

## U. Warlord 91

### Chapter 91: Mobilization

"Captain, is this the Eclipse Sage?" Fang Yi asked.

"Who else could it be, if it's displayed so prominently in the castle? Of course it has to be him!" Sun Mengmeng declared.

The others nodded, and Zhang Lie inclined his head in agreement.

If he remembered correctly, this plaza was a safe area, and the real danger would emerge at the sage's training ground. Of course, this danger really only applied to his teammates.

No matter how strong the Eclipse Sage had been, he was now dead. His trials were intended to establish a successor, so they wouldn't be too difficult or life-threatening. Zhang Lie, whose superior gene fragments were at capacity, should easily be able to handle them. Perhaps the last trial would be somewhat difficult and arduous, but he was quite certain there would be no danger to his life.

Indeed, what was more dangerous to Team Zenith would be the encroaching parties from the clans around the region. After all, none of them knew that the castle they had just entered had become the target of all the clans close to Liao.

Liao, located in the northeast region of China, was bordered by the sea on three fronts, with beautiful mountains and streams. As one of the three most impressive cities of the region, over a hundred clans of all shapes and sizes gathered around Liao. Only four, however, could be considered major players: the Qin, Zhao, Wang, and Liu clans.

The beam of light was closest to the Qin clan, and Qin Feng was the first to reach the scene.

Unfortunately for him, his speed didn't give him any advantage, because the kaleidoscopic array possessed a self-restoration ability that allowed it to resume activation not long after Zhang Lie and his team entered the extradimensional space.

As a result, despite being the first to arrive, Qin Feng wasn't even able to identify where exactly the portal was.

"Young Master, I've found something!" Qin Feng and his guards immediately approached the shouting scout. They saw an ancient stump by their feet, one that seemed perfectly ordinary.

However, upon closer inspection, the oddities surrounding it were quite evident. There were a few gears hidden around the vicinity, as well as a large footprint on the stump itself.

Qin Feng praised, "Well done, Shunzi! This must be the mechanism to unlock the portal to the ruins. Step aside, let me—"

"Ah, it looks like I've come at an opportune time!"

Just as Qin Feng was about to examine the apparatus in more detail, a dozen beams of light emerged nearby, and a voice could be heard from the distance.

"And just who do you think you are? Liu Ke, do you think I'll let you steal our clan's ruins?!"

Qin Feng hesitated for a moment, but when he saw just who was talking, he relaxed.

Liu Ke was the young master of the Liu clan, as well as an elite. The Liu clan was quite a bit weaker than the Qin clan, explaining Qin Feng's attitude. However, Liu Ke, who normally didn't dare rebuke Qin Feng, actually strode up to him and met his gaze.

"Young Master Qin, you don't think your Qin clan can claim these ruins as its own, do you? Chasing me off now isn't a smart move at all! You do realize that other clans could see that beam of light piercing the heavens?"

Liu Ke's attitude greatly displeased Qin Feng. He narrowed his eyes. "Oh, is that so? What do you propose?"

"We need to cooperate, of course! Only if we work together can we split a fraction of the rewards."

"A fraction?" Qin Feng glanced at Liu Ke as though he were an idiot.

"I mean what I said. Given how much commotion these ruins generated all around the world, even if all four of the major Liao clans worked together, we would only be able to get a fraction of the rewards, and even that will require significant cooperation on our parts," Liu Ke explained firmly.

"Are you crazy? Who's stopping me from heading in and taking everything for myself? This is the real world, not the dimensional world— who's going to try to start a clan war? The federal government's rules and regulations are there for a reason! Now, scram! If you keep talking, I'll take you out first!"

Qin Feng was growing more and more irate.

"You're right that there won't be a clan war here on Earth, but don't you realize how close we are to the capital? If the clans from the capital want us to capitulate to them, do you think they'd need to start a war? There are quite a few ways to get around governmental regulation—say, for example, hunting us down in the dimensional world instead."

Qin Feng stilled. Liu Ke wasn't wrong: it would cause quite a commotion if other clans tried to kill them in the real world, but what about in the dimensional world? If they were targeted by the major clans, unless they had strong protection in every realm, they would easily be wiped off the map.

Just as Qin Feng was thinking matters through, two more clans arrived at the scene: Zhao Kai and Wang Lun, from the Zhao and Wang clans respectively, had arrived with their own elites.

Zhao Kai seemed to have heard part of the conversation, and the moment he appeared in sight, he added, "Qin Feng, there's no need to think further about it! If we work together, we all benefit; if we fight among ourselves, we all lose out!"

"That's right. Only with all four of our clans working together can we hope to stand against the other clans!" Wang Lun agreed. Clearly, he had thought matters through during the way here.

With the other three clans in agreement, Qin Feng had no choice but to agree. If he didn't, the other three clans would spurn him, and he wouldn't be able to obtain anything from the ruins at all.

"Fine, fine! In that case, we'll form an alliance. How do you propose splitting up the rewards?" The moment he agreed, Qin Xiao brought up this question, hoping to gain a little advantage, but he clearly still wasn't thinking straight.

"Qin Feng, given this sort of situation, do you really think that we're qualified to discuss the allocation of spoils? Unless you can activate the portal immediately and leave with everything inside, the four of us will just have to be grateful with whatever the other clans decide to hand us.

"I've just received news from the capital: the Chu clan's Chu Feng and Chu Xun are mobilizing, led by Chu Zhennan, an elder a generation above us, himself! Do you think our four clans can stand up to a formation like that?"

The Zhao clan was the strongest of the four major clans in Liao, and he was far more direct than Liu Ke could hope to be.

Qin Feng gaped. Chu Feng, Chu Xun, and Chu Zhennan himself?! Was the Chu clan intending on monopolizing the rewards from the ruins for himself?!

These names splashed on Qin Feng's face like cold water. No, his clan certainly wouldn't be able to afford arousing the ire of these hunters! It looked as though he had no choice but to cooperate with the other Liao clans and hope that the Chu clan was generous.

## Chapter 92: The Clans of the Capital

Just as Zhao Kai finished speaking, Wang Lun added, "It's not just the Chu clan! The Yun clan's sending a similar delegation. Yun Bing and Yun Meng, along with Yun Chongzheng, arrived at the Liao teleportation array just five minutes ago, and they'll likely be here within five more minutes! And not only that, the Zhou, He, and Qian clans seem to be sending parties as well!"

Qin Feng sighed. "All five of the major clans from the capital? Is there a need for such a big fuss?"

"Qin Feng, don't you know who the owner of these ruins is?"

"What? Who is it? Surely it isn't the Eclipse Sage's?"

Zhao Kai looked toward him with disdain, but Qin Feng's annoyance was overcome by his curiosity. Just whose ruins could these be?

"Likely not the Eclipse Sage's, but perhaps Devil's Eye or Graylight!" Just as Zhao Kai was thinking about how to play a prank on Qin Feng, Wang Lun spoke up.

Yes, the Devil's Eye or Graylight Sage! That was what his own father had supposed. When Qin Feng heard about this, his eyes gleamed. Recalling his father's words, he pressed his wristwatch lightly a few times without attracting any attention.

The four clans had gathered and had found the entrance to the ruins, but none of them dared to try to activate it. After all, the five major clans from the capital were rushing over, and they didn't dare to head in knowing that.

The other clans arrived within a few minutes.

The Yun and Chu clans came together, assembling their forces as they chatted away. Both generations of the two clans knew each other fairly well, and it was only natural that they would congregate.

The four clans of Liao didn't dare approach them without a summons.

Chu Xun sniffed thoughtfully, as though she sensed something unusual.

Chu Feng immediately noticed. "Chu Xun, what's the matter? Do you smell something?"

Chu Xun giggled. "Brother, that fellow's been here!"

"That fellow?" Chu Feng was a little confused. "Who?"

"Blackie!"

Chu Feng gaped. "You mean, Zhang—" His face turned funny.

Yun Bing sensed the unusual commotion and immediately approached them. "What's the situation? Chu Xun, did you discover something?"

Her eyes twinkling, Chu Xun said, "Yun Bing, he's been here, I can smell him!"

"Him?!"

"Who? You mean, Zhang..."

Just like Chu Feng and Chu Xun, none of the three of them said his full name out loud, but Yun Meng could easily deduce just who they were talking about.

"In that case, do you think he was the one who caused all this commotion?" Yun Bing was quite shocked.

"I don't want to believe it, but given the situation, what else could it be?"

"Who are you talking about? Who's this Zhang fellow, some friend you made in the dimensional world?" Chu Zhennan, standing beside Chu Feng, couldn't help interrupting their conversation.

It was then that the four of them realized that their elders were also there with them.

"No, no, it's nothing! Chu Xun's just guessing, and we're not certain yet," Chu Feng exclaimed, trying to change the topic.

Yun Bing jumped in, "Right, why don't we head over to the portal? Uncle Zheng, Uncle Nan, both of you have significant experience in the dimensional world, so would you have a look at the portal?"

They walked over to the ancient stump. The two elders began to inspect it carefully, while Yun Bing, Chu Feng, and their siblings walked over to the Liao clans.

The elites of the Liao clan immediately greeted them.

"Young Master Chu, Miss Yun!"

Chu Feng and Yun Bing inclined their heads in response. Beside them, Chu Xun placed her hands on her hips and commanded, "Alright, answer my questions! If I'm satisfied with your answers, you'll get a larger share of the rewards! First: which of you was the first to arrive?"

Chu Xun was widely known as a devilish girl, and none of the elites dared to cross her. They immediately pointed toward Qin Feng.

Chu Xun smiled, but the more she smiled, the paler Qin Feng became. He clearly remembered embarrassing himself in front of her at that bar in the Blacksteel settlement, and now...

"Don't be afraid. Just answer all my questions truthfully, and I'll leave you alone! Of course, if you lie..."

"Please, ask me anything, Young Miss Chu! I, Qin Feng, swear to reveal all I know!" Qin Feng didn't dare go against someone like Chu Xun.

"Good. Did you find traces of anyone when you arrived at the scene?"

"No, Miss! By the time we got here, the beam of light had already dissipated, and it took us a long while just to find this stump."

Qin Feng's response disappointed the Chu and Yun hunters, and Chu Xun questioned him again, "That can't be. Are you certain? If I find out you're lying, you'll be in for it!"

"I'm certain, Miss! If you don't believe me, you can ask my subordinates. None of us saw anyone else by the time we arrived!" Qin Feng repeated, and his subordinates hastily nodded.

It was unlikely that they were lying, so could it be that Zhang Lie had been in the vicinity in the past? No, that couldn't be—his scent was very fresh, and he had to have been here this very night!

But if no one had seen him, then there was only one possibility: he was already inside!

#### Chapter 93: Underground Treasury

"Alright, I understand. You guys can leave now!" Chu Xun dismissed them with a wave of her hand.

Yun Bing, Chu Feng, and the others had more or less guessed what was happening as well.

The four clans of Liao were once again ignored and left to their own affairs, but they were happy with this turn of events, because Chu Feng had commanded them to guard the perimeter and to report in if they noticed something amiss.

In other words, he had assigned them a responsibility, so they would surely receive a share of the rewards from the ruins.

The four clans each headed in a cardinal direction away from the portal.

Meanwhile, Yun Bing, Chu Feng, Chu Xun, and Yun Meng crowded around their uncles.

"Uncle Nan, have you figured out how difficult it is to activate the portal?" Chu Feng asked.

It was likely that Zhang Lie had already entered the ruins, so they were getting increasingly anxious. After all, they were fully aware of just how terrifying Zhang Lie was. His knowledge of the foundational breakthrough, as well as his Potion #1, was more than sufficient to shock the world.

And now, they had found traces of him here. How could they not be anxious? Zhang Lie's target was clearly these ruins; in other words, within these ruins was something he had to acquire at any costs.

Zhang Lie had always given them an impression of strength and mystery, and they could hardly imagine just what sort of treasure would be inside.

Chu Zhennan laughed. "It's not too hard, but it might take some time. If I'm not wrong, this is a duplication-illusion array."

"A duplication-illusion array?"

"A construction that was in vogue in the early days of the dimensional world—not too complicated; the tedious part is finding the eye of the array. Only by doing so can we break out of this array and activate the teleportation array underneath!"

This series of questions and answers allowed Yun Bing and the others to get a good grasp of the situation.

"Uncle Nan, in that case, please hurry! If I'm not mistaken, our friend has already entered the extradimensional space, so we also have to hurry up, or he'll snatch up all the goodies!" Chu Xun pressed, wanting to meet Zhang Lie again as soon as possible.

Chu Zhennan stroked his beard. "Chu Xun, there's no rush: the other three clans from the capital are about to arrive. Why don't we conserve our energy and wait for them? As for your friend, there's no need to worry at all. No matter what spoils he's managed to obtain, he'll have no choice but to hand them all over when faced with the might of the five clans of the capital."

Chu Zhennan's words sent shivers down Chu Feng and Yun Bing's back.

Chu Feng immediately argued, "No, don't, Uncle Nan! Trust me, please, we need to enter immediately! If my friend came here, then there's surely treasure of unimaginable worth within. We'll surely benefit from entering first!"

Chu Feng was so insistent that it surprised even Chu Zhennan.

But before he could say anything, Yun Bing also added, "Uncle Zheng, Chu Feng's right. That friend of ours is really quite special, so we need to head down immediately!"

If it were only Chu Xun insisting on it, the two of them might have thought that she was simply impatient, but with Chu Feng and Yun Bing jumping into the fray as well, things were different. After all, both of them were being groomed for leadership positions within the clans, and they tended to be thoughtful and attentive to detail. If even they were in such a hurry, then there surely had to be something unusual about this friend of theirs.

The two elders glanced at each other. Eventually, Yun Chongzheng said, "Alright, if you're all in such a hurry, then the two of us will give it a try. However, don't expect too much: everything within the array will be twisted and distorted, and the eye likely won't be easy to find. It's quite possible that the other three clans will arrive before we can do so."

"That's not a problem, Uncle Zheng. Please try your best!" Yun Bing immediately replied.

"In that case, we'll head inside now. Stay safe out here!"

"Don't worry, there won't be anyone here who would dare to touch our clans!"

As Yun Bing and the others stepped back, the two elders stepped into the array.

While the Yun and Chu clans were attempting to access the extradimensional space from without, Zhang Lie and the others were already reaping rewards from within.

A long corridor at the opposite end of the plaza led to all variety of rooms, allowing Zhang Lie and the others to find quite a number of spoils, including frameworks and techniques, potion recipes,

and a few pieces of armor and weapons. Of course, during this process, they encountered a number of small trials, but Zhang Lie easily overcame them all.

What they had found was only the tip of the iceberg, because the Eclipse Sage's treasury wasn't located in any of the rooms of the castle at all, but rather underground. Yes, underground—in an underground treasury!

Information from his past life made Zhang Lie aware of just where the mechanism for accessing the treasury was, and heading to the treasury was his last remaining goal. However, because it would be somewhat dangerous, Zhang Lie intended on heading down alone.

At the tallest clocktower of the Eclipse Sage's castle stood Zhang Lie, Fang Yi, Sun Mengmeng, Yang Ze, Li Feng, Zhou Ying, and Sun Xiaowu.

"Fang Yi, Sun Mengmeng, for now, your task is to help me guard this clocktower. The trials to access the treasury are still too dangerous for all of you, so it's best if I go down alone. Don't worry, I'll definitely be looking out for suitable treasures for all of you."

Zhang Lie punched the heavy bell, causing a deep, resonant toll to sound throughout the castle.

As the sound waves reverberated, the entire castle seemed to tremble, and a number of inscriptions could be seen on the surface of the bell. Right beneath the bell appeared a small teleportation array, seemingly out of nowhere.

The moment it did, Zhang Lie stepped within it, vanishing in a flash of white light.

The teleportation array vanished as though it had never existed.

All that remained of Zhang Lie was his final instruction: "Remember to ring the bell once every fifteen minutes!"

#### Chapter 94: Fighting Fire With Fire

After a short period of darkness, Zhang Lie appeared within a cramped underground chamber. It wasn't particularly large, and the scone on the wall was only dimly lit. A person rested by one corner of the room— or, more accurately, a skeleton.

This supposed treasury left Zhang Lie somewhat disappointed.

After all, given how ornate the castle had been, why did this underground treasury look so dilapidated? It was the treasury of the Eclipse Sage himself!

Regardless, Zhang Lie was quite certain that this place was indeed the Eclipse Sage's underground treasury. He glanced all around him. There were no treasures heaped up into small hills, or any sort of framework or technique manuals.

In fact, within this supposed treasury, there was nothing but that skeleton left.

Zhang Lie carefully inspected his surroundings, and eventually focused on the skeleton.

In his past life, he had once accessed these ruins, but never the treasury. However, after the treasury was first accessed, a hunter who claimed to be the successor of the Eclipse Sage had appeared. Not only had that hunter learned [Eclipse], he had even acquired another of the Eclipse Sage's trademark techniques, [Art of the Rising Moon].

Unfortunately for the hunter, he had died to a beast horde within the dimensional world, causing [Eclipse] to be lost forevermore.

Zhang Lie made no further discoveries despite inspecting the skeleton for quite some time. There were no storage-type artifacts on the skeleton's body, and its clothes were as normal as could be. What on Earth could be going on?

Zhang Lie had spent half the night—on the eve of the Void Cup, no less—searching for these ruins for [Eclipse]. Was he to return empty-handed?

He tried to search all around the skeleton's body, but out of respect for the dead, he avoided touching the skeleton as much as he could.

"Well, are you disappointed?"

Zhang Lie's face grew dismal after a fruitless search, but just as the light from the sconce petered out and a beam of moonlight shone in from above, a striking specter appeared in front of Zhang Lie's eyes, his mien severe, his robes white and expansive, his sword gleaming and brilliant.

The moment Zhang Lie saw him, he was certain of his identity.

"The Eclipse Sage!"

"Yes, it's me!"

"Y-You can speak? Are you man or ghost?"

"Hah, I'm neither! A remnant of who I was, nothing more."

"A remnant? I didn't realize remnants were able to communicate so normally..."

"It'll take too long to explain the details, so you can just treat me like an artificial intelligence!"

"Very well, Eclipse Sage. I apologize for interrupting your rest, but as one of humanity's greats, surely you understand my intentions for coming here?"

"For [Eclipse], of course."

"Yes, Sage! Your [Eclipse] has been used to devastating effect against the lifeforms of the dimensional world, and for it to remain a lost art would be a pity."

The Sage's remnant seemed to smile. "You're rather frank, aren't you? [Eclipse] has been a lifetime's worth of work for me. What makes you think I'll hand it over so easily?"

Zhang Lie grinned. "What else would be the purpose of this extradimensional space? Given how hard you worked to advance humanity, you surely wouldn't allow death to terminate your efforts."

"Haha, not bad, not bad! You must have done quite a bit of research before coming here. In that case, I won't beat around the bush. Take on my final challenge!"

The Sage's words were quite surprising to Zhang Lie. After all, they had only shared a few words at best, and the Sage had no understanding of his character at all. Was he so cavalier about his inheritance?

Zhang Lie had no time to think further. The moment the Sage finished talking, the four walls of the chamber shone with fiery inscriptions. A frightening surge of energy pressed down on his body, and he barely managed to stay upright.

Instinctively, Zhang Lie countered the spiritual pressure with his own genetic energy. A black serpent emerged, coiling around him protectively. However, the moment his genetic energy left his body, he noticed something amiss—it was quickly being depleted, no, being dissolved!

Wisps of black smoke were floating away from the serpent surrounding him.

This unusual technique... could it be [Eclipse]?! Zhang Lie's heart leapt, first in surprise, then in greed. It had to be, without a doubt! After experiencing the effects of [Eclipse] for himself, he was even more adamant about acquiring it. It was simply far too compatible with the second stage of his [Ninecarp Transformation].

However, he would have to focus on the challenge at hand first. If he didn't reduce the speed at which his genetic energy was being sapped away, he would be drained within five minutes, and even his genetic core would be in danger.

Furthermore, if he didn't pass this trial and obtain the recognition of the Eclipse Sage, he would be unable to acquire [Eclipse].

What was he to do? How could he prevent the loss of his genetic energy?

If he used his genetic energy to counteract the dreadful pressure surrounding him, it would increase the rate at which his energy was being drained.

However, if he didn't, his body would have to bear the brunt of the tremendous pressure.

As expected, [Eclipse] was extremely difficult to deal with.

Zhang Lie couldn't think of a strategy to counteract it in the heart of the moment.

He felt more and more of his energy draining away; if he didn't come up with a solution quickly, he would soon be eliminated. But no amount of anxiety would help him now. No, he would have to calm down and focus, despite the inexorable drain.

Zhang Lie closed his eyes and sat down cross-legged on the floor. He sensed the minute changes and fluctuations in his genetic energy at the moment they came into contact with [Eclipse], as though it were being devoured bit by bit.

The more intensely his genetic energy surged, the faster the devouring process: his initial guess had been correct.

Zhang Lie had no choice but to firmly suppress his genetic energy and keep it close to his core, but doing so would expose his body to the pressure.

He shook as he retracted his genetic energy.

Fortunately for him, he had filled all his gene fragments to capacity, and his body had been strengthened by both his foundational breakthrough and his consumption of Potion #1. Any other hunter would have been severely wounded the moment they stopped surrounding their body with a protective layer of genetic energy.

As he forced himself to cope with the pressure, Zhang Lie activated his [Ninecarp Transformation], all his genetic energy condensed within his compact core, attempting to corrode his environment even as he himself was being drained.

This was the only strategy he could come up with against [Eclipse].

#### Chapter 95: Usurping the Spoils

Yes, Zhang Lie would fight fire with fire.

The second stage of his [Ninecarp Transformation] afforded him with extremely corrosive genetic energy, and he had discovered that [Eclipse] was consuming some sort of resource in order to dissolve his genetic energy, so if he were careful, it wouldn't be impossible to drain [Eclipse] before he was drained instead.

His first attempt was reasonably successful. Even as his own genetic energy was consumed, he successfully corroded away part of [Eclipse]'s strength.

When the Eclipse Sage saw what was happening, he couldn't help but praise Zhang Lie. "Oh, your technique isn't too shabby! To think that it too would possess potent corrosive power! You have quite a few secrets, don't you?"

"Sage, I'm trying to pass your trial! Please, let me concentrate!" While Zhang Lie spoke, a significant fraction of genetic energy had been drained from his body.

The Eclipse Sage guffawed.

What followed would be a test of endurance. Whether or not Zhang Lie would be able to pass the trial would depend on just how large the Eclipse Sage's reservoir of energy was. Zhang Lie's only goal was to hold out as long as possible, until his last skein of genetic energy had been dissolved away.

As he hunkered down and settled into silence, the portal to the ruins became more crowded than ever. After the Yun and Chu clans, the Zhou, He, and Qian clans successively arrived at the portal, but one step too slowly.

By the time they found the weathered stump, the Yun and Chu clans had managed to break past the array and head inside. Worse, the array had restored itself, and they would have to find the eye on their own.

This would give the Yun and Chu clans a head start.

Zhou Qiang motioned for the four clans of the Liao family to head over, trying to understand the situation, but the more they heard, the more panicked they became. The Yun and Chu clans were both rather strong, and now that they had taken the lead, it was possible that they would monopolize the best items for themselves.

Of course, no matter how much they tried, they wouldn't be able to obtain the Eclipse Sage's inheritance. Neither would the Yun and Chu clans.

By the time Yun Bing and Chu Feng arrived at the clocktower with their elites in tow, Fang Yi, Sun Mengmeng, and the others were guarding its vicinity. Only when they saw the familiar faces of Yun Bing and Chu Feng did they seem to relax a little.

The Yun and Chu clans were shocked to see them. Yun Bing and Chu Feng were quite familiar with Fang Yi and Sun Mengmeng, and they knew full well that they were Zhang Lie's subordinates. If they were here around the clocktower, then their leader, Zhang Lie, was surely somewhere within the ruins.

"Fang Yi, Sun Mengmeng, it really is you guys!" Chu Feng exclaimed.

The Yun and Chu scions had interacted with them quite a few times already, and they instantly confirmed that the mysterious appearance of these ruins had something to do with Zhang Lie.

"Good to see you, Young Master Chu, Miss Yun!" Fang Yi greeted them with a smile, as did the other members of Team Zenith, but they were as alert as ever.

Li Feng, who was up by the bell, immediately crouched down, not wanting to attract attention to himself.

"Where's Zhang Lie?" Yun Bing asked.

Fang Yi's eyes glinted. "Since you're friends with the captain, I won't keep it a secret from you: he's undertaking the trial of inheritance!"

His words shocked the Yun and Chu clans, and the elders of the two clans couldn't stand still any longer.

"The trial of inheritance? Tell us where your leader is! Where's the treasury?!" Chu Zhennan yelled, threats edging into his tone.

He had no choice; of course he would be anxious.

After entering the ruins, the construction and style of the castle, along with the rooms they had gone through, made it quite clear that the owner of these ruins was none other than the Eclipse Sage, a hunter with such renown that he was included in the Xumi Tome.

If nothing else, his lost inheritance, [Eclipse], was sufficiently valuable a treasure that the great clans of China would fight tooth and nail over it.

"I don't know, and I wouldn't say even if I did!"

Fang Yi refused to budge despite Chu Zhennan's threats.

"Lad, you really aren't afraid of anything, are you? Well—"

"Uncle Zheng, please stop! Let Chu Feng and I handle this. We know each other, after all, and we're friends!" Seeing that Chu Zhennan's threat was ineffective, Yun Chongzheng was about to speak when Yun Bing interrupted him.

No, neither the Yun nor Chu clans could afford to offend Zhang Lie, and neither could Yun Bing and Chu Feng themselves! After all, they still had a favor to beg of Zhang Lie, and if they were to sour the relationship between them, they wouldn't have any opportunity to obtain the Potion #1 that they had been eyeing.

As for the two clan elders, they wouldn't have reacted so aggressively if they knew that Zhang Lie was the one who had sold them the information about the foundational breakthrough.

Yun Bing's words made the two clan elders eye each other. Both Yun Bing and Chu Feng had made several choices that they didn't understand that night, but they had been designated as the leaders of this expedition, and the elders' responsibility was only to assist and protect them.

If they were friends with these other hunters, perhaps they would be able to find out what was going on more easily.

With these thoughts in mind, the two elders nodded tersely and stepped back, letting Chu Feng and Yun Bing direct the conversation.

Once they had received the elders' affirmation, Chu Feng and Yun Bing immediately stepped forward.

"Fang Yi, I'll tell you the truth: it'll be impossible for you to claim all the spoils from these ruins for yourselves!" Chu Feng spoke directly.

Fang Yi cocked an eyebrow. "Indeed? Do you intend on wresting them away by force, just like these esteemed elders here?"

"No, no, of course not, Fang Yi! As you've said, we're friends with Zhang Lie, and it's exactly because we're friends that I'm telling you this now! As for you, are you unaware of the situation outside the ruins?"

Fang Yi and the others suddenly realized that they had neglected an important question: how had Chu Feng and the others found their way over here?

When they had first noticed a party heading in their direction, the members of Team Zenith all tensed up, trying to think about who those hunters could be. Were they enemies, or were they friends?

But they had neglected to think about how those hunters had made their way to the scene.

After all, Zhang Lie had mentioned that, after they entered, the array would repair itself. The fact that other hunters had appeared in the ruins meant that its location had been exposed, and there were surely other hunters lying in wait outside.

This was apparent from Chu Feng's words.

"What's the situation like out there?" Fang Yi asked, trying to gather more information.

Chapter 96: Chu Feng's Lie

"The four major clans of Liao and five from the capital have all gathered by these ruins," Chu Feng informed Fang Yi and the others. "And if I'm not mistaken, the clans from nearby Qing are on their way too. Not only that, government officials in charge of discovered ruins are also going to arrive soon. You understand what sort of situation you're in, don't you?"

Fang Yi and the others' eyes widened.

No, they didn't. They didn't realize that the night excursion that Zhang Lie had led them on would have such repercussions—the four clans of Liao, the five of the capital, those from Qing, the federal government...

Fang Yi refocused on Chu Feng. "Young Master Chu, you're not lying to us, are you?"

Before Chu Feng could speak, Yun Bing jumped in. "Lying to you? Is there such a need? When you uncovered the ruins, a beam of light emerged from the portal, so bright it turned night to day and spooked half the citizens of Liao. Information spread immediately!

"If Zhang Lie were here, we would tell him the same thing. Regardless, one thing is certain: Zhang Lie cannot hope to claim all the spoils from these ruins for himself. The reason we chose to head in first was to inform him to keep the most valuable objects for himself, but to prepare to hand over the rest.

"Only then, only with the help of the Yun and Chu clans, can you all hope to get away from this unscathed. You have to tell us where Zhang Lie is. We need to come up with something to deal with the forces converging on this location."

Yun Bing's words clearly indicated that she would stand on Zhang Lie's side.

After experiencing all sorts of surprises from Zhang Lie within the dimensional world, she and Chu Feng had begun to trust him implicitly, and it was this trust that caused them to choose to leave the treasures with Zhang Lie himself.

Yun Bing's words caused the members of Team Zenith to look at her with gratitude, but Zhang Lie had instructed them to protect the clocktower at all costs. In other words, they couldn't allow anyone else access to the underground treasury.

As a result, despite Yun Bing's kind intentions, they refused her.

"I apologize, Miss Yun, I know you're quite close to our captain, but he instructed us not to let anyone in. We can't reveal anything to you, but I ask that you trust our captain. Since he brought us here, he could well have come up with a solution for the scenario that you're describing, so please, I beseech you to wait for him. Perhaps he'll be out very soon!" Sun Mengmeng jumped in.

With her words, the situation became a stalemate: both parties understood each other, but neither was able to convince the other to give in.

What they didn't know was that, while they were waiting for Zhang Lie, a great hubbub had descended by the entrance to the ruins. The remaining three clans from the capital, four from Qing, six from Meng, and the officials from the ministry of ruins had all arrived at the scene, and they were entering the castle in batches.

The first would be the three clans from the capital, followed by the officials, then the four from Qing, four from Liao, and finally six from Meng.

Meanwhile, Zhang Lie's trial was reaching its conclusion.

Li Feng, who had lain hidden at the top of the clocktower, again rang the bell. As the sound waves reverberated through the castle, a small teleportation array again emerged underneath the bell, but only for a short moment. Subsequently, the runic inscriptions on the bell faded away, as though nothing had ever happened.

None of the hunters below knew what exactly was going on, but their attention was all drawn to the clocktower.

Chu Feng asked, "Why are you ringing the bell? Is there any meaning to it?"

"I'm sorry, Young Master Chu, but we don't know. Our captain instructed us to ring the bell without explaining why," Fang Yi stated.

Zhang Lie had left so quickly that he hadn't given them any further instructions or information save to ring the bell every fifteen minutes.

Because of the bell's tolling, the Zhou, He, and Qian clans, which had just stepped through the portal, immediately gave up searching the perimeter and headed right toward the source of the sound.

Within a few minutes, the five great clans of the capital had gathered underneath the clocktower.

Zhou Hong, He Feng, and Qian Hong, had each brought over a dozen elites and an elder from their respective clans, a considerable force indeed.

"Yun Bing, Chu Feng, what's the current situation? Who are these people?"

As clans of the capital, the gathered parties were all quite familiar with each other, and it was evident at a glance that Fang Yi, Sun Mengmeng, and the others represented an unknown third party. Furthermore, the members of Team Zenith were standing by themselves, away from the Yun or Chu delegations.

Unexpectedly, Zhou Hong's words were more curious than combative.

Chu Feng smiled sheepishly. "Good timing. We just arrived ourselves, and upon discovering this clocktower, thought that there might be some mechanism associated with the bell, so I had them give it a good ring. Unfortunately, it caused a loud commotion, but nothing else! As for who these people are, they're professional ruin delvers that I sent for."

Everyone was shocked at his words.

The members of Team Zenith were surprised by how quickly Chu Feng had spun up his fabrication, papering over everything and shielding them with his clan's status and power.

The Chu and Yun clans were surprised that Chu Feng had made such a decision. In that case, at least for this expedition, the two clans would be inextricably linked to Zhang Lie and his Team Zenith. The two clan elders cast confused glances in his direction: after all, Chu Feng wasn't known for hoodwinking others. Why was he doing so now?

Yun Bing, Chu Xun, and Yun Meng, on the other hand, applauded his quick thinking.

Meanwhile, the Zhou, He, and Qian clans were surprised that the Yun and Chu clans had been so prepared that they would have professional ruin delvers on call.

"It looks as though you were quite... prepared... for this unusual event, Young Master Chu," Zhou Hong spoke up again, but this time his tone seemed quite a bit more suspicious.

"Haha, it was just a matter of luck! They were present when the beam of light emerged, so..."

"In that case, with a professional team with you, as well as your early entrance into the ruins, you must have reaped quite a few rewards, Young Master Chu, Miss Yun?" Beside Zhou Hong, He Feng spoke up.

They were all familiar with one another, so he didn't have any qualms about being so direct.

"We've picked up a few things here and there, but nothing particularly good. The Eclipse Sage's inheritance still hasn't been found, and I wish you all luck in the search!"

Chu Feng's words clearly relieved the other clans. If no one had found it yet, then they still had a chance!

#### Chapter 97: Obtaining the Inheritance

The Zhou, He, and Qian clans immediately turned to leave, beginning their search for the treasury and the Eclipse Sage's long-lost inheritance. They all understood that, as more and more hunters gathered at the scene, the less likely it would be for them to find the inheritance.

Chu Feng and the others were happy to see them leave. Of course, Chu Feng's trick wouldn't delay them for too long; the ruins weren't too large, and the hunters of the three clans would finish searching it relatively quickly.

By then, not having made any discovery, they would notice that something was amiss, and to gather back at the clocktower again. At that point in time, it would be much harder for Chu Feng and the others to dismiss them.

Meanwhile, the clans from Qing, as well as the government officials, had finally broken through the illusion array and entered the ruins. As the number of hunters in the ruin increased, the ruins grew more chaotic, but this chaos didn't affect Zhang Lie, who was still participating in the Eclipse Sage's trial.

The trial was almost over; in the underground chamber, the runic inscriptions had dimmed considerably, and Zhang Lie could sense that his genetic energy was being dissolved far more slowly as well.

Under the moonlight, even as the Eclipse Sage's body grew transparent, he let out a satisfied smile.

"Lad, you're the first person to successfully survive [Eclipse] by exhausting the caster's energy! Furthermore, even though your primary framework isn't very high-ranking, the corrosive nature of your genetic energy is particularly compatible with [Eclipse]. Yes, the heavens have left me with a worthy successor indeed!"

With the Eclipse Sage's confirmation, the trial finally came to an end, and Zhang Lie slumped over.

That trial had only lasted at most a quarter-hour, but it felt like hours to Zhang Lie. He had almost completely exhausted his supply of genetic energy—yes, exhausted, not dissolved.

Comparatively little of his genetic energy had been dissolved; most was used up in countering and defending against [Eclipse], then striking back at it. It was only for this reason that he was able to make it to the end of the trial, having forced the runic inscriptions powering [Eclipse] to exhaust much of their stored energy as well.

Regardless, Zhang Lie viewed [Eclipse] as a ridiculously overpowered technique, and the remnant of the Eclipse Sage likewise viewed Zhang Lie as a ridiculously overpowered hunter.

"Thank you for the praise, esteemed Sage. Your [Eclipse] is shockingly powerful!"

"Haha, of course! It's my life's work!"

To the Eclipse Sage, [Eclipse] was his magnum opus. The day he created it, his life was changed forever, and the title of Eclipse Sage had come from this grand achievement.

"However, compared to you, this is nothing worth bragging about. Believe me: the future you will surely be far stronger than even I could be. Handing [Eclipse] to you will be a relief to me, but before I do so, I hope you can promise me two things."

The Eclipse Sage, finding his successor more and more pleasing to the eye, couldn't help heaping a few more praises upon him, but suddenly changed his tone upon remembering something.

Of course, Zhang Lie couldn't back down now. "I'll do anything, Sage!"

"Oh? Are you so sure of your capabilities that you can do anything?" He guffawed again. His tone was doubtful, but he was actually quite happy with Zhang Lie's attitude.

"As long as I don't die, I'll keep growing stronger. I might not be able to handle these responsibilities now, but I firmly believe I can do so in the future!"

As an experienced hunter, this sort of question wouldn't stump Zhang Lie. Furthermore, if the Sage was subjecting him to this line of questioning...

"Not bad, lad, not bad! In that case, I have two tasks for you. Destroy the Musi clan on the star Tarkus, and assist the remaining members of the Hong clan in the Tianhong city on Mars, any that were fortunate enough to survive the calamity!"

The Eclipse Sage quickly listed two tasks for his successor, his tone seething as he spoke.

"Yes, Sage! I swear I'll do my best to accomplish these tasks."

"Good! In that case, accept my inheritance!"

The Eclipse Sage's remnant appeared in front of Zhang Lie. Before he could react, it struck the center of Zhang Lie's forehead with a pointed finger, instantly making him feel as though he were burning all over, as if all his cells were being vaporized, as his bones and muscles creaked and compressed.

A voice seemed to speak distantly to him, "Meditate on the realm of [Eclipse]!"

You think I can meditate in this state? With his body completely drained of energy both mental and physical, he lost consciousness then and there.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Zhang Lie woke up groggy in the now-familiar underground chamber, and what happened immediately before he lost consciousness slowly drifted back to him. After checking that his body was fine, he let out a sigh of relief.

"What sort of meditation did that old geezer expect I could do right after finishing his trial?!"

That said, the moment he felt the strength surging through his body, Zhang Lie found himself quite satisfied with the experience. Not only had this final hurdle strengthened his body to some extent, he even discovered a manual that the Eclipse Sage had left in his mind, detailing the process for cultivating [Eclipse], as well as a few tricks and techniques for using it effectively.

Zhang Lie circulated his genetic energy according to the description in the manual, causing mysterious energy to waft out of his body and suffuse a region a hundred meters wide around him. This—this was [Eclipse]!

[Eclipse], a mythic-grade technique with no elemental attunement, would allow its user to form a unique domain around it, supported by the user's genetic energy. This unusual ability had myriad possible applications; the most obvious was a fieldwide debuff that would nullify any numerical advantage against Zhang Lie.

It seemed as though the 'meditative experience' he had had earlier was meant to engrave [Eclipse] on his genetic core, courtesy of the Eclipse Sage. As a result, he was able to turn the eclipse domain on and off at will, with a facility that would have taken years of experience to obtain normally.

What skill the Eclipse Sage had! And yet such an esteemed figure had fallen to the devious struggles and internal politics of mankind. If he were still alive, humanity wouldn't have suffered the disastrous calamity it did a hundred years later.

It was a pity indeed.

Chapter 98: At All Costs

Zhang Lie sighed in regret. The Eclipse Sage had been one of the brightest stars among the first wave of humanity's hunters. Except for [Eclipse], he had also left seven pinnacle-grade techniques and two mythic-grade techniques in his mental world, the last pieces of the Eclipse Sage's inheritance.

Despite being a sage, the Eclipse Sage was actually quite poor in terms of material resources, leaving behind not a single decent piece of equipment.

However, Zhang Lie was grateful and exuberant for what he had received: after all, from start to finish, he had only ever eyed [Eclipse].

And now that he had gotten what he was here for, it was naturally time to leave.

By that time, the clocktower that Fang Yi and the others were guarding had become the center of attention. The five clans of the capital, the six from Qing, four from Liao, and the government officials, over two hundred hunters in all, had gathered beneath the clocktower. They were all staring at Chu Feng, Yun Bing, and the other members of those two delegations.

By this point, they had scoured every other piece of these ruins, finding nothing but a few extremely low-quality weapons. As such, they focused their attention on Chu Feng and Yun Bing, whose hunters had been the first to arrive at the scene, and whose behavior had been the most suspicious.

Since the beginning, none of the hunters gathered by the clocktower had stepped away from it; and not only that, they had come up with all sorts of reasons to prevent the other clans from entering, or even approaching, it.

Wasn't that suspicious?

In the end, the hunters blocked Chu Feng, Yun Bing, and the members of Team Zenith by the entrance to the clocktower, trying to get an explanation as to their actions.

"Young Master Chu, Miss Yun, as hunters from major clans, surely you're aware of the rules and regulations surrounding discovered ruins? As a member of the ministry of ruins, by the authority vested in me by the federal government, I insist that you move aside. You have no reason or authority to bar me from searching the interior of the clocktower!"

"These ruins appeared in Liao, and I, the head of the Liao division of the ministry of ruins, should have priority in searching through it! If you continue deterring my search, I'll have no choice but to detain you all for disruption of the public good!" Zhang Quan threatened.

"Your speech isn't bad, and neither is the aura you're projecting, but please keep one thing in mind: neither Yun Bing nor I will cower in the face of a threat. Are you sure you want to play this card against us?" Chu Feng asked, his gaze piercing, perfectly assuming the role of a spoiled, arrogant young master of a major clan.

The hunters arrayed outside the clocktower were buzzing in impatience.

Zhou Hong, from the Zhou clan, was the first to speak up. "Chu Feng, stop pretending to be a fool. Move aside! It's not just the ministry of ruins who wants to enter the clocktower. I believe I speak for everyone here when I say that we all want to enter, and we all must be allowed to enter! What exactly are you trying to protect? You'd better tell us the truth, or neither the Yun nor Chu clans will be bringing anything out of these ruins!"

Once he finished, He Feng immediately added, "Yes, Young Master Zhou's right. The He clan will fully support his declaration: if your two clans don't explain the situation, the He clan won't allow you to leave!"

Qian Hong, from the Qian clan, also stepped forward. "Think matters over, Young Master Chu. After all, we're all major players in the capital. Is there really a need to sour relationships between us?"

"We three clans, along with the officials from the ministry of ruins, as well as the many clans from Qing and Liao, are all gathered here to inspect the clocktower behind you. Won't you show us this courtesy?"

The other clans murmured their agreement, not daring to threaten the Yun and Chu clans outright, but making their stance clear.

It was apparent that, if the Yun and Chu clans didn't give in, what awaited them would be resistance and retaliation from the gathered crowd. Even the elders from the two clans were staring at Chu Bing and Yun Feng, trying to get them to change their mind.

However, despite the mounting pressure, neither Yun Bing nor Chu Feng gave in.

"Qian Hong, what do you mean? Just as you ask that we show the three clans of the capital some respect, so too do we ask that you show us the same courtesy. If you insist on using force, then I shall have no choice but to do the same. If nothing else, I can guarantee that we shall all suffer the same fate."

Yun Bing raised a palm, displaying the glowing black orb clenched within for one and all to see.

Everyone present sucked in a breath.

"An orb of primality!" Zhou Hong and the others shouted.

An orb of primality was a mythic-grade weapon that could rarely be found in ruins, with devastating power that would strike directly at a hunter's genes.

Once it was activated, the genes of all living creatures nearby would undergo sudden atavism, reversing the effects of billions of years' worth of evolution and turning all hunters present to paramecia, to amoebae, to basal prokaryotic and eukaryotic lifeforms.

"Miss Yun, please be calm! You can't trigger that orb!"

Every hunter present recoiled in ancestral fear. It would truly be a fate worse than death, and no treasure from the dimensional world would save them at that point.

"You have nothing to worry: I fear death as much as the rest of you. As long as you refrain from threatening me, I have no intention of detonating this orb. To be quite frank, the top of the clocktower is the entrance to the Eclipse Sage's treasury, but one of my hunters is already inside.

"Regardless of his success, I will not allow any other hunter to enter before he comes out. As for what happens afterward, and in which order you all intend to enter, I leave to your discretion. If you believe me, I recommend that you sit down and wait. If you don't, I will be happy to entertain any challengers."

The crowd of hunters went silent. No one had expected that Yun Bing would be so adamant, nor that she had made such a calculated plan.

Of course, the members of Team Zenith were touched by her gesture. They didn't expect that, even under such circumstances, Chu Feng and Yun Bing would protect their captain with so much drive.

It completely changed the way Fang Yi viewed the scions of the major clans— there were actually those whose eyes weren't blinded by profit for themselves!

The members of Team Zenith felt as though they too had to step forward and do something, but at that precise moment, as Li Feng rang the bell of the clocktower once more and waves of sound reverberated through the castle, the figure of another man appeared by the bell.

## Chapter 99: High Stakes

Yun Bing was well known in the capital for her calm, cool, and collected nature, and her calculated threat with the orb of primality left every hunter present stunned. It forced the various factions to calm down, but though it held them back for a moment, it wouldn't be able to do so for long.

After a moment's hesitation, Qian Hong slowly stepped forward. "Miss Yun, your orb of primality might be a threat indeed, but it surely isn't guaranteed that you'll be able to kill all of us here. If any of us were to escape, then the Yun and Chu clans would be doomed."

Even though the Yun and Chu clans were relatively strong, it would still be difficult for them to deal with all the factions that had gathered here today.

Yun Bing's face remained as impassive as ever. Chu Feng stepped forward, barely curtailing his genetic energy, his intention obvious. They wouldn't let anyone disturb Zhang Lie at all costs.

Their opposition, ultimately fearing the orb of primality in Yun Bing's hands, reined in their genetic energy and didn't dare make a move.

The scene descended into a stalemate, and the tension grew so thick in the air that it was almost palpable.

Amidst the swelling tension, Zhang Lie slowly walked down the stairs of the clocktower and into plain sight.

"Oh? What's going on here? Yun Bing, Chu Feng, it looks like you're both in trouble!" The moment Zhang Lie appeared, he began teasing Yun Bing and Chu Feng.

He had learned about what had happened during his departure from Li Feng, and he was honestly quite thankful to the two of them for taking on the other three clans in the capital, and even the ministry of ruins, on his behalf.

This was why he chose to step forward now, forcing everyone's attention on him, and making it obvious that he was the hunter whom the Chu and Yun clans had deemed fit to head into the treasury.

"Haha! Yun Bing, now that your friend's out, surely there's no reason to keep us from the clocktower any longer?"

The crowd of hunters had all gathered here in search of wealth, not a fight. Since Zhang Lie had come out of the treasury empty-handed, they might still have some chance at the inheritance.

Yun Bing smiled as she stored her orb of primality. "As you please."

Zhang Lie didn't spare the crowd a single glance. Looking at Yun Bing and Chu Feng, he asked, "Did these fellows threaten you while I was gone?"

Of course, Zhang Lie's arrogant tone incited the fury of the gathered hunters, and one of the hunters from the other three major clans in the capital was just about to say something when white flames spread down the top of the clocktower, causing it—and the large copper bell—to crumble into ash and dust.

The gathered hunters had a wide array of emotion on their faces.

Some were shocked, wondering why the teleportation array had suddenly self-destructed, and some sighed deeply, understanding that the inheritance of the Eclipse Sage would forever be lost to them. Most, however, were glancing toward Zhang Lie with envy and jealousy.

"You damned bastard! You dared to destroy the teleportation array? Don't think that you can do what you want just because the Yun and Chu clans are protecting you!" Zhou Hong shouted.

It was obvious that this Zhang Lie had obtained the Eclipse Sage's inheritance and whatever wealth he possessed. Now that even the teleportation array itself had been destroyed, they would make him cough up as much as they could.

The members of Team Zenith stepped forward, intending to defend Zhang Lie.

"I didn't destroy the array, but you can think what you want." Zhang Lie ignored them and glanced over at his teammates, Yun Bing, and Chu Feng. Seeing that they were all unharmed, he let out a sigh of relief.

He didn't intend on provoking the other clans and factions, but that didn't mean that he was afraid of them.

"You must be Miss Yun's good friend, Zhang Lie." Zhang Quan, leader of the delegation from the ministry of ruins, spoke up. He didn't know this Zhang Lie fellow at all, and the only reason he was so polite was out of deference for the Yun and Chu clans.

"I'm an official from the ministry of ruins. The ministry of ruins should have first priority over any ruins that appear in the region. Not only have you entered the ruins without our permission, Zhang Lie, you've even destroyed the teleportation array into the Eclipse Sage's treasury. What do you have to say for yourself?" Zhang Quan challenged Zhang Lie, intending to lay the blame for these alleged crimes on him.

"As I've said, I didn't destroy the teleportation array—it self-destructed. Perhaps it was because I acquired the inheritance of the Eclipse Sage."

Every hunter present turned toward him. These particular ruins were of no small importance to them, and even more ordinary ruins would require a dedicated team a month or two's worth of scouting and surveyance to minimize the danger required for obtaining the ruins' inheritance.

Of course, there were a few ruins, generally those of the highest echelon of hunters, that would self-destruct after a successor to the inheritance had been found. In that case...

Identical expressions of greed and excitement appeared on many of the hunters' faces. If Zhang Lie had obtained the inheritance, then they wouldn't have to undergo any dangerous trial to obtain the inheritance for themselves: they just had to divest Zhang Lie of his newfound wealth!

Of course, Zhang Lie noticed their killing intent immediately. "Hah, trying to kill me and take the inheritance for yourself, are you?"

Yun Bing immediately stepped up to Zhang Lie's side, brandishing her orb of primality and once again setting up the stalemate that had descended right before Zhang Lie's reappearance.

In the end, it was an elder from the Zhou clan who stepped forward. "Haha! it looks as though you've grossly underestimated us five major clans of the capital. We do want to acquire the Eclipse Sage's inheritance for ourselves, but we surely wouldn't stoop to the dishonorable deeds you suggest.

"That said, it simply wouldn't do for us to return with nothing, not when we had expended so many resources to gather here. Neither would it make sense to start a fight: everyone has some sort of dead man's switch, and a serious fight would hurt us all."

He looked at Zhang Lie expectantly.

"You want a share of the spoils, of course. In that case, what do you propose?"

Zhang Lie circulated his genetic energy throughout his body, ready to call upon it on a moment's notice. At this point, it seemed quite likely that he would have to fight, but he would listen to their terms first.

Fortunately, after accepting the Eclipse Sage's inheritance, he had gained significant familiarity with these ruins, and he had a way of evading the other clans' pursuit if he had to.

"Haha! Zhang Lie, if you're so confident in your abilities, will you stake the spoils from these ruins on a match?" The Zhou elder finally showed his true colors.

#### Chapter 100: Fire-Advantaged

Zhang Lie smiled. "Best of three, then?"

Although he would be able to escape on his own, he had ended up embroiling the Yun and Chu clans in his affairs. Furthermore, it would be somewhat more difficult with Fang Yi, Sun Mengmeng, and the rest of Team Zenith in tow.

Settling the dispute with a match would be the cleanest resolution, and one that was overwhelmingly in his favor.

"As you will," the Zhou elder replied, having glanced all around him to see if there were any objections.

"Count me in!" Chu Feng patted Zhang Lie's shoulder. At this key juncture, he was the first one to step up and support Zhang Lie.

"I, as well." Yun Bing did the same.

The Yun and Chu elders stared even more curiously at Zhang Lie; meanwhile, Zhang Lie cast a grateful glance at Yun Bing and Chu Feng. Except for him, none of the members of Team Zenith were qualified to take part: he would be facing off against the other clans' equivalents of Yun Bing and Chu Feng, the best hunters of the younger generation.

If the two of them hadn't volunteered, Zhang Lie would have had to fight all three matches by himself.

"Thank you for your assistance," Zhang Lie murmured. "I'll owe you both a favor for today's events."

A favor was a precious thing indeed, especially from someone like Zhang Lie.

"I'll take your word for it, Zhang Lie! In that case, leave the first match to me!" Chu Feng stepped forward, wind-attuned genetic energy surging all around him.

His competitor followed: Zhou Hong, from the Zhou clan.

The younger generation of the major clans of the capital all knew each other, but few of them had ever exchanged blows. The reason Zhou Hong stepped forward was because of his elemental attunement. Everyone knew that the Chu clan favored wind-attuned techniques, whereas the Zhou clan favored fire-attuned techniques.

While the two elements weren't in direct opposition, fire would have an advantage over wind.

"Chu Feng, we're both members of the five major clans of the capital. Shouldn't we stand united? Who would have thought that you would oppose everyone here on behalf of some hunter with nothing to his name? Are you really that righteous, or are you just a fool?" Zhou Hong mocked Chu Feng confidently.

From his perspective, he had already won the match.

"We'll just have to see, won't we?" Chu Feng activated his footwork technique and dashed toward Zhou Hong. A gale of wind blew by, caressing the strands of his hair. For a brief moment, he seemed untethered to the mortal world.

His opponent, Zhou Hong, surged with genetic energy, as though he were smothering himself in a dense layer of smoke. Zhou Hong was a careful hunter, and the first thing he did was to protect himself against attack.

In contrast, Chu Feng's offense seemed far more impactful. The onlookers were left with the sensation that Chu Feng was a strong hunter indeed.

The moment he vanished from sight, Zhou Hong felt a devastating gale blowing right toward him so strongly that he couldn't even keep his eyes open. However, his defense wasn't for naught.

Chu Feng was certainly a strong opponent, but Zhou Hong wasn't weak, either. He punched forward with a flaming fist, shooting jets of flame into the air and forcing Chu Feng back.

Zhou Hong's dull-looking defense actually empowered his flames significantly, fortifying him and protecting him as though he were encased within a live volcano.

Fortunately, Chu Feng's reflexes were quick enough to dodge the blow; if he had been hit by the roiling waves of fire and downed by Zhou Hong's very first attack, his reputation would have been ruined.

The two competitors had each gained a measure of the other's strength.

Green gusts of wind and fiery bursts of flame filled the field. Neither party used a weapon; this fight would solely be determined by framework and technique, strength and constitution, and their reserves of genetic energy.

"[Wind Palm]!"

"[Fists of Flame]!"

With an explosion of genetic energy, palm and fist met each other, shaking the entire castle. Amidst the dense smoke that resulted, both combatants stumbled a few steps back, neither having gained the advantage from the clash.

Zhou Hong, successor to the Zhou clan and the strongest among the Zhou hunters of his generation, was at the top of the Maple settlement's gene leaderboard, and it was only natural that he would have true skill.

Chu Feng's gaze filled with excitement. Ever since he had advanced to the second position on the Blacksteel settlement's gene leaderboard, he hadn't had such an enjoyable fight.

Flames surged all around the battlefield, as did gusts of wind so sharp they felt like blades.

The two hunters within tangled together. With another huge explosion, they stumbled apart, a few superficial injuries marring their skin. Neither combatant had yet displayed their true strength; they were simply warming up and testing the other party.

After yet another clash, they grew tired of dancing around each other, and each began to gather genetic energy around them. Around Chu Feng swirled a whirlwind; around Zhou Hong, a storm of

fire. Both were rapidly growing larger by the second, and as they glanced at each other, their masses of genetic energy reaching a peak, they shouted almost simultaneously,

"[Hallowed Winds]!"

"[Primeval Fire]!"

A blinding green light and a frightening blast of fire impacted against each other, causing a massive quake. The gathered hunters lost their footing, and the clocktower and nearby buildings crumbled into oblivion.

Clouds of dust and grit scoured the battlefield, swirling without end. The hunters nearby were all astounded by the strength of the combatants.

Because this was only a match, and not a fight to the death, neither of them used their weapons or soulshards—but even with bare hands and fists, with technique alone, they had wrought such devastation!

So these were the successors to the major clans of the capital!

The flames and whirling wind dissipated in a matter of moments, but silence filled the battlefield. Everyone craned their necks, trying to discern what lay at its heart, at the intersection of green and red.

"They... couldn't have both perished, could they?"

"I doubt it, it's only a match! Would the successors of the great clans die so easily?"

The smoke finally cleared, revealing a lone figure.

"It's Chu Feng!" someone shouted, and everyone focused their attention on what lay ahead of them.

Much of Chu Feng's garments had been swallowed up by the flame, and he looked quite the worse for wear, but, most importantly, the tip of his pointer finger was touching Zhou Hong's throat.

A small jab would be all it took to kill Zhou Hong.

"Not bad, Zhou Hong. It's a pity that your opponent was me—you've lost!"

The Yun and Chu delegations erupted in cheers.