

U. Warlord 891

Chapter 891: Titan-Class Shuttle

Yang Ze continued, "In that case, why should you have exclusive access to the disaster-grade farm? Everyone here is a disciple of the Zenith Dojo—surely they have the right to have access to it too."

Hong Xi argued, "We're Master's disciples!"

"So are they!" Yang Ze countered. He was about to keep going when Zhang Lie raised a hand to interrupt him.

"The dojo will lavishly reward those who have the skill and drive to challenge themselves, and their rewards will be commensurate with the effort they put in. Hong Xi's simply worried that, if more people find out about the disaster-grade farm, the secret will eventually leak out to the public. In fact, that's not a problem. The Zenith Dojo has nothing to fear, and public knowledge of the existence of this farm won't change anything."

Sun Mengmeng nodded. "I agree. Those who are willing to risk their lives deserve to be compensated well for their success."

After Zhang Hong recorded everything down, she told everyone, "In that case, I'll set up this reward system and prepare for tomorrow's departure."

The next morning, Zhang Lie, the members of Team Zenith, and Hong Xi's four-hunter group waited outside the Chinese spaceport.

Given the Zenith Dojo's fame and reputation, it was easy for Zhang Hong to charter a space shuttle on such short notice—but the members of Team Zenith were shocked by the monstrous shuttle that had appeared before them.

Sun Xiaowu swallowed a gulp of saliva and gave Zhang Lie a thumbs up even as Zhang Lie turned to Zhang Hong and asked, "You brought over a... titan-class... space shuttle?"

A humongous shuttle was parked at the spaceport. Its design was sleek and modern, with a metallic exterior and rays of light streaking down its surface. In comparison to its bulk, Zhang Lie's body was minuscule—if the shuttle was an elephant, Zhang Lie was an ant. Not only that, the shuttle was outfitted for battle.

Zhang Hong was truly impressive to have chartered such a shuttle for them on short notice.

This sort of battle-oriented shuttle was something that boasted enough firepower to take down a small solar system, and China only possessed two or three such shuttles in its entire arsenal. The world at large had at most ten.

Zhang Hong replied, "You gave me too little time. I could only make use of my military connections to get such a shuttle, and when they heard that I was going to be sending reinforcements to Mars, they approved it immediately. Allegedly, Hong Tianqi himself expedited the process and lent us the use of a titan-class shuttle."

Zhang Lie marveled at the extent to which Hong Tianqi was willing to go to help Zhang Lie accomplish his objective.

Hong Xi asked, "Where's everyone else?"

Hong Xiao joked, "Surely they couldn't all have run off?"

Li Feng chuckled dryly. "If they all did, we might as well shut down the Zenith Dojo."

Sun Mengmeng shook her head. "Relax—I've worked with some of the older disciples directly, and I know just how motivated they are. Look, they're coming right now!"

Everyone looked into the distance to see the disciples of the Zenith Dojo converging on the spaceport.

"Of the 500,000 disciples, over 300,000 have shown up."

Those who had abstained from participating were largely the newcomers that didn't feel particularly tethered to the dojo, and who were the weakest and hence most likely to die.

After all, this expedition to Mars would be particularly dangerous, and there would always be those who were too scared or had family or children that they weren't willing to leave behind.

Zhang Lie didn't intend to punish those who weren't able to participate; instead, he would forgive them.

Even so, the first few waves of Zenith Dojo disciples, who had settled the first realm on behalf of the Zenith Dojo, all showed up. They might be starting to grow lazy, but that laziness was something they were willing to discard for a worthy cause.

The laziness had yet to corrupt their soul or form a habit around which their entire lives would revolve. From Zhang Lie's speech, they recalled the hot-blooded youth they had once been, who had rolled up their sleeves and fought for land and territory to call their own.

The hunters of the Zenith Dojo thumped their fists on their chests.

"356,642 members of the Zenith Dojo, here to report for duty!"

Zhang Lie was very pleased with the hunters' performance. Even the laziest hunter no longer looked like a layabout; their eyes and minds were sharp, and they all seemed to be ready for danger.

"Very good. The first wave of hunters will now board!"

Zhang Lie strode forward at the very front, followed immediately behind by the other members of Team Zenith and Hong Xi's four-hunter group. The remaining hunters followed suit in an orderly procession.

The members of the Zenith Dojo were all wide-eyed as they stepped into the titan-class shuttle. None of them had ever seen a spacecraft so large and so magnificent.

The floors were made of some steel alloy, and electronics filled the shuttle. The shuttle's sheer size was astounding enough from the outside, and the equipment on the inside was largely novel.

Even Zhang Lie had yet to experience a flight on a shuttle of this size before.

A disciple asked, "Dojo Leader, are we flying straight to Mars on this shuttle?"

Zhang Lie explained, "That's right. Given the current situation on Mars, we won't be able to use a wormhole or teleportation array to get there. Is that a problem?"

The disciples of the Zenith Dojo shook their heads. They couldn't help but respect Zhang Lie from the bottom of their hearts—only someone like the dojo leader would have been able to charter a titan-class shuttle for this trip. There were only a dozen such shuttles on Earth, at best!

They thought that they would have to face battle after perilous battle on Mars, but this titan-class shuttle's firepower would certainly help deal with the worst of the bugs.

Of course, no matter how large the shuttle was, it wouldn't be able to fit all the members of the Zenith Dojo. Only 30,000 people could be transported at once. One of their primary responsibilities was to fix the teleportation apparatus so that the rest of the disciples could teleport straight there from the Zenith Dojo.

Zhang Lie smiled and cracked a joke. "At any rate, we're all on the shuttle now—you can't get off even if you wanted to. Our goal is to support Mars and defend against the invading space bugs. This is a dangerous mission. You may get hurt, you may die, your companions and allies may die—but in the process, tempered by blood and flame, you'll all become stronger and more competent hunters."

The disciples turned serious.

"Many of you joined the dojo immediately after it was founded. This operation will be a chance for all of you to demonstrate your abilities to the rest of mankind, to the rest of the Milky Way. Those of you who are new to the dojo, watch carefully as your seniors fight. This is an excellent learning opportunity, and I hope all of you will be able to develop as hunters in the process."

Zhang Lie snapped his fingers. "Zhang Hong, are we ready to depart?"

"Yes, Zhang Lie!"

Zhang Lie was just about to nod when he suddenly thought of an important problem. "Who knows how to pilot a shuttle around here?"

Everyone was silent. They were genetic hunters, not shuttle pilots. Zhang Lie did have some experience flying a shuttle, but only a personal one, not this titanic monstrosity...

Chapter 892: You Should Know

Zhang Lie clutched his face. "Ah, this—"

Zhang Hong stepped forward. "Dojo Leader, there's no need to worry. The shuttle has an excellent autopilot system, and the military has helped to coordinate our route."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "For safety precautions, we need a crew at the scene. If something goes wrong midway through our journey and we're forced to pilot the aircraft manually, none of us would survive."

A titan-class shuttle was so expensive to construct that even China only had two or three of the like, and damaging one would be no laughing matter.

Zhang Hong made a few discreet calls and had a crew ready within moments.

When everything was ready, Zhang Lie waved a hand and shouted, "We head to Mars!"

The disciples buckled themselves in as the shuttle rose into the air.

Waves of gravitational force careened toward all the passengers, but Zhang Lie stood still where he was, as though his feet were stuck to the floor. Despite the growing strength of the waves and overwhelming force of gravity, he stood straight and unyielding.

Behind him were the members of Team Zenith, followed by Hong Xi's four-hunter group. All of them followed Zhang Lie's lead, standing straight and still as though the force of gravity meant nothing to them.

Only Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith were able to do so with ease. Hong Xi and the other three were still quite a bit weaker, and they were forcing themselves to remain still with gritted teeth.

If Zhang Lie didn't budge, neither could they.

In mere moments, the shuttle escaped the atmosphere. A robotic voice called out, "Gravitational field deploying in 5, 4, 3,..."

While the field was being generated, there would be a temporary loss of gravity within the shuttle.

Zhang Lie and the other members of Team Zenith still had their feet firmly planted on the ground, as though they suffered no ill effects whatsoever, but Hong Xi and the other four didn't have the near-mythical strength that the members of Team Zenith did. Their bodies slowly floated up into the air.

Some hunters were taking a space shuttle for the first time, and they didn't buckle themselves into their seats properly. They began floating upward in the zero-g environment.

Few of the hunters had ever experienced zero-g. They lived on planets with gravity, and gravity persisted even in the dimensional realm. Some of the hunters began to panic as they floated out of their seats, and incidents could occur as they scrabbled for purchase along the interior of the shuttle, accidentally activating certain controls or commands.

Zhang Lie quelled the disturbance as the image of a dragonturtle manifested behind him. His water-attuned genetic energy seemed to turn heavy and sluggish, and the runic tablet of gravity appeared behind his back. As the golden runes illuminated the interior of the shuttle, gravity was restored once more.

Hong Xi's four-hunter group touched down on the floor of the shuttle, and those hunters who had begun floating up fell back into their seats.

A robotic voice rang out, "Warning! Anomalous gravitational fluctuations detected. Gravitational generation cannot proceed. Please identify the cause of the problem immediately!"

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For safety considerations, such anomalies would cause the associated systems to lock down and remain inoperational to prevent further issues from occurring.

Zhang Lie shouted, "Check that your seatbelts are fastened!"

Those disciples who had floated into the air immediately buckled themselves in tightly before Zhang Lie turned and eyed Hong Xi's four-hunter group. "Go have a seat. It's too dangerous for you all to be standing here."

Jun Jiuxiao smiled awkwardly as he slid into a seat, followed by Ye Xianchen, Hong Xiao, and Hong Xi. The Hong siblings were rather dejected; they believed that they were at least approaching the same level of strength as Team Zenith.

Only now did they realize just how far they were from reaching Team Zenith's level of strength—as if there were an abyss separating the members of Team Zenith from Hong Xi's group.

Hong Xi was the most disappointed among the four of them. She had been able to keep up with the members of Team Zenith for the most part in the second realm, but after they advanced into the third, Hong Xi's strength had lagged behind.

Of course, this wasn't Hong Xi's fault—it was simply that the members of Team Zenith had finished acquiring their third-realm gene fragments, and they had honed their techniques in direct combat with kings of the realm.

The main reason Hong Xi had fallen behind was because she was lacking third-realm gene fragments of her own. The moment the Mars operation finished, Hong Xi promised herself that she would immediately delegate her responsibilities to Hong Xiao and ascend into the third realm.

Once the shuttle flew into space, Zhang Lie canceled his gravity-altering domain, and the shuttle's gravitational generation proceeded as normal.

The disciples of the Zenith Dojo unbuckled themselves from their seats.

Hong Xi caressed her brother's head as she looked at him tenderly.

She had wanted to drop her responsibilities in the kingdom of Limit for quite some time already; just a few days of work had made her head feel as though it would explode. She respected Yun Bing from the bottom of her heart because she didn't know how Yun Bing could stand to deal with so much for so long.

She had helped Yun Bing with a few simple administrative tasks, thinking they might be somewhat tedious, but not realizing just how tedious they were. Only someone like Yun Bing, who had been the prime minister of Limit for years, knew just how draining her position could be.

Hong Xiao suddenly raised his head and looked at her alertly. "Sister, you're looking really shifty and devious right now. Are you planning something?!"

"No, no, of course not!" Hong Xi shook her head fervently.

Zhang Lie had Zhang Hong send out the point reward system the Zenith Dojo would be implementing for this event.

When the disciples saw the top prize, their eyes widened.

"What's this? Potion #3? A superior limit-breaking potion?!"

"Aren't there only Potions #1 and #2?"

"Did the dojo succeed in making a superior limit-breaking potion already? None of us knew!"

One of the disciples raised his hand and asked, "Dojo leader, are all the rewards on this list immediately accessible?"

"You wouldn't be lying to us, would you, dojo leader?"

Sun Mengmeng stepped forward. She called out firmly, "Calm down, everyone. Yes, Potion #3 is real. In truth, the dojo leader developed this limit-breaking potion quite some time ago, but there weren't enough of the rarest ingredients for mass production. As to why it hasn't been announced until now, well, all of you should know..."

Chapter 893: An Overwhelming Reward

The members of the Zenith Dojo looked toward Zhang Lie with shock and respect.

He was truly an excellent inventor—one who had already developed and mass-produced Potion #3 while the rest of the Milky Way was still researching how to adapt Potion #2 to their respective species, as well as setting up production lines for the core ingredients.

Zhang Lie was truly at the frontier of limit fragment research.

Many of those present had joined the Zenith Dojo either because of their deep respect for Zhang Lie or because they wanted access to the limit-breaking potions that he had developed.

Upon learning that the superior limit-breaking potion, Potion #3, was now available, they congratulated themselves for having the foresight to join the Zenith Dojo in advance.

Zhang Lie wasn't worried that news of Potion #3 would spread; it was just annoying to deal with all the trouble that would result in the aftermath. However, all the disciples of the Zenith Dojo were risking their lives on this mission. Zhang Lie thought it only fair that he presented them with something of value for their efforts.

Zhang Lie had clearly delineated the dangers of participating in this expedition to Mars, which meant that those disciples willing to brave the battlefield truly wanted to remain in the Zenith Dojo. He might not be able to entrust them with his life, but he would surely show them the courtesy of basic trust.

Those disciples who had come with ulterior motives, who were only interested in what the Zenith Dojo could give them, rather than the other way around, wouldn't have been willing to risk the trip to Mars, let alone be among the first wave of disciples that would arrive there.

With this mission, Zhang Lie was essentially selecting the cream of the crop, a trustworthy group of hunters who would be tempered by this expedition and form the core fighting force of the dojo.

Zhang Lie was confident that those who managed to survive on Mars would grow into fearsome fighters. With the help of a superior limit-breaking potion, it would be only a matter of time before they exceeded Hong Tianqi himself. Thirty thousand Hong Tianqis—if Zhang Lie could grow a force that strong, no one would ever dare pull anything against the humans again.

The disciples of the Zenith Dojo had originally been rather scared of the space bugs they were about to face, but after seeing the lavish rewards that they could receive, all that fear dissipated.

The space bugs might as well have been walking sacks of gold. Nowhere else would they be able to obtain vials of Potion #3, nowhere in the universe! A single vial would be able to purchase an entire planet.

Sun Mengmeng instructed, "Everyone, keep this a secret for now—this is a major development that will shake the entire galaxy. The herbs that are required for this potion largely grow in the second realm, and we don't have enough of a supply for the entire Milky Way."

Sun Xiaowu continued, "Once word of this development spreads, the Zenith Dojo will be bombarded by requests and demands from all sorts of entities, so we need to keep this a secret for now."

The disciples all nodded fervently.

They returned to perusing the list of rewards. As they glanced at an unassuming little line, they rubbed their eyes, sure that they had misread something.

One disciple drummed up her courage and asked, "Dojo Leader, is something wrong with the rewards?"

Zhang Lie frowned. "Not as far as I'm aware. I checked the list over with Zhang Hong before it was distributed."

The disciple continued uncertainly, "Well, the disaster-grade cores listed here... do they refer to disaster-grade lifeforms?"

Zhang Lie countered, "What else could they refer to?"

The disciples of the Zenith Dojo all widened their eyes.

"The disaster-grade lifeforms that you discovered, dojo leader?"

"Disaster gene fragments..."

"I've read quite a few articles about them. The dojo leader was the one who discovered and identified them. Allegedly, these disaster-grade lifeforms possess disaster-grade cores that have to be absorbed via special means. Disaster gene fragments are said to be remarkably powerful, and they're something the strongest hunters are fervently seeking out."

The disciples of the Zenith Dojo all began to pool their knowledge together.

"Is the dojo leader crazy? He's giving such precious cores out as rewards?"

"What are you talking about? Of course he's not crazy!"

"Then—are we really going to be able to obtain such cores as rewards for hunting down these bugs?!"

"More importantly, where did the dojo leader find such a large supply of disaster-grade cores that he can give them out as rewards? You know how the strongest organizations are all trying to hunt these disaster-grade lifeforms down, but the majority can't even find one, let alone kill one!"

Because Zhang Lie had started a disaster-grade farm in the second realm, he and the members of Team Zenith had never had to participate in the stiff competition for hunting down disaster-grade lifeforms, and they weren't aware of just how bad the situation was in the second realm.

The hunters of the Milky Way and all major factions were trying to find and take down as many disaster-grade lifeforms as they could. The number of disaster-grade lifeforms in the second realm was surely limited; every lifeform that someone else hunted was one less for them.

Competition was stiff and growing stiffer by the day.

Zhang Lie had had a hard enough time trying to find these disaster-grade lifeforms with the monarch of stars' map and detailed information and no competition besides. The situation had to be far worse for the hunters of the Milky Way.

To them, the discovery of disaster gene fragments was far more impactful than that of the limit-breaking potions that Zhang Lie had pioneered.

Although these limit fragments were of immense value to the races of the Milky Way, many of the races were yet unable to develop their own analogues of those potions. On the other hand, every race could absorb disaster-grade cores directly.

As such, the disciples of the Zenith Dojo were unbelievably shocked to see these cores appear as potential rewards for this mission.

If other hunters and factions could participate in this mission, the disciples were certain that the space bugs would be wiped out to the point of extinction in a matter of days—that was how valuable these disaster-grade cores were.

For the Zenith Dojo to be able to supply its disciples with these rewards, well, some of the disciples were tempted to sell them rather than to absorb them themselves. Rationally, it was near-impossible for them to believe that they could really receive these miraculous cores just by hunting down bugs.

Of course, the number of points they would have to obtain for this ridiculous reward was commensurate with its value, but that didn't diminish the disciples' eagerness at all. These cores were just that valuable.

The only thing they worried about was whether Zhang Lie could really supply them with these cores.

Chapter 894: Worse Than Reported

As though he had seen the uncertainty written on the disciples' faces, Zhang Lie smiled. "Don't worry. I've reviewed the list of rewards. Feel free to exchange your points for anything on the list—if you can obtain enough points, you can even get a dozen disaster-grade cores. I'll find them somehow. This I pledge to you all."

Zhang Lie's pronouncement reminded the disciples of the Zenith Dojo that the man in front of them, their dojo leader, was the king of Limit. He was the monarch of the sole and largest kingdom in the second realm, and he had the power to do as he wanted. Even though he had ascended to the third realm, he still had control of his kingdom in the second realm.

The disciples grew excited fantasizing about the rewards they would be able to obtain by slaughtering these bugs. They grouped up into parties as they discussed how they would take on these bugs.

The expedition to Mars was, by this point, more a hunt than a rescue mission.

Seeing the disciples' greedy stares, Zhang Lie cautioned, "Don't get overconfident. It's not as easy as you think to deal with these bugs. They've managed to take over half of Mars in a matter of days. It's clear that they have a strong leader and tactician, and even the foot soldiers will be stronger than anything you've faced to date."

Sun Mengmeng added, "It won't be easy to obtain these rewards—you'll need courage, and you'll have to risk your lives!"

The disciples of the Zenith Dojo stood up and thumped their fists on their chests.

Zhang Lie and Sun Mengmeng's words didn't dampen the hunters' enthusiasm; if anything, they were fortified by the challenge.

Zhang Lie led the hunters of Team Zenith and Hong Xi's four-hunter party to a private conference room.

"Hong Xi, the four of you will be responsible for leading the disciples of the Zenith Dojo into battle and protecting them. It's fine for there to be wounded, but you have to make sure they don't suffer too many casualties."

Hong Xi and the others nodded.

Zhang Lie turned to Sun Mengmeng. "Sun Mengmeng, I'll task you with protecting the Zenith Dojo's disciples as well. This won't be difficult for you, will it?"

Sun Mengmeng shook her head. "Leave it to me."

Just then, the titan-class shuttle's robotic voice rang out, "Warning! Warning! A large number of unidentified flying objects are approaching!"

Zhang Hong grew alarmed. "A swarm of bugs?"

Zhang Lie led the hunters of Team Zenith toward the shuttle's command center, which had large screens from which they could see outside the shuttle.

There, they saw an endless swarm of bugs approaching them through the void of space, their frightening probosces clattering. The bugs were ridiculously large. Each was the size of an autobus, and the largest were even the size of cruise ships.

Those bugs that were strong enough to survive in outer space had to be at least four-star—the equivalent of peak-grade second-realm lifeforms, or mutated-grade third-realm lifeforms. Some of the largest bugs might even have strength on par with superior- or peak-grade third-realm lifeforms.

The crew that Zhang Lie had requested to pilot the ship opened a communications channel with Team Zenith. "A swarm of space bugs is approaching us up ahead. Your command, sir?"

Zhang Lie shouted, "Get ready for a skirmish—we'll barrel through their forces!"

By then, Mars was in terrible shape.

Hong Tianqi himself had told Zhang Lie that more than half of Mars had been taken over by the space bugs, but in truth, the situation was much worse than Hong Tianqi had described.

Hong Tianqi didn't hide any pertinent information; rather, the situation on Mars was deteriorating in real time, and it had been three whole days between when Hong Tianqi received the news and Zhang Lie set off. Quite a lot could happen in three days—by now, Mars was almost completely occupied by the space bugs.

Despite the grievous wounds that had been dealt to the Marshal of Flame Li Pu, the clans and hunters of Mars continued to resist the bugs' invasion, but to no avail. The bugs seemed to come in endless numbers, and the Martian clans were the first to retreat.

Because they retreated without informing the rest of the hunters, the painstakingly constructed defensive lines on Mars fell apart within moments, and huge swarms of bugs overwhelmed the Martian military. The situation was far more severe than anyone could have anticipated—and there was worse to come.

"Scram! I won't stay here like the rest of you to be turned into fertilizer for these bugs!"

As the situation on Mars grew worse and worse, the clans began to flee from Mars itself.

The Martian clans took the lion's share of the planet's resources for themselves and reveled in the power they wielded—but now that Mars was beset by an overwhelming crisis, their first thought wasn't to protect their planet, but rather to flee.

The Martian military tried to stop them. "If you leave now, Mars will truly be destroyed! There are still about a hundred million hunters in the various settlements, and a few hundred million people on Mars overall!"

"That's none of our business! Why should we hunters of the major clans give up our lives for the chaff?!"

The Martian military boasted little power to prevent their departure.

"Even the Marshal of Flame was heavily injured. If we stay, we'll die! Better to leave while we can."

The Martian commander himself appealed to the two clans. "The Yang and Gu clans have lived on Mars for centuries! Are you really going to flee as your homeworld gets destroyed?!"

The Yang clan head spoke first. "Of course I'm upset. Everyone is—but no matter how important our land and properties are, our lives come first! We can rebuild once the worst of the disaster is over."

The Yang clan was among those clans that were departing from Mars.

"Enough." Li Pu walked out of the military encampment, grimacing as he clutched his wounds. "If they want to leave, let them leave. I'll stop these damned bugs myself!"

The soldiers had no choice but to hold Li Pu back.

"Marshal, you can't go!"

"Your injuries are too severe to allow you to fight. The situation on Mars is bad enough—if we lose you too, this will truly be the end!"

Li Pu cried out, "If I don't stop the invasion, who will?"

Just then, a huge crash shook the entire settlement. The hunters turned to the source of the commotion. Their faces turned pale; their eyes widened with shock.

"This is the end..."

A gigantic black bug emerged from the ground. It had the body of a python—a long, sinuous body, with an engorged head that faced the sky. The exposed portion of its body alone was over five hundred meters long.

The hunters, who had had to fend off countless waves of bugs over the last few days, could immediately identify that the bug that had just emerged was a five-star one.

Li Pu's face turned pale. "For the bugs to have evolved so quickly..."

The bugs hadn't been too dangerous at the start of the invasion. As time progressed and they devoured the planet's resources and life force, however, they began to evolve from one-star to two-star, three-star, four-star, five-star—a five-star bug was one that Li Pu would have trouble defeating even at peak strength, let alone in his current severely injured state.

The fifth-star bug had destroyed the encampment's underground security measures. With their defensive perimeter down, a swarm of bugs bore down on the encampment like a black wave filling the horizon.

Li Pu stepped forward. "All of you, leave! I'll try to get you as much time as I can!"

The soldiers called out, "No, General, you can't! You're our last hope!"

Li Pu's face was stoic as he shouted, "This is an order from your marshal!"

Despite their unwillingness, the soldiers immediately saluted him.

"Yes, Marshal!"

The Yang clan head rushed back. "We're trapped by bugs from all over! They're swarming toward us—they want to take us down in one fell swoop!"

Li Pu strode forward. "No need to panic. I'll hold back their assault. The rest of you should form a vanguard and evacuate as many of the civilians sheltering in the encampment as possible."

The Yang clan head frowned. "Most of those civilians are ordinary citizens with no combat ability whatsoever. If we try to escort them out, we'll all die!"

The Gu clan head advised, "Marshal, think carefully about the situation. It'll be difficult enough for our clans and your soldiers to push through this endless swarm of bugs. If we have to evacuate the civilians as well, everyone will die!"

The Yang clan head continued, "Li Pu, Marshal Li, do you really not care about the fate of your soldiers?"

The Gu clan head chorused, "Li Pu, think carefully about your brothers-in-arms! You have to be responsible for their lives."

The Yang clan head advised, "Li Pu, there's no need to risk your life or your soldiers' lives for people you barely know."

Li Pu grabbed both clan heads by their collars. "Don't be ridiculous," he spat out. "I'm a soldier, and my duty is to protect everyone on Mars. Among the civilians in the encampment are my soldiers' families. If you don't want my soldiers' help, feel free to try to break out of the bugs' enclosure yourself!"

The clan heads' faces turned ugly. Even with the clans' full strength, they would be hard-pressed to survive under such dire odds.

The Yang clan head struggled to detach himself from Li Pu's grip. "Calm down, Li Pu, calm down!"

Li Pu snorted as he threw both clan heads to the ground. "Neither of you should have run while the military was setting up a defensive perimeter. If your clans hadn't fled, we wouldn't be in such dire straits, and my soldiers wouldn't have perished! When I heard about what you two fools did, I had half a mind to court-martial you all—and I would have done so if not for these exceptional circumstances!"

Desertion was a crime punishable by death, and Li Pu hated the idea of deserters.

Li Pu shouted, "As soldiers, our first responsibility is to the civilians of Mars. What say you, soldiers?"

"Yessir!" The soldiers remaining in the encampment stomped on the ground with their right boot, sending a tremor through the battlefield.

"Do as you will!" Li Pu commanded the two clan heads, then soared into the sky.

The two clan heads talked it over before coming to the inevitable conclusion that they had no choice but to agree to Li Pu's terms. This was their only chance at survival. If they were to try to break out of the bugs' enclosure themselves, they wouldn't be able to succeed.

The clan hunters' faces were as pale as ash. "We should have fled long ago."

The Yang clan head consoled his family, "There's no need to make such expressions. The situation isn't as bad as you expect."

The Meng clan head asked, "Oh? Could it get any worse? We're hemmed in by a swarm of bugs, and there's no way we'll be able to break out. If we have to protect these civilians at the same time..."

The Yang clan head's eyes glinted maliciously. "If we have no choice, we can use those civilians as bait. Feed them to the bugs."

The Gu clan head reared back. "What would the soldiers say?"

The Yang clan head snorted. "Do you really think Li Pu's working for the good of the common people? He's just making a show of it! Don't you see that he's indirectly signaling what his forces should do? He's telling them to use the civilians as bait—do you really think a simple-minded person could become the Marshal of Flame? Everyone in his position has trodden on the dead to get where they are. Their hands are fresh with blood!"

Chapter 895: The Renowned Yang Ze

To a malicious person, the entire world was filled with malice; to a kind person, the world was far more beautiful. Those filled with malice found malice reflected in lies and deception, in the masks that people wore.

As the swarm of bugs approached the settlement, the soldiers grouped up and prepared to break through their lines.

Suddenly, the ground shook. A huge rumble portended the arrival of another five-star bug from underground, a snakelike worm that was the twin of the five-star bug that Li Pu was currently fighting against.

The humongous worm surrounded the encampment, causing the soldiers, civilians, and Martian clans to let out identical looks of despair.

"We're dead now..."

"Won't heaven even give us a chance?"

Unless a miracle occurred, there was no hope of escape. No one else had the strength to prevent the bugs' one-sided slaughter. Civilians scattered and fled, children and babies cried, men howled—and the bugs devoured them all.

While in the middle of combat, Li Pu found himself distracted by the appearance of a second five-star bug. That distraction left an opening for his enemy, which slammed its tail against Li Pu's body and sent him falling to the ground like a meteor.

He smashed into the ground and formed a crater upon impact. Blood seeped out of his mouth as he tried to stand back up, but the bones all throughout his body had been broken. Though he was a fearsome genetic hunter, it would take his body quite some time to regenerate. He wouldn't be able to regain his mobility in the short term.

Li Pu had already been fighting with serious wounds that had yet to heal fully. The one devastating blow from the five-star bug completely crippled his ability to fight.

He lay in the crater, his eyes staring glassily at the sky. He murmured to himself, "We're doomed."

He couldn't have imagined that there was still another five-star bug present at the scene. His body was so badly wounded that he couldn't even move. None of his soldiers or even the Martian clans had the firepower to overwhelm such bugs on their own.

The worm that had taken down Li Pu opened its bloodthirsty maw, revealing sharp, spiky teeth all the way down its throat.

Meanwhile, the soldiers were suffering huge casualties against the other five-star bug blocking their way. At the height of despair, Li Pu suddenly noticed a shadow appearing in the sky. It appeared behind the swarm of bugs that filled the earth and sky, something metallic that seemed to shine behind the swarm of bugs.

Li Pu's face widened into a half-crazed smile. "Am I dreaming...?"

A pillar of light pierced through the bugs in the sky, lighting them aflame. It shot straight through the five-star bug's head, causing it to burst in an explosion of blue ichor.

Everyone looked up at the sky, at the burning bugs and the sudden flash of light.

A titanic shuttle could be seen in the distance, with a sleek metal exterior covered in rays of streaking light. They were shocked by its sudden appearance when all hope seemed to be lost.

Even the bugs seemed surprised by this sudden foe. Those in the sky began to fly haphazardly, and those on the ground scurried aimlessly.

The five-star bug that was attacking the soldiers twisted its head to the sky and let out a ghastly screech.

"Yang Ze, go!"

A small dot burst out of the shuttle, surrounded by pale blue ripples of genetic energy. When the soldiers squinted, they could barely make out that the dot was a hunter with his head held high.

"[The Boundless Blade: Shark Frenzy]!"

Huge sharks manifested in the air and formed a shark horde about a fifth the size of the shuttle—as though the shuttle were releasing a swarm of cruisers to combat the bugs. Spatial ripples swamped the bugs in the sky like the rising tide, allowing sunlight to be visible once more.

The pale blue sharks careened toward the five-star bug, smashing into its body and destroying it in an instant.

The hunter's demonstration of power shocked the soldiers and civilians. The bugs that they were unable to do anything about were killed in one strike by this man who had leapt down from the heavens.

He alone had reversed the calamitous fate that was about to befall the Martians, who had slaughtered a foe that would have stymied the Marshal of Flame Li Pu himself. Just who could this hunter be?

The Yang clan head was gobsmacked. He squinted, then called out with some hesitation, "Yang Ze?"

Yang Ze landed on the ground and turned toward the Yang clan head. It was clear that Yang Ze recognized him, but then he turned away.

Yang Ze glanced all around him, at the bugs that were swarming all over. He sent his water-attuned genetic energy into the air, causing the white mists of [Mirrored Refraction] to emanate from him.

"That's Yang Ze?!" the Gu clan head asked uncertainly.

Another clan head queried, "Clan Head Yang, Clan Head Gu, it seems like both of you are familiar with this hero?"

The Yang clan head nodded with a complicated expression on his face.

"Do you remember the Yang hunter who helped win the Void Cup?" the Gu clan head replied, with a mocking smile directed at the Yang clan head.

"What?! This hero who fell from the heavens—he's one of the hunters who won us the Void Cup?" Upon learning of his identity, the soldiers and civilians present began to cheer.

"He must be here to save us!"

"Our savior..."

"They're true heroes!"

The atmosphere of despair was washed away with Yang Ze's mists. The soldiers and civilians present smiled with relief.

Although the sudden appearance of the titan-class shuttle had shocked the space bugs, they quickly rallied in a matter of moments. The bugs in the sky furiously struck at the shuttle, while those on the ground swarmed toward the humans.

As the white mist continued to spread, Yang Ze sent his genetic energy swirling around him. Crystalline lotuses condensed in the vicinity of his body.

The Gu clan head continued, "The Yang clan head is intimately familiar with this hero. Isn't that so?"

The Yang clan head's face turned ugly with regret. The mocking tone in the Gu clan head's voice was evident; Yang Ze had originally come from the Yang clan, but the Yang clan had spurned him and pushed him away.

Who would have expected that a nameless bastard like him would undergo such a dramatic metamorphosis after becoming one of Zhang Lie's followers? Not only that, he had even helped win the humans the Void Cup!

Chapter 896: The Yang Clan's Reparations

Humanity was more or less a joke with regards to the Void Cup.

The humans participated in the Void Cup year after year and returned home as losers time after time. The sudden upheaval caused by Zhang Lie and Team Zenith, who became champions in the year of their participation, ended the humans' shame.

It was after that point that humans were no longer considered weaklings among the races of the Milky Way. At this point, they were among the hundred strongest races of the galaxy.

Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith had brought fame and renown to humans throughout the Milky Way, and their achievements had even been used for instructional manuals for budding hunters.

Team Zenith's victory was a boon to all humans—save for the Yang clan.

When the members of the Yang clan saw Yang Ze's smiling face appear on screen, the elders and clan head's faces all turned green with envy and regret.

Everyone in the Milky Way learned of the Yang clan, who had thrown a talented hunter out of their clan, and who Zhang Lie fostered into a burgeoning genius.

Yang Ze was a rising star, but he wasn't affiliated with the Yang clan. The other great clans of Mars had made fun of the Yang clan head for this incident, and the more Yang Ze's fame grew, the worse the Yang clan's reputation became.

Yang Ze's name had first made waves during the Void Cup, and those waves had only grown larger since.

After the Void Cup was the founding of the kingdom of Limit. Although Zhang Lie's name was far more widely known, Yang Ze was someone that hunters all over the Milky Way would recognize—and whenever someone brought up Yang Ze, people would mention the Yang clan, who had discarded a veritable genius.

The Yang clan head thought that he had grown accustomed to being joked about at his expense, but when Yang Ze once again appeared before him, the Yang clan head felt so bitter a taste in his mouth that he couldn't seem to force any words out.

The hero that stood before them was meant to belong to the Yang clan—and yet his lack of foresight had caused him to sever ties with Yang Ze!

The Yang clan head briefly contemplated dying. If he could turn back time, he would surely kill his past self, who had tried to push Yang Ze away. Yang Ze was a member of the Yang clan; he should have been one from the beginning!

The Yang clan had continued to make attempts to contact Yang Ze, hoping that he would agree to return to the clan, but their offers had been completely ignored. Even now, despite Yang Ze being within sight of the Yang clan head, Yang Ze had refused to look directly at him.

One clan head who hadn't participated in ostracizing Yang Ze didn't know what the other clan heads did. His eyes lit up when he heard about the connection between Yang Ze and the Yang clan. "Clan Head Yang, it's great news that Yang Ze's one of us! Could you ask him about what's going on with the titan-class shuttle?"

Some of the Yang clan members nodded. "Right, Clan Head, would you ask if we can board the shuttle?"

One of the Yang elders also requested, "Clan Head, please see if Yang Ze's willing to send us away from Mars. If nothing else, we're related by blood—he might do us this one favor!"

"Yes, Clan Head! Blood is thicker than water, isn't it? We might have pushed Yang Ze away from the beginning, but he's still coming back to lend us a hand in our time of need! I'm sure he'd be willing us to offer assistance."

The Yang clan head rubbed his lower jaw, wishing to believe that the other members of the clan were right. If not for Yang Ze's familial connection to Mars, why would he have come?

The entire galaxy knew just how inhospitable Mars was at the moment. It was filled to the brim with bugs, and there didn't seem to be any help forthcoming. Even those who were willing to lend aid had to consider whether or not they would survive and be able to return—but while all those on Mars were trying to evacuate, Yang Ze had returned.

What did that imply? It meant that Yang Ze was still thinking of the Yang clan—it meant that he had returned to save them!

The reason he had refused to entertain any communication with the clan had to be because he didn't want to lose face. Now that the Yang clan was in danger, he couldn't sit still and do nothing.

The Yang clan head successfully brainwashed himself into thinking that Yang Ze still cared about the Yang clan. His mood brightened immediately.

He smiled. "Elders, you're absolutely right. Blood is thicker than water, and there's no other reason Yang Ze could have returned here."

"Thank goodness you agree, Clan Head! Please, ask him if he'd be willing to escort us out of here!"

The Yang clan head nodded. "As long as I make amends to him, I'm sure Yang Ze will be willing to return to the Yang clan given our shared blood."

White mist continued pouring through the battlefield as Yang Ze released his genetic energy. By then, the mist had covered up the entire military encampment.

The Yang clan head walked forward confidently, bowing and smiling at Yang Ze. "Yang Ze, it must have taken you quite some trouble to return here. If you're willing to return to Mars, does that mean —"

Yang Ze turned toward him and frowned. "Who are you?"

Who are you? Who are you? Who are you? Those three words echoed in the Yang clan head's ears. He found it difficult to keep groveling at Yang Ze, but he steeled himself and continued,

"I know you bear the clan and me ill will because of how I treated you in the past, but I did what I did for the good of the clan! Won't you forgive me on account of the blood that runs through our veins?"

Yang Ze glanced at the Yang clan head coldly. Even if Yang Ze had entertained the notion of returning to the Yang clan, he would have lost any intention of doing so after hearing the Yang clan head's words.

Ostracizing and harming Yang Ze 'for the good of the clan'? That was just an excuse—and he wanted Yang Ze to forgive him and the clan just because they shared the same blood? What kind of reason was that to warrant unconditional forgiveness?

The Yang clan head continued, "We were wrong. I was mistaken, and it's only to be expected that you would hold a grudge against us—but if there's anyone you're going to hate, hate me. I'm the clan head, and I'm willing to bear all responsibility for what you had to go through. The rest of the clan is innocent, however, and it's very dangerous on Mars at the moment. They need to be brought to safety."

Yang Ze ignored the droning Yang clan head. He had his own duties to contend with, and the overwhelming swarm of bugs before him was enough of a headache already. He had neither the time nor the presence of mind to deal with his estranged family, but just because he ignored the members of the Yang clan didn't mean that they would ignore him back.

"Yang Ze, what are you thinking? Don't you see how the clan head's all but begging you? Aren't you going to respond?"

"Don't be so arrogant, will you? We know that you came back to help us out! The clan head's willing to let bygones be bygones. Won't you forgive him?"

The members of the Yang clan, panicking at the thought of having to deal with these bugs for a moment longer, began to berate and harangue Yang Ze in hopes of pressuring him into succumbing.

Chapter 897: Six-Star Bug

Yang Ze laughed. "Innocent, you say?"

When an avalanche occurred, no flake of snow was innocent.

Yang Ze had grown up in the heart of the Yang clan, and he had seen how vile and corrupt some of these clan-based hunters were. He didn't want to stay in conversation with them for even a second longer.

The five-star bug that had been struck by the titan-class shuttle's lasers was badly wounded and momentarily disoriented, but it recovered after a momentary period of rest.

Yang Ze ignored the members of the Yang clan as he strode forward, but they pulled him back. "Hold on—we're not done!"

"Are you trying to sneak off? Do you still consider yourself a member of the Yang clan?"

"You have to apologize to the clan head, and then escort us to the shuttle!"

Yang Ze frowned. Water-attuned genetic energy spread out around him like the tides. He activated [Mirrored Refraction].

"Scram!"

Those disciples of the Yang clan who were reaching forward to grab ahold of Yang Ze were sent flying as Yang Ze shot forward like a phantom, right in front of the five-star bug.

The crystalline lotuses that Yang Ze had manifested flew ahead of him and smashed into the five-star bug's body. Water-attuned genetic energy erupted in an explosion and formed bloody craters that pockmarked the bug.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragonwhale]!" In the blink of an eye, Yang Ze was surrounded by a patch of ocean.

"Water?" Those around him thought they heard the crashing of waves. The pale-blue genetic energy around Yang Ze's body reached a crescendo and rose into the sky like a tsunami, manifesting in the form of a huge whale.

The whale's body was long and streamlined, with long whiskers and scales patterning its body. It filled the sky, covering the entire battlefield.

The five-star bug's eyes narrowed. Despite its size, it was minute compared to the dragonwhale. With a turn of its body, the dragonwhale crushed the five-star bug underneath it in an explosion of water-attuned genetic energy, which caused space to warp as it flooded the battlefield like waves.

Under Yang Ze's control, the water-attuned genetic energy exploded once more in a burst of white mist. It spread all around the bugs that had been circling the military encampment.

Yang Ze strode forward and lifted Li Pu's prone body from the ground. "You've worked hard, Marshal Li. Leave the rest to us."

Li Pu's expression was complicated. "You came back?"

Li Pu recognized Yang Ze—there were few people on Mars who didn't. Most had recognized him at first sight, but none had expected that he would show up now to save Mars during its time of need. Li Pu himself could hardly believe that the youth he had sent away from Mars would return bearing such stellar accolades.

Given the devastating blow Yang Ze had just unleashed, Li Pu was certain that Yang Ze was stronger than he was. Even at peak strength, he wouldn't have been able to block Yang Ze's attack. To think Mars had let go of such a promising young talent...

Yang Ze nodded. "Mars is my homeland, after all. I was forced to leave under rather upsetting conditions—but it's still my homeland, and I couldn't bear to see it be destroyed."

Li Pu was happy for and proud of Yang Ze, gratified that he was willing to return to Mars despite such danger. Though he was now a powerful hunter in his own right, and he owed Mars nothing, Yang Ze didn't forget his roots. At the same time, however, Li Pu pitied that Yang Ze, who should have become a dragon that would shake the entirety of the Milky Way, would perish against this endless invasion of space bugs.

Were he to have enough time to grow, a new star of humanity would have risen up from Mars—but Yang Ze would be dragged down by his homeland instead.

Li Pu didn't want Yang Ze to suffer such a fate, so he simultaneously regretted and was relieved that Yang Ze had shown up. His complicated emotions merged together into a long sigh. "You shouldn't have returned..."

A huge wave of bugs was approaching from the horizon, a black swarm that threatened to engulf earth and sky.

"If you're talking about these bugs, there's not much to worry about." With a wave of his hand, Yang Ze manifested a horde of sharks from within the mist, which clashed against the invading bugs. The bugs formed a black tide; Yang Ze countered with a barricade of blue sharks.

The two sides met and began to tear each other apart. Pale-blue sharks exploded into puffs of mist even as they tore the bugs apart in a battle of attrition. The sharks won out. They were made of genetic energy, and it didn't matter even if they were hurt or destroyed. They exploded into mist when destroyed, but could easily reform from the white fog that had filled the battlefield.

This was a scenario that no one had expected—that Yang Ze would somehow be able to counter the bugs' greatest advantage, their seemingly endless numbers. Yang Ze, standing alone in the center of the fog that shrouded the battlefield, turned the tide of the battle.

Everyone present gulped. Yang Ze was a hunter barely out of his youth, but he was already able to hold back a whole invasion force's worth of bugs. At that moment, he looked like a god of war, in full control of the battlefield.

The Yang clan head clutched at his heart. Such a martial god should have belonged to the Yang clan, but in a fit of lunacy, he had chased Yang Ze out of his homeland and damaged their relationship irrevocably.

The Martian soldiers glanced toward Yang Ze with awe and respect.

Yang Ze had been releasing white fog all this time, forming a huge sea of fog, in preparation for this defense. In order to counter the endless swarm of bugs, he had to come up with an equally insurmountable horde of sharks, a process that required huge quantities of genetic energy and time.

Yang Ze was very pleased with the results.

Li Pu was momentarily shocked before he released a long sigh. "What a pity. If you had come just a few days earlier, we would have been able to supply you with enough firepower to fend off this invasion, but by now, it's too late."

Yang Ze smiled. "Not too late, I should think."

The soldiers walked up to Yang Ze and helped him support Li Pu.

Li Pu shook his head. "Did you think that I was referring to dealing with all the bugs in one fell swoop, combining the forces of the Martian military, the Martian clans, and your own strength?"

"Isn't that what you meant, Marshal?" That question came not from Yang Ze, but the soldiers helping to support Li Pu.

Li Pu laughed harshly. "You underestimate the bugs. A few days ago, they had yet to devour the resources of the planet, but now..."

The entire battlefield began to shake. A huge sinkhole appeared in the ground, as though the earth itself was trying to swallow everything up. The hunters present felt a huge suction that pulled everything in—the sharks, the mist, the bugs. The ground began to collapse in on itself as a huge existence appeared from underground, the shape and size of a pitch-black skyscraper...

Chapter 898: The Reinforcements Have Arrived

Li Pu explained, "When I saw the second five-star bug, I understood that the bugs had begun to evolve much faster than predicted. The fact that there were two five-star bugs present on the battlefield implied that there had to be a six-star bug somewhere, too."

The huge six-star bug rose into the sky and widened its maw at the titan-class shuttle, as though it were about to consume it whole.

The hunters present at the scene were so shaken by the appearance of the monstrous bug that they had frozen stiff, but Yang Ze remained calm. "Marshal Li, I believe you're mistaken about something."

Li Pu glanced at Yang Ze in confusion.

"I didn't come alone, you see." Yang Ze raised his head and looked toward the sky, where a shout could be heard from a distance.

A huge gale began to blow as a storm of genetic energy filled the air, destroying any airborne bugs. The skies suddenly darkened as a fish the size of a giant whale manifested above the ground.

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

A wave soared into the air. As Zhang Lie punched forward, the fish slammed its huge tail on the ground and sent a torrent of water surging into the air. Ripples of energy spread out from Zhang Lie, warping the space around him.

The towering waves looked like enraged black dragons, swamping the six-star bug that was the size of a skyscraper and knocking it down.

The waves burst apart, filling the air with ripple after ripple of genetic energy. A storm of water-attuned genetic energy flooded the battlefield, smothering the fog, smashing the ground, and utterly annihilating the bugs that were crawling all over. Bug shells, ichor, and appendages were sent flying.

The six-star bug the size of a skyscraper fell to the ground in a heap. Li Pu glanced at the scene from afar, his mouth agape. Just who was the hunter that had knocked a six-star bug down with a single punch?

"Who is that?!"

Yang Ze's head dipped in respect. "The leader of the Zenith Dojo, the king of the kingdom of Limit, the champion of the Void Cup, of mankind, and my mentor—Zhang Lie."

Li Pu's shocked expression didn't fade. "Zhang Lie!"

He now understood the source of Yang Ze's confidence. With Zhang Lie himself participating in the fight, this invasion of bugs was hardly a problem at all.

Yang Ze continued proudly, "I also work with a group of excellent hunters."

Earth-shaking sounds came from all over the encampment.

In the east, storm and lightning took to the air. A dragon of wind and tiger of thunder manifested in the skies.

To the northeast, golden radiance illuminated the skies, and a golden rain fell to the ground.

In the north, a brilliant white light scorched the air.

To the west, with a surge of vitality, a patch of forest grew out of nothing.

In the southwest, purple flames formed a bonfire that dyed the skies purple. Huge meteors fell from the skies.

To the south, a black sun and silver moon rose into the heavens. In the southeast, paired blades of white and black shot toward the ground.

Li Pu was shocked by the manifestations that had appeared all over the encampment.

"These are..."

Yang Ze smiled. "My companions, my team."

Tears suddenly fell from Marshal Li Pu's face.

Yang Ze's arrival had brought him hope. He knew that the bugs were far more difficult to deal with than they seemed, but as Yang Ze quelled more and more of his fears, Li Pu finally allowed himself to dream of salvation.

At the height of his despair, Li Pu believed that the entire galaxy had forsaken Mars. Only now could he recognize that the opposite was true. He hadn't cried even in the face of death, even against a five-star bug—but now, the moment he believed that salvation was truly here, Li Pu cried.

Yang Ze smiled sadly. Li Pu had had to shoulder too heavy a burden, one so heavy no one else could imagine its weight. He hadn't had a chance to rest since the start of the invasion—there were always more bugs to slaughter, more battles to win, more troops to command.

As the explosions rang out through the air, the swarm of bugs was forced to retreat. They fell back to avoid the slaughter.

The six-star bug slowly crawled back up. Zhang Lie's blow had heavily wounded the bug instead of killing it entirely—but the first thing the bug did was try to flee.

Yang Ze strode forward. "Rest well, Marshal. Leave this six-star bug to me."

Each step that Yang Ze took summoned crystalline lotuses around him. A horde of sharks appeared to his back.

"[The Boundless Blade: Shark Horde]!" As Yang Ze unsheathed his blade, the water-attuned genetic energy around him shot forward in a flood. The sharks followed the current toward the six-star bug, and the crystalline lotuses exploded on contact with its body.

Green ichor splattered the ground as a chain of explosions wrecked the six-star bug's body.

The pale-blue sharks ganged up on the prone bug and tore at its exoskeleton and the flesh beneath. They hindered its movement, slowing it down as Yang Ze's blade traced an arc through the air.

"[Argent Mirror]!" Yang Ze's sword swung down. A huge crack extended down the six-star bug's body from head to tail, less a sword strike than a crack splitting the surface of a mirror.

The crack propagated, and with the sound of shattered glass, the humongous six-star bug's body fell apart.

This was a brand-new technique that Yang Ze had intuited with [Reflected Sight, Refracted Vision] as the basis.

Once the six-star bug was killed and the other bugs retreated, the titan-class shuttle began to land. Zhang Lie jumped down from the shuttle as Yang Ze stepped forward and asked, "Are all the bugs in space dealt with?"

The shuttle had been beset by a swarm of bugs while heading toward Mars. Zhang Lie had leapt out of the shuttle and slaughtered a path through them.

He shrugged. "There were too many of them, and I couldn't kill them all before they ran off. I was a little worried about you, so I had the shuttle head here first."

Zhang Lie had arrived just in time to prevent the six-star bug from attacking the titan-class shuttle. At the same time, the teleportation array on the shuttle flashed. Countless disciples of the Zenith Dojo surged forth toward Mars...

Chapter 899: To the Battlefield

Sun Mengmeng stepped forward with a smile. "We've finished installing the teleportation apparatus. Three hundred thousand disciples of the Zenith Dojo are making their way over now!"

While Yang Ze defended the military encampment from the bugs, the other members of Team Zenith and Hong Xi's four-hunter group had different tasks. Some were responsible for attacking the other bug nests scattered all over Mars, forcing the bugs to retreat, while others installed the teleportation apparatus in a secure and easily defensible location.

This was the solution that Zhang Lie had proposed to deal with the situation on Mars. If they were to solely defend, it would only give the bugs more time and opportunity to grow; they would have to go on the offensive as well.

Zhang Lie decided that an elite group of forces would attack the bug nests directly to seize the initiative in this war. They would simultaneously drive the bugs back while more reinforcements arrived from Earth.

This strategy proved particularly effective, and the Zenith Dojo was able to help the besieged Martian soldiers regain much-needed control.

Many of the Zenith Dojo's disciples were smiling gleefully, clearly having bagged quite a number of bugs and points during the defense.

Zhang Lie commanded, "Yang Ze, you're from Mars. Work together with Zhang Hong to ensure that the Martian civilians return to the encampment—this is the safest place they could be at the moment."

Li Pu walked up to them with the help of a few soldiers. "You must be the dojo leader of the Zenith Dojo, the king of Limit, Zhang Lie. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for your assistance."

Li Pu was about to lower his head and bow when Zhang Lie stopped him. "Marshal Li, you're far more of a hero to Mars than I am. You've been fighting at the forefront ever since the start of the invasion."

Li Pu chuckled dryly. "I only did my duty, and I didn't even manage to do it well."

"No, hardly!" Zhang Lie replied. "To be frank, you shouldn't be thanking me—I'm here because of Martial Sage Hong Tianqi and Yang Ze. If Yang Ze hadn't expressed his intention to head to Mars, I wouldn't have come myself—and if Martial Sage Hong Tianqi hadn't enlisted the help of the Zenith Dojo, I wouldn't have brought my disciples along."

Li Pu nodded. "I understand, but I still wish to thank you. The fact that you were willing to come at all despite the grave danger that you and your disciples would face is worthy of respect."

Zhang Lie nodded.

Li Pu continued, "Are the youths behind you all from the Zenith Dojo, then? Reinforcements from Earth?"

Sun Mengmeng replied in the affirmative.

Li Pu lowered his head in gratitude. "I can't thank you enough."

No one had looked favorably on the situation on Mars, and no reinforcements were forthcoming. The fact that Zhang Lie had brought so many disciples of the Zenith Dojo over in Mars' time of greatest need spoke for itself.

"Marshal Li, please rest. We'll handle the rest," Zhang Lie suggested. "Right, I have a special restorative I brought back from the third realm. It may help with your wounds."

Zhang Lie handed over the newest potion that the Yeluo chieftain had researched.

Zhang Lie had made a name for himself in the Milky Way not just because he had won the Void Cup or founded the kingdom of Limit. Everyone knew that Zhang Lie had been the creator of the limit-breaking potions that had taken the galaxy by storm. Even leading herbalists and potioners within the Milky Way wouldn't dare claim to know more than Zhang Lie did.

Li Pu therefore knew that anything Zhang Lie handed out had to be worth its weight in gold.

Of course, what he couldn't have guessed was that this potion wasn't developed by Zhang Lie himself, but rather the Yeluo tribe.

Li Pu downed the potion in one gulp. As though he had consumed liquid vitality, his entire body seemed to teem with life. His wounds began to heal at a rate visible to the naked eye.

He gasped in amazement. "This is an incredible potion! If I had taken it before fighting with the five-star bug and worsening my injuries, I would have been at full strength..."

Unfortunately, the wounds that he had subsequently amassed would take some more time to heal.

Li Pu asked with some embarrassment, "Dojo Leader Zhang, do you have more such potions?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Marshal Li, it'll take a while for your body to handle the stress that this healing potion places on it. If you drink another one too quickly, the healing might even backfire."

What Zhang Lie couldn't say was that Zhou Ying's cells had gone into that healing potion. If too many such cells flooded into Li Pu's body, his body would innately reject them all, and he might undergo a monstrous transformation.

"Ah, my apologies. I don't mean to consume it myself—it's for my wounded soldiers."

Zhang Lie understood Li Pu's intent, but he shook his head. "I apologize, Marshal Li, but we haven't begun mass production of these potions." Your soldiers would benefit from them, but how about my Zenith Dojo's disciples?

Although he did have a stockpile of these restorative potions, he preferred to save it for the disciples of the Zenith Dojo. No one would mind having more of such a miraculous restorative, after all.

Zhang Lie even handed each disciple of the Zenith Dojo one vial of the highest-grade restorative; the other potions were all from the older batches that the Yeluo had produced.

Conveniently, Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith had a large stockpile of potions from those older batches, which could now be used immediately.

Li Pu sighed. "What a pity, but it's only to be expected. How could healing potions of such strength be mass-produced? I apologize for making a presumptuous request, Dojo Leader Zhang."

Zhou Ying stepped forward then. "Marshal Li, there's no need to worry about your injured soldiers. I'll be able to handle them."

"You? But—" Li Pu was confused as to Zhou Ying's suggestion until Zhou Ying sprung into action.

An outburst of green light shielded Zhou Ying. Her hair grew long enough to reach her legs, turning into a green the color of sparkling jade. She looked so beautiful that everyone was immediately enraptured.

The vitality radiating from her was visible to the naked eye. With a snap of her fingers, a wave of vitality spread out from her in a ring.

The soldiers in the vicinity found their wounds healing rapidly. In awe, they turned to Zhou Ying, the splitting image of a goddess of nature. Someone shouted, "A goddess, a goddess!"

"Right, a goddess!"

The Martian civilians began to kneel toward Zhou Ying.

"A goddess herself has descended on Mars."

"Please, goddess, save us all!"

The Martian civilians had despaired for days after the start of the bug invasion. None had been able to save them—neither the strength of hunters or technology. As a result, they clung to whatever brought them hope, and they were perfectly willing to venerate Zhou Ying as a goddess if she could bring them salvation.

Yang Ze stepped forward. "Zhou Ying's no goddess, but it's true that we've come to save you all!"

Chapter 900: An Ethical Dilemma

Zhang Lie likewise stepped forward to address the citizens of Mars. "We're from the Zenith Dojo, here as reinforcements."

The Yang clan head emerged from the crowd. "It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Dojo Leader Zhang. I'm the clan head of the Yang clan of Mars."

Zhang Lie smirked. "I know of you, I believe."

The Yang clan head's eyes brightened. "A great honor for me that such an esteemed personage like you would know me, Dojo Leader Zhang."

Zhang Lie folded his arms. "To be specific, I know of you because of the incident with Yang Ze on Mars."

The Yang clan head's face turned ashen. If Zhang Lie knew of him because of Yang Ze, that surely wasn't a good sign. He hadn't expected that forcing Yang Ze out of the clan and Mars would cause such a devastating chain reaction. If he could rewind time to that fateful moment, he would have done everything in his power to allow Yang Ze to remain.

The Yang clan head smiled in embarrassment. "I believe there must be some misunderstanding between us..."

Zhang Lie glanced at his transceiver and said brusquely, "My time is precious. I'll give you a minute, nothing more."

The Yang clan head hastily cut to the chase. "Dojo Leader Zhang, would you be willing to escort us away from Mars with that titan-class shuttle of yours?"

The other clan heads and members of the Yang clan all nodded.

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Before we exterminate the bugs, no one will be leaving Mars.

"What right do you have to restrict our freedom?"

"Even if you saved us, how can you force us to remain here?"

"We can leave whenever we'd like! You have no authority over us, and you're not even a Martian yourself. Even Marshal Li didn't stop us!"

The hunters of the Martian clans began to push back against Zhang Lie's statement immediately. They had already finished preparations to leave; they simply wanted to see if they could gain an extra degree of safety with the help of Zhang Lie and the titan-class shuttle he commanded.

The Yang clan head narrowed his eyes, and his expression turned icy. "We Martians believe in personal freedom. You might be strong enough to fend off the bug invasion yourself, but you have no right to restrict our departure!"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "If you won't heed my warning, then so be it. If you want to die trying to leave Mars, I certainly won't stop you."

The Yang clan head frowned. "Dojo Leader Zhang, what do you mean?"

Zhang Lie glanced at his transceiver. "Time's up. I need to discuss plans for the invasion with my disciples and Marshal Li. If you want to leave, feel free."

The Martian clan heads all stood forward in an attempt to block Zhang Lie's path. The Yang clan head shouted, "Dojo Leader Zhang, please clarify things before you leave!"

The Gu clan head added, "Don't leave before you make things clear!"

"Hoh? Do you really think you can stop me?"

A burst of genetic energy erupted from Zhang Lie, causing the clan heads to stagger back. They felt as though they were trying to contain not a person, but rather a galactic cruiser.

Genetic energy billowed from Zhang Lie like waves. The clan heads felt as though they were about to be struck by a tsunami. A howling gale shook their bodies; none of them could stand straight. They collapsed to the ground, and Zhang Lie walked out from the mess.

Zhou Ying was kind-hearted enough that she told them all what was going on. If these clan heads were to leave with their clans, all of them would become food for the space bugs that had surrounded Mars.

"There are huge swarms of bugs surrounding Mars. Our captain only cleared away a portion of them, so if you were to leave Mars on your own..."

All the clan heads immediately grew alarmed.

The Yang clan head immediately scrambled up from the ground and chased after Zhang Lie. He stumbled and fell as Zhang Lie turned around.

"What's the matter, Clan Head Yang? Don't prostrate yourself in front of me—I can hardly claim such reverence."

The Yang clan head got back up. Without even pausing to clean himself up, he bowed his head deeply. "Dojo Leader Zhang, you underestimate your strength. I apologize for not heeding your advice earlier."

If nothing else, the Yang clan head was at least willing to drop his pride and arrogance in times of need. He continued, "Given how strong you and the Zenith Dojo are, you can surely escort us from Mars!"

The other clan heads immediately followed the Yang clan head's example.

"Right, the Zenith Dojo surely can do it!"

"If they were able to enter Mars, they should be able to leave Mars as well."

"Dojo Leader Zhang, please escort us to safety!"

Zhang Lie nodded. "You're all correct. If I wanted to leave, I certainly could. The bugs all around Mars wouldn't be able to stop me, and I could escort a group of people out as well—"

The Yang clan head bowed down again in gratitude.

Zhang Lie snorted. "—but why should I?"

The Yang clan head froze.

The Gu clan head stood by the Yang clan head's side, bowing down to Zhang Lie himself. "There are over a million civilians in the military encampment."

The Yang clan head understood what the Gu clan head was up to. He lowered his head and echoed his rival's words, "Your decision will impact a million lives on Mars, Dojo Leader Zhang."

The Gu and Yang clan heads were appealing to Zhang Lie on ethical and humanitarian grounds—a matter of life-threatening urgency, a quest to save millions, a need to help the less fortunate. It was only ethical, only moral, for Zhang Lie to help out those in need, even if it came at his own expense. Wasn't that so?

Zhang Lie smiled coldly. "You may be right."

The Yang and Gu clan heads gave each other knowing smiles before Zhang Lie continued, "But what of the hundreds of millions of lives still on Mars? Do you expect me to save one person and leave ninety-nine behind?"