attack from that palm, but Zhang Lie remained motionless, with his lips quirked up into a smile.

In anger, Zhang Quan used his full strength, as if he wanted to slap Zhang Lie dead with his earthen palm. [Burial Palm] was a rare technique that he had acquired by chance; allegedly, when trained to its extreme, he would be able to manifest a palm a kilometer wide.

As he howled, the gigantic earthen palm slammed toward the ground.

"This—that hunter isn't going to die, is he?!" someone shouted. Chu Zhennan glanced toward Chu Feng, as if asking Chu Feng if he would need to step in to rescue Zhang Lie, but Chu Feng immediately shook his head in refusal.

"Compressing the earth with genetic energy, then saturating it with energy and charging up for one deadly attack... it isn't a bad technique, but it's a pity!" Just as the palm was about to strike Zhang Lie, he shifted his left arm, releasing a black fog in his vicinity.

With the hiss of a snake, a series of black ripples began to emanate from his arm. These unassuming ripples were all it took to disrupt the attack, dissolving the gigantic palm almost from within and ignoring Zhang Quan's supposed elemental advantage—all just from one activation of Zhang Lie's [Fists of the Silent Sea].

Zhang Quan's eyes widened, and that moment of hesitation was enough to conclude the match. By the time he came to his senses again, there was a finger by his forehead.

"Admit defeat, or I'll make you suffer!" Zhang Lie called out.

Zhang Quan was at a loss for words.

Chapter 102: Returning to the Capital

What had happened? How had he lost to Zhang Lie in just one move?

Zhang Quan was unable to accept this result. He hadn't even seen just what Zhang Lie had done to evade his attack; indeed, neither had the onlookers, given the billowing clouds of dust that Zhang Quan's attack had generated.

On the other hand, Zhang Quan was able to sense the fluctuations of genetic energy from his attack quite clearly. The unusual black ripples that Zhang Lie had generated had dissolved his attack in an instant—Zhang Lie was a far stronger hunter than he was!

Since Zhang Quan didn't surrender to him, Zhang Lie flicked his finger at his forehead and knocked him unconscious.

The victor was Zhang Lie. Unlike Chu Feng, who received quite a few cheers from the Chu and Yun delegations after his victory, Zhang Lie's victory was greeted with silence, shock, and astonishment.

How had they not known about the existence of such a powerful hunter? It was only then that Chu Zhennan understood why Yun Bing and Chu Feng were so willing to side with Zhang Lie.

After a pregnant silence, the Yun and Chu delegations finally gave a belated cheer.

"Haha! Zhang Lie, you knocked him unconscious with just a flick of your finger? Aren't you getting ridiculously strong?" The moment he walked back toward the Chu delegation, Chu Feng began to tease him.

Yun Bing didn't say a word, but her eyes were gleaming. Zhang Lie's dominating victory had been firmly imprinted in her mind. Chu Xun and Yun Meng both surrounded Zhang Lie, circling him as they gave him admiring looks.

On the other hand, the other factions present had gone completely silent, their expressions making it seem as though they had forcibly swallowed a few large flies. What sort of disgusting situation was this?! Who would have expected that they would lose so completely? Just who was that hunter called Zhang Lie? How had Zhang Quan fallen to a single blow?

They were the ones who had suggested staking everything on a match. After losing so completely, they didn't dare remain at the scene any longer.

After a few customary farewells and a few heated glances in Zhang Lie's direction, the remaining delegations all left swiftly.

"Phew, they're finally gone!" Zhang Lie relaxed.

Yun Bing scoffed. "As if you were ever worried!"

"Didn't you see how many people there were? It would have been troublesome, even for me, to fight them all!"

In truth, Zhang Lie did have a way of escaping, given how familiar he had become with the ruins. If a fight were imminent, it would have been trivial for him to escape, but it would have been far harder to bring Fang Yi and Sun Mengmeng with him.

"Alright, alright! Regardless, I have to thank both of you for standing up for me today. These techniques aren't too bad, so I'll hand them over to you."

The reason that the Yun and Chu clans had protected Zhang Lie at all costs was because they knew that the other major clans wouldn't dare attack, and that Zhang Lie's strength as a hunter was worth the favor that they would obtain from him.

Furthermore, they were more or less friends by now. He wouldn't have met Chu Feng and Yun Bing if he hadn't initially wanted to make a transaction with them, but after a slew of successful transactions, they had earned his respect.

Zhang Lie knew that Yun Bing and Chu Feng hadn't done him a favor out of pure altruism, but it was nevertheless a rare ally who would do so much for him. In particular, Yun Bing, who had brought out her orb of primality, had staked her life on the line.

Even if they weren't interested in the spoils from the ruins, the elders who had come along with them would hardly permit them to return with nothing. After taking such a huge risk on his behalf, they should certainly receive part of the spoils.

Although these techniques weren't too valuable to the prestigious Yun and Chu clans, surely there had to be something unusual about techniques that the Eclipse Sage himself would keep on hand.

Zhang Lie offered each of them a manual. [Almanac of the Winds] and [Cloud Spires] were two of the seven pinnacle-grade techniques left behind by the Eclipse Sage.

The two of them were intending to refuse politely and instead accept a favor for the indeterminate future, but Zhang Lie refused to play such games. "What, are you looking down on these pinnacle-grade techniques? If you are, I'll keep them for myself!"

The moment he made to take back the manuals, neither hunter could stand still. Even the elders beside them were raring to make a move.

"No, Zhang Lie, don't! We were just trying to be polite!" Chu Feng immediately took the proffered [Almanac of the Winds], and Yun Bing [Cloud Spires].

Of course, Zhang Lie wasn't really intending to keep the manuals for himself; he would reward amity and avenge enmity. The manuals were certainly worth the favor the Yun and Chu clans had done for him, and even if Yun Bing and Chu Feng had refused the manuals, he would have foisted the manuals on them regardless.

Having divided up the spoils, it was time to leave the ruins.

"Again, thank you for helping my team when they were in need. I'll see you both again soon!"

Zhang Lie was about to leave with his team when the elders from the two clans called him back. "Wait, lad!"

Zhang Lie, Chu Feng, and Yun Bing had been talking among themselves, and the two elders had remained silent during their conversation. That Zhang Lie had handed over the two manuals gained him the two elders' approval. He seemed relatively honorable, and he was certainly a strong hunter, so it would be well worth the two clans' time to make an acquaintance of him.

"Lad, we, along with the Zhou, He, and Qian clans, have been major powers in the capital for decades, and we're all quite familiar with each other's antics. I doubt they've given up on the inheritance so easily, so as a precaution, you'd best return to the capital with us before teleporting away!"

Indeed, he had obtained the Eclipse Sage's inheritance! How could the other clans retreat so easily, especially after knowing that such a valuable possession was in his hands?

The Yun and Chu clans would protect him within the ruins, and they had motioned to stake their claim to the inheritance on a match, but who knew what they would do when they were all back in the real world?

After all, no matter how strong Zhang Lie was, he was still from a younger generation of hunters, and if the three clans were adamant on acquiring it even at the cost of their reputation, they could easily send stronger hunters from older generations his way.

Zhang Lie bowed his head. "I neglected this possibility. Thank you for your reminder, elders, and I'd be honored to travel with your delegation!"

Chapter 103: A Sudden Invasion

The elders from the other delegations were all quite sly, Zhou Hong's uncle in particular. The reason he had proposed a match was because the Yun and Chu clans were present, and a direct confrontation would have led to severe losses for their delegation.

If they had won, then the Chu and Yun clans would have had to hand over their goods, but now that they had lost, they would have to launch a sneak attack and force this Zhang Lie fellow to spit out everything he had managed to claim for himself.

After all, the Eclipse Sage was a hunter whose name had been immortalized in the Xumi Tome, and if [Eclipse] had been included in his inheritance, then the Zhou clan would immediately be elevated in power.

How could he give up on such valuable treasure? At any rate, he was certainly willing to sacrifice his reputation and ethics for it.

On the other hand, the Yun and Chu clans were playing the long game. If they were to try to snatch the spoils from Zhang Lie, they would immediately sour the budding relationship between Zhang Lie and their clans. In that case, why not do him a favor and develop a stronger bond between this hunter from the younger generation who had displayed impressive potential and the clans' successors?

The moment they exited the ruins, the Zhou, He, and Qian clans, along with the ministry of ruins and various other delegations, quickly came to an agreement. At this moment, they were lying in wait by the portal to the ruins, intending to ambush Zhang Lie.

Unfortunately for them, Zhang Lie arrived with the delegations of the Yun and Chu clans in tow. The gathered forces didn't anticipate that the Yun and Chu clans' protection would extend so far. The elders from the two clans were sandwiching Zhang Lie between them, and Yun Bing held out her orb of primality prominently.

They were all cautiously circulating their genetic energy, clearly having prepared for an ambush.

"These damned bastards!"

"What, were we discovered?"

"No, but they predicted that we wouldn't give up so easily!"

"What?! Have they been working together all this time?"

"Alright, shut it! Let's just follow them for now! We'll observe the situation and see what happens. I bet they're heading to the capital first, before using the teleportation array there. We won't have a chance to catch this Zhang Lie today, but we can certainly track where he's headed. It won't be that easy to get away from us!"

The ambushers had no opportunity to strike; under the protection of the Yun and Chu clans, Team Zenith successfully returned to the capital.

As they stepped toward the teleportation array, Zhang Lie turned around and waved toward the ambushers following them, making the other three major clans from the capital itch to punch him in the face.

However, just as Zhang Lie and the others were about to step into the teleportation array, a mysterious tearing sound came from the sky, and a wormhole emerged in mid-air, causing emergency alarms to flare throughout the capital.

"Warning! Warning! A mysterious wormhole has connected to Earth. We are experiencing an alien invasion! Alien invasion! All citizens should seek shelter immediately! All hunters, mobilize!"

"Warning! Warning!..."

Everyone stared up at the skies, only to find fleet after fleet of alien warships appearing out of nowhere. Countless black dots descended on the capital like a thunderstorm, and the tremendous pressure made it difficult to breathe.

It had been dawn by the time they emerged from the ruins, but the clear skies were quickly covered by dark, ominous clouds. The capital hadn't suffered an incursion in years—at least, not until this morning.

The Kez, an alien insectoid race whose name sparked fear in lifeforms all around the galaxy!

Zhang Lie had fought against the Kez in his past life. The Kez were a highly coordinated force with considerable strength and constitution that dwarfed mankind in terms of numbers. They were famed for the sheer magnitude of soldiers that they dedicated to any single battle, as evidenced by the size of the fleet that they had sent to Earth.

The first wave of attacks was here. Woofbugs flooded the skies and ground in numbers so dense the sun was blotted out.

These so-called woofbugs were ferocious insectoid lifeforms the size of dogs. Except for the fact that they walked on all fours, they bore little similarity to actual dogs. They possessed an extremely hard, thorny carapace, an unusual ability to leap, and made sounds that were uncannily like dog barks.

They were the infantry and shock troops of the Kez, famed across the universe for their immense reproductive ability and ferocity, and were key to the number of units the Kez could field in any given battle. They often swarmed the battlefield, so it was extremely difficult for their opponents to systematically exterminate these pests.

On the streets, there were more of these woofbugs than humans. While regular pedestrians stood frozen by the sudden appearance of the Kez, countless woofbugs had opened their mouths wide and let out piercing woofs.

"Help! Save me!" a man shouted, just as a woofbug swiped its forelegs and sliced off half his head.

In the skies, a slender, green-winged insectoid flapped its wings as it grabbed a five- or six-year-old girl with its pincers, flying off into the distance. The woofbugs flooded the streets, slaughtering yet another life with every crunch of their mandibles.

Hovercars trailing black smoke crashed into the ground, citizens cried and howled as they fled from the insects, and blood dyed the streets red.

"Please, someone, help! Help!" As a little boy cried out, a sharp foreleg sliced toward him like a reaper's scythe—but a violet shortsword blocked the woofbug's foreleg before its attack could land.

"Flee!" Zhang Lie flipped the woofbug over, leapt up into the air, and thrust his shortsword, wreathed in black mist, into a chink in the woofbug's exoskeleton, killing it instantly.

Woofbugs only had two weak points: a small triangular patch of chitin on its back, and a slit by the third patch of chitin on its abdomen.

This was valuable information whose cost had been paid in blood in Zhang Lie's past life.

"What are all of you waiting for? Save the civilians!" Zhang Lie cried out.

The Kez were one of the most vicious alien races known to the galaxy; other intelligent life might well have enslaved these conquered humans instead, but those races that had fallen to the Kez faced one certain outcome: death.

As a result, battles against the Kez had a particularly high death toll, and if they were to lose, everyone in the capital would be consumed by the Kez! Not only that, the capital would be turned into a breeding ground for the Kez, and once they gained a foothold, they would be able to devour the entire planet.

Fortunately, mankind had discovered the dimensional world, obtained gene fragments, and constructed a relatively robust defense system. In the past, the Kez had created wormholes that were too unpredictable for humanity's forces, which had lost quite a few battles as a result,

but this time, the moment the alert sounded, the government's reserve forces reacted immediately.

All manner of experts were rushing toward the capital. What everyone in the capital had to do was to protect themselves, along with the major teleportation arrays in the region.

"These damned bugs!" Zhang Lie cried out. "Kill them all! Are we going to stand here and let them invade the capital? Surely not!"

None of the clan hunters were weak, and they immediately jumped into the fray as soon as they reacted. In a matter of moments, the vicinity of the teleportation array had turned into a gruesome battlefield, with human and insectoid limbs splayed out all over the ground.

The stench of blood permeated the air. Despite all their efforts, the clan hunters represented only a small fraction of the present citizens, and there were so many woofbugs that more and more humans were dying every second.

If there were ever a time to reveal the extent of his powers, it was now. When he saw a young girl being bitten to death by a woofbug, he could hardly stomach the sight. For what other reason had he obtained such strength?

He darted from road to road and street to street, killing every insectoid lifeform he encountered.

Drones whizzed through the air, and the sound of explosions had become a refrain. Since they were on Earth and not in the dimensional world, all sorts of high-tech weaponry were usable, but they would have to restrict themselves to small-scale bombardments so as not to damage the capital beyond repair.

After all, their goal was to defend the capital, not to destroy it.

By this time, armed soldiers had begun appearing around the teleportation arrays.

"Stand back! This is the main battlefield, and you civilians should stay far away from this area!" a soldier yelled out, commanding hundreds of elites behind him. As he shouted at the civilians, he began firing into the midst of the woofbugs.

Zhang Lie glanced at the soldier and immediately motioned his team over.

"Captain, why are we heading over to the soldiers? Shouldn't we head to areas that they haven't cleared out yet?" Li Feng asked.

He wanted to keep fighting, to protect the weak and the innocent! He scarcely noticed that they were where the fighting was most intense, that, given their current strength, without the soldiers' firepower holding their enemies back, they could easily die.

"Just follow my orders!" Zhang Lie shouted back, picking up his pace.

The members of Team Zenith followed closely behind him. They trusted their captain, and would follow him through trial and tribulation. Zhang Lie knew that the battlefield would be dangerous, but the safety of the capital was far too important to be ignored.

The Kez would focus all their efforts on taking down the teleportation arrays so as to isolate the capital. Without any reinforcements, the Kez would easily be able to take over the capital given their numerical superiority.

Zhang Lie and the rest of Team Zenith would have been able to escape from the battlefield via the teleportation array, but they certainly weren't about to let their capital fall to the Kez. No: they had to stay, to protect the capital, to protect the teleportation array that the bugs were after.

Chapter 104: Bug Swarm

The streets of the capital were filled with carnage.

After the Kez had emerged from the skies, countless hunters from the capital began to fight off the Kez invasion. The reserve forces from the government had arrived and set up a defensive perimeter, and the hundreds of clans from the capital, both large and small, immediately sent hunters out to support the defense effort.

There were far fewer civilian casualties during this invasion than in the past, and soldiers were still entering the fray via the teleportation portals throughout the capital. The invasion temporarily entered a stalemate.

"Damn it, what are all you hunters doing? Shoot those damn bugs down from the sky! Don't let them near the teleportation arrays at any cost!"

Countless green-winged bugs were hovering near the vicinity of the array, and a commander was howling as his machine gun continued to patter away. The appearance of these military personnel caused the independent hunters to congregate.

During such a critical period, it was important for the allied forces to cooperate; otherwise, the Kez would eventually take control of the teleportation array. Before any of the military commanders arrived, although the hunters were all fighting for a common cause, none of them were willing to follow a single leader.

However, they did submit to military command, and these military personnel could partition up the gathered forces effectively.

The situation by the teleportation array quickly stabilized. The highest-ranking soldier present, Li Tian, gathered the forces right outside.

"I'm Li Tian, third commander of the reserve troops stationed at the capital, and I've been sent over here to protect the teleportation array! Let's introduce ourselves as I connect your devices to the

military's communication channel. Lad, you over there! You've been very efficient in your attacks. Who are you?"

"I'm Zhang Lie!" Zhang Lie didn't expect he would be the first to be called out, and the other leaders immediately took note of him.

Li Tian connected his device to the military network, then did the same with Zhou Hong, Yun Bing, Chu Feng, and the other factions' leaders. He quickly catalogued the forces at his disposal. The strongest hunters present were the Yun and Chu elders, Chu Zhennan and Yun Chongzheng.

Both of them were in the second realm of the dimensional world, and had filled up their superior gene fragments to capacity. They were easily able to handle the regular woofbugs and green-winged insects that had appeared, and it would be trivial for them to defend one side of the perimeter.

"We don't have much time, so we'd better discuss how to repulse the next wave of attacks," Chu Zhennan suggested. "After the first wave's defeat, the Kez must have learned something about how strong our defenses are, and subsequent waves will only get harder and harder to defend against!"

Chu Zhennan's whole body was covered in red and green insectoid fluids, a clear sign of how valiantly he had fought against the Kez, but his eyes were gleaming resolutely.

Li Tian nodded seriously. "Yes, it's a standard strategy for those damned bugs— they start by sending some cannon fodder in to test the waters, and once we've depleted our stamina, that's when they'll send elites over. That last wave, well—those weren't even strong enough to be considered cannon fodder. We'd best get ready. Now, let me announce the hunters responsible for defending each side of the teleportation array!"

Li Tian divided the thousands of hunters present into five groups: north, south, east, west, and skyward. Zhang Lie and the others, as hunters of the younger generation, were sent to the north, where the density of bugs would be the weakest.

Just as Li Tian finished assigning everyone their roles, a tremendous buzzing sound filled the skies. The second wave of attacks was here!

"Everyone, head to your designated positions! These bugs are still small fry, so preserve your stamina and energy— let us soldiers shoot them down first!"

The woofbugs and green-winged insects filled land and sky, swarming toward the teleportation array like a black tide. Li Tian raised, aimed, and fired his machine gun into the mass of bugs, as did his subordinates.

Of course, none of the hunters were willing to stand by and do nothing.

Some launched low-stamina long-ranged attacks, and others fired whatever weapons they could find. A few close-combat specialists headed to the outskirts of the perimeter, thinning out the numbers for the long-ranged attackers.

Kill, kill, kill! In a matter of seconds, the fighting between man and bug resumed anew. Gunshots and genetic energy fired into the air, splattering blood and viscera all over. After an indeterminate period of time, the tide of bugs finally thinned, but so did the number of hunters defending the perimeter.

Fortunately, the bugs weren't able to break through to the teleportation array, and reinforcements were continuously being sent through the portal.

"We've defeated another wave of bugs!" Li Tian reported, from a vantage point by the top of the teleportation array. He glanced at the bugs surging from the horizon and knew that the next wave of attacks was quickly approaching.

A significant fraction of the defenders had been wounded or killed in the previous onslaught; even the Yun and Chu clans, who were working together and were being protected by their two elders, had suffered significant losses, let alone the Zhou, He, and Qian clans.

On the other hand, Team Zenith, under Zhang Lie's capable leadership and having been assigned to the easiest front, suffered few injuries.

The harsh buzzing that once again filled the skies sparked the hunters' fighting spirits once more. Li Tian pointed the smoking barrel of his gun toward the green-winged insects leading the formation. "Another wave is approaching!" he called out. "Kill them all!"

The skies were still darkened with buzzing insects. Zhang Lie didn't know how many of them he had killed; his mind was growing dim, his arm robotically raising and lowering, genetic energy sweeping out from his blade with every blow.

Other hunters were having the same experience: Chu Feng repeatedly thrust forward with his sword, Yun Bing nocked and loosed another arrow, Li Tian pointed his gun at yet another insect...

Finally, with all their effort, the hunters managed to repel the second wave of bugs.

This time, the casualties were even more serious. Several hunters from the Chu and Yun clans had been taken out of commission. From Team Zenith, Yang Ze and Zhou Ying had been heavily injured.

Except for Zhang Lie, the other members of Team Zenith all sported some kind of injury or another.

The Kez left them not a single moment of breathing room, and another wave of insects covered land and sky.

"That's a greenflame demonbug!"

"I see a black-tipped scarab!"

"And there's a hellwind beetle over there!"

The defenders began to yell out every species they could identify: these were lifeforms that they had only ever learned about in books and reference material, but now they were seeing them for themselves.

A devastating pressure seemed to crush the defenders' spirits. These bugs were all elites; they were far too strong for the weakened defenders to handle!

It was only Zhang Lie who was eager to fight against these bugs, because he knew that the appearance of the elites indicated that this incursion was coming to an end. If they were able to hold out against this final wave, they would win!

But if they didn't, they would die.

"Everyone, we're almost done! This is the last wave!" Li Tian tossed his smoking gun aside and dashed into the midst of the bugs with an impressive surge of genetic energy. At the same time, the elders from the various clans, who had conserved much of their energy and stamina, rushed into the fray.

The final battle had begun!

Chapter 105: Black-Tipped Scarab

As the final wave of bugs approached, Zhang Lie found a mysterious black bug among them.

"Sun Mengmeng, Fang Yi, protect the team. I'll be right back!" Zhang Lie shot forward like a bullet. As Venombane flashed, he suddenly vanished in mid-air.

Sun Mengmeng and Fang Yi took over the defensive position that Zhang Lie had been holding.

Sprays of fire erupted from Sun Mengmeng's body, the purple flames giving her the appearance of a malevolent villain. Her bow twanged again and again, releasing countless firebirds into the approaching swarm of bugs. The birds smashed into the swarm of bugs, stunning them and lighting them on fire. The woofbugs screamed and howled under the assault of the flames.

Fang Yi stood in front of Sun Mengmeng, waving his spear around as wind and storm swirled before him, clearing away the bugs that Sun Mengmeng's bombardment had missed.

Beside him, Li Feng and Sun Xiaowu also gave it their all.

Li Feng stood encased in a suit of radiant armor, genetic energy swirling around his greatsword in the shape of a dragon. Much like Li Feng, Sun Xiaowu's fighting style also focused on body augmentation. With his [Adamantine Aegis] activated, Sun Xiaowu was wreathed in a golden aura, complementing Li Feng's silver one. Together, they seemed like a pair of holy knights in silver and gold.

Behind them, hundreds of hunters activated their own genetic techniques as they prepared to enter the fray.

Zhang Lie, who had left the other members of Team Zenith, finally found his target amidst the crowd of bugs, a big beetle encased in dark green chitin, looking like a snake that was rearing to attack.

It had twelve eyes, tough mandibles, row after row of spikes on its carapace, and three long protrusions by its back, so dark a shade of green that they were almost black. This was an elite black-tipped scarab, a long-ranged attacker from the Kez.

The government had run a few tests on captured black-tipped scarabs: in just a tenth of a second, they were able to shoot out more than thirty of the poisoned spikes that dotted their carapace. Whenever they evolved, they would grow another dark-green protrusion out of their backs, and the specimen in front of him had three such protrusions!

The government had categorized the Kez in terms of the number of evolutions that each insect had undergone, ranking them from one-star to five-star. A black-tipped scarab that had undergone three evolutions was naturally a three-star black-tipped scarab.

As a three-star elite, not only was it endowed with surprising speed and strength, it was able to shoot out poisonous spikes more than ten times as rapidly as standard black-tipped scarabs. If he didn't stall it here, it would certainly cause massive casualties by the northern perimeter just by itself.

In truth, even with all his gene fragments, Zhang Lie wasn't confident that he would be able to take it down: under usual circumstances, it would require a hunter who had advanced to the second realm and had filled over half the superior gene capacity to emerge victorious against a three-star elite, but the hunters of this caliber were all dealing with even more dangerous elites.

He glanced all around him: on the northern front, there was no one else who could take on such a challenge. In that case, Zhang Lie had to step forth!

He crept close to a hundred meters of the three-star black-tipped scarab, but the moment he passed the hundred-meter boundary, the scarab's eyes lit up, and it shot a beam of green light toward Zhang Lie, breaking his stealth and revealing him for all to see.

Damn it, it discovered me so easily?! Zhang Lie hadn't expected that the three-star black-tipped scarab would have such a ridiculous sensory capabilities, but in truth, the scarab had only detected something unusual in that direction.

It had only shot out one poisoned spike toward Zhang Lie as a probe; if it were certain that there had been an enemy present, Zhang Lie would instead have faced a barrage of hundreds of needles, as was the case now.

Zhang Lie had barely regained his footing after rushing backwards before a spray of green beams shot toward his position. Any woofbug unfortunate enough to be caught within the spray immediately melted into a puddle of goo, highlighting the extent of the poison.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Quake]! [Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]! [Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!"

Zhang Lie instantly unleashed three fists, even incorporating some elements of [Three-Wave Crescendo] in a combination attack. Three ripples of black mist spread out around Zhang Lie, causing even the air to vibrate.

[Fists of the Silent Sea] was the skill that Zhang Lie had grown most comfortable with, and it embodied a strength that could quell even the sea itself. That strength was smashing the bugs surrounding Zhang Lie to pieces.

The attack clashed with the poisonous spikes that the three-star black-tipped scarab shot toward Zhang Lie, neither quite able to overcome the other. The poisonous spikes weren't able to make it past the ripples, but the ripples also lost their potency upon striking the spikes.

The scarab cried out; then, like a gatling gun, it launched a fountain of spikes in Zhang Lie's direction. Zhang Lie instantly activated his superior-grade forest wolfman and blood ant soulshards.

As a howl shook the entire northern front, Zhang Lie transformed into a three-meter-tall wolfman. At the same time, the wolfman's original dark-green fur turned blood-red, and his aura grew stronger by at least an order of magnitude, simultaneously transforming Venombane into a red and violet greatsword.

"[The Boundless Blade: The River Lethe]!" Zhang Lie yelled out, his greatsword cleaving the barrage of poisoned spikes shooting toward him and swallowing it in a torrent of blood-red liquid.

Zhang Lie's attack completely negated the scarab's spikes; the moment they touched Zhang Lie's attack, they dissolved in the corrosive aura of the blood-red liquid.

Unfortunately, as a three-star elite, the scarab's reflexes were quick enough that it managed to escape out of range the moment it noticed that its attack had failed.

Chapter 106: Extermination

The three-star black-tipped scarab might have been able to avoid Zhang Lie's attack, but countless regular black-tipped scarabs dissolved within the bloody river. Even so, Zhang Lie wasn't satisfied: his sole goal was to get rid of the three-star scarab. He had used all his abilities, and if he weren't able to defeat his target before the effect of the blood ant soulshard wore off, he would certainly perish.

A wolf's howl shook the ground. The moment the three-star scarab left the attack range, Zhang Lie shot toward it.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!" A blood-red dragon formed around Zhang Lie's arm, thrashing against the scarab as Zhang Lie unleashed his attack.

With a dull thump, the three-star scarab shot into the air like a shooting star, its three-meter-long body attracting the attention of hunters throughout the battlefield.

This was a rare opportunity! The captain in charge of the forces by the northern perimeter immediately reacted, commanding his subordinates to attack.

"Snipers, shoot that scarab! Blind it!"

The twenty or so snipers gathered around the teleportation array and nearby buildings all aimed at the scarab, shooting at its dozen eyes.

The scarab sensed the danger immediately. The protrusions from its back immediately grew larger and longer, protecting its head from most of the bullets shooting in its direction.

However, the bullets that these snipers were using were no trifling matter. Termed 'godslayer bullets', they had been devised by the military specifically to deal with the Kez, and while many of the bullets were blocked, the scarab still lost three of its twelve eyes from the bombardment.

Unfortunately, the Kez were rather tough, and while this particular scarab had been injured, its injuries were far from life-threatening. In fact, the scarab became even more enraged after suffering an injury.

The pain of losing three of its eyes made it cry out, and its poison spikes shot out in every direction from its body, turning it into a ball of glowing green light.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!"

A blood-red dragon emerged from below, swallowing the glowing green scarab whole. Flashes of red and green light could be seen through its maw, but shockingly, despite the scarab unleashing its full power, it was still trapped within the dragon.

Corrosive water-attuned genetic energy was assaulting the scarab from all directions. Its exoskeleton began to crack, to soften, and even to slough off its body.

Under such life-threatening danger, the scarab became even more crazed. It released more and more spikes from its body and mouth, and the ball of green light trapped within the dragon's mouth grew brighter and brighter.

With a gigantic eruption, the blood-red dragon dispersed into red mist over the northern perimeter. At the same time, the glowing green ball abruptly darkened—but the fight wasn't over yet. Amidst a gale of howling wind, a blood-colored figure broke past the curtain of mist and struck at the head of the scarab.

"Die!" Zhang Lie shouted.

By this point, Zhang Lie was right about to collapse, but there was only a small window during which the scarab would be defenseless after having shot out so many of its spikes. During this window, its offensive capabilities would drop significantly, and this would be Zhang Lie's only chance to kill it.

Otherwise, the scarab would kill him.

Zhang Lie channeled all of his genetic energy to Venombane, even going as far as to cancel his wolfman transformation, then shot toward the scarab like a shooting star.

The weakened scarab shot three last spikes toward Zhang Lie, hoping to deter him, but Zhang Lie ignored the spikes entirely. A layer of flexible silver armor suddenly appeared, protecting his body. Despite all three spikes hitting their target, none of them led to serious injuries. The first, which shot toward his head, didn't even make it past his white-grub armor, whereas the two that pierced his skin weren't able to penetrate his organs.

All this happened in the blink of an eye.

Zhang Lie crashed into the scarab flailing through the sky, then thrust Venombane through one of its empty eye sockets. Its screeching death throes shook the air. Venombane had struck its brain directly, and the scarab's head exploded as it corroded away. Its last cries shook the swarm of insects in the north, as well as the valiant hunters fighting on the ground.

The three-star black-tipped scarab was essentially the Kez's commander in the region, and its sudden death sent the swarm of insects into disarray, significantly reducing their offensive capabilities.

"Nice going, Zhang Lie!"

"He actually succeeded in killing it alone! Zhang Lie? Who's this fellow?"

"If he's able to take down a three-star black-tipped scarab at his age, I'm sure he'll grow to be a menace in the future!"

Cheers erupted from the defending hunters, and agonized cries from the Kez. However, after a temporary disruption to their lines, the Kez seemed to regain much of their coordination and immediately swarmed toward Zhang Lie.

Chapter 107: A Valiant Rescue

It was evident that the Kez's goal was to kill Zhang Lie.

The downsides of Zhang Lie's evolving framework were prominently displayed at that moment: his reservoir of genetic energy was rather limited, and he was barely sustaining himself with his stamina. Without genetic energy, he would be unable to use any of his multi-target techniques, and he would eventually be overwhelmed by the bugs swarming toward him.

"We have to save our captain!" Fang Yi shouted, noticing the danger at once.

The other members of Team Zenith were all looking in Zhang Lie's direction.

"These damned bugs!" Li Feng yelled out.

"Come on, we have to save our captain!" Sun Mengmeng loosed arrow after arrow at the approaching swarm, and Zhou Ying and Sun Xiaowu immediately hurried over. Zhou Ying's framework boasted significant regenerative abilities, and she had recovered somewhat from her serious injuries.

Fang Yi took the lead, Li Feng and Sun Xiaowu followed closely behind, Sun Mengmeng ran after them, and Zhou Ying defended the rear. In their five-man formation, they charged toward and within the swarm of bugs, hoping to rescue their captain.

When the military commander saw this sight, he immediately shouted, "Quick, assist them!"

The bullets that rained down on the bugs before them significantly lowered the pressure that Fang Yi and the others had to face, but even with supporting fire, saving Zhang Lie would be a difficult and dangerous operation.

As the vanguard of the party, Fang Yi held his obsidian spear before him, its tip swirling with gusts of wind and storm. The genetic energy took the form of a dragon's head, smashing apart the bugs that lay before him.

The other members of Team Zenith followed quickly behind him.

Sun Mengmeng continuously launched arrows into the distance, thinning out the swarm of bugs before Fang Yi reached them, charring them into ash and soot. And while Sun Mengmeng and Fang Yi cleared the way, Sun Xiaowu and Li Feng guarded their flanks, one in silver and the other in gold, sweeping aside any bugs that drew near from the sides.

At the very end of the party, Zhou Ying caused vines and other obstacles to surge up from the ground, preventing the bugs that they had just passed through from catching up to and surrounding them.

Despite the extreme danger, the members of Team Zenith worked in such cohesive unity that they managed to sweep through a wide swathe of the bugs in a matter of moments.

However, the longer they remained amidst the swarm, the more intense the danger they would face. They were currently using up their last reserves of genetic energy, and they wouldn't be able to sustain this output for long. Fortunately, even though none of the soldiers or hunters could spare any forces to help them, the supporting fire never stopped.

When Zhang Lie saw Team Zenith heading in his direction, he immediately made his way toward them, and they reunited after just a few short minutes. However, by that time, they had all suffered quite a few injuries.

Poisoned spikes stabbed into Zhang Lie's body from head to toe, and the only reason his injuries weren't more severe was because of his white-grub armor. Otherwise, Zhang Lie could well have died to just a swarm of regular black-tipped scarabs.

Fang Yi, Sun Mengmeng, and the others all had cuts and scratches lining their body, courtesy of the swarm of bugs that they had just passed through.

"Captain, are you alright?!"

"Nothing life-threatening for the moment. Quick, we'll reverse the formation and rush out of this swarm of bugs!"

"Yes, Captain!"

They had to rush out of danger before their supply of genetic energy ran out, or they would be in grave danger, but their reserves were already flagging, and the injuries on their bodies were steadily increasing.

They were only a few hundred meters away from the teleportation array, but these few hundred meters seemed as though they would take an eternity to traverse: lying in wait for them were countless mandibles and sharp forelegs.

"Hold on! We'll be able to rush back to the array within half a minute at most!" Zhang Lie cried out.

Blood and gore trickled down their faces. Logically, they would likely collapse before they made it back to safety, but none of the members of Team Zenith gave up. They looked up, toward the defensive perimeter that had been set up around the teleportation array.

It seemed as though they would falter and perish at any moment, but they were still stubbornly and steadfastly making their way, ever closer, to safety.

The hunters defending the perimeter were all staring at them.

The fighting was still going strong in the other directions along the perimeter, but there was significantly less pressure on the northern front because of how quickly the three-star black-tipped scarab had been killed.

However, their position still wasn't secure, and emerging from the relative safety of the defensive perimeter would be extremely dangerous.

It was evident to most of the gathered hunters that Team Zenith was about to perish, but when they saw how strongly the hunters of Team Zenith clung to life, the hunters in the perimeter couldn't stand still any longer.

After all, they had just seen Zhang Lie kill a three-star black-tipped scarab on his own! Were they going to watch him die?

"I'm not going to sit here any longer! Team Lone Wolves, gather up—we're going to rescue these hunters!" a man with a scarred face yelled out. Yes, it would be dangerous—but how could he do

nothing? His teammates were all fierce-looking hunters, and most of them were excited upon hearing his orders.

His team's reaction caused the other defenders to start to mobilize as well.

The actions of Zhang Lie and his team, who were fiercely struggling despite all odds, had touched them all.

"Right, we'll head down with you!"

"Look at how strong he is despite his youth! Surely we can't let him die now!"

"If we work together, we can keep the casualties to a minimum. Team, gather up!"

"We'll head down together!"

Almost all the gathered hunters began to mobilize, and some teams were already heading out.

"Soldiers, listen up! Support that team of hunters with cover fire—we have to bring them back at all costs!" At the same time, the soldiers guarding the northern front all received an order from their commander.

Chapter 108: Honor and Glory

The gathered hunters had all seen Zhang Lie's performance. Would they be able to assuage their guilt by doing nothing while Team Zenith died in the midst of a colony of bugs? No, of course not!

"Kill them, kill them all!" Dozens of small teams of hunters dashed into the sea of bugs, rushing toward Team Zenith's location.

"We have to fight! There are reinforcements on the way—we'll surely be able to make it out!" Zhang Lie suddenly yelled out, sparking his team's fighting spirit once more.

Everyone in the team used up their last reserves of genetic energy in order to forge forward at their fastest speed. Opposite them, the rescuers also began moving even faster. It took them just half a minute for the rescuers to reach Team Zenith and fend off the bugs swarming toward them on all sides, grabbing the mired hunters and pulling them to safety.

At the same time, more and more hunters began emerging through the teleportation array.

After the death of the three-star black-tipped scarab, the bugs by the northern perimeter were noticeably less organized than before, and the humans gradually regained control of the battlefield.

However, this was a sight that none of the members of Team Zenith were able to see. The moment they retreated to safety, they each fell unconscious. They were exhausted, drained of stamina, and had suffered grievous injuries after the prolonged battle.

Just the amount of blood they had lost would have caused an ordinary human to die of blood loss, but as hunters, they barely preserved their lives due to their superior constitution.

"Medics, we need medics over here!" the rescuers hurriedly shouted.

Zhang Lie had no idea what happened next, because he only woke up two days later.

Apparently, the defensive perimeter in the capital had held, and mankind had successfully repelled the alien invasion. Even the Kez warships had been destroyed by the strongest of humanity.

One of mankind's three greatest monarch-class hunters, the Heavenly Monarch Lei Heng, had arrived at the scene himself, destroying all of the Kez's warships with a single attack and instantly causing his reputation on Earth to reach its peak.

Even so, their victory had come at a steep cost.

According to preliminary statistics, about 50% of the citizens living in the capital had been wounded or even killed, as well as 40% of the independent hunters in the region. The reserve forces stationed at the capital had suffered a staggering 60% casualty rate, and much of the infrastructure in the capital had been severely damaged.

Without the selfless hunters who sacrificed themselves for the greater good, the casualty rate might have been even higher—the capital might have become nothing more than a pile of smoking rubble.

As a result, there were quite a few other hunters who had been designated as heroes, beyond just the Heavenly Monarch Lei Heng, for example, Liu Xi, who had perished with his opponent, a five-star hellwind beetle; Fu Yifang, who had defeated a five-star green-winged insect on his own; Zhang Lie; and a dozen other hunters besides.

Their heroic and courageous performance in light of the sudden invasion was publicized and praised by all, and both the world federal government and the Chinese government rewarded them richly for their efforts.

After Zhang Lie had awoken and listened to Zhou Ying's recounting of events, his ward in the hospital was stuffed full of visitors. Both governments had dispatched representatives to congratulate him the moment they received news of his recovery.

"As expected of our hero, the Dragonwolf Zhang Lie, to be able to recover from such serious injuries within just two days!" a military colonel praised the moment he entered Zhang Lie's ward.

"Me, the Dragonwolf?" Zhang Lie had no recollection of the title.

"Ah, you don't know? You've been given the title of Dragonwolf because of your performance and appearance during your fight with the three-star scarab!" the colonel explained, and a middle-aged man beside him, wearing the uniform of the federal government, nodded in appreciation.

"That's correct. Dragonwolf Zhang Lie, footage of your meritorious deeds has spread around the world, and you've become an idol for the masses. You're someone that we hunters from Earth can truly be proud of!

"In addition, you've been recognized by the federation's military, and they've decided to award you the designation of 'galaxy fighter'! From now on, you'll be a galaxy fighter officially recognized by the federal government, and you'll have access to the special privileges that accompany that position."

Zhang Lie was stunned.

The title of galaxy fighter was an incredible honor, and the corresponding privileges it afforded were even greater than those for special-class citizens.

At that moment, Zhang Lie had yet to realize the enormity of what he had done, having acted on instinct for much of the fight.

However, before he could accept the medal that came with the title designation, the Chinese colonel also pulled out a box with a smile. "Given how generous the federal government has been, the Chinese government certainly can't afford to be stingy. We'll be awarding you with the medal of a dragonsoul warrior!"

Hunters were awarded with this distinction for valor and courage, succeeding the mantle borne by countless illustrious hunters of yore. Within China, this designation would confer generous benefits and, during periods of necessity, the highest level of protection the government could provide.

This award could, in some sense, be considered an inheritance. The awardees were understood to be the next generation of top hunters, and they would be given the greatest support the country could provide to aid their development.

Zhang Lie opened the two boxes, revealing a dazzling silver galaxy fighter medal, as well as a golden dragonsoul warrior medal with a runic imprint.

The silver medal would grant free passage throughout the Milky Way, and the golden medal had a runic inscription from the strongest monarch-level in all of China, the Heavenly Monarch Lei Heng himself. It would be able to withstand a few blows from even a monarch-class hunter, and was, at Zhang Lie's level, essentially a second life.

Zhang Lie bowed in gratitude to both officials, who nodded and left after a customary farewell.

After all, there were a few dozen hunters who had earned such commendations during the sudden incursion, and while most of them had perished, these awards would be conferred posthumously as well.

The moment they departed, Zhou Ying, Yang Ze, Li Feng, Chu Xun, Yun Meng, and the others immediately crowded around him.

"Wow, Captain, this is a beautiful medal!" Zhou Ying exclaimed in admiration.

"These medals are priceless!" Yang Ze gasped, understanding their significance immediately.

Chapter 109: A Miraculous Victory

"Isn't that so? He got the two most prestigious awards from this invasion, and it's far more impressive than the 'brave fighter' ones we got!" Li Feng's eyes were gleaming.

"Well, of course he did! Wasn't the scene of him killing that three-star scarab impressive enough to be worth these two medals?" Yang Ze exclaimed. "Could you have done that?"

Li Feng smirked as he retorted, "Perhaps not, but at least I did get a 'brave fighter' award, unlike someone who was defeated by the second wave of Kez..."

"Ah, you bastard! If you keep bringing this up, I'll break off all relations with you! I told the medics I was fine, but they carted me off anyway!" Yang Ze shouted.

The moment Zhang Lie confirmed that the rest of Team Zenith was safe and sound, he turned towards the two girls from the Yun and Chu clans. "Chu Xun, Yun Meng, are your older siblings alright?"

"Yes, they only sustained light injuries!" Chu Xun replied. "And are you alright, Zhang Lie? You had such frightening injuries when they finally brought you back!"

"Yes, I'm fine now. It was just some blood loss—there's not much to worry about."

"You're amazing, Zhang Lie—how did you recover from such a serious injury within just a day or two?!" Yun Meng's voice was filled with wonder. "I have to report your status to our fan club!"

Yun Meng, Zhang Lie's #2 fan, aimed her wristwatch at him and snapped a picture.

"Fan club?...what fan club?"

"A fan club for you, Captain, who else? Don't you know just how popular that recording of you slaying a three-star scarab on your own has been? There's a reason people are calling you an idol now, you know!" Zhou Ying jumped in before Yun Meng could speak up.

Zhang Lie finally understood what had happened. His fight with the scarab had occurred by the side of the teleportation array, an area of dense security. Although the Kez invasion had destroyed much of the surveillance cameras nearby, there were still a few that had made it through the invasion unscathed.

In other words, it was likely that footage of his fight had been captured in its entirety. But in most cases, wouldn't such footage be kept under guard? Who had decided to release it to the public?

"Yun Meng, is the footage publicly available?"

"Yes. Apparently, a media company got to it first, and then..."

Zhang Lie rubbed his forehead. If his sister were to see that footage, she would surely worry about him!

In fact, what Zhang Lie was worried about was occurring right then and there at the Holy Glory Academy.

The classroom was deathly silent.

On the holographic display, a hunter had suddenly appeared within the swarm of bugs and was about to challenge the three-star scarab.

The battle was so intense that just watching it was making the students' hearts palpitate.

The hunter punched a fist in triplicate to ward off the scarab's attack, then countered with a river of blood. Finally, he morphed into a draconic wolfman, fought off the scarab with a gigantic broadsword, then fell to the ground with it like a comet.

The final image was of the human warrior extricating himself from the scarab's corpse, then glancing at the swarm of bugs encircling him.

Zhang Hanxiang's face morphed from excitement and surprise into worry.

"Teacher, may I ask what happened to this hunter at the very end?" Zhang Hanxiang, who never spoke up in class, suddenly ventured a question. She hated drawing attention to herself, but there was no choice—after all, the hunter in the video was her own brother!

None of her classmates noticed her unusual behavior, because just like Zhang Hanxiang, they were extremely interested in what happened to that brave and valiant hunter.

Their teacher smiled. "This isn't part of the message I wanted to convey, but it looks as though we won't be able to continue with our lesson if I don't answer this question. Don't worry: the hunter in the recording was saved by his teammates and the gathered defense forces, and he's recuperating at the moment."

The students all heaved a sigh of relief.

"Teacher, I'm sorry, I need to take a half-day break!"

Of course, despite her teacher's reassurance, Zhang Hanxiang, as Zhang Lie's only relative, was still quite worried about him. The teacher was nonplussed by Zhang Hanxiang's curious reaction, but she agreed.

"Very well, but I expect an explanation as to why when you return, Miss Zhang."

Zhang Hanxiang nodded fervently, then hurriedly left the classroom with her guardian robot.

Many of the students were still overwhelmed by their emotions after watching the clip that their teacher had just shown them, and most were daydreaming about being as imposing and impressive a hunter as the one they had just seen on screen.

Meanwhile, their teacher emphasized the bravery, decisiveness, and fearlessness that the hunter had shown in the face of grave danger.

However, footage of the fight wasn't being used solely as educational material for civic purposes. In the St. Roland Military Academy, footage of Zhang Lie's battle was being dissected one frame at a time as part of a special seminar on battle tactics.

The instructor's conclusion was that Zhang Lie, who was a hunter in the first realm who had filled all his gene fragments to capacity, should only have had at most a 0.1% chance of winning a battle against a three-star scarab, but not only had he won, he had done so decisively with a frontal assault.

Indeed, if not for the fact that Zhang Lie's qualifications as a hunter had been publicized as an awardee of the prestigious 'dragonsoul warrior' medal, there was hardly anyone who would believe that a hunter from the first realm would have been able to defeat a three-star black-tipped scarab on his own.

A three-star black-tipped scarab would have been a difficult opponent even for hunters of the second realm, with only about equal odds of winning, and that only if they had all their gene fragments at capacity.

When these experts first saw the footage, almost all of them guessed that Zhang Lie was such a hunter from the second realm, but in truth, he was only a first-realm hunter. The difference between a first-realm and second-realm hunter was significant enough that these experts could hardly believe their eyes, and Zhang Lie's fight was eventually termed a near-impossible feat ascribed to his breaking through his limits at a critical juncture.

As this footage was disseminated to and dissected by military academies all over China, and even all over the world, Zhang Lie's name spread far and wide, and countless hotblooded youths began to idolize him.

Chapter 110: The Wang Clan's Plans

Of course, there were two sides to every story, and while Zhang Lie had become an idol to most, there were others who were gnashing their teeth as they saw his rise to prominence—for instance, the Wang, Qin, and Zhou clans, as well as those hunters who believed themselves to have been wronged by Zhang Lie.

In a refugee camp on the Moon, within a small, cramped room, Wang Xiaohua punched her optical television. "What Dragonwolf? He's nothing, a piece of trash, a useless hunter! Argh!"

Zhang Lie's seemingly limitless future caused Wang Xiaohua to want to pull out her hair in fury. Ever since he had ruined her life, her only motivation to continue living was to seek revenge. As a result, she had been putting her life on the line to defeat lifeforms in the dimensional world.

She had already amassed over fifty superior gene fragments, and she was anticipating that, with a little more time and effort, she would surely be able to kill Zhang Lie and avenge her father's expulsion from the clan.

However, Zhang Lie had long since surpassed her.

Countless experts had confirmed that Zhang Lie had to have capped all his gene fragments and that he had a combat ability equivalent to that of a second-realm hunter. Furthermore, he had to have at least three superior-grade soulshards in his soulspace.

How was she to contend with someone like him? After her sudden fit of rage, Wang Xiaohua began to regret her past decisions.

Why had she discarded Zhang Lie for a piece of trash like Qin Xiaotian? Her vanity and repeated provocation of Zhang Lie had ruined her life and family. If she had a chance to repeat her past, she wouldn't have messed with him at any cost, but there were no second chances in life.

After packing up her scant belongings, Wang Xiaohua walked out of her rented room. She had no chance at revenge. In that case, she would leave and try to distance herself from Zhang Lie as much as possible.

She wasn't the only one with that thought. In the Wang clan headquarters in Ning, Wang Han had called a meeting with the clan elders from the branch families, and they were currently watching a holographic recording of Zhang Lie's now-famous battle.

After the battle were reports regarding Zhang Lie from various media sources.

"I'm sure you're all aware of just who this Zhang Lie is. The reason I've called an emergency meeting is to discuss just how to deal with this lad."

Wang Han's face was sunken and sallow. He was disgusted by Zhang Lie's meteoric rise, but this was surely an event that he and the entire Wang clan had to pay attention to.

"A galaxy fighter, as well as a dragonsoul warrior... these two titles alone make him an enemy we have to avoid at all costs. My recommendation is to leave Ning, or to give up our pride and formally apologize to Zhang Lie.

"Wang Jianxin and his family have already been punished for their misdeeds, and he should bear no further ill will toward the Wang clan. As long as we're sincere enough, he should be willing to let bygones be bygones," an elder suggested.

Wang Han exploded in fury. "You want us, the mighty Wang clan, to bow down and apologize to a kid? Aren't you ashamed for even suggesting such a course of action?!"

"Ashamed? No, of course not. Head, please consider the significance of his new titles carefully. If we oppose him, then we're all but opposing the Chinese government itself. Why take such an unnecessary risk? He's demonstrated his potential for all to see, and there's no need for the Wang clan to be enemies with a man who's being groomed to lead the next generation of hunters."

The elder's reasoned argument won over many supporters.

"Is that so? Just because he has demonstrated potential doesn't mean that he'll be able to live to actualize that potential! He'll be given more opportunities in light of that potential, yes, but he'll also become a greater target for enemy factions. I propose that we kill him before he reaches his full potential. After all, Ning isn't a large city, and were he to reach his full strength, would we be able to retain any power in Ning at all?"

Wang Han's view was completely antithetical to that of the Wang elder who had spoken previously. After all, Wang Jianxin was his younger brother, and although Wang Han had been forced to expel him under significant pressure from the various elders, it had been pure torture for him to do so.

Whenever he was reminded of Zhang Lie, he felt a throbbing pain deep in his bones.

Wang Jianxin's expulsion, the huge financial losses that the Wang clan had had to swallow... how could they annul this enmity so easily? He and Zhang Lie were destined to be bitter enemies. Now that he had finally saved the Wang clan from destitution, his next target would be Zhang Lie's destruction.

So what if he were a galaxy fighter, so what if he were a dragonsoul warrior? Regardless, that lad had no backer nor background to speak of. He was talented, sure, but only within the younger generation. The Wang clan had hunters famed even in the second realm of the dimensional world, and they had no need to fear Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie was a young hunter, and it would be quite easy for his newfound fame and attention to get to his head. As long as the Wang clan was able to seize an opportunity or two to manufacture some form of negative publicity, even the federal and Chinese governments wouldn't be able to save him.

Wang Han was quite certain that he would succeed, and his desire to take decisive action drew the favor of several elders as well. Just like Wang Han, they believed that Zhang Lie's rise would cause the Wang clan's position in Ning to weaken.

The Wang clan had its roots in Ning, so how could they leave so easily? And because of a hunter of a younger generation, no less! If word were to spread, the Wang clan's reputation would fall overnight.

The elder who had taken the opposing position, Wang Feng, staunchly recapitulated his claim: Zhang Lie would surely outgrow the confines of Ning, and there was no need to take the unnecessary risk of making him an enemy.

The contentious issue of Zhang Lie caused a schism within the Wang clan.

"Elder Wang Feng, this time, I really have to side with the clan head. Zhang Lie's a member of the younger generation. If we bow down to him, what will the other clans say? Perhaps you might not know this, but this brash and arrogant Zhang Lie has purchased all the land within a kilometer of his house, and is intending to construct a dojo there! Surely you understand how threatening this might be to us?" another elder spoke up.

However, he was instantly met with a rebuttal from Wang Feng's faction. "Indeed, the fact that he's constructing a dojo is exactly why we shouldn't confront him directly. Right now, Zhang Lie's every action will surely draw the scrutiny of both the federal and Chinese governments, as well as countless citizens! If anyone were to stand against Zhang Lie now, they would surely face stiff opposition. Surely you can all see that this isn't worth it!"

Neither side was quite able to convince the other.

After the incident with Wang Jianxin, Wang Han's position as clan head had grown relatively insecure, and multiple factions had developed within the clan. This internal schism was made obvious by the day's events.

In the end, Wang Han stared stonily at the gathered crowd. "Since we can't seem to reach an agreement, we'll let a majority vote determine our path ahead."