

U. Warlord 351

Chapter 351: Musi Fala

In the end, Musi Te's strength was solely due to all the resources, potions, and herbs he had consumed, rather than his own skill, talent, or hard work. His tutors were the best the Musi clan could afford, and countless soulshards were his to pick and choose, but in the end, he was hardly a battle-hardened fighter.

On the other hand, Hong Xi had spent the last two months struggling just to live. She had threaded the line between life and death so many times that she had become inured to it all.

"And this blow's for the ancestors of the Hong clan! [Fists of the Silent Sea: Moonbeam]!"

Musi Te was moments from death; his death would be all but guaranteed even if Hong Xi did nothing. However, she didn't plan on stopping just yet.

Thin cracks propagated through the sky around his body, and twin beams of moonlight shot out from her palms. The indignation, anger, and helplessness that Hong Xi had felt all these years, she returned to Musi Te with her fists.

Blood sprayed from Musi Te's battered body, dyeing Hong Xi's fists red. Hong Xiao's eyes widened in pride and awe. Father, Mother, Grandfather, spirits of the Hong clan, are you watching this sight? My sister's fighting for the Hong clan—she's paying them back for a century of humiliation and disgrace!

Hong Xi's genetic energy spiked as she concentrated it all on her fists. Her right shoulder was aching; her body was on the verge of giving out. Her anger overrode these feelings. Raising her right arm high up into the sky, shining as brilliantly as the moon, she cried out, "Trash of the Musi clan, perish! [Fists of the Silent Sea: Radiance]!"

As space splintered all around her, a man appeared out of thin air, thrusting a sharp blade toward Hong Xi's heart.

Musi Te's eyes gleamed as he regained consciousness. "Uncle Fala!"

Hong Xi twisted her body slightly and continued her punch, ignoring the blade in her chest as light exploded out of Musi Te's body. His body burst apart in a dazzling flash of light, sending Hong Xi's body flying out into the distance.

With his last shred of consciousness, considering how crazy Hong Xi had revealed herself to be, Musi Te regretted provoking her.

A deep crater was left in the storehouse's floor, one that almost seemed to have been carved out with prodigious effort by a sharp blade. As the smoke and dust from the battle cleared, Hong Xi clutched her chest as she rose from the ruins of the warehouse, her face cold and desolate.

Musi Fala couldn't help but be impressed by her willpower.

"Give up on those crazy thoughts in your head, lass! I saw everything that happened. Believe me, I don't want to kill you, and I don't want [Eclipse] to die out just like that. To be honest, despite being

enemies, I was very impressed by the Eclipse Sage, and I don't mind preserving the blood of the Hong clan."

Hong Xi's eyes flashed coldly at him. "Even if I've killed those from the Musi clan?"

Musi Fala shrugged. "The Musi clan is large and prosperous, and we have countless talents. Musi Te was a rather strong fighter in his generation, but hardly unparalleled. The fact that he lost to you meant that he was weak, and a weakling would hardly matter to the clan."

Hong Xi snorted. "As cold-blooded as I'd expected."

Musi Fala corrected her, "Not cold-blooded, but realistic. Musi Te has no value to us dead, and living hunters will always be worth more than the dead."

Hong Xiao naturally took his sister's side. "The Musi clan really doesn't seem like a clan of humans."

Musi Fala folded his arms. "Were Musi Te still alive, I would be his uncle, his elder—but now that he's dead, what is he to me? The two of you are far more important than a corpse, wouldn't you agree?"

Hong Xi stared at Musi Fala without speaking a word. No matter what, it was obvious that he was far stronger than Musi Te.

"You don't have to stare at me so cautiously. I don't believe there's any need for the Musi and Hong clans to be mortal enemies. Perhaps we can conduct a private trade? Give me [Eclipse], and not only will I let your brother go, I'll let you live a life of luxury."

"We don't need wealth or riches!"

"Is that so? Well, the two of you both seem to have excellent talent as hunters. With appropriate nurturing, you might well become as strong as your forefather, the Eclipse Sage. Follow me. Let go of this grudge between your clan and mine, and I promise those of the Musi clan will never find you. I hope this sufficiently demonstrates my sincerity. As long as you nod, I'll instantly guarantee you and your brother a peaceful life."

Musi Fala's offer was tempting, but Hong Xi knew what he was plotting. "You want to squirrel us away to some unknown location, then monopolize [Eclipse] for yourself!"

Musi Fala waved his arms. "No, no, you're mistaken—I've told you, this is just a transaction. You give me [Eclipse], and I give you shelter and protection. Isn't this a win-win situation?"

A win-win situation? No, of course not—the grudge between the Musi and Hong clans was simply too deep. If Hong Xi were to agree, he would treat her well until she divulged the secret to [Eclipse]—then kill her afterwards. After all, she would have no further value beyond that.

To Musi Fala, the two siblings were children that he could manipulate at will, but he was mistaken. Having traveled with Zhang Lie for a few months, Hong Xi had matured greatly, and it was straightforward for her to see through the flaws in Musi Fala's logic.

Chapter 352: The Pride of the Hong

Hong Xi countered, "And what of the enmity between the Hong and Musi clans? I hardly think there's any possibility of repairing our relationship."

"Repairing our relationship? Oh, no, no—I'll simply tell the clan that you're all dead. The two of you can't be thinking of taking revenge on the Musi clan, surely?"

Hong Xi narrowed her eyes. "Why not? Should I allow the Musi clan to kill those of the Hong clan without retribution?"

Musi Fala laughed. "Come, now— how many hunters are left in the Hong clan? Just you and your brother, no one else! On the other hand, the Musi clan's at the height of prosperity. Even if you kill Musi Te, there'll still be a Musi Ke, a Musi Zhan, a Musi He—far too many young masters for me to name. Do you really think you would be able to take revenge on the Musi clan as is?"

Hong Xiao roared, "In that case, we'll slaughter them one by one, until they become as decrepit as the Hong clan!"

"Lad, it took your sister all she had to kill Musi Te. Do you think you'll be able to kill Musi Ke, Musi Feng, and Musi Lu, who are said to be at the peak of the third realm? And after that, how about the Musi clan head? Do you really think you can get rid of him too? The Musi clan will only grow more and more prosperous with every day he remains alive, but on the other hand, if the two of you die here, the Hong line will end with you!"

Musi Fala was quite good at persuasion, and his words left both Hong Xi and Hong Xiao silent. Indeed, they wouldn't be able to accomplish much beyond killing the young masters of the Musi clan. The head of the Musi clan was a hegemon in the third realm, and his continued presence would only strengthen the clan. On the other hand, the Hong clan was already on its last legs.

Musi Fala was confident that he would be able to secure the two youths' cooperation, but Hong Xi remained unconvinced.

"I admit that you're right, that the Hong clan consists only of us siblings. As descendants of the Hong, we should do our best to protect our line, but my master has taught me never to succumb, and the Hong clan needs no cowards." She stared at Musi Fala firmly, steely resolve in her eyes.

Hong Xiao nodded. "The clan's honor is more important than our lives."

Musi Fala shook his head in regret. "Ah, the naivete of youth! You wouldn't last three blows against me with your current skills. Believe me, you don't have any other choice but to cooperate with me. I'm trying to be nice here—don't force me to hold you here until I find a hunter who has a summoned soulbeast with them!"

Hong Xi cocked an eyebrow. "So you were scheming against us from the very beginning! Don't you worry—regardless of whether we live or die, there's no chance at all that you'll be able to acquire [Eclipse]."

The hunters of the Musi clan began to laugh.

"This girl's crazy to think that she can stand up to Musi Fala!"

"Who does she think she is? Does she really expect to be able to take on Musi Fala just because she managed to defeat Musi Te? They're on a different level entirely!"

Musi Fala sighed. "A foolish woman you are. Even ten of you combined wouldn't be able to touch me—this sort of fight would be meaningless!"

He continued to try to persuade Hong Xi, but she refused to listen. With a fan in her left hand and a sword in her right, she activated the domain of [Eclipse].

Musi Fala shook his head and pulled out his long sword in exasperation. "It looks like you won't ever be obedient if I don't teach you a lesson!"

Hong Xi shot forward with a flurry of moonlight strikes, but Musi Fala countered her attack with nothing more than a simple wave of his sword.

Hong Xi shot out a beam from her iris peacock soulshard. Before it struck him, he vanished from sight, then appeared immediately in front of her.

"I told you, there's nothing you can do against me." Musi Fala impaled Hong Xi with his sword.

Hong Xiao cried out in fear, "Sister!"

Strangely, however, not a single drop of blood leaked out of the wound. Musi Fala frowned. Before he could react, Hong Xi's body shattered, and she appeared by his side, shooting out another beam from her iris peacock soulshard at him.

Musi Fala had been observing the match between her and Musi Te, and he had devised a strategy to counter hers in the meantime. He dodged the beam once more, then swept his sword in an arc all around him, revealing the cloaked Hong Xi.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Tremor]!" Ripples of genetic energy collected on her fist, sliding down and stacking over her arm.

Musi Fala had watched Musi Te die to such a blow, and he was naturally careful not to take it head-on. He swiveled his body, but, to his surprise, Hong Xi also pulled her arm back and sent a kick in his direction instead.

With his left arm, Musi Fala caught and hooked her leg, then made to attack her with the sword in his right. The attack was so rapid that Hong Xi had no chance of evading it.

A long, fiery robe suddenly materialized over her body. Flames flared where Musi Fala's sword touched it, forcing him to stumble back in shock.

He narrowed his eyes. "To think you were hiding this even in your fight against Musi Te."

He inwardly cursed Musi Te for being such a useless hunter that he wasn't even able to force Hong Xi to reveal her armor-type soulshard. It was evident that she had considered Musi Te beneath her all this time.

The short-ranged explosion didn't hurt Musi Fala, but it did singe part of his hair. He tsked in annoyance. "It looks like I have to take this somewhat seriously, too. [Black Sun, Occluded Skies]!"

A black sun rose into the air, one far stronger and larger than Musi Te's pale imitation of the technique. Under the black sun, Musi Fala's aura grew tremendously. His body swelled; he seemed to turn into a deity of black flame, with an aura that forced Hong Xi to stagger back.

Musi Fala clenched his fists. Just how much stronger would [Black Sun] grow with the inclusion of [Eclipse]? He stared greedily at Hong Xi.

Chapter 353: I'll Give You Half

In the blink of an eye, Musi Fala appeared in front of Hong Xi, having moved so quickly that she couldn't even activate [The Elusive Moon] in time. Musi Fala sliced her raiment of fire apart, setting off a series of explosions as both of them were forced back.

The flowing red dress, cut and scarred, transformed into a short skirt instead, with flaming holes where there were still missing patches of fabric.

"What a troublesome soulshard!" Musi Fala frowned as he vanished once again from sight, but he wasn't able to approach Hong Xi so easily this time around. She had vanished almost at the same time he did.

They exchanged blows with their swords. Musi Fala managed to nick Hong Xi's thigh, reducing her mobility—but then a pair of leopard-print boots materialized over her feet.

"Another soulshard?" Musi Fala smirked. "It looks like you have quite a number of tricks up your sleeve. Were they all part of the Eclipse Sage's inheritance?"

He had thought that he would be able to deal with Hong Xi quickly, but she was growing more and more annoying by the second. Although Musi Fala hid his displeasure outwardly, he was internally quite annoyed.

"[Moon Seeker]!" Instead of responding, Hong Xi dodged Musi Fala's incoming attacks with agility and grace.

Unable to strike his target, Musi Fala frowned. The black flames on his body flared up. [Blackflame Sweep]!

The explosion from his sword strike filled up almost the entire warehouse. When the smoke cleared, it revealed the smoking, battered body of Hong Xi, but when he drew closer, he realized that it was nothing more than an illusion from [The Elusive Moon].

The blow that Musi Fala thought would surely hit Hong Xi had missed.

Where did she go? Musi Fala closed his eyes and flared his aura, barely noticing Hong Xi before she struck with her fists.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Tremor]!" Ripples of genetic energy collected on her fist, sliding down and stacking over her arm.

Musi Fala didn't have time to dodge the blow, and was forced to materialize an armor-type soulshard to defend against it, then counterattacked. "[Heavenfall]!"

The black sun fell from the skies, drowning the warehouse in a sea of black flame, one that struck even his own men. Musi Fala's eyes swept over the entire battlefield, then found Hong Xi tightly hugging her brother, protecting him with her own body. A large patch had been burned off her fiery dress, revealing her charred back.

"Fool!" Musi Fala called out. "To have suffered such grievous injury on your brother's account, especially when you're still facing me—foolish, far too foolish! Now, get up! I know you aren't dead yet!"

Hong Xi's stubbornness had caused Musi Fala to lose all his patience.

Hong Xi struggled up, sending what remained of her reserves of energy into her right fist, then flung it at Musi Fala.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Flash]!" She struck his chest point-blank, but he managed to summon an armor-type soulshard in time to block the blow. In the end, her paltry reserves weren't able to break through Musi Fala's defenses, and Hong Xi fell to the ground.

"Give up!"

Her body was battered, her reserves drained, her wounds serious. Nevertheless, by pure force of will, she forced herself up once more.

Musi Fala laughed coldly. "I don't know whether to admire or mock your ridiculous perseverance."

She made as if to punch him, but Musi Fala easily tripped her. Stepping on her chest, he announced, "Hand over [Eclipse]! This is the last chance I'm giving you."

"N-Never!"

Musi Fala put more force on her chest. "What did you say?"

Hong Xi repeated, "No matter what, I won't hand over [Eclipse] to the Musi clan!"

Musi Fala's foot roamed over her chest, up her neck, and against her face. "A stubborn girl, are you? Well, I'll have fun making you submit, then."

His sword stabbed into her thigh, but despite the immense pain, Hong Xi gritted her teeth and said nothing. Musi Fala wiggled his sword and forced fresh blood out of the wound.

"What a beautiful thigh! I might chop it off and add it to my collection—and perhaps your hand as well." With a careless flick of his sword, he sliced off her hand at the wrist. "What a pity for such a beautiful girl as you to lose a hand!"

Hong Xi shut her eyes in pain, but again she refused to cry out.

"To think I wanted to settle this matter like a gentleman... Very well. How about I remove one of your eyeballs next? Left or right? Or perhaps... there are quite a few men of the Musi clan waiting outside the warehouse, protecting the perimeter. They've been standing there for quite some time, and I would hate to have them do all that for nothing. How about I blind you, then chop off your four limbs, and then hand you over to them?"

"You bastard!" Hong Xiao scrambled up from behind his sister and rushed toward him, but he was sent sprawling by just a wave of Musi Fala's arm.

Hong Xi cried out, "Hong Xiao!"

Musi Fala turned back to Hong Xi. "It looks like you care very much for your brother. In that case, how about I blind him and chop off his limbs instead?"

"Wait!" Hong Xi cried out, seeing him going after her brother.

Musi Fala turned around. "Have you changed your mind?"

Hong Xiao yelled out, "Sister, ignore me! You can't give him [Eclipse], no matter what, or I won't forgive you even in death!"

Hong Xi's eyes teared up. "But you're the only remaining male descendant in the Hong line."

Musi Fala smirked, then raised his sword into the air. "I'm going to strike now!"

"Wait! I can, I can give you half of [Eclipse]!"

Chapter 354: Defeat in One Blow

Remnants of black flame continued to burn within the smoking and charred warehouse, causing its walls to turn brittle.

Musi Fala grinned wickedly. "No, I want all of [Eclipse]!"

"You—dream on! Kill us if you dare!" Hong Xi suddenly spat out a mouthful of blood. She was in a perilously weakened state, though she refused to give in.

Musi Fala crept closer to her. "Many of the Musi men are willing to copulate with men and women alike, you know, and—"

"And I've already dealt with them all for you," a calm, uninflected voice interrupted from the distance. A man walked into the smoking warehouse, the flames extinguishing themselves around him.

"The Eclipse Sage!" Musi Fala widened his eyes, then shook his head. It was a misunderstanding; the stranger's demeanor simply seemed too much like the Eclipse Sage's.

Hearing the familiar voice, Hong Xi shouted in relief, "Master!"

As the man approached, Musi Fala finally identified him. "Champion of the Void Cup, Zhang Lie!"

He turned to Hong Xi. "Would the champion of the Void Cup be your master? Don't be ridiculous—you'd never be able to approach a personage like him!"

He kicked Hong Xi's wounded and bleeding body, causing Zhang Lie to frown. "Do you want to do the honors, or shall I?"

"What? What do you mean?"

Zhang Lie snorted. "For injuring my disciple, you'll have to die in atonement. If you don't commit suicide, I'll melt your body down instead." His eyes flared with anger, and the aura emanating from his body was sufficient to shock even Musi Fala.

"Champion of the Void Cup, this is a matter that doesn't concern you. Why force yourself into the affairs between the Musi and Hong clans? You must have heard of the Musi clan—and the clan head, Musi Yu, warlord of the third realm! Is your disciple really worth rousing the ire of the Musi clan?"

Zhang Lie narrowed his eyes. "Are those your last words?"

"Champion of the Void Cup, think about it carefully! There's nothing to be gained from having the Musi clan as an enemy. Your dojo has countless disciples, so why would you go so far for just one? If you're willing to look the other way, the Musi clan will surely provide you with appropriate compensation. What say you?"

Hong Xiao went quiet. Even if Zhang Lie weren't convinced by Musi Fala's words, he was. It was clearly illogical for Zhang Lie to prioritize one lone disciple over the Zenith Dojo as a whole, and the Musi clan's compensation would surely be more tempting.

Any other dojo leader might have agreed to such a transaction, but unfortunately for Musi Fala, Zhang Lie thought nothing of the Musi clan.

When Zhang Lie didn't speak, Musi Fala continued, "Champion of the Void Cup, let me be honest: your disciple is the descendant of the Eclipse Sage, and she has the manual for [Eclipse] in her hands. This technique is of paramount importance to the Musi clan, so if you're willing to relent this once, I'll be happy to share this manual with you on behalf of the Musi clan, and we'll always be your allies. Well? Surely you see that this can be a win-win situation for both of us?"

The Zenith Dojo had gained tremendous popularity ever since Zhang Lie won the Void Cup, and youthful hunters from all over the galaxy were interested in attending the dojo. An alliance between the Musi clan and the Zenith Dojo would benefit the Musi clan far more.

Unfortunately for Musi Fala, Zhang Lie wasn't interested in anything the Musi clan could offer.

"Anyone who dares attack the disciples of the Zenith Dojo will have to pay, no matter their clan. I'll ask you again: are you going to kill yourself, or are you going to force me to make a move?"

Musi Fala felt as though he were about to explode with anger. He clearly hadn't expected Zhang Lie to be so stubborn and unyielding. "Zhang Lie, I'm reaching the limits of my generosity. I called you champion of the Void Cup out of respect; but if I were to be impolite, I might have addressed you as a country bumpkin from Earth instead!

"Do you really think that winning a competition means all that much in the grand scheme of things? The Musi clan's important even among the ranks of the world federation. Let me advise you once more: we can both benefit from cooperation, or I can claim all you own."

Zhang Lie replied calmly, "I'll consider what you said your last words, then."

"Lad, you might be a strong hunter among the younger generation, but there are countless geniuses in the galaxy. Do you really think you're all that? If our clan head were here, he could defeat you with just his pinky alone. If you dare touch me, I can assure you the Zenith Dojo will fall in retaliation."

Zhang Lie ignored his words. He stepped forward and vanished from sight. Musi Fala's eyes widened. His field of vision suddenly shifted; he saw a headless corpse slowly falling to the ground.

Th-That's my body! His body had remained where it stood, but his head had been severed—Zhang Lie was holding it up by his hair.

It was too late for Musi Fala to regret his actions. Zhang Lie tossed Musi Fala's head aside, then headed to Hong Xi's side. Blood pooled around her body, and Zhang Lie hurriedly poured a few

vials of healing potions down her throat. "Why were you so rash? Couldn't you have waited to contact me before rushing off to the Musi clan?"

Hong Xi didn't retort. She smiled blissfully, enjoying Zhang Lie's care and ministrations.

He frowned at the bleeding stump of her arm, then hurriedly found and reclaimed her cut-off palm. Reattaching the palm wouldn't be too difficult given the technological and medical advancements of the age.

It was only then that Hong Xiao, having recovered from his shock, rushed over.

"Champion of the Void Cup, M-Mr. Zhang Lie?!"

He was so astonished that he could hardly speak.

Chapter 355: The Musi Bounty

In the past, he didn't understand why his sister would idolize such a hunter, why she would buy his posters and newspapers with articles about him to pin up in her room.

Now, however, he understood. He too would admire a man who was willing to live for his ideals, unflinching against authority and strength. Hardly anyone else would be willing to go against the Musi clan, who controlled an entire planet, for a single disciple, and the courage and resolution that Zhang Lie had shown was second to none.

After stabilizing Hong Xi's condition, Zhang Lie turned to Hong Xiao. "You must be Hong Xi's brother."

"You know of me, Mr. Zhang Lie?" Hong Xiao's eyes widened in amazement.

Zhang Lie looked him up and down. "Yes, your sister has mentioned you before."

Hong Xiao's injuries were only slightly better than his sister's, and his left arm seemed to have been incinerated during the fight. Zhang Lie strode forward and cleaned his wounds, then asked, "Why don't you follow me back to the Zenith Dojo as well?"

Hong Xiao gaped. "C-Can I really go with you?"

Hong Xi weakly rolled her eyes at him. "You idiot, kneel down and kowtow to your new master!"

After doing so, however, Hong Xiao suddenly sighed. "But my genetic core was shattered to pieces by Musi Te..."

Zhang Lie didn't think much of it. "Then you can start anew. Do you have the courage to do so?"

"Wait, please! I have one last question—where did you obtain your copy of [Eclipse]?" Hong Xiao asked, staring as sternly as he could at Zhang Lie.

Hong Xi replied, "Our master's the successor of the Eclipse Sage! It was only because of him that I managed to make it into our ancestor's treasury. Otherwise, I would have perished months ago to a superior-grade lifeform."

Hong Xiao lowered his head. "Thank you for saving my sister."

"I'm the successor of the Eclipse Sage, after all. His visage left me with two tasks: one, to take care of the Hong clan, and two, to get rid of the Musi clan." Zhang Lie continued curiously, "How did you know that I possessed [Eclipse]? I don't think I've used it in front of you."

Hong Xiao lowered his head. "We've met in the past."

Zhang Lie frowned as he glanced at Hong Xiao more closely.

"The deepsea vines," Hong Xiao reminded him.

"Ah, that's right! You were the kid who tried to steal my vines!" There had been so many things happening around that time that Zhang Lie would hardly have remembered what had occurred without a reminder.

He smiled bitterly. Even before then, he had already begun searching for the descendants of the Hong clan—only to have one appear in front of his eyes without realizing it.

Hong Xiao cupped his fists and lowered his head. "I apologize for striking you, Master, but I urgently needed the vine to save someone."

"To save someone? What happened in the end?"

Hong Xi shook her head. "Our elderly housekeeper passed away. He had doted on us while he was alive, and he wouldn't have suffered such grievous injuries if not for the Musi clan."

Zhang Lie swallowed, feeling somewhat guilty about what he had done. "Let's let bygones be bygones. Once we're back at the dojo, I'll teach you about the foundational breakthrough."

Zhang Lie had exchanged blows with Hong Xiao before, and he knew that Hong Xiao was a talented hunter. However, Hong Xiao shook his head regretfully as he supported his sister's body. "I apologize. I'm very grateful for your help, but I can't drag you down with me."

Zhang Lie waved a hand carelessly. "I promised the Eclipse Sage I would take care of his descendants, and that includes the two of you."

"The Musi clan won't let either of us go. They're essentially the rulers of Tarkus and the nearby planets, and the Musi clan head himself is a hunter of overwhelming strength. They have a conglomerate that spans the entire galaxy.

I'm worried that—"

"Worried? Don't be, there's no need. I don't fear the winged, one of the four prime races of the Milky Way, let alone the Musi clan. Come, follow me back to the dojo!"

Hong Xi added, "Hong Xiao, believe in our master! He—"

"I know that you're very strong, Master, but the Musi clan isn't as easy to deal with as you would imagine. As far as I know, the Musi clan head, Musi Yu, is a warlord of the third realm, and it's been at least a century since he reached the peak of his cultivation. He's a peerless fighter!"

Zhang Lie snorted. "Will you follow me back to the dojo if I can deal with the Musi clan, then?"

"I'd love to, but I don't want to bring you trouble," Hong Xiao insisted. "The Zenith Dojo's in a period of growth. If you rouse the Musi clan's ire now, it might be a devastating blow for your dojo. I can't be so selfish, and—"

"You think the Musi clan has more influence than I do?" Zhang Lie interrupted him again, rolling his eyes. He was about to pull out his transceiver when he remembered that he had crushed it to pieces in his hurry to find Hong Xi. "Hong Xi, lend me your transceiver."

Hong Xi nodded. As he took the transceiver, Zhang Lie made a quick call.

"Zhang Hong, please help me place a bounty on the entire Musi clan. I'll trade one vial of Potion #1 for ten subordinate hunters of the Musi clan, five branch hunters, or one hunter from the main family. For a core hunter of the main family, two vials of Potion #1! Announce this bounty immediately—and if there aren't enough vials of Potion #1 around, have the labs halt their research and focus on producing as many vials as they can. Alright, I'll speak with you once I get back." Zhang Lie hung up. "The Musi clan's finished."

Hong Xiao and Hong Xi stood stock-still.

The two siblings were almost entirely unaware of the true value of these potions, and they weren't certain if anyone would actually be willing to anger the Musi clan just for one or two such vials.

Of course, just because they didn't appreciate the value of these potions didn't mean that other hunters didn't, either. A golden bounty shone at the top of the largest bounty hunters' forum in the galaxy, and the appearance of that bounty immediately led to repercussions throughout the dimensional world.

"Just what sort of enmity could there be between the Zenith Dojo and the Musi clan for Zhang Lie to be willing to hand over his precious potions as a reward?"

"The Musi clan's done for, I say!"

"Eh, where are you off to?"

"Isn't it obvious? There's a branch company of the Musi on this planet, and the managerial staff are all members of the Musi clan!"

The assassins of the Milky Way reacted even more decisively, and one of the most infamous such organizations, the Night Shadows, recalled all its members immediately.

Seated on his skeletal throne, the leader of the assassin troupe announced, "From today onwards, the night shadows will cease all other activity and focus solely on killing those of the Musi clan."

There were quite a number of outstanding assassination requests, for which the troupe would have to pay a hefty cancellation fee, and one daring member asked about them.

"Haven't you all seen the news about the bounty from the Zenith Dojo? Do you know how much these potions are worth? Pay the cancellation fees—they're nothing compared to the profit we'll get in return!"

Some of the killers, who had yet to hear about the news, immediately pulled up the corresponding information.

The champion of the Void Cup, Zhang Lie, had grown rather famous in the Milky Way, and many believed that the source of his extraordinary strength in the first realm was the additional fifty limit fragments and ten peak gene fragments that he possessed.

If they too were able to obtain a vial of Potion #1 for themselves, even if they couldn't become the next Zhang Lie, their strength would surely improve by leaps and bounds as well.

The assassins vanished from sight even before their leader dismissed them all. After all, there were only a limited number of people in the Musi clan, and they were afraid that others would get to the Musi hunters first...

The Beika plane in the third realm was an unusual location, filled with an endless swarm of bugs whose numbers never seemed to get smaller no matter how many were killed.

A man bathed in blood stood atop a hill of bug corpses, a bowl of ramen in his hands and a transceiver on his wrist. He was glancing at the daily news from the world federation.

"A bounty on the Musi clan? Interesting." Xing Yan stood up and tossed his cup of ramen aside. "In that case, it looks like it's finally my turn to shine."

To the pack of starbeasts below him, he announced, "Xing Zhi, inform the entire clan that the Musi clan is now our sworn enemy. We'll kill their hunters on sight!"

Xing Zhi seemed rather flummoxed. "Why, young master? We won't be able to make use of the humans' limit-breaking potions!"

Xing Yan smiled again. "That's unimportant. What matters is that Zhang Lie's a good friend of the clan, and helping him out in his time of need is worth far more than any material possession."

The other three prime races felt much the same way. Destroying the Musi clan would be as easy as squashing a fly, and that was a cheap price to pay for winning Zhang Lie's goodwill.

Chapter 356: Hunting Far and Wide

The eldest young master of the Musi clan, Musi Ke, was so incensed that he smashed the cup of wine he held against the ground.

"Musi Te, that useless fool—he wasn't even able to take care of the two children of the Hong clan! And isn't Musi Fala aware of how important [Eclipse] is to the Musi clan?!"

Nothing on Tarkus could get past the Musi clan's eyes, and they found out about the outcome of the altercation almost immediately after it had occurred.

Just then, someone rushed in, shouting, "Young master, something's wrong, something's very wrong!"

Musi Ke frowned. "What's the problem? Just catch the two children."

The newcomer was the old housekeeper of the Musi clan, who had diligently served the family for over fifty years. He had watched Musi Ke grow up himself. Panting, he wheezed, "Zhang Lie of the Zenith Dojo has set a bounty on the Musi clan, and it's spreading all over the web! Look!"

"A bounty?" Musi Ke brought up an optical interface and quickly identified the bounty in question. When he saw it, instead of getting angry, he began to laugh. "Ha! I hope this Zhang Lie fellow doesn't think that this ridiculous bounty will turn anyone against the Musi clan. Thoughtless fool!"

The old housekeeper hesitated, then urged, "Young master, I think it best to consider this bounty more seriously. Zhang Lie might not be as strong as you, but the theory of limit fragments that he

developed, along with the corresponding potions, really seem to be impactful. In the face of sufficient temptation—"

"Enough!" Musi Ke broke off the old housekeeper. "I'm well aware. It's been a long time since I went out fighting, so this should be a good warm-up activity."

"Young master, you—"

"Have my men meet up in front of the entrance to the Zenith Dojo on Earth!" Musi Ke commanded.

Before he could set off, however, another man burst into the room, his robes stained with blood, a prominent injury over his face. He shouted, "Run, young master! Something's wrong—a flock of black-cloaked men have rushed into the manor and are killing everyone in sight!"

"What?!" Before Musi Ke could respond, the man who had rushed in found a blade piercing through his chest. In a single blow, his head was decapitated from his body.

The next moment, a black-cloaked man stepped into the room. "You're Musi Ke, aren't you? There's someone who wants your head."

Musi Ke's eyes bulged. "Y-You're part of the Night Shadows!"

Night Shadows—the top assassin troupe in the world federation! Musi Ke quailed. "Who set a bounty on me? I'll pay you double it, no, triple— no, ten times the amount!"

The assassin chuckled. "The price was two limit-breaking potions. Is that something you can afford?"

Two limit-breaking potions?! "I'll give you money, all the money you want!"

"Money won't do me any good, now, will it?" The assassin smiled coldly as he raised a dagger, but just then, a beam of light shot toward Musi Ke from the side.

In anger, the original assassin deflected that beam of light, then turned to the assassin in the shadows behind him. "Fei Du, what're you trying to do?"

The new assassin stepped out of the shadows. "There are only so many hunters in the main family, after all. Should I wait my turn just because you found him first?"

While the two assassins argued with each other, smoke suddenly billowed throughout the room. The old housekeeper slowly approached Musi Ke and whispered, "Young master, this way!"

Musi Ke's eyes brightened. The Musi clan was large enough to have quite a number of enemies, and the main estate of the Musi clan had been built with safety contingencies in mind. In every room of the manor was a hidden tunnel, the end of which was a teleportation array that promised them a safe abode.

Right before the teleportation array, Musi Ke heaved a sigh of relief. "I really have to thank you for being here for me. Otherwise, I truly might have perished! Just you wait, Night Shadows. Once I escape from this place, I'll make you pay the price of daring to attack the Musi clan—"

Before Musi Ke could finish, he felt an icy shock by his chest, and he spat out a mouthful of fresh blood.

He turned to the old housekeeper in disbelief: it was he who had thrust a knife into his heart.

"Why? C-Could you want this limit-breaking potion for yourself, too?!"

The old housekeeper had been almost like his father. He had followed him around since he was little, and they had overcome many a challenge in the Musi clan together, in pain and suffering, exasperation and annoyance, happiness and joy.

No matter what happened, the old housekeeper remained steadfastly by his side, and he was the person Musi Ke trusted above all.

"You're not a hunter—what would you do with such a potion?!"

The old housekeeper's face was lined with sorrow. "I apologize, young master, but they've captured my granddaughter. They want your head in exchange, and I had no choice but to succumb to their threats! She's the only family I have left. On account of how hard I've worked for the clan for the last fifty years, please die peacefully—don't worry, once my granddaughter reaches adulthood, I'll immediately join you down here."

He twisted the silver blade in his hand, crushing Musi Ke's heart.

To his last breath, Musi Ke didn't understand why the world had gone so crazy over a few vials of potions.

In economics, it was often said that only goods in circulation would possess value. By announcing a bounty on the Musi clan with these potions as a reward, Zhang Lie had instantly raised the value of these potions by an order of magnitude.

In the past, conversations had been about just how much a vial of such a potion would cost, but now, they were about how many heads would be needed to exchange for one such potion, as well as how difficult it would be to amass these heads.

The impact of the Zenith Dojo's bounty rippled across the entire galaxy. If you had the strength, and if you didn't mind breaking the law, you could hunt down the Musi clan on Mars. If you didn't have the strength and did mind breaking the law, then you could at least be an informant and earn a hefty sum of money just by reporting the whereabouts of such members.

"Have you seen the subsidiary bounties that came out? If you're able to provide accurate information about a member of the Musi clan, you can get a million government points!"

"We'll be rich, rich! Send everyone out into the streets. We might not be capable of hunting down the Musi clan ourselves, but we can at least get this bounty just by numerical superiority!"

Zhang Lie was the one who had posted the main bounty, but the subsidiary bounties were subsequently issued by the major corporations and a number of top clans and organizations in order to accumulate more information about their targets: their identities, for example, in case there were any bastard children that might not otherwise be recognized as members of the Musi clan, or any secret hideouts that the Musi clan might have.

Any useful information would be rewarded with a commensurate amount of money.

Some black markets had even begun using the heads of the Musi clan as some sort of currency.

The cloaked Musi Ou rushed through a small alley, already having killed or defeated three waves of assassins.

In the three days since Zhang Lie had posted his bounty, he had experienced over a dozen attempts on his life. If not for the fact that he was a powerful third-realm hunter in his own right, he would already be dead.

He had cursed Zhang Lie a thousand times over in the last three days; by now, he was almost inured to the sight of assassins. After a long slog, he finally escaped yet another assassination attempt as he darted into a secret pub.

In the last three days, Musi Ou learned to avoid being forced into a fight—if he were forced to remain stationary, wave after wave of assassins would quickly swarm toward him. If he had to fight, he would have to end it quickly.

The pub was frequented by all sorts of criminals and wanted hunters. The reason Musi Ou had stopped there was because he wanted to rest for a little, and also to take on a new identity with which he would be able to flee farther away.

His pride as a member of the Musi clan had been beaten out of him over the last three days; he wished he could divest himself of that identity completely.

"Look, they raised the reward for the subsidiary bounties again! If you're able to provide accurate information about any member of the Musi clan, you can get up to two million points!"

"Two million— the Musi clan's done for!"

"They'll never be able to rise up again after this. Why on earth would they provoke someone like Zhang Lie? Don't they know what happened to the winged race?"

"If only I could encounter a member of the Musi clan! Don't you know how much a vial of Potion #1 is worth?"

The discussion in the pub caused Musi Ou's expression to turn even paler.

He ordered steak and wine, then secretly handed over a point card. "I need a new identity, as well as transportation to the planet Oden."

Oden was a newly discovered planet on the outer edges of the galaxy. No teleportation arrays had yet been set up there, and he could only get there by long-distance travel.

The hubbub in the pub died down instantly upon hearing his words.

Chapter 357: Secret Meetup

Everyone present in the pub was a hunter. Although Musi Ou's voice had been pitched low, it instantly attracted everyone's attention. His requests were simply too eye-catching. A new identity, and transportation toward the edge of the galaxy?

The suspects and criminals had been enjoying a rare bout of freedom ever since the release of the bounty. Just what sort of person would still be running away, even now?

As though he could feel everyone's curious stares, Musi Ou pulled his hood further down his head, arousing everyone's suspicions further. The bartender thanked Musi Ou, then took his money and card.

He had ordered the food so as to blend in with the crowd, but if he didn't eat, he would draw even more suspicion. As such, he took a small sip of the beer, a very, very small sip—but the next moment, he found the world spinning around him. The bartender gave him a small smile.

Musi Ou's eyes widened as he scrambled out of his seat, but it was already too late. He fell to the ground, his eyes spasming. The hunters in the pub all stood up, each staring at him as though he were prey.

Musi Ou died without realizing the difference between him and ordinary criminals. The latter were walking gold coins, even sacks of gold, but the members of the Musi clan were vaults of gold, nothing less. What criminal wouldn't be tempted by such a prize?

The pub quickly turned into a ruin as the criminals fought over Musi Ou's head.

In a secret underground chamber somewhere on the star Laer, the members of the Musi clan had gathered for the first time since Zhang Lie's bounty. However, the lack of people in attendance shocked everyone present. It had only been a few days, but of the tens of thousands of people in the Musi clan, fewer than fifty had made it to the secret meeting.

An elderly man's voice broke the stunned silence. "What happened to Musi Mo?"

Musi Mo was his nephew, his closest living blood relative.

A middle-aged man who had lost an arm sighed and replied, "He was killed by his wife, who poisoned him. Musi Mo was a known Casanova, and his wife had gotten tired of his countless affairs. She took this opportunity to poison him to death, decapitate him, and flee!"

"That damned slut! How dare she!"

Everyone fell silent. This was far from the wildest story they had heard of their relatives' downfall. The Musi clan members sighed. Who would have expected that their conglomerate would fall so quickly? It had only been three days!

"Do you have any ideas?"

"I don't think there's anything we can do but to wait for the clan head to terminate his secluded cultivation in the third realm," someone muttered.

The one-armed middle-aged man slammed his remaining fist on the table. "We have to think of a strategy immediately! We can't take this lying down!"

Another voice sighed. "What else can we do? Don't you know how many people are trying to catch us these days?"

"In that case, are we just going to do nothing? When has the honorable Musi clan ever been treated in this fashion?!"

"Musi Yongda, does that mean you have an idea?"

Musi Yongda was the one-armed middle-aged man. His eyes gleamed. "How much money does the clan have at the moment?"

"Only about 2% of what we originally had. The moment something happened to the clan, quite a lot of hunters who married into the clan ran off, taking a significant chunk of wealth with them."

"My intention was to place a bounty on the Zenith Dojo instead," Musi Yongda suggested. "Zhang Lie might have these potions of his, but aren't we rich? Even a fiftieth of what we originally had is far more than sufficient for placing a bounty on a small entity like the Zenith Dojo, surely. Zhang Lie killed those of our clan and murdered our relatives. We might not be able to handle him, but what about his dojo and his paralyzed sister? We can start with them!"

The hunters of the Musi clan began to nod, and their bloodshot eyes began to brim with killing intent. The root cause of their suffering was Zhang Lie, and they would pay him back!

"Indeed! It doesn't matter how much money we spend. Let's kill off everyone in the Zenith Dojo and make sure that he understands that the Musi clan isn't something he can control!"

"If he can place a bounty on us, then we too can place a bounty on him."

"Right. Let's have him experience just what it's like to lose those important to him."

The elderly man nodded. "This is one potential strategy. Do you all have anything else in mind?"

A bespectacled hunter suggested, "The main reason we've been dealt such a heavy blow isn't because of Zhang Lie's personal strength, nor the influence of the Zenith Dojo, but rather solely because of these potions that he possesses. The effect of these potions is ridiculous, but Zhang Lie's been monopolizing them all. This is clearly unfair, and I think there are quite a number of forces that would dearly love to get the recipe for themselves. I suggest we manipulate them into action."

"Oh? That's an excellent idea! If we do it right, we might even be able to get the highest authorities of the world federation to join us. Once we reach critical mass, Zhang Lie will surely be pressured into acting!"

"Absolutely! He shouldn't be able to monopolize the limit-breaking potion like that—it's a treasure that belongs to the whole of humanity!"

"Without his monopoly on these potions, Zhang Lie would be nothing. We'll be able to trounce him then!"

The members of the Musi clan began to laugh.

Suddenly, an explosion rang out above them.

"Ah, the news was right! We'll be rich—there's a whole nest of Musi hunters here!"

The Musi hunters' eyes widened. Someone had clearly leaked this secret location!

"Fifty of them, and some are even members of the main branch, a veritable fortune! Don't let any of them run off!"

The Musi hunters hurriedly fled through the underground tunnels, chased by a whole horde of bounty hunters and assassins. Their secret underground bunker was soon dyed red with blood.

Chapter 358: Demise and Downfall

Chen Simu sat on the sofa as he watched the daily news. "My goodness, can you believe how many people have joined this craze of hunting the Musi clan? Someone's even developed a device for testing for Musi blood! Wait a moment, this device looks surprisingly familiar..."

He shouted toward the kitchen, "Lily, why does this device look like the virus scanner you used on me yesterday?!"

"What? Oh, what I used on you was the Musi blood-testing device."

"What?!"

The beautiful girl draped in an apron walked out with a platter of food. She couldn't help laughing. "I borrowed it from a friend for fun."

Chen Simu frowned, feeling that something was wrong. The beautiful girl in front of him was heralded as one of the beauties of their campus, and she had only recently become his girlfriend. He had admired her for a very long time, and although she had rejected him whenever he confessed, she suddenly accepted him a few days ago, and she even agreed to move in with him. Chen Simu felt as though he was about to reach the pinnacle of student life.

"What did the test reveal?" he couldn't help asking.

Lily placed the food in front of him and smiled mysteriously. "Guess."

Chen Simu didn't have to. His parents loved and cared for each other, and he knew his ancestry quite well. How could he have anything to do with the once-majestic Musi clan?

Nevertheless, he replied, "Lily, if I really were a member of the Musi clan, would you chop off my head?"

Lily smiled, a beatific expression on her face. "Of course I would!"

"In that case, what should I do? I've brought you right to my house!"

"Does that make you unhappy?"

"Oh, no, I'm very happy!"

Lily smiled even wider as she went back into the kitchen to prepare more food.

Chen Simu continued looking at the news. "What? Our planet's decided that the hunters of the Musi clan aren't to be considered human beings, so killing them won't result in legal punishment... that's far too cruel!"

In the kitchen, Lily replied placidly, "Believe me, our planet won't be the first or the last one to do so. The moment the champion of the Void Cup announced his bounty, the Musi clan was done for. I even heard that, a few days ago, an organization wanted to designate the Musi clan as a critically endangered species, but the head of that organization was assassinated the day he made that announcement—and that was that!"

Chen Simu sighed as he glanced at the ceiling. "Lily, when do you think we might be able to encounter a member of the Musi clan? Killing one would be sufficient to pay your tuition, and if there were more, we could even get a big mansion on a better planet!"

"There's no need to daydream. Come, wash your hands and let's have dinner."

As Chen Simu walked into the kitchen and smelled the mouthwatering dishes, he murmured in bliss, "It's so fragrant! Lily, I can't believe you're such a talented cook as well."

Lily pointed at one particular dish. "Quick, try some of this. I've prepared each of these specially for you!"

Chen Simu had a bite, then asked, "Lily, just what did you add to this to make it taste so good?"

"Guess."

Upon failing to guess the secret ingredient a few times, Lily had him taste a few more mouthfuls. In the end, Chen Simu gave up. "I can't tell."

Lily leaned over and whispered in Chen Simu's ear, "Actually, I added a sleeping pill inside."

Chen Simu's eyes widened. "What? Surely you must be joking, Lily..."

"Chen Simu, didn't you say that you loved me? That you were willing to die for me?"

Lily pulled out a cleaver from underneath the table, causing Chen Simu's eyes to bulge in fear.

"Lily, w-what are you planning on doing?"

"Didn't you want to encounter a member of the Musi clan?" Lily's smile gradually turned horrifying. "He was right by our sides all along, because... you're from the Musi clan."

"That's impossible, impossible!" Chen Simu scrambled up and tried to flee, but he found that his limbs were almost completely paralyzed.

"Don't struggle futilely. I added quite a number of drugs in this food, so you'll be paralyzed for quite some time."

Chen Simu shouted urgently, "Lily, Lily! Believe me, I'm really not a member of the Musi clan. My surname's Chen!"

"Remember how I used the Musi blood-testing device on you? Its false positive rate is negligible."

"Could the result have been—"

Lily smiled. "To be frank, I'm a bit surprised myself. I can't believe that you were actually a bastard son of the Musi clan—or, well, perhaps it's to be expected."

"That's impossible! I'm not a member of the Musi clan, surely not!"

Lily countered, "Don't you think it strange? Your mother doesn't have to work, but there's always money in your bank account. And what of your name? When I heard about this from your friend, I suspected that you were someone's bastard son—and it turns out that I was right!"

By this time, Chen Simu had been entirely paralyzed by the poison. "Y-You've never loved me? You only got close to me because you thought I was part of the Musi clan?"

Lily rolled her eyes at him. "Love? What's there to love about you? You were nothing but a loser, but now, you're a moving vault of gold! Well, then, I hope you enjoyed your last few days with me, my darling gold vault," Lily crooned, then chopped his head off with her meat cleaver. The fountaining blood stained her pale hands red, but she didn't stop what she was doing.

Chen Simu's encounter wasn't unique; similar situations were playing out all throughout the Milky Way.

It seemed likely that the Musi clan would go extinct within half a month—and all this had been caused by one single bounty and vials of Potion #1. The impact of the bounty shocked the world federation.

The Musi clan was a massive conglomerate that had taken over multiple planets, but it had collapsed in a matter of days. Except for the clan head and several other powerful members of the clan, who were isolated in secluded cultivation somewhere in the third realm, the clan had almost died out entirely.

No matter where they hid, it seemed that someone was always able to find them. Those hiding in the dimensional world found that their locations had somehow been divulged; those hiding in the real world found their houses broken into.

The Musi clan had, overnight, turned into Public Enemy #1. The members of the Musi clan, no matter how they hid, found one confluent fate waiting for them: beheadment.

Chapter 359: Winds of Change

In the end, even the highest authorities of the Milky Way were roused to action. They wouldn't have been so shocked if what had destroyed the Musi clan was a rival clan or rival power, but there had only been one instigator behind this entire affair: the champion of the Void Cup, Zhang Lie.

There had been quite a few allies of the Musi clan who had spoken out against the rampant slaughter, but the next day, they had all mysteriously vanished. Ever since then, no one dared to voice a word of dissent against what had happened.

It was rumored that Zhang Lie had issued this bounty because one of his apprentices had been bullied. Except to issue this bounty, neither Zhang Lie nor the Zenith Dojo had taken part in hunting down the Musi.

Those who had had altercations with Zhang Lie and the Zenith Dojo in the past suddenly began to panic, and the world federation felt as though it had to step in. After all, who knew whether Zhang Lie would place a bounty on them? No one wanted to become the next Musi clan.

The world federation had no choice but to convene a meeting. After all, were they to let Zhang Lie take over the galaxy?

Deep in the Milky Way floated a magnificent palace constructed for the highest authorities of the world federation. Thousands of members of the world federation now arrived at that gigantic palace, the strongest representatives of planets all over the Milky Way.

Among them, even the weakest was on par with a peak fourth-realm fighter, and they were uniformly lord- and monarch-class hunters. The four authorities representing mankind, Hong Tianqi, Wilson Peters, Gresham Anderson, and Jill Rodney were all in attendance.

The meeting quickly began. The representatives had divided into several factions, and one speaker was chosen for each faction. Any rulings proposed would have to be approved by vote from the ten judicial authorities of the world federation.

There were two main perspectives on the matter of Zhang Lie: one, that he had to be warned or even punished for his actions in issuing a bounty, and two, that this was a perfectly valid course of events, and that nothing needed to be done about him.

"Ridiculous! Everyone, haven't you seen just what has happened in the Milky Way since Zhang Lie issued that bounty? Citizens are being slaughtered left and right! What has the Musi clan done to warrant such an affair? Zhang Lie clearly doesn't care a whit for the laws of the land!

"Look at all these images! People are breaking into manors, beheading people in public—acts clearly, expressly forbidden by law, but which Zhang Lie has incited by issuing his bounty! How can we, the world federation, stand by and do nothing?" one representative challenged.

The authority who presided over this meeting, Amurong, stood up again. "We have heard from one representative, and we believe he makes valid points. Are there others who would wish to speak?"

Another representative strode forward.

"Yes! It's clear that Zhang Lie's bounty has manipulated the public for his own ends—even ordinary hunters are going crazy for these potions. Zhang Lie has ignored law and order by issuing such a malicious bounty, and the sins of the public must fall on him!

"Killers are prowling the streets, police officers are being alerted to all sorts of reports of beheaded bodies of the Musi clan in every city, in every planet—all this has been caused by the appearance of this bounty.

"From my perspective, Zhang Lie should be arrested by the world federation. He should be forced to cancel this bounty and be punished for his misdeeds. Furthermore, speaking of the bounty, we have to speak of these limit-breaking potions that he has devised. This sort of treasure should not be under the control of a single human or single country.

"Representatives, are you aware that, because of this bounty, tens of thousands of innocent victims have already been killed, mutilated, or heavily wounded? Will the world federation stand by and do nothing?

"Zhang Lie can't be allowed to monopolize these potions. We've seen what the public has done because of his monopoly. Can we allow this sort of situation to happen again? Representatives, I urge you to consider this: who among you could bear to be the next Musi clan?

"To this end, let me suggest an adequate punishment for Zhang Lie: to divulge, without reservation, the full recipe behind this limit-breaking potion.

"I believe Zhang Lie is far too dangerous a criminal to leave on his own. He has to be arrested, to be under supervision from the highest authorities for life. If we leave him be, he shall ruin the entire Milky Way."

These representatives spoke of Zhang Lie's callous disregard for law and order, but their main intention was to seize the recipe of Zhang Lie's limit-breaking potion for themselves.

The conservative representatives, who felt that Zhang Lie had done nothing wrong, listened to the diatribes half-heartedly. Hong Tianqi, who stood on Zhang Lie's side, yawned and rubbed his eyes blearily as the representatives spoke.

Only when their representatives had spoken their fill when Amurong turned to the conservatives. "Hong, as the strongest authority in the Solar System and one of the ten judicial representatives, do you have anything to say in response to these allegations?"

Hong Tianqi countered, "And what of you, President? What is your perspective?"

Amurong replied seriously, "These representatives do have a point, but they've been rather uniform in their opinion. I would like to consider both sides of the debate carefully."

Hong Tianqi seemed to come out of his dazed stupor. In truth, the ten judicial authorities were the ones who held all the power to make decisions on behalf of the world federation, and the two most powerful among these ten, who would be able to cajole the others into agreeing with them, were Amurong and Hong Tianqi.

Hong Tianqi had already approached Amurong regarding this affair, and they had more or less brokered an agreement, but Amurong seemed to be changing his mind. As a result, Hong Tianqi certainly couldn't rest easily anymore.

"From my perspective, this was never a matter that should have been brought up to the world federation to begin with."

Chapter 360: A Mountain out of a Molehill

Hong Tianqi's words left the other representatives shocked.

"Representative Hong, what exactly do you mean?" one particularly daring representative called out, standing up in a fit of rage.

"I mean exactly what I said. Don't you think you're making a mountain out of a molehill?"

"Hong Tianqi, don't think we representatives will believe you blindly just because of your strength. This is a meeting convened by the world federation, not a human alliance!" Another representative strode forward, but Hong Tianqi didn't back down. The antics of these other representatives made them seem like clowns.

"If you examine what the Musi clan has done in the past, you'll see why Zhang Lie has been justified in issuing his bounty. As for the claim that the bounty disrupted law and order, and even in the trust that the public has in the world federation, that's even more ludicrous.

"Zhang Lie's bounty was perfectly reasonable, and it has always been understood that such bounties are enforced only in the dimensional world. Whether or not those assassins and bounty hunters choose to attack their targets in the real world instead is hardly a crime to be attributed to Zhang Lie, who suggested nothing of the sort.

"I suggest you arrest the actual culprits behind the crime instead. What does all this have to do with Zhang Lie? Don't you think it's rather embarrassing to be trying to get someone else to address your problems?"

"As for the limit-breaking potions, those are Zhang Lie's own discovery, and he can do whatever he wants with them. Out of his own generosity, he's divulged the list of herbs that have gone into the potion, so won't you all be able to deduce the recipe just by experimentation? Surely you don't intend on profiting off his labor for nothing?"

"I'll say this just once: whether or not Zhang Lie is willing to reveal the recipe is his own business. If anyone dares interfere with his decisions, I'll be the one you'll face."

Hong Tianqi slammed a fist down on the table, the fluctuations in his genetic energy stunning the gathered representatives. Even Amurong looked surprised. At his level of strength, he could clearly discern that Hong Tianqi's strength had increased yet again. Hong Tianqi had been a little weaker than he was in the past, but now, he seemed to be somewhat stronger.

Amurong had managed to obtain a vial of Potion #1 for himself, and although the increase in his strength was discernible, it wasn't particularly significant. He suspected that Hong Tianqi had consumed a limit-breaking potion beyond what Potion #1 had to offer; if that really were the case, then he couldn't remain still any longer.

"Hong, please, don't get too angry. Your points are reasonable, but so are theirs. The impact of these potions is simply too immense; none of us representatives want to become the second Musi clan." Amurong strode forward. His words sounded logical, but Hong Tianqi felt as if there was an undertone of guardedness behind it.

He replied, "If you don't want to become the second Musi clan, then don't provoke Zhang Lie. He's not crazy—he wouldn't issue a bounty on you for no reason. As far as I'm aware, he was never the instigator of any attack."

Hong Tianqi's words sent a shock running through the crowd.

Amurong cried out, "Ridiculous! You're trying to use your personal strength to coerce the representatives to your will. Hong Tianqi, I'm warning you—others might be afraid of you, but not me! If you don't hand over the recipe to the limit-breaking potion within three days, all representatives in favor of punishing Zhang Lie will band together and attack you."

Hong Tianqi laughed. "Oh? Declaring war now, are we?"

"The presiding representative's right. None of us want to become the second Musi clan, and none of us believe you should hold so much power! Believe us: no matter how many limit-breaking potions you have, you won't have enough time to convert it all into strength. Against this many allied parties, Earth will never be able to hold out."

They understood that, if they didn't cooperate and rally against Zhang Lie now, they would have no choice but to bow down to him in the future. Furthermore, they wanted to obtain the newest results of his research—the limit-breaking potions—paying as little a price as they could.

Of course, their wish wasn't about to come true.

Hong Tianqi sighed. "Very well. Let's have the ten members of the judiciary vote on the matter."

Everyone seemed placated by this outcome, which was the standard mode of resolution for all affairs, contentious or otherwise, brought forward to the judicial committee. If nothing were to go wrong, those in favor of punishing Zhang Lie would certainly win.

"A show of hands!" Amurong proclaimed, standing up. "Those who find it unreasonable for Zhang Lie to retain sole rights over his limit-breaking potions, who believe the world federation should instead acquire his research materials, raise your hands!"

Four members of the committee immediately raised their hands, causing the hunters in the faction hostile against Zhang Lie to grin at each other. Just two more representatives would be needed—and once the world federation's highest authorities had made their decision, even Zhang Lie would have to accede to their will.

Otherwise, he would truly become a public enemy.

However, after these four representatives had raised their hands, followed slowly by the presiding representative, Amurong, that was that. Hong Tianqi and the representatives of the nightdemons, aquatic, starbeasts, and winged races had no intention of raising their hands.

In other words, they favored Zhang Lie. With five raised and five unraised hands, the vote was a tie!

According to custom, a tie meant that further deliberation was necessary; the committee would shelve the matter for a year, during which time they would observe how the situation developed, and then vote once more.

For a hunter like Zhang Lie, whose strength was in his ridiculous growth, a year was far more than enough time to develop beyond the constraints of the world federation, and those who were opposed to Zhang Lie would hardly be able to monopolize the seeds of his labor.

Those representatives were outraged by this outcome, and they could hardly give up just yet. They stared daggers at the representatives from the four prime races. To them, it wasn't a surprise that Hong Tianqi, a fellow Earthling, would be in support of Zhang Lie, but the four prime races had promised that they would support the hostile representatives in seizing Zhang Lie's assets!

However, they had then backed out of that agreement when it came time for the actual vote. How could the hostile representatives not be upset at their sudden change of mind?

The four prime races had been tentatively willing to commit to the vote despite their ongoing cooperation with Zhang Lie because their research teams had yet to have any success, but they recently received news that their scientists had just made a breakthrough.

They would be able to get limit-breaking potions developed specifically for their own races from Zhang Lie himself, so why would they want to renege on their cooperation with Zhang Lie now?

Furthermore, it was unrealistic to think that they could make heads or tails of Zhang Lie's work immediately. Without his guidance, they could well spend orders of magnitude more energy and time in order to understand what he had done—and that only if they managed to secure all of Zhang Lie's research material!

The four prime races were fully aware that this was an unrealistic assumption. Zhang Lie would surely ensconce himself in the depths of the dimensional world, never to be seen again. Neither would they be able to snatch the information from him.

Furthermore, even if they were to acquire all his information and research results, what would happen next? Could they be satisfied with just Potion #1? The four races that had been cooperating with Zhang Lie knew quite a bit more about his theory of limit fragments than did the ordinary

specialist. By analyzing his combat footage, they determined that he had already come up with and consumed Potion #2.

Could the four races in cooperation with Zhang Lie not be tempted by this realization? Of course they would—and they would naturally side with Zhang Lie.