

U. Warlord 631

Chapter 631: Without Even a Corpse

"What should we do? Kaichen might be a bastard, but he's the son of the chieftain of the beast tribe! Once he finds out that his son was killed, he'll surely come for us."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "How would he know that we're the culprits?"

Mu suddenly stopped short.

"And even if he does, does he know where the alcohol tribe's village is located?"

Zhang Lie snorted. The elder had likely suspected that there were beast tamers around scouting the location of their old village, and he had specifically sent Zhang Lie on this mission to deal with them. He'd be certain to teach the elder a lesson.

"Come on—we'll clean up here and bring the alcohol back." Zhang Lie waved a hand unhappily, motioning for White and Whiter to clean up the corpses while he cleared away the cellar as quickly as he could.

Zhang Lie was just about to leave when Mu shouted, "Hold on!"

"What's the matter?"

"There's a second floor to this underground cellar. The older brews are all kept there; the first floor only has the standard stuff."

Mu pushed open a hidden chamber.

Once again, Zhang Lie had to be impressed with the elder's cunning. If Zhang Lie had killed Mu along the way or otherwise reneged on his promise, he wouldn't have been able to obtain the precious brews of the alcohol tribe. Meanwhile, the alcohol tribe might have lost some of its alcohol, but the really precious vats would have been preserved—and Zhang Lie had just cleared the way for them to retrieve it.

As they headed deeper into the cellar, the pervasive aroma of alcohol grew stronger and stronger. Zhang Lie's face flushed; he was getting drunk just smelling it. He immediately purged himself with genetic energy.

Unlike the first floor, the second floor wasn't filled with vats. What it lacked in quantity, it made up for in quality. An overwhelming fragrance had settled around the vats. It was clear at a glance—or a sniff—that this was good alcohol. In principle, sealed vats shouldn't have given off any smell at all, but the air was thick with the heady scent of alcohol.

Naturally, Zhang Lie didn't intend to give up on this treasure. He looted the alcohol and stored it all in his extradimensional space. Subsequently, he killed the two tamed lifeforms from the beast tribe and commanded Mu, "Roast them."

Mu jumped up in shock. "But the beast tribe could come at any moment!"

"Good—I hope they do!"

Mu sighed, but he did roast the meat following Zhang Lie's orders. Based on what he had witnessed on the way to the alcohol tribe's old village, he was more than convinced of Zhang Lie's strength.

Meanwhile, Zhang Lie continued adding to his collection of gene fragments.

Zhang Lie: a disaster-grade lifeform

Framework: Foundation, Lv. MAX; Ninecarp Transformation, Sixth Form: River Dragon
Techniques: Rippling Walk (pinnacle), Three-Wave Crescendo (pinnacle), Calm Waters (advanced),
Fists of the Silent Sea (pinnacle), The Boundless Blade (pinnacle), Eclipse (pinnacle), Syzygy
(pinnacle), Ninesoul Dragonblade (advanced),...

Genes: Basic, 65; Mutated, 55; Superior, 10

Soulshards: White Grub (superior), Blood Ant (superior), Potbellied Toad (mutated), Eternalspring
Cocoon (superior), Dragonwolf (superior), Moonlight Wurm (peak), Golden Roc (peak), Mismeld
Clam (disaster)

After acquiring all the gene fragments he could obtain, he gave the rest of the meat to White and
Whiter.

Satiated with food and alcohol, Zhang Lie set off on the way back to the alcohol tribe's village. The
only thing he was upset about was that the beast tribe hadn't dispatched any more tamers in his
direction.

By the time Zhang Lie and Mu returned to the alcohol tribe, quite a few villagers had gathered by
its entrance awaiting them.

When they saw White and Whiter, they seemed rather amazed. Some of the bolder villagers even
stepped forward trying to pat the two leopards, but they were dissuaded against that notion thanks to
the leopards' bared teeth and howls.

Zhang Lie slapped White on the head, motioning for it to be quiet.

With the help of two attendants, the elder walked out to greet Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie narrowed his eyes at him. "Very good, elder."

The elder feigned ignorance. "Is something the matter?"

"You never mentioned the ambush waiting for us at the location of the old village."

The elder schooled his expression into perfect innocence. "Was there an ambush? My goodness—I
had no idea!"

He was, indeed, a wily old fox. Zhang Lie snorted. "I was deeply wounded while fighting off the
members of the beast tribe, and—"

Mu interjected, "What? Savior, you—"

Amu dragged Mu away before he could say anything more. "Come, son, let's talk inside! Don't
disturb the elder and your savior."

Amu stood with the tribe on principle, but he knew how strong Zhang Lie was, and what a bad idea
it would be to rouse his ire. The two superior-grade lifeforms he had ridden back were proof enough
of that. What could a small turtle do in a confrontation between a lion and a dragon?

The elder fretted. "My goodness! There are some healers in the tribe, and I insist they have a look at you."

"There's no need. Alcohol's good enough—double the quantity of hundred-year-old vats owed to me."

The elder sighed. "It's not that I'm unwilling, but rather that the village doesn't have such a large supply of alcohol to give you."

Zhang Lie snorted. "Don't try to fool me—I brought these vats back myself."

"I'm afraid I simply can't give you more alcohol—our tribe needs to maintain our strength as well. How about you choose from one of the beauties of the tribe? Or I can even introduce you to my own granddaughter..." The elder smiled, his eyes twinkling.

If Zhang Lie accepted one of the tribe's women, they would be able to count on him for some support.

"Do you really think I don't dare to kill you?"

Zhang Lie's eyes narrowed in anger. "I could very well chop you to pieces and have no one in this tribe think anything of it."

The elder's forehead beaded with sweat. "Please, calm down! Perhaps we could set up a different kind of trade. Our tribe has lasted for millennia, and we still have some treasures. If you're willing to accept them, let's let bygones be bygones."

Zhang Lie rubbed his jaw. "Mu told me that the alcohol tribe has been in decline for quite a while now."

"Haha, you're not wrong, but we once used to be the strongest tribe in the region. Two hundred years ago, all this land belonged to us. We controlled it all; our word was law. Even a thin camel is larger than a horse, and our tribe still has quite a few treasures from that age. I'm sure there are some that will catch your attention."

Zhang Lie was indeed quite tempted. This tribe had dominated this world for some time, after all, and they very well might possess something Zhang Lie coveted.

"Let me have a look."

The elder brought Zhang Lie back to his little cottage. He retrieved a worn-down chest and revealed a secret compartment within.

"Hoh! I hadn't expected you to hide your treasures in this little cottage, Elder."

The elder smiled in mock embarrassment. "Most of our treasures, we had to leave behind during the raid, but I couldn't bear parting with a few artifacts left behind by our ancestors."

The elder placed the various items on the table: a shortsword studded with jewels, a pitch-black stone, a dried tree root, the hand of a mummified corpse, and a tattered map.

Zhang Lie glanced at the objects with a cultivated air of indifference. He shook his head as he picked up the shortsword, sighed upon inspecting the stone, sniffed the root, squeezed the mummified hand, and finally picked up the map.

His actions seemed casual, but his eyes were perfectly serious.

This—this was the key to the largest treasure of the third realm!

He had obtained a piece of the map from Musi Yu way back when, but he didn't expect to find the second piece here in this small village.

Chapter 632: Worse than a Mongrel

Zhang Lie sighed and put down the tattered map, shaking his head. "Elder, to be honest, none of these look any good. They're all trash, but well, I like making friends. I'll accept all this trash as medical fees."

"Lad, please, don't play these tricks with me. If they really were trash, why would you take them away?" The elder laughed. "I'm getting old, and my brain's not so agile anymore. Take what you want—take them all if you will, but I hope that you'll show this rundown tribe a little mercy and leave us something."

Zhang Lie picked up the root. "I'll take this—I need a supplementary ingredient for one of my brews."

Then, he picked up the tattered map. "This as well—you're surely not going to find anything with just this one piece, and I like collecting all sorts of oddities. With these two items, I'll ignore the fact that you didn't tell me about a potential ambush from the beast tribe."

The elder asked, "If you don't mind my asking, I'm a little curious as to just what this root is. We've had it in the village for quite some time. As the alcohol tribe, we're well-versed in all sorts of herb and plant lore, but none of us have ever managed to identify just what it is."

Because the alcohol tribe had to experiment with different plants for brewing alcohol, they were much more knowledgeable about herblore than the other tribes around, but even they had no records of this pitch-black root.

Millennia of research and study had left behind what was essentially an encyclopedia of herbs and plants within the tribe, so it was even more extraordinary that the root hadn't been cataloged at all.

If not for the premier brewmaster of the era claiming that this root had potent medical properties, it wouldn't have been preserved in the elder's chest. However, that was all the brewmaster was able to uncover about the root.

"This is a darksky anchoring root. When a particularly rare species of tree dies, the roots that are left behind age into this black mass over millennia. This root can stabilize gene fragments in someone's body, but it's useless for most people—it won't be able to make you stronger, or grant you access to potent power, or make you handsome, or anything of the sort."

Of course, if it didn't have any utility, Zhang Lie wouldn't covet it. He believed that this root's stabilizing properties would be instrumental to Potion #5, which would cause even larger shifts in Zhang Lie's genes than the previous four potions had done.

"And what of the map?" The elder asked about the other item.

"It's just a bonus."

The elder smiled. "I might be old and close to blind, but that doesn't mean I'm clueless. The map was the last item you picked up, and clearly the most important in your mind. When I brought out all the items, your gaze landed on the map immediately."

As expected of a wily old fox, to be able to catch such subtle details. Zhang Lie emphasized, "The map is useless. Do you understand me?"

"As you will. There was never such a map in this village; all you claimed for yourself was a tree root."

Talking with the elder was a painless affair—he understood what Zhang Lie meant almost immediately. Some curiosity was acceptable, but too much could lead Zhang Lie to do something drastic.

"We'll let bygones be bygones, then." Zhang Lie strode to the door of the hut and retrieved the vats of alcohol from his potbellied-toad pouch. A large number of mud-sealed vats appeared out of thin air, emanating such a potent and aromatic scent of alcohol that everyone around could smell it. The members of the clan all began pouring out of their houses and heading toward the elder's.

"I've brought back what you requested," Zhang Lie declared.

As the elder saw his clan's delighted faces, he nodded in satisfaction. He slowly walked to the doorway and proclaimed, "Kin and kith, hear me! Our honored guest has retrieved our long-lost alcohol from our old village—along with the ingredients for our ancestral recipe! The worst of our days are over—let us rejoice for our future, for our esteemed guest!"

Cheers echoed through the entire village.

On the other hand, compared to the festive atmosphere in the alcohol tribe's village, that in the beast tribe's village was dark and cold.

"Kaimie and Kaichen, those two bastards, still haven't returned," the chieftain of the beast tribe informed everyone gathered within the tent—his other sons and close aides.

His eldest son, who sat to his left, immediately replied, "I headed to the ruins of the alcohol village and found new footprints there. Following the footprints, I saw an underground cellar that we hadn't noticed before."

The chieftain's face grew darker. "In that case, you believe that Kaimie and Kaichen were killed by men from the alcohol tribe?"

"That's my guess."

The chieftain hissed. "I told them to report to me instantly if they were to find anything! Those damned fools!"

The chieftain's eldest daughter sat to his right. With a mocking tone, she suggested, "Perhaps Kaimie and Kaichen simply took all that alcohol for themselves and ran away."

To her right sat the chieftain's third-eldest son. "Kaimie's not so daring, but as for Kaichen..."

The chieftain slammed a palm on the table, smashing it to splinters. "If Kaichen really did that, I'll skin him alive!"

His eldest daughter spread her arms. "Now that he's gone missing, what can you do?"

"We'll see." The chieftain narrowed his eyes and clapped his hands, causing a blood-colored shadow to dart to his side—a gigantic wolf with fur the color of blood. Scales grew out of its body and limbs, and its head looks simultaneously like that of a snake and a wolf. Sharp incisors emerged from its mouth, and it would stick out its long slitted tongue from time to time.

Everyone within the tent stood up, wracked by fear. That was a blood-colored snakewolf, a commander-class lifeform!

The chieftain's eldest son snapped out of his daze and warned, "Father, be careful!"

The chieftain of the beast tribe gently patted the snakewolf's nose. "Don't worry. I've tamed it already."

Within the tent, the chieftain's children and aides slowly began to kneel. As one, they chorused, "Congratulations, chieftain! Our peerless leader will establish dominion over a thousand beasts and lead our tribe to glory!"

Despite their words, their expressions were all subtly different—some were shocked, others surprised, more scared, and some regretful.

The chieftain's eldest son asked, "Father, when did you tame a commander-class lifeform?"

The chieftain of the beast tribe smiled cockily. "It's all thanks to the alcohol tribe. The snakewolf was very fond of alcohol, so I gave it a great deal of the hundred-year-old brew and took my chance when it was drunk."

Chapter 633: Awaiting the Alcohol

Only then did the chieftain's children and aides understand why he had insisted on attacking the alcohol tribe despite the grievous injuries their tribe would suffer.

Back then, quite a few elders and personal aides had strenuously objected, but the chieftain overrode all those objections.

The chieftain explained, "Not only is this snakewolf particularly strong in its own right, it even has the ability to track people by blood. Just one drop of blood will lead us to the owner of that blood."

The chieftain's eldest daughter laughed. "Very good, Father! With this snakewolf around, Kaichen will be doomed no matter where he tries to hide."

The chieftain's second-eldest son smiled maliciously. "Kaichen surely didn't predict this outcome. How unlucky of him!"

The chieftain took out a small bottle of blood. After taming the snakewolf, he had specially informed everyone in the tribe to present a bottle of their own blood to him. The snakewolf stuck its long tongue within and licked a drop or two, then shook its head.

The chieftain's eldest son asked, "Father, were you able to find him?"

The chieftain smashed the bottle in anger. "He's dead—they're both dead, and their corpses have been destroyed! The snakewolf can't find any trace of them if no part of their body has survived intact."

"What?!"

"They're both from the beast tribe—how could they have died? Was it the alcohol tribe?"

"Not even their corpses? Just how did Kaimie and Kaichen die?"

The eldest daughter of the chieftain suggested, "It's really not too hard to get rid of their corpses—just feed them to the lifeforms all around."

The beast tribe chieftain thundered in rage, "Useless trash though they may be, they're my sons! I won't let their deaths go unavenged—the entire alcohol tribe will pay!"

"But we don't have any clues, and we don't know where the alcohol tribe has gone!" his eldest son protested.

The chieftain of the beast tribe snorted. "Don't worry. The snakewolf's special ability might be to track others by blood, but it can do so by scent as well."

Zhang Lie remained with the alcohol tribe for some time. He did want to leave, but brewing the alcohol would require considerable time. He had nothing else to do, so he walked his leopards and killed some regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms in the meantime.

This world was rather low-leveled in the grand scheme of things, and he didn't see any superior-grade lifeforms nearby. In fact, Zhang Lie suspected that Red Comet might be the only peak-grade lifeform around, and almost certainly that there were no disaster-grade lifeforms to hunt.

One day, there was a commotion from outside the village. Every alarm bell in the alcohol tribe was ringing, and the tribespeople immediately dropped what they were doing and scurried into action.

Zhang Lie appeared in the watchtower in the blink of an eye, shocking Amu, who had gotten there first.

Beside him, someone from the alcohol tribe murmured, "Is this a beast stampede?"

There were countless beasts in the vicinity rushing toward the village like a tsunami. Their eyes were red, and their odor carried through the air.

Amu's face turned dark. He grabbed the railing with such force that it splintered to pieces in his palms. "No. They're from the beast tribe."

He had witnessed one such scene before in his life, and it was one he would never forget—the original invasion of the alcohol tribe.

One of the fighters from the alcohol tribe pointed at Zhang Lie. "It's all your fault! You must have brought the beast tribe over, just like the foreigner from the past! None of you can be trusted!"

Amu sent a punch in the direction of the speaker, sending him flying. "Do you think it's the time to be fighting among ourselves? Go, prepare for battle!"

Amu sighed as he glanced at Zhang Lie. "This is a conflict between tribe and tribe."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "It's no problem. Before you finish brewing the alcohol, I need to keep this tribe safe, at any rate."

He stepped off the ground and flew outside the watchtower, White and Whiter rushing out with him. In a whirr of red light, Red Comet had zipped to his side.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!" Ripples of genetic energy emanated from Zhang Lie's fist, exploding amidst the beast horde in a torrent of water. The frightening waves of energy decimated half the horde in an instant, leaving nothing but bone and blood behind.

The fighters of the alcohol tribe stared at Zhang Lie in shock. Just how strong was he that he could destroy half the beast horde in one blow?

Amu's eyes widened. "This is, this is the power to control space!"

Legends had been passed down among their tribe of fearsome hunters at the acme of strength who had the ability to warp space and time.

"It's like a legend come alive..." Amu murmured.

The beasts from the beast horde began to rear back. They had lost all their momentum; the air was heady with fear.

Zhang Lie sighed as he glanced at the floor strewn with lifeform remains. "I used too much strength by accident. I suppose we can't have a feast anymore..."

"To think there was such a fighter in the alcohol tribe! Might I know your name, and why you're helping them out?" A man riding a lifeform emerged from the midst of the beast horde. His mount had scales covering its body and limbs, and its head looks simultaneously like that of a snake and a wolf. Sharp incisors emerged from its mouth, and it would stick out its long slitted tongue from time to time. It looked like a snake-wolf hybrid.

"What kind of mongrel is this?" To his surprise, Zhang Lie found that it was a peak-grade lifeform.

The man's expression turned dark, but he didn't dare say a word.

Zhang Lie hastily explained, "I'm talking about your mongrel of a mount, not you—you're worse than the mongrel."

The man roared in rage, "I'll kill you, you bastard!"

His eldest son, who rode a superior-grade toad, hurriedly pulled him back. "Father, remain calm! We don't know how strong our opponent is. There's no need for too much bloodshed yet."

The man sucked in a deep breath and visibly reined in his anger. He stared at Zhang Lie. "I've never seen the likes of you around. Who are you?"

Chapter 634: A Problem Resolved

Zhang Lie responded to a different question entirely. "I guard the alcohol tribe."

The beast tribe's chieftain's eyes glinted with murderous light. "And you aren't afraid of my beast tribe?"

"Sir, you're a clever man. Why stay with the alcohol tribe?" asked the chieftain's eldest son, riding on a toad.

Zhang Lie began to laugh. "And why not? Why should I listen to the likes of you—a mongrel, trash worse than a mongrel, and the son of that trash?"

The beast tribe's chieftain was unable to rein in his anger any longer. "Attack!"

Zhang Lie's lips curled up as he snapped his fingers. White, Whiter, and Red Comet rushed out into the beast horde.

Red Comet darted straight at the snakewolf, zipping around it and inflicting wounds all over its body before the snakewolf could react. White and Whiter pounced toward two of the superior-grade lifeforms in the horde, striking in unison.

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Brash and arrogant, without the strength to back it up."

The tamers of the beast tribe were strong fighters in their own right, even ignoring their beasts.

The superior-grade leopards were having a hard time vanquishing their opponents, but Red Comet dominated the snakewolf. Even among peak-grade lifeforms, it was one of the strongest around.

The beast tribe's chieftain was unable to do anything about Red Comet; it moved so quickly that he couldn't react to its motion in time. His face dark, he muttered, "To think you're a tamer yourself, too."

"Ha! I'm more skilled at manipulating people than beasts." Zhang Lie's eyes glowed with a rainbow gleam. He intended to wrest control over the snakewolf, but the beast tribe's methods were uncommonly effective—for the first time, his compulsion failed.

Instead, Zhang Lie struck at the beast tribe's chieftain, capturing him in a dreamscape almost immediately. He had the chieftain control his snakewolf and attack the other superior-grade beasts of the beast tribe, causing his eldest son to cry out, "Father, what's gotten into you?!"

The beast tribe's chieftain slammed a huge punch into his son, knocking him off his toad and onto the ground.

The chieftain's son was barely fighting on equal footing with White, and when the chieftain suddenly knocked him down, the toad he controlled froze up. That was White's chance, as well as Zhang Lie's.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Quake]!" Zhang Lie's technique was faster than even Red Comet's movement. He struck the snakewolf before it could react, ripples of water and spatial distortions striking its body head-on.

The snakewolf's body trembled, and then collapsed.

[You successfully killed a peak-grade snakewolf. By consuming the flesh of the peak-grade snakewolf, you may receive one to ten peak gene fragments.]

Of course, this was the result of fine control on Zhang Lie's part. The snakewolf's organs had all exploded under the impact of Zhang Lie's punch, but its skin remained intact.

After Red Comet lost its target, it hovered into the air and began striking at the other superior-grade lifeforms nearby instead. It honed in on a white bird controlled by the chieftain's eldest daughter, who didn't notice Red Comet's presence.

As though predicting what was about to happen, Zhang Lie suddenly shouted, "Hey, leave the birdbrain intact!"

A beam of blood shot into the air, slicing off half of the white bird's wing. As blood-red light crisscrossed in the air, the chieftain's daughter and the white bird fell from the air, diced into cubes.

Red Comet clutched the bird's head with its forelegs and brought it safe and sound to Zhang Lie, whereupon Zhang Lie rubbed at his temples. "No, that's not what I mean!"

Red Comet cocked its head. He put down the bird head and returned with the head of the chieftain's daughter.

"Alright, alright, that's enough! Stay away from me."

White wasn't doing very well; the tables had turned. The superior-grade toad's body was wounded all over, but its skin and blood were poisonous. White's mouth and teeth were all starting to decay, and purplish-green poison dripped down its mouth. The toad was wounded, but it seemed as though it would survive the ordeal—until Zhang Lie struck and killed it with a single punch.

[You successfully killed a superior-grade sac toad. By consuming the flesh of the superior-grade sac toad, you may receive one to ten superior gene fragments.]

At the same time, Red Comet finished off the chieftain's eldest son.

The battle ended very quickly. When the other tamers of the beast tribe saw how strong Zhang Lie and his three genetic lifeforms were, they didn't dare fight back.

With their chieftain dead and three of the strongest tamed lifeforms killed in a flash, the other tamers began to run off. Zhang Lie shook his head. He had Red Comet clean up the battlefield while he finished off the regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms—he still needed to max out those gene fragments.

Red Comet flew fast and killed even more quickly. With every flash of red light, it decapitated another head. The tamers screamed; their beasts howled. Some of the tamers, scared stiff, dropped to the ground on jellified legs and begged for mercy, but Red Comet ignored them all. As it swiped and swiped, the tamers of the beast tribe continued to fall.

Zhang Lie was also enjoying himself. With every punch, he heard the pleasant chime of the will of the world's voice.

[You successfully killed a regular-grade ghost wolf. By consuming the flesh of the regular-grade ghost wolf, you may receive one to ten regular gene fragments.]

[You successfully killed a mutated-grade sabre leopard. By consuming the flesh of the mutated-grade sabre leopard, you may receive one to ten mutated gene fragments.]

[You successfully killed a regular-grade blackwind mantis. By consuming the flesh of the regular-grade blackwind mantis, you may receive one to ten regular gene fragments.]

[You successfully killed a regular-grade black spider. By consuming the flesh of the regular-grade black spider, you may receive one to ten regular gene fragments.]

[You successfully killed a mutated-grade white dragontiger. By consuming the flesh of the mutated-grade white dragontiger, you may receive one to ten mutated gene fragments.]

Zhang Lie strode through the battlefield like a god of war. His body was drenched in blood, and a smile decorated his face. Every punch rippled with genetic energy, killing whatever lifeforms it struck.

The fighters of the alcohol tribe had gathered to fend off the onslaught, only to find that they were completely unnecessary.

The battlefield was filled with debris, the scattered corpses of the beast tamers and carcasses of genetic lifeforms. So concentrated was the stench of blood and offal that it wouldn't clear away for three whole days.

Those of the alcohol tribe grew more fearful and respectful of Zhang Lie, submissive in the light of his strength and simultaneously fearful because of it.

Zhang Lie had long since grown used to those gazes.

With the battle concluded, Zhang Lie had the alcohol tribe bring a large pot over to cook the lifeforms' carcasses and prepare a feast for one and all. Zhang Lie's orders were carried out with the determination and urgency of an imperial edict. The entire tribe mobilized, cleaning the carcasses and getting to work.

Very quickly, the tribespeople's fear of Zhang Lie's strength morphed into festive joy as they realized that their nemesis was gone for good. The beast tribe, which had assaulted their home and forced them to flee, had been decimated in battle.

Chapter 635: Final Destination

The alcohol tribe set up a large fire on which several lifeforms' carcasses were being spitroasted. They passed alcohol around and drank to their hearts' content as they sang and rejoiced.

Zhang Lie portioned away much of the meat, leaving behind only that which he needed—only his own kills would give him gene fragments, after all.

As he devoured a whole tableful of food, the will of the world chimed.

[For consuming the flesh of a regular-grade ghost wolf, you received one basic gene fragment. Current total: 95]

[For consuming the flesh of a mutated-grade white dragontiger, you received one mutated gene fragment. Current total: 77]

[For consuming ten-year-old alcohol, you received one mutated gene fragment. Current total: 78]

[For consuming the flesh of a regular-grade darkwind spider, you received one basic gene fragment. Current total: 96]

[For consuming the flesh of a regular-grade darkwind spider, you received one basic gene fragment. Current total: 97]

[For consuming ten-year-old alcohol, you received one mutated gene fragment. Current total: 79]

He drank big gulps of wine and ate big mouthfuls of meat as he gained big improvements to his gene fragments.

"Bring over the spoils of battle!" Amu shouted.

Eight tribespeople waddled over with a humongous pot in which the peak-grade snakewolf had been stewing. Zhang Lie dug in with gusto.

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

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

[For consuming the flesh of a peak-grade snakewolf, you received one peak gene fragment. Current total: 13]

White, Whiter, and Red Comet all got their fair share of food.

Despite suffering from the effects of the poison, White still seemed remarkably healthy. Its superior-grade constitution would likely alleviate much of the deleterious effects in time, but the wounds to its mouth and jaw meant that it could only lick at the meat broth as it watched Whiter and Red Comet gulp down mouthfuls of meat.

Zhang Lie then consumed the superior-grade sac toad, given that he was immune to the effects of the poison because of his eternal-spring cocoon soulshard.

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

As he feasted, Zhang Lie's gene fragments again grew rapidly in quantity.

Zhang Lie: a disaster-grade lifeform

Framework: Foundation, Lv. MAX; Ninecarp Transformation, Sixth Form: River Dragon
Techniques: Rippling Walk (pinnacle), Three-Wave Crescendo (pinnacle), Calm Waters (advanced), Fists of the Silent Sea (pinnacle), The Boundless Blade (pinnacle), Eclipse (pinnacle), Syzygy (pinnacle), Ninesoul Dragonblade (advanced),...

Genes: Basic, 160; Mutated, 150; Superior, 20; Peak, 10

Soulshards: White Grub (superior), Blood Ant (superior), Potbellied Toad (mutated), Eternal-spring Cocoon (superior), Dragonwolf (superior), Moonlight Wurm (peak), Golden Roc (peak), Mismeld Clam (disaster)

Thanks to the presence of all sorts of regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms from the beast tribe, Zhang Lie's basic and mutated gene fragments had reached their capacity.

Three days later, owing to the hard work of the alcohol tribe's brewers, the tribe's new brew was complete.

Zhang Lie collected his vats of alcohol as promised. The elder asked, "Will you really not stay here in this tribe with us?"

"No, I won't."

"If you're willing to do so, we'll make you the new chieftain of our tribe. No one will object—we lost our old chieftain during the beast tribe's assault and haven't established a new one since."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "I've already refused you a few times, and I'll do so again. I need to find my own race."

"Will you really not consider it? My granddaughter's physique is unparalleled. She's as strong as a tiger or a bear, her skin is the most perfect bronze, her muscles are—"

Zhang Lie broke the elder off. "Elder, please stop talking about your granddaughter."

He was worried that he would develop some form of mental trauma if he kept picturing the elder's granddaughter in his mind.

He knew that the elder wasn't trying to be malicious; these aliens simply had a different perception of beauty than he did. To them, the perfect woman was muscular and tanned, with the strength of a dragon and the voice of an ox.

To Zhang Lie, these women seemed more like weapons of war.

The past night, the elder's granddaughter snuck into Zhang Lie's bed. Zhang Lie, wary of the presence of an assassin, ended up fighting with the elder's granddaughter and collapsing half the cottage.

To be honest, he had to praise her strength. She was an unparalleled fighter, stronger than both Amu and Mu, and she was clearly the top fighter of the tribe. If he were to marry a woman like her...

Just imagining it made Zhang Lie's mind feel as though it were about to burst. He had had a girlfriend in his past life, after all!

The elder sighed. "To be honest, it's very difficult for me to understand your sense of beauty. What's so good about skinny wrists and legs? They break so easily! And pale white skin, a voice as reedy as a mosquito's—I simply don't understand it."

Zhang Lie laughed. "Indeed, it looks as though our viewpoints are diametrically opposed."

He even suspected that there was a hidden force in the alcohol tribe, one that mobilized only in times of great danger—the women. They usually didn't serve as fighters, except in times of need.

The elder sighed. "If you don't like my granddaughter, there are still plenty of women in the tribe you can consider."

"Haha, perhaps another time! Goodbye!" By then, Zhang Lie had made his escape. He was heading toward another wormhole.

The entrance of that wormhole was guarded jealously by a rather large tribe, and it was apparently protected by a guardian lifeform.

Zhang Lie set off on White with three hundred vats of alcohol in his extra-dimensional storage. Thanks to White's aura, no genetic lifeform dared to bar his path. He quickly arrived at the tribe the elder had directed him towards.

When Zhang Lie arrived, he was immediately interrogated. "Who are you?"

When the guards saw Zhang Lie's mount, one of them frowned and asked, "Are you from the beast tribe?" The guard seemed rather hesitant; Zhang Lie didn't look like a regular tribesperson.

Zhang Lie ignored the questions. His eyes radiated rainbow light as he mesmerized all the guards with his mistmeld clam soulshard.

The guards bowed to Zhang Lie at once, their eyes shining in rainbow colors.

Zhang Lie commanded, "Bring me to the wormhole."

"Yessir!" The guards escorted Zhang Lie into the tribe and toward the entrance of the wormhole, which was as well-protected as was claimed. The ground was paved with stone, and the surroundings covered in stone pillars.

As Zhang Lie approached the wormhole, the ground began to shake. The stone statues that stood in front of the wormhole suddenly began to morph into beasts of stone. When Zhang Lie's eyes shone radiantly once more, the stonebeasts transformed obediently back.

As he stepped into the wormhole, Zhang Lie instructed the guards, "Return to your original posts and forget everything that happened here."

Chapter 636: Granite Rhinoceros

As the guards leading the way bowed, Zhang Lie stepped into the wormhole.

A light breeze drifted toward him; it was nothing like a tempest, but it had frightening destructive ability on its own. To most hunters, that breeze would be like the scythe of a reaper.

Without the strength of a superior-grade lifeform, just touching that breeze would inflict serious damage. A weaker lifeform could be ripped apart, chopped into cubes by even the weaker spatial rends.

A thin layer of water appeared over Zhang Lie's body, blocking off the spatial rend that crept toward him.

Wormholes were known to be very dangerous. An idiot who chose to battle within a wormhole could easily destabilize it and let in a torrent of spatial rends, destroying the wormhole in its entirety.

The three genetic lifeforms that accompanied Zhang Lie all reared back, particularly White and Whiter. They felt as though their bodies could explode at any moment.

In some sense, the mere act of traveling through these wormholes was a form of training. Anyone who walked through them would gain some understanding of the power of space, especially for newly evolved lifeforms like Red Comet. Fending off these spatial rends with one's own power boasted great benefit—at the expense of great danger.

Zhang Lie strode into the wormhole, and the three lifeforms had no choice but to grit their teeth and follow suit.

According to the alcohol tribe's elder, they had originally been the guardians of that wormhole, but as it went into decline and stronger and stronger aliens began showing up through the wormhole, the alcohol tribe had no choice but to block it off. They were worried that someone whom they couldn't afford to offend would head through that tunnel and demand alcohol they no longer possessed.

The alcohol tribe's alcohol was a treasure even among the top worlds, after all, and there would surely be those who sought its recipe.

To be honest, the alcohol tribe had indeed encountered quite a few opportunistic aliens, and they chose to publicize their recipe out of concerns for their own safety. In the end, however, the fruit that was the core ingredient of the brew could be found nowhere else and didn't seem to have any obvious substitutions.

These fruits were precisely the ones that Zhang Lie had given the elder ten huge sacks of.

Since no other power in the third realm was able to obtain these fruits, they were unable to brew the alcohol tribe's alcohol. They had spent considerable effort trying to engineer and develop modifications that didn't require the fruit, but all their creations were significantly inferior.

As a result, the alcohol tribe's alcohol grew more precious by the day. As long as the alcohol tribe held control over the wormhole, it would be able to govern trade for the entire world, but once the fruit-world's wormhole was blocked off by a swarm of demonic bats, the alcohol tribe began to decline. Without access to those essential fruits, they were unable to brew their signature alcohol, and they were eventually forced to give up their claim over the wormhole to the larger worlds.

After quite some time, Zhang Lie and his three lifeforms finally arrived at the exit to the wormhole.

The exit was located high up in the mountains of another world in a secluded location. It was clear that whoever governed the wormhole on this side had chosen to leave its precise location a secret—no one was willing to provoke foes from another world, after all. Perhaps this was a consensus that all the tribes had reached together, but since the elder didn't specify, Zhang Lie didn't know the details behind the decision.

White and Whiter's bodies were all covered with wounds. Blood matted their glossy black fur, dyeing it a deep shade of red. Nevertheless, their mental strength seemed to have increased greatly.

Red Comet's body likewise had a few injuries. Spatial rends had scored a few wounds on its body, but they were nothing compared to what White and Whiter had suffered.

Regardless, it was clear that Red Comet was the clear winner of the ordeal. The whirring of its wings was already generating weak amounts of spatial force, and it had clearly gained a glimmer of insight.

Within the third realm, spatial manipulation would be the domain of the strong. A lifeform or hunter who possessed dominion over space was generally an invincible force.

Zhang Lie retrieved some Yeluo concoctions from his potbellied-toad pouch. The Yeluo chieftain had been inspired by the newly developed sura poison, and the new potions he had made from Zhou Ling's cells were incredibly potent brews that shouldn't have existed in the second realm.

Zhang Lie himself didn't have any need for such potions, but they could be useful for bartering or for his allies in the third realm. He applied the concoction on the three lifeforms, whose wounds healed in an instant.

Zhang Lie didn't know what to do next. After all, since he had been transported to a strange location in the third realm, with no way to contact the human settlements in the realm, he could only hope that he would be able to reach them by slow exploration.

The third realm was immense, and he hadn't ever heard of anyone traveling through it all. Zhang Lie's search was destined to take quite some time. At the very least, that event won't happen for a while yet. She'll still be safe for the moment.

Zhang Lie suddenly turned to Red Comet. "Can you scout for the nearest city?"

Red Comet buzzed in agreement and flew off in an instant. The effect of its spatial manipulation was obvious—Red Comet was using it to gain a boost in its flying speed.

Zhang Lie suspected that, after going through several more wormholes, it might be able to reach the boundary between peak- and disaster-grade.

Red Comet returned in bare moments. It was waving its forelegs excitedly, a sure sign that it had made a discovery. Given how excited it seemed, perhaps it had indeed found a city. Zhang Lie followed behind it expectantly.

He cut down a few trees and made a simple wagon held together by genetic energy. He retrieved a few vats of alcohol from his soulshard, then stowed them on the wagon and tethered the wagon to White and Whiter, pretending that he was a merchant.

He intended to use that identity to try to find information about the human race, but before he could reach the city Red Comet was directing him towards, the ground beneath his feet suddenly started to tremble.

Zhang Lie turned in the direction of the motion to see a huge rhinoceros-type lifeform chasing a heavily wounded youth, his face gray with dust and streaked with sweat, his clothes so tattered they were barely more than rags.

Compared to the youth, however, Zhang Lie was more interested in the superior-grade lifeform—it represented free gene fragments for him. He stepped forward, transcending the boundaries of space as he appeared before the rhinoceros, stopping the train-like creature with nothing but his palm alone.

Red Comet morphed into a beam of light, whizzing around the rhinoceros and cutting deep into its skin. White and Whiter pounced toward the rhinoceros from both sides of Zhang Lie, and Zhang Lie himself lay a palm sizzling with genetic energy on the creature's skin.

With a low groan, the rhinoceros fell to the ground, bleeding from all its orifices.

Chapter 637: In Search of News

The youth who was being chased by the rhinoceros turned around upon hearing the commotion.

[You successfully killed a superior-grade granite rhinoceros. By consuming the flesh of the superior-grade granite rhinoceros, you may receive one to ten superior gene fragments.]

"How wonderful—we'll have a meal immediately after that journey."

Red Comet began slicing up the rhinoceros. Zhang Lie broke off a chunk of flesh and noticed to his relief that the granite rhinoceros was thankfully not made of pure granite. He had Red Comet cut up the rhinoceros meat into smaller pieces to be roasted.

The youth who had been chased finally reacted. He broke free from his stupor and bowed down to Zhang Lie in thanks. "I thank you for my life."

Zhang Lie waved a hand, indicating that he didn't much mind.

The youth continued, "My name is Jie Jiuquan, and I'm the ninth son of the king of the realm."

"King of the realm?"

"That is indeed my father."

This world had a king of the realm? That was impressive. So-called "kings of the realm" were recognized by the will of the world and granted authority over a small part of the realm. They were responsible for protecting their territory and maintaining order within it.

In other words, they were akin to masters of the realm, with powers that superseded common sense. Even a strong hunter wouldn't dare offend a king of the realm needlessly.

Zhang Lie scrutinized the other party carefully. Among humanoid aliens, he was rather beautiful. Except for a few scales by his left arm, he looked almost indistinguishable from a human. He was on the young side, about thirteen or fourteen years old.

Zhang Lie nodded to himself, but he didn't much care as to the alien's status.

Suddenly, however, the ninth son of the king of the realm knelt down on the ground. "Please, accept me as a disciple!"

Zhang Lie glanced at him. "Well, you're certainly curious. Why should I believe that you're the ninth son of the king of the realm? And even if you are, why should I take you as a disciple?"

"I have a token to prove my identity—though I have no means by which to induce you to allow me to become your disciple save my identity."

"Hmm." Zhang Lie glanced at the young prince appraisingly. "Do you know how to make a fire?"

The ninth prince nodded. He hurried off in search of some dry branches. This was clearly his first time carrying out such a task in practice, but he did have the theory down—in the end, he succeeded on his first attempt.

Zhang Lie skewered the rhinoceros meat and left it above the fire to roast. "As a prince of the realm, how did you end up in such straits?"

The ninth prince sighed. "Some of my guards betrayed me and lured a few third-level beasts over. The guards that were loyal to me fought to their deaths, and I was forced to flee. If I hadn't met you, master, I would have perished to these beasts."

These third-level beasts that the prince made reference to were clearly superior-grade lifeforms.

"Why would you want to be my disciple? As a prince, you hardly need martial strength—so you're simply interested in my protection, aren't you? More accurately, you'd like a bodyguard and escort rather than a master—or perhaps more than that."

The ninth prince countered, "Wouldn't you benefit from my status?"

"I'm not interested. You do seem intelligent and interesting, so I'll send you to the nearest city once we finish our meal, but that's as far as I'll go."

Zhang Lie had no desire to stick his nose into trouble, no matter how much he admired the prince. Not only had the prince been able to make his request with composure despite his near-death experience, he was even able to treat Zhang Lie calmly and naturally despite the strength that Zhang Lie had demonstrated.

For a child in his teens to accomplish that much was certainly impressive, but even that wasn't enough for Zhang Lie. He was the king of Limit, and he had seen countless geniuses from all over the galaxy when the Zenith Dojo recruited new talent.

At his level, his interest in students was far more important than their own talent. The members of Team Zenith, Jun Jiuxiao, and Ye Xianchen couldn't strictly be considered geniuses, but his guidance was enough to elevate them over the common hunter.

The ninth prince replied seriously, "When I become king, I'll give you anything you want, Master."

"Haha, you?" Zhang Lie glanced at the child, his face still caked with dust and mud, and couldn't help laughing.

He divided the roast meat among the two people and three beasts. "I'm satisfied with my life. Why should I go along with you just for your fantasies?"

The ninth prince puffed up his chest. "Are you looking down on me, Master? When I become king, I'll own this entire piece of the realm—heaven and earth alike!"

Zhang Lie sighed and shook his head. "Believe what you will. Finish your meat and I'll send you to the nearest city. You'll find a large bed there where you can dream whatever you like."

The ninth prince glanced at him in worry. "Master, if you send me back to the city, you'll be sentencing me to death."

"What's the matter?"

"My guards' betrayal had to be planned by my brothers, and if they were to find out that I'm not dead, they surely won't let me go. An assassination attempt on one of the princes is no trifling business. My brothers have no choice but to continue with their plan, and they won't let me get back to the capital safely."

"In other words, you desperately need a bodyguard." Zhang Lie nodded. "Well, you're interesting enough, and I'd rather you not die so quickly."

The ninth prince's eyes widened. "You accept, Master?"

"That depends on whether you have a reward that would satisfy me," Zhang Lie replied.

The ninth prince earnestly announced, "As long as you can guarantee my safe return to the capital, Master, I'll give you as much gold and jewels—"

"Enough, enough! I'm not interested in those trifles."

"How about beautiful women, Master?"

Zhang Lie coughed as he spat out the meat in his mouth. "Do I look so desperate?!"

"I apologize, Master. My mother—the empress—told me that any man who didn't like gold or jewels was interested in women, or otherwise in men... Master, are you fond of men?"

Zhang Lie clutched his head. "Just what did your mother teach you?"

The ninth prince smiled. He wouldn't repeat his mother's actual words, of course—"Most men want gold or women. Those who want neither are the most dangerous."

Zhang Lie replied, "Well, I don't want women or men. Do you have any information on the human race?"

"The human race?"

"Those of my kind."

"I apologize, Master, but aren't you a scaleman like me? I don't know anything about these 'humans', but I'm sure the royal study has the records you need."

Chapter 638: Ninth Prince of the Realm

Zhang Lie hadn't thought about matters from this perspective before, but it was clear the prince had a point.

Since this world had a king of the realm, he would surely possess the most information out of anyone in the world. All the news and secrets of various worlds would naturally concentrate in the palace.

The ninth prince thought for a moment, "I can't just bring any random person into the palace, let alone the royal study. Of course, a prince's master would easily be able to access these places."

"Ha! Do you think you can hire me, Zhang Lie, on the basis of this information alone? Surely you have some treasures of your own as well."

The ninth prince scratched his head in embarrassment. "I do have a few, but I doubt you'll be interested in them, Master. The only thing that you might want is this."

The ninth prince retrieved a familiar piece of a tattered map from a hidden slit in his belt.

"This is—"

The ninth prince explained, "This is the only treasure I possess that may catch your attention, Master."

Zhang Lie asked, "Where did you obtain this?"

The ninth prince hesitated midway through proffering this map to Zhang Lie. "My mother, the empress, gave me this right before her death. She told me that this map had extraordinary origins, and even my father was unaware of its provenance."

Zhang Lie snatched the piece of the map up. "This is more than enough to send you back to the capital, but insufficient for me to help make you king."

The ninth prince thought for a moment. "Master, if you aren't interested in land, gold, titles, or women... well, the royal treasury has an herb that can elevate your biological status."

"Hoh? That sounds extraordinary." Thinking that Zhang Lie didn't believe him, the ninth prince continued,

"The herb is a fiery-red flower, like a burning piece of the heavens. It possesses immense energy. Father obtained two sprigs from an unknown source, and he's already consumed one."

Upon hearing the ninth prince's description, Zhang Lie was unable to remain calm. He shot upright. "Is the flower about the size of your face? Does it exude red light—do the petals look like burning flames, does it scorch the air all around it?"

The ninth prince frowned. "I only had a single look at the treasure. It was preserved by my father's power, and I wasn't able to get too close a glance. What you said sounds reasonable, Master, but how do you know so much of it? Have you seen this herb before?"

"For this flower, I'll make you king."

Zhang Lie's eyes glowed with light. He could hardly have imagined that a primordial starflower would have made its way to this planet—it was one of the primary ingredients that Zhang Lie was planning Potion #5 around.

Upon hearing Zhang Lie's response, the ninth prince immediately bowed. "Thank you for your assistance, Master."

Zhang Lie urged, "We'll leave immediately once you're done eating."

The ninth prince gulped down his portion of meat, hungry after his ordeal, whereas Zhang Lie had just enough meat to acquire his missing gene fragments.

Zhang Lie: a disaster-grade lifeform

Framework: Foundation, Lv. MAX; Ninecarp Transformation, Sixth Form: River Dragon
Techniques: Rippling Walk (pinnacle), Three-Wave Crescendo (pinnacle), Calm Waters (advanced), Fists of the Silent Sea (pinnacle), The Boundless Blade (pinnacle), Eclipse (pinnacle), Syzygy (pinnacle), Ninesoul Dragonblade (advanced),...

Genes: Basic, 160; Mutated, 150; Superior, 30; Peak, 10

Soulshards: White Grub (superior), Blood Ant (superior), Potbellied Toad (mutated), Eternalspring Cocoon (superior), Dragonwolf (superior), Moonlight Wurm (peak), Golden Roc (peak), Mismeld Clam (disaster)

He had the ninth prince ride on Whiter. The ninth prince was very shocked to see that a third-level beast was only suited to be his master's mount—just how strong did his master have to be?

Zhang Lie asked, "Do we need to search for your remaining guards?"

The ninth prince shook his head. "My older brothers wouldn't take the risk of leaving any of them alive."

The ninth prince's tone was calm and logical, but it highlighted his family's terrible cruelty. Either his guards were purged, or they had been compelled to work for his brothers instead.

White and Whiter moved rapidly. They arrived in a neighboring town within moments, and White and Whiter's presence shocked the aliens within.

Zhang Lie and the ninth prince were forced to leave them outside the town. To Zhang Lie's surprise, the ninth prince possessed no money, and Zhang Lie had to sell off a few of the Yeluo potions.

Thanks to their superb effect, he was able to fetch a high price for them from the local apothecary.

He bought the ninth prince a change of clothes. When the ninth prince walked out of the dressing room, Zhang Lie stared at him with such shock that it looked as though his eyes were on the verge of popping out of their sockets.

The ninth prince's face was pale white, his eyes clear and limpid like water, with intelligence and maturity unbecoming his age. His features were exquisite, his limbs slender and delicate. All the women of the world would be jealous of his appearance.

"You're... cross-dressing?"

The ninth prince nodded. "I've simply touched up my appearance a little."

"Is this something that interests you?" Zhang Lie couldn't help but wonder just what he had experienced within the palace to end up with such an unexpected hobby.

The ninth prince touched his hair. "Well, I don't dislike this get-up, but it's hardly just a matter of personal interest. My brothers' eyes and ears are everywhere to be found, and I need to disguise myself to avoid unnecessary trouble."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Return to your original appearance. Dress like a prince."

The ninth prince seemed flummoxed.

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes at him. "If anyone were to find out that you dressed as a woman to survive, you'll be a laughing-stock when you make it back to the palace."

"The ends justify the means," the prince retorted.

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Change."

He wanted to use the ninth prince as bait for the other eight princes' men to get a sense for the methods they tended to use.

To his credit, the ninth prince understood Zhang Lie's reasoning within moments.

"Master, I understand! You're trying to make it seem as though I have a strong backer, so strong I can appear in public after the assassination attempt without any disguise. That will cause my brothers to think twice before trying again."

Zhang Lie laughed. "I don't need to pretend to be strong."

The ninth prince frowned. "Master, you mean—"

"Do as I say, immediately!"

The ninth prince returned to the dressing room a young girl and emerged a young man.

"Very good. Let's set off."

Chapter 640: The Fight for Succession

"So there's something around even Red Comet can't deal with on its own..." Zhang Lie murmured.

He knew very well how quickly Red Comet could move, so this opponent clearly boasted some strength. The next moment, Zhang Lie vanished from the spot. He appeared right behind the man who was trying to run away.

When the man noticed his presence, he swung his polearm toward Zhang Lie, but Zhang Lie halted the attack with a single pinch of his fingers. His eyes took on a rainbow gleam, mirrored immediately in the other man's eyes. Red Comet rushed forward and knocked his polearm aside.

The man broke out of the illusion due to the intense pain of Red Comet's blow, but before he could react, Zhang Lie punched him in the face and sent him dropping to the ground in an explosion of dirt.

As the man clambered up, he was again caught within Zhang Lie's gaze.

White, whose body was bleeding all over, dragged over a corpse with its mouth, and Red Comet proudly displayed another corpse it had slashed to pieces.

When he saw the body that White brought over, Zhang Lie was momentarily shocked—it was the corpse of an alien not endemic to the third realm, but rather from the Milky Way.

Zhang Lie frowned. "Where's Whiter?"

He flashed over to Whiter's side. Compared to White and Red Comet, Whiter's battle was far more intense. Wounds festooned its body. One of its legs had been chopped off, and an eye had exploded from an unfortunate jab.

Zhang Lie instantly grew angry.

"Who dared to touch my cat?!" His aura swamped his surroundings like a tsunami. The entire world began to shake, as though a dragon were waking from deep slumber.

"And how about me?" an unfamiliar voice piped up.

Zhang Lie turned to the stranger, and his anger dissipated immediately. Whiter's opponent didn't have it easy, either; in fact, he had suffered worse than Whiter. All Whiter lost was a leg and an eye; its opponent had lost half its body.

"What sort of superior-grade lifeform is this? How does it have access to spatial abilities?" Whiter's opponent grumbled.

Zhang Lie glanced at Whiter in surprise. Had it really developed spatial abilities? It had to have gained a glimmer of understanding while they were traveling through a wormhole, one which solidified during this life-and-death battle.

In a moment of clarity summoned by the stress of battle, Whiter managed to infuse its understanding of space into one of its swipes, which had cut its opponent apart.

"Very good, Whiter." Zhang Lie retrieved a Yeluo concoction from his potbellied-toad pouch and applied it to Whiter.

Whiter's flesh squirmed, and one of its back legs and its mutilated eyeball were quickly growing back.

The alien who only had half his body left called out, "Lord of Renhuang, will you save me too? I think I'll make it with your help!"

Zhang Lie twisted his head. "You recognize me?"

The alien smiled at himself deprecatingly. "Who in the Milky Way hasn't heard your name or seen your face?"

It looked as though he really was from the Milky Way, after all.

Zhang Lie took out a vial of potion from his soulshard and waved it in front of the alien's face. "Do you want this?"

"Of course." Despite his apparent desire for the potion, however, this alien was hardly about to die. Even with the lower half of his body cut off, with his guts spilling out, he still spoke with gusto. He was a member of a very special race, and his body was segmented much like that of a centipede's.

That the lower half of his body had been cut off didn't seem very life-threatening, and he could very well have dragged himself back to the nearest city for emergency treatment.

"You don't seem particularly hurt."

The alien chuckled drily. "You must be joking, lord of Renhuang! I may look fine, but I'll surely bleed out in three to five hours."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Heijie Niu, from the star Heiman in the Milky Way. I belong to the Heijie clan."

"I've never heard of it."

"It's a small clan, lord of Renhuang, completely unlike the humans whom you represent. After you managed to take over the second realm with the help of the four prime races of the galaxy, everyone knows of you and your clan."

Zhang Lie continued waggling the potion in front of the alien's face. "I'll exchange this vial of potion for whatever information you possess."

"Absolutely, lord."

"Tell me about the relationship between the various princes."

"The king of the realm is getting old, and he's looking for a successor."

"It looks like there are quite a few races participating in this competition."

"There are four clans participating in all—the Heijie, the Yinlian, the Jindao, and the Zijing."

"Which princes do the various factions support?"

"The king of the realm is fond of the eldest prince, and he's also supported by the various factions of the court. He commands the army of the kingdom, and he's the most likely successor at the moment.

"The second prince is supported by the Jindao, and the third prince by a local power, the Wang clan—the third prince's mother is the Wang clan head's younger sister. The fourth prince is supported by the Feng clan; his mother is the Feng clan's head's older sister.

"The fifth prince has the Qian clan's support. His mother's from a branch family of the Qians, and his wife is the Qian clan head's daughter. The Qian clan is a clan of merchants possessing tremendous wealth, and the fifth prince's information network is unparalleled.

"The sixth prince is supported by the Yinlian, and the seventh prince by us, the Heijie. The Zijing endorse the eighth prince, and as for the ninth prince—well, he's an orphan. His mother was a commoner who died a few years ago, and he's essentially a powerless pawn."

Zhang Lie frowned, causing Heijie Niu to duck his head and shut his mouth abruptly.

Zhang Lie continued, "How did these four clans end up participating in the battle for succession?"

"We Heijie wanted to establish ourselves here in the third realm. The Yinlian are indigenous, and they want greater authority here. The Jindao and Zijing clans are a little different."

"Oh? In what sense?"

"The Jindao are participating in order to obtain a certain treasure from the royal treasury."

"What treasure?"

"The primordial starflower!"

Zhang Lie's eyes glinted with frost. "Somehow, I have the feeling that's what your clan wants, too."

Heijie Niu smiled. "Of course, but our main goal is to establish a city on this world, one guarded by the king of the realm."

The Heijie claimed that they wanted a city, but it wasn't just that. The worlds of the third realm were fractious and prone to violent conflict, and the politics of the various worlds were often very unstable.

Zhang Lie suspected that the Heijie were trying to establish themselves here with the intention of conquering the nearby territory and spreading out from there.

"And the Zijing?"

"Well, they claim they're interested in the resources of this world, but I thought that that seemed like a mere excuse."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because they're very strong, far stronger than the other three clans."