

## U. Warlord 1031

### Chapter 1031: Hong Xi's Transformation

If Hong Xi hadn't been lucky enough to meet Zhang Lie, the Hong clan would have been completely exterminated by now.

Unlike Zhang Lie, Hong Xi found the techniques of [Eclipse] and [Black Sun] particularly meaningful, and she had studied, researched, and cultivated them deeply. Her hard work had subsequently become her downfall.

[Eclipse] and [Black Sun] were a set of paired techniques, but they weren't a perfectly matched pair.

There had originally been little issue with [Eclipse] and [Black Sun], but upon consuming Potion #4, Hong Xi's body teetered on the precipice. A small flaw could be immediately magnified, causing a very serious problem indeed. [Eclipse] and [Black Sun] began to clash with each other.

Zhang Hanxiang hurriedly asked, "Brother, what should we do?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "There's nothing we can do. We'll have to keep watching and hope that Hong Xi can make it through this stage herself."

While the two of them were talking to each other, Hong Xi struggled. She didn't disappoint the two of them; in the end, she successfully survived the clash of energies. Gold, black, and silver threads appeared around her.

The silver threads were like skeins of moonlight, the black threads like burning flame. The gold threads represented karma and fate. The threads in three colors intertwined and mutually influenced each other.

They formed a cocoon around Hong Xi, wrapping her up in black sunlight and silver moonlight.

The cocoon pulsed like a beating heart. The energy within it grew denser and denser. The black threads exploded with light, like a burning sun, followed quickly by the silver threads, like a bright full moon.

The black and silver threads criss-crossed. Energy spread and twisted between them.

Two distinct energies swirled around the cocoon, clashing against and refining each other, trying to merge together into one. Hong Xi's cocoon seemed more like a furnace, and the black sunlight and silver moonlight like steel and flame. In their midst, something was being constructed.

An unknown change was occurring within the cocoon. Silver sunlight and black moonlight appeared, followed by a crisp, sharp snap.

A crack appeared on the surface of the cocoon. Silver moonlight flooded out, and pitch-black sunlight rushed into the air.

The crack propagated, forming a hole. Two beams of light rushed out from the cocoon, shining brightly in the air. Everyone in the superior draconian world could see them.

In the sky was a pitch-black sun and a shining silver moon. The remnant energies in the cocoon now swept out over the ground, forming a sea of black flames that melted the frost that remained from Zhang Hanxiang's earlier advancement.

With a wave of his hand, Zhang Lie blocked the advance of the flames, shielding himself and his sister. As silver moonlight merged into the sea of black flames, the ground cracked.

The cocoon completely crumbled. Black flames and silver moonlight shrouded Hong Xi. Her twin eyes were bright: the left had transformed into a miniature black sun, and the right into a miniature silver moon.

In the sky, a golden thread appeared between the black sun and silver moon. As Hong Xi pointed at the sky, her fingers twisting together, the golden thread forced the black sun and silver moon to merge.

Zhang Lie's eyes gleamed in understanding. "A genius idea—to make use of karmic power to combine [Eclipse] and [Black Sun]."

[Eclipse] and [Black Sun] were already a matched pair of techniques, and there was a strong karmic link between them. The longstanding feud between the Hong and Musi clans had strengthened that link manifold, and Hong Xi cultivated both techniques personally. Her idea of combining the techniques via a karmic link was evidently a huge success.

The black sun and silver moon slowly approached each other. As they grew closer, their colors changed. The black sun turned slightly gray, and the silver moon, slightly brown.

The draconian sage appeared by Zhang Lie and Zhang Hanxiang's side with a sudden teleport. "What's going on now?"

Upon witnessing the black sun and silver moon in the air, he was quite certain that Hong Xi was the cause of the disturbance this time, and Zhang Hanxiang with the sudden change in temperature moments before. When the members of Team Zenith had consumed Potion #4, they had caused similar disturbances around them.

"Shh!" the two Zhang siblings both shushed the draconian sage immediately, who couldn't help but remark on the familial resemblance.

He turned to Hong Xi and watched warily as she absorbed her newly unlocked energy, in case she caused an explosion as Fang Yi had.

Despite the fact that the draconian world had evolved into a superior world, and that they were in the wilderness, the draconian sage would still be upset to see his land explode away.

The black sun and silver moon began to merge. The black sun turned a deep red, and the silver moon a rusty red. Everyone in the draconian world looked up at the unexpected celestial phenomenon, the merging black sun and silver moon.

"What's that?"

"Not the beginning of an apocalypse, surely?"

"Could it be invaders from afar?"

"Why is there an additional sun and moon in the sky?!"

Fear, curiosity, panic, and shock—all sorts of emotions filled the aliens, the entire draconian world.

As the king of the realm, the draconian sage could naturally sense their panic and worry. He immediately announced, "Everyone, remain calm. This is an unusual phenomenon, but there's nothing to be worried about. Leaders of the various alien races, please maintain order."

With the king of the realm's pronouncement, the aliens naturally relaxed.

The black sun and silver moon merged perfectly, forming a bright-red wheel of fire, as their corresponding energies combined as well.

The wheel of flame shone with light. A beam of light shot down toward Hong Xi, covering her body. Energy coalesced behind her back and formed a crimson sun. On its surface, a pale blue moon appeared.

With the appearance of the moon, a pale blue domain formed all around her. Zhang Lie and Zhang Hanxiang, who were within the domain, found their strength being sapped away...

#### Chapter 1032: A Perfect Fusion

The pale blue domain of celestial flame that Hong Xi had erected was far stronger than Zhang Lie's aura of [Eclipse].

Hong Xi's twinned eyes glowed. Her black left eye was ringed with crimson flame, and her silver right eye with a pale blue flame.

The two antipodal flames flickered in sync with each other. Suddenly, both eyes glowed gold, and Hong Xi reined in the manifestation of her newfound strength.

Zhang Lie smiled in satisfaction. "It looks like you've succeeded."

Hong Xi lowered her head. "Thank you for taking me in, Master."

"Your success is due to the fruits of your labor. I merely gave you an opportunity."

Hong Xi continued seriously, "No, Master. When [Eclipse] and [Black Sun] merged into a cohesive whole, I was given a vision of the past by karma. It reminded me that, if you hadn't been present to save me and my brother, we would have perished. I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

Zhang Lie touched his nose, about to say something, when a white figure scampered up to her. Zhang Hanxiang dashed forward and pounced on her, hugging Hong Xi tightly. "Hong Xi, you've succeeded too!"

"Yes, I have." Hong Xi smiled gently and hugged Zhang Hanxiang back.

Zhang Lie asked curiously, "What special abilities do you have now that [Eclipse] and [Black Sun] have merged?"

Hong Xi's understanding of the two techniques far surpassed Zhang Lie's own.

Although Zhang Lie had also merged [Eclipse] and [Black Sun] together to form [Syzygy], Hong Xi's merger of the two techniques was entirely different.

Zhang Lie had done so forcefully with his overwhelming strength and experience, but Hong Xi instead connected the two techniques via karma. Neither strategy was necessarily superior to the other; they were simply different, as would be the resulting techniques.

Hong Xi's back flashed blue. "There are two effects. The domain of [Lunar Eclipse] saps away the strength of all enemies in the region and transfers it to me, whereas the domain of [Solar Eclipse] strengthens all allies in the domain, much as [Black Sun] did."

"Very impressive!"

Perhaps because of how much the recent war had weighed on her mind, Hong Xi had manifested this twin pair of techniques, an advancement over [Eclipse] and [Black Sun].

On the battlefield, she would be able to strengthen all her allies and weaken all her enemies, which was where her true strength would shine.

Zhang Lie continued, "Although I'd like to allow both of you to remain here to get a sense of the powers you've unlocked, to extract as much of the potency from the potion as you can, we need to move on. Let's return to Sun Mengmeng and the others."

The draconian sage suggested, "Let me teleport all of you back."

Zhang Lie asked curiously, "Sage, have you finished inspecting the changes to the superior draconian world?"

"Yes, I have. There were massive changes—I barely recognize my own world."

The draconian sage himself had grown stronger. Careful inspection and understanding of his world was a path to growing strong as a king of the realm.

In the past, the draconian world was limited in scope and size, and the effect of this study was minimal. Now that the draconian world was a superior world, the effect of such understanding was noticeably more pronounced.

Zhang Lie's eyes gleamed. "Did you discover anything good?"

The draconian sage groused, "This is the main thrust of your questioning, isn't it?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I'm just asking."

The draconian sage continued, "And what of it?"

"A newly evolved superior world must have lots of goodies, surely." Zhang Lie grinned as he pulled out a list of ingredients for Potion #5, for disaster-grade limit fragments.

There were surely many spiritual herbs and ingredients that had popped out after the draconian world evolved into a superior world, and Zhang Lie would claim what he could. He intended on making quite a few excess disaster-grade potions, and he intended to collect all the ingredients he could.

When the draconian sage saw the list, he glared at Zhang Lie and frowned, "What do you take me for, an apothecary? This is my world, a superior world! Are you trying to turn my superior world into an apothecary?"

The draconian sage sighed and took the list. "There are many herbs on this list that I don't recognize. Once I'm done with my affairs, I'll ask the Yeluo chieftain for assistance."

The draconian sage didn't refuse Zhang Lie's request because he knew what an impactful role Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith had played in allowing the world to evolve.

As long as their requests wouldn't actively harm the draconians and destroy their foundations, he would accede to as many of them as he could. After all, the draconian world had only grown to its current glory because of them. Without them, there would be no superior draconian world.

"Thank you for your hard work," Zhang Lie replied, grinning.

The draconian sage sniffed as he transported them all back to the members of Team Zenith. When Sun Mengmeng saw them return, she smiled. "It looks like you're all finished with Potion #4, then."

Zhang Hanxiang smiled as she puffed out her chest. "I've grown quite a bit stronger!"

Yang Ze glanced at Zhang Hanxiang's chest. "Where?"

Zhang Hanxiang scowled at Yang Ze as she hurriedly folded her arms.

Zhang Lie flicked his fingers, sending a stream of water-attuned genetic energy at Yang Ze. Caught by surprise, Yang Ze was sent flying. He landed sprawled on the ground.

Zhang Hanxiang stuck out her tongue at him. "Serves you right!"

The other members of Team Zenith laughed.

Sun Mengmeng patted Hong Xi on the shoulder.

"Hong Xi, you're stronger than we were back then. We could see the manifestation of your evolution all the way over here."

Hong Xi smiled in embarrassment.

Zhang Lie turned to the draconian sage. "Have you thought of a good replacement?"

The draconian sage suggested. "How about Chen Fan?"

"He's not too reliable."

The draconian sage replied, "Chu Feng's one option, and I can select someone I'm relatively familiar with among the draconians as well. Yun Bing would also be suited for the task, but it's a pity..."

Zhang Hanxiang asked curiously, "A pity? Why, Sage?"

The draconian sage replied, "Yun Bing is helping me deal with interspecies conflicts among the aliens. If she has to be sent here, I'd have a huge headache."

Everyone knew how skilled Yun Bing was at administration.

Zhang Lie smiled. "Yun Bing is indeed very reliable, but it's a waste for her to work on such a small scale. She should have a grander stage on which to shine."

Chapter 1033: Cultivation Plans

Zhang Lie asked, "How well does Yun Bing handle things?"

Zhang Hanxiang nodded fervently.

While she was the princess of the kingdom of Limit in the second realm, Yun Bing had been prime minister. She had taken care of everything, and Zhang Hanxiang's role was purely ornamental.

Despite the fact that she was a princess of Limit and Zhang Lie's only family member, and thus should have been a queenly existence, Zhang Hanxiang's personality and experience made her ill-suited to managing a kingdom. If she were responsible for its administration, she would have made a mess.

Furthermore, she didn't have any desire to manage the kingdom, either. Yun Bing had been the one who did everything from behind the scenes.

While Zhang Hanxiang was still in the kingdom of Limit, Yun Bing had resolved all the problems that had popped up, allowing her to remain a happy princess unfettered by politics.

Zhang Hanxiang wasn't a fool. She knew how hard Yun Bing had worked to prevent her from being trapped in any ploys.

After all, Zhang Hanxiang was the only princess of Limit, the only royalty of Limit, and many people wanted to make use of her identity to cause trouble. These people included both aliens and hunters of the Milky Way.

No matter how strong the members of Team Zenith were, they couldn't ferret out all the rats that remained in hiding. It was Yun Bing who dug them out one by one, then twisted their necks, never afraid to dirty her hands.

She was an impeccable politician and administrator, a universal handyman.

Zhang Lie said, "Calling her a handyman is a form of praise! Don't you understand? If you tell Yun Bing that I called her a handyman and she refuses to be a handyman anymore, no, refuses to help us anymore, what would we do?"

Zhang Hanxiang visibly hesitated then.

Zhang Lie continued, "If there's a kingdom of Limit again in the future, or even a world of Limit, would you be willing to become its administrator?"

Zhang Hanxiang made a zipping motion with her mouth, implying that she wouldn't reveal a single word.

Sun Mengmeng laughed. "Hanxiang, there's no need to worry. Yun Bing likes what she does."

Zhang Hanxiang asked curiously, "She likes being a handyman?"

Sun Mengmeng folded her arms. "For one, Zhang Lie is Yun Bing's idol, and she's been following him since the very beginning. For another, Yun Bing knows she's skilled in this area, and she's able to maintain her status and obtain rare resources thanks to her abilities. Because she's comparatively weak at fighting, this is the best path forward for her."

Zhou Ying nodded. "Yun Bing has always been happy about the fact that her actions can change the entire world."

That was the true reason she enjoyed her work, not because she liked being a handyman.

Zhang Hanxiang considered this thoughtfully. "Doing work to obtain resources... hold on, are you sure she isn't just an employee?"

Yang Ze joked, "Even our employees are the best of the best."

The draconian sage interrupted their conversation. "Back to business, which of the candidates do you think is best?"

"Chu Feng, I suppose. There's no one more reliable than he is."

The draconian sage nodded. "Very well. I'll pick someone from among the draconians as well, and we'll have Chu Feng and the draconian supervise this territory and each other. I don't think there'll be a problem then."

Zhang Lie nodded. "I'll leave this to you, then."

He waved at the members of Team Zenith. "It's time for us to head out!"

Sun Mengmeng rushed over. "What are we doing, Captain? What are you treating us to?"

"The meat of a monarch-grade lifeform."

"What?!" The members of Team Zenith were astounded.

"Monarch-grade?!"

"You mean, above disaster-grade?"

Zhang Lie explained, "Thanks to the genetic lifeform farm that has been set up, we've managed to cultivate lifeforms beyond disaster-grade. The evolution of the draconian world also brought many benefits to the lifeforms in the region, and one of the disaster-grade lifeforms evolved directly into monarch-grade. It's very large."

Generally, a disaster-grade lifeform that evolved into monarch-grade would shrink rather than grow, and there would only be enough meat for one or two people to consume.

Zhang Lie added, "It's large enough that all of us can eat our fill."

Sun Xiaowu cried out, "Captain, you've finally succeeded in cultivating a monarch-grade lifeform?"

Sun Mengmeng scowled at her brother. "Have you forgotten that the gold mantis that's always by Zhang Lie's side is a monarch-grade lifeform?"

Sun Xiaowu replied in excitement, "But that's a unique case, Sis! If we're able to mass-produce monarch-grade lifeforms at will..."

It would change the entire development of the Milky Way. Zhang Lie, who controlled the spread of these monarch-grade lifeforms, would be able to have the galaxy at his fingertips.

This was why the members of Team Zenith were always the strongest hunters.

There were countless hunters in the Milky Way, with all sorts of unique racial abilities and affinities. There were plenty who were more talented than the members of Team Zenith, and

humanity was little more than a speck of dust in comparison. Humanity certainly didn't possess enough resources to compare favorably to the four prime races of the Milky Way.

Zhang Lie's appearance meant that humanity was considered a rising star, but it was still difficult to compare it to the four prime races, who had been gathering and stockpiling resources for centuries on end.

So why was it that the humans, the six members of Team Zenith, were able to dominate the hunters of the Milky Way to such an extent?

In the second realm, the members of Team Zenith had been stronger than the members of the four prime races. In the third realm, the members of Team Zenith had crushed the members of the four prime races. What explained that discrepancy?

They had made ample use of limit-breaking potions, and their accumulation of gene fragments had allowed them to advance as disaster-grade lifeforms through the second realm.

Why was it that the members of Team Zenith were able to evolve as disaster-grade lifeforms the moment information about disaster-grade lifeforms was released? It was all because Zhang Lie had set up a disaster-grade farm.

Many hunters had flitted with the idea of setting up a farm for such lifeforms, and many of the stronger races in the Milky Way had even tried it.

Some had succeeded, but much more had failed. The stronger these lifeforms became, the harder they would be to control.

Even with a huge investment of resources, these farms were barely successful—and unlike Zhang Lie, they wouldn't be able to directly cultivate disaster-grade lifeforms.

Those successful farms were at most able to handle regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms. Superior-grade lifeforms were already too difficult to control, even if they had been cultivated since birth.

There were far too many regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms easily available in the various realms, and these farms weren't worth the resources invested into them.

In the end, everyone who tried to farm gene fragments gave up, and this was why the other races failed where Zhang Lie had succeeded...

#### Chapter 1034: Another Monarch-Grade Lifeform

Zhang Lie made use of the rare combination of his disaster-grade mistmeld clam soulshard and Zhu's special racial abilities to prevent the genetic lifeforms from breaking free. This was how he had been able to build such a massive farm, allowing the kingdom of Limit to produce strong warriors without end, strong hunters that would start out in the third realm as disaster-grade lifeforms.

Sun Xiaowu continued, "Our captain's genetic lifeform farm has clearly been very successful. The fact that it's been able to produce a monarch-grade lifeform means that we can generate them en masse."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Mass production of monarch-grade lifeforms is too much."

Sun Xiaowu asked, "Can't it be done?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "Disaster-grade lifeforms that want to advance need some sort of catalyst."

"What catalyst?"

"The energy of a superior world."

Everyone in Team Zenith gasped. "That's ridiculous!"

The members of Team Zenith had invaded quite a few worlds and interacted with a number of kings of the realm, so they had some familiarity with the world's energy.

Although they were yet unfamiliar with superior worlds, they knew that a superior world's energy was a rare treasure indeed. Currently, there were only nine superior worlds, six from antiquity, and three that had recently evolved. It felt as though there were an unwritten rule in the third realm that mandated that there be no more than ten superior worlds at once, as though the realm could only sustain that many superior worlds at once before older ones were destroyed and newer ones formed.

The appearance of a new superior world necessitated the disappearance of an older one. This was the law of the third realm, which Blood Heaven and the draconian world had experienced for themselves.

And yet the evolution of a disaster-grade lifeform into a monarch-grade one required a superior world's energy?

Sun Mengmeng sighed. "As expected, trying to cultivate a monarch-grade lifeform is no easy feat."

Sun Xiaowu nodded. "I suppose so... it would be rather ridiculous to be able to mass-produce monarch-grade lifeforms, wouldn't it?"

Yang Ze commented, "It's impressive enough that our captain succeeded once."

"Or rather," Fang Yi added, "No one else would even have known where to begin."

Li Feng shrugged. "Our captain is exceptionally talented. If he hadn't revealed the existence of disaster-grade lifeforms to the world, no one would even know about them at this point! We had no clue ourselves."

Zhou Ying nodded. "That's right. Many people still aren't aware that there are lifeforms beyond disaster-grade, either."

"Haha, my brother's the best!" Zhang Hanxiang latched on to Zhang Lie's arm.

Zhang Lie sighed. "Alright, alright, that's enough. If you keep praising me like that, I'll get big-headed. Zhu's the one who did most of the work with the farm, at any rate."

Zhang Hanxiang replied, "But if you didn't identify how to cultivate monarch-grade lifeforms, Brother, you wouldn't have succeeded!"

Zhang Lie didn't deny that.

Sun Mengmeng continued, "If we need a superior world's energy as a catalyst, just how many superior worlds do we have to destroy to obtain a hundred monarch gene fragments...?"

Zhang Lie replied, "A regular world's energy would work as well, but it'd take quite a bit longer."

When the scaleman world had been invaded by black spirits, Zhang Lie had exterminated them all and claimed the world's energy that they had collected, roughly ten large worlds' worth. There had been enough world's energy then to cultivate a few monarch-grade lifeforms.

Zhang Lie had identified two possible means of cultivating monarch-grade lifeforms: either by having it kill large numbers of disaster-grade lifeforms, or by having it consume a world's energy, preferably a superior world's energy.

The first method would undoubtedly require a tremendous number of disaster-grade lifeforms, which weren't easy to mass-produce themselves, or a tremendous number of worlds. The first method sacrificed time; the second, resources.

"At any rate, let's return to the farm first."

Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith moved quickly, and they returned to the genetic lifeform farm within moments.

Zhang Lie waved. "Zhu, I've come over for the monarch-grade lifeform."

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

The members of Team Zenith quickly dismembered the monarch-grade lifeform and made a hotpot with it. Zhang Lie beckoned Zhu over. "Come on, Zhu, join us!"

Zhu waved a hand. "No, there's no need. The meat is precious, and I don't gain as much from it as you all do."

Even so, Zhang Lie brought Zhu over. "You're the one who has been taking care of these lifeforms. You deserve to join us, too."

Everyone began to gobble up the food. Zhang Lie took a slice of meat and felt it melt in his mouth.

[For consuming the flesh of a monarch-grade mountainous peak dragon, you received one monarch gene fragment. Current total: 26]

Fang Yi cried out, "I wanted that slice of meat!"

Yang Ze laughed at him. "Then you'd better grab it faster next time."

Sun Xiaowu harrumphed. "Go fight by the side—I'm trying to eat!"

Sun Mengmeng warned, "If you guys don't start eating, there won't be any meat left."

Zhang Lie laughed at their antics. "Don't worry. There's plenty of meat over there."

[For consuming the flesh of a monarch-grade mountainous peak dragon, you received one monarch gene fragment. Current total: 27]

[For consuming the flesh of a monarch-grade mountainous peak dragon, you received one monarch gene fragment. Current total: 28]

[For consuming the flesh of a monarch-grade mountainous peak dragon, you received one monarch gene fragment. Current total: 29]

After finishing the meal, Zhang Lie had gained a total of ten monarch gene fragments, and his strength had even increased by almost 20%. Ten monarch gene fragments didn't seem like a lot, but their effect was evident.

He once again reviewed his data.

Zhang Lie: a disaster-grade lifeform

Techniques: Rippling Walk (pinnacle), Three-Wave Crescendo (pinnacle), Calm Waters (pinnacle), Fists of the Silent Sea (pinnacle), The Boundless Blade (pinnacle), Eclipse (pinnacle), Syzygy (pinnacle), Ninesoul Dragonblade (advanced), Blade of the Heavens (pinnacle)

Genes: Basic, 160; Mutated, 150; Superior, 150; Peak, 150; Disaster, 100; Monarch, 35

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

Chapter 1035: Bad to Step In

Everyone who finished the meal gained ten monarch gene fragments. Because this was the first time the members of Team Zenith and Zhang Hanxiang were consuming monarch-grade meat, the impact it would have on their bodies was significant. They would all need to rest and consolidate their strength.

Unlike what Zhu had said, the monarch-grade lifeform meat turned out to be quite valuable for her. The flesh of high-grade genetic lifeforms had a particularly beneficial effect even on aliens, allowing them to strengthen their bodies.

The explosive strength it contained would hasten their own cultivation, though the effect was far less direct than with the hunters of the Milky Way.

Zhang Lie stood up and was about to leave when Zhu, who had finished consolidating her strength, opened her eyes and asked, "Won't you wait for the others?"

Zhang Lie replied, "It isn't dangerous here, so there's no need for me to remain present—and what's more, you're here too, aren't you?"

With Zhu around, no one would disturb the members of Team Zenith and Zhang Hanxiang from digesting the monarch-grade meat they had just consumed.

Zhu shook her head. "That's not what I mean. Aren't you going to say farewell to them when they wake up?"

Zhang Lie sighed. "It's not as though I'm leaving forever—just a few days. I'll be back in two days to participate in the meeting among the superior worlds. There's no danger."

Zhu widened her sapphire-like eyes, each of which seemed as wide as an ocean. "I'll miss you, Zhang Lie."

Zhang Lie reached out and patted Zhu on the head, feeling her soft, cold, wavy hair. "I'll just be a few days. Keep working hard on cultivating the genetic lifeforms and await my return."

Zhu nodded. "I'll cultivate another monarch-grade lifeform, so you'd better return quickly!"

Zhang Lie waved a hand in farewell, shattered space, and left.

He arrived by the disaster-grade multicolored dragon's side. When the dragon sensed his arrival, it immediately widened its eyes.

Zhang Lie patted it on the head and grumbled, "You've been with me for so long! Why haven't you advanced yet?"

It was evident that the multicolored dragon was already beyond an ordinary disaster-grade lifeform in strength, but trying to break through the next threshold was no mean feat. Perhaps different lifeforms had to accumulate different amounts of energy between each threshold.

The disaster-grade multicolored dragon keened in protest: Do you think every disaster-grade lifeform is like that weirdo, Gold Comet? It was ridiculous that it had gone from superior-grade all the way to disaster-grade in such a short period of time, and from there into monarch-grade. I'm normal; Gold Comet's just too fast!

Zhang Lie didn't, and indeed couldn't, realize just how aggrieved the dragon felt.

"Alright, then, let's set off!"

Zhang Lie clambered up the dragon's back and into the palace therein. The disaster-grade dragon spread its wings, flapped them, and flew off toward the Zongming world.

The moment Zhang Lie arrived, Li Zongming seemed to sense him. He teleported right outside the palace. Zhang Lie waved and stepped out.

Li Zongming called out, "Zhang Lie, you're finally here! I was wondering whether you had too many affairs to take care of in the draconian world now that it had evolved into a superior world, and whether it might delay our departure."

Zhang Lie replied, "There's no need to worry, Your Majesty. I'm punctual and reliable."

Li Zongming glared at him. "I told you, call me Father or Father-in-Law!"

Zhang Lie touched his nose without answering Li Zongming.

Li Zongming didn't mind. "Do you want to go see Qianlin for a bit?"

"Of course." Zhang Lie flew to her room and knocked.

"Come in," Li Qianlin's pleasant voice called out.

"Did you miss me?" Zhang Lie asked, pushing open the door.

Li Qianlin rolled her eyes. "Dream on! You haven't been gone for long. Why should I miss you?"

Zhang Lie sighed. "I'm a lonely child that no one cares about..."

"You're a rather fast-growing child, aren't you?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "Just two days ago, I wonder who was it that was almost bawling her eyes out because of me..."

Li Qianlin blushed red. "Who was almost bawling her eyes out? My eyes were simply sweating!"

"...just what sort of biology do you have that you sweat from your eyes?"

"Hmph!"

Zhang Lie stepped forward and reached out to grab Li Qianlin's hands. Li Qianlin tried to break free from his grip, but she gave up after a few tries.

Zhang Lie looked her in the eyes. "I did miss you. I've missed you for an entire year."

"When have we been apart for a year?"

Li Qianlin blushed as she lowered her head, not daring to look straight into Zhang Lie's ardent gaze.

Zhang Lie smiled. "China has an ancient proverb: a day without seeing each other is like being apart for three autumns. It's been too long, hasn't it?"

Li Qianlin freed her hands from Zhang Lie's grip and turned around. "Is this how you pick up innocent girls?"

"Why would I do so?"

"Don't you have lots of beauties around you? Aren't you enjoying being around Sun Mengmeng?"

"What's this about Sun Mengmeng?"

"If not Sun Mengmeng, then how about Hong Xi, or Yun Bing? There are so many beautiful women around you that I don't know how to feel. As an alien princess, I might feel fresh and exciting to you—but how about after that freshness has passed?"

Zhang Lie whirled Li Qianlin around and faced her seriously, directly. "The only thing I'd like to steal with my words is your heart."

The two of them looked at each other, gradually growing closer, just as a voice piped up from outside the door. "I can't see anything, nothing at all! Pretend I'm not here."

Zhang Lie turned around in rage. He was familiar with this voice, of course. "Damn it, Dong Mingxing! Don't you know how to read the mood?"

If you wanted us to pretend you weren't here, you shouldn't have made any noise! Not only were you peeping at us from outside, you even interrupted us at the most critical moment...

Dong Mingxing snapped back, "I was going to welcome you after seeing your dragon! What sort of attitude is this?"

Zhang Lie found Li Zongming in the audience chamber. Li Zongming sipped his tea and turned to him. "How was your chat with Qianlin?"

Zhang Lie's face was as dark as charcoal. "Don't mention it. I'm sure you saw how it went as the king of the realm, didn't you?"

Li Zongming laughed as he handed him a cup of tea. "Don't be angry. Have some tea and calm down. I can't imagine Dong Mingxing harbors any ill will."

Zhang Lie snatched the tea over and downed it in a single gulp. "You knew she was there, and you didn't stop her!"

Seeing Zhang Lie drink the highest-quality tea as though it were water, Li Zongming winced. "I shouldn't meddle in the affairs of the young."

"Considering how much I do for you, can't you do this much for me?"

Li Zongming had a pained expression on his face as he replied, "Surely you don't expect me to guard the door for you? As the king of the realm, I'd hope I could keep a little dignity..."

Chapter 1036: Feeling Down

If nothing else, Li Zongming was Li Qianlin's father. It was good enough that he wasn't preventing Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin from seeing each other, and he was happy to provide a little assistance, but for him to serve as a meat shield as well...

Zhang Lie calmed down somewhat and cleared his head. This wasn't Li Zongming's fault.

"It's all that crazy woman's doing!" Zhang Lie grabbed the tea that Li Zongming had just poured and swallowed it all.

Li Zongming asked, "Do you have any thoughts regarding the upcoming meeting?"

"None at all!" Zhang Lie's temper still hadn't subsided completely.

Li Zongming smiled. "You haven't had a chance to rest since the war. Take some time to do so now. I've already prepared a guest room. We can set off once it's time for the meeting. No one will bother you before then."

Zhang Lie thought back to what had happened during the last few days. Indeed, he hadn't had an opportunity to rest—he had been continuously moving from one objective to the next, without any time to rest. Because his body was strong, he didn't notice the strain, and if he were to continue like this, he would collapse.

Although Zhang Lie's mental fortitude was stronger than everyone else's, that didn't mean it was unlimited. The fact that he hadn't noticed his strain until now wasn't a good thing; it was a very serious issue indeed. It meant that he had grown accustomed to his fatigued state, both physically and mentally.

At that point, it was difficult for him to identify that anything was wrong, and if something really were to happen, his mental or physical state might give out on the spot.

For example, while staying up overnight, you might feel a little faint. That was normal—but if you stayed up long enough, you would suddenly feel much more energetic and clear-headed, so much so that you couldn't sleep even if you wanted to.

But that was all just an illusion caused by adrenaline. Your brain would eventually become more and more sluggish, and the best solution was to go to sleep immediately before your mental state became worse.

Zhang Lie's body would be able to withstand things a little longer, but who knew what would happen during the meeting of the superior kings? It wouldn't be unusual if the superior kings of antiquity were to gang up on him during the meeting.

Zhang Lie nodded. "Thank you for the offer. I'll rest a little."

He took a shower and went to lie in bed. Although he wasn't tired, in preparation for the upcoming meeting,

Zhang Lie thought that he had better sleep. He even contemplated knocking himself out, though there was no such need. Eventually, he fell into a state of dormancy.

He thought he could sense Li Qianlin and Dong Mingxing make their way over at some point, but Li Zongming blocked them from entering.

In a daze, he heard, "His majesty has forbidden anyone from disturbing the guest inside."

Dong Mingxing snorted. "Don't you know who I am, and who's by my side? That's your princess! How dare you block my way!"

The guard hesitated. "Miss Dong, please don't make our lives difficult."

Dong Mingxing cried out, "You know who we are, and you're still daring to block us?!"

The guard replied, "Miss Dong, his majesty himself instructed us to ensure that the guest within can rest well. We can't let anyone by."

"Hey, you inside, how dare you avoid our visit! If you don't come out, I'm going to come in for you!"

Li Qianlin visibly hesitated. "Mingxing, since Zhang Lie is resting, we shouldn't disturb him."

Dong Mingxing cried out angrily, "Qianlin, you're too good-tempered! You can't let someone like Zhang Lie get too comfortable, or something will happen immediately. I'm going to rush in now—who's going to stop me?!"

"And if I do?" Li Zongming suddenly teleported before them.

Dong Mingxing obediently shut up and lowered her head.

Li Zongming frowned. "Surely you wouldn't try to get through me, would you?"

Dong Mingxing was silent.

Li Zongming, mindful that this was where Zhang Lie was resting, chose not to berate them loudly right there and then. With a snort, he transported them all away, and Zhang Lie couldn't hear what transpired next.

"What's wrong with the two of you? I commanded that no one was to disturb Zhang Lie. Why did you try to get past the guards?"

Li Zongming glared at them both. "Dong Mingxing, I gave you full permissions to roam the palace because you were Qianlin's friend, as well as someone who's aware of the big picture. What made you so rash today?"

Dong Mingxing instantly lowered her head.

"Li Qianlin, you have truly disappointed me." Li Zongming stared grimly at his daughter.

Dong Mingxing hurriedly shouted, "No, it's not Qianlin's fault! I insisted on rushing in on my own."

Li Qianlin shook her head. "No, no, it was me. I made some snacks and, thinking that it was rare that Zhang Lie was here, decided to send him some."

Li Zongming snorted. "You're both as thick as thieves, I see."

Li Qianlin sighed. "I'm sorry, Father."

Li Zongming sighed as well. "Both of you used to know better."

Dong Mingxing sounded exasperated. "Perhaps it's because we spent too much time in the draconian world, which doesn't have any of the constraints and trappings of court."

Li Zongming advised, "Be more mindful in the future. Zhang Lie just returned from the battlefield, and he hasn't had any time to rest. He's been rushing back and forth because of the evolution of the draconian world, and he's tired both mentally and physically. It's rare that he has some downtime, so don't disturb him."

Li Qianlin couldn't help but feel a twinge of pain at Zhang Lie's suffering.

Dong Mingxing explained, "We truly are sorry, Your Majesty. We worked hard to make these snacks, and this is our first time giving the fruits of our labor to a man—so when we heard that Zhang Lie refused to see us, that our hard work was for naught, I was so upset I tried to barge inside."

Li Zongming clasped both hands behind his back. "Indeed? And yet my daughter has never made me any snacks before..."

Li Qianlin couldn't help but laugh.

"Father, if you don't mind, please have these snacks. I'll make another serving with Dong Mingxing later."

Li Zongming waved a hand. "Forget it. I'm sure Zhang Lie will be very interested in them once he wakes up, and I won't try to snatch them away from him. I'll bring him the snacks once he's up. I do have to talk to him as well, at any rate."

Li Qianlin bowed. "In that case, Father, let me and Mingxing make you a serving too."

Upon witnessing Li Qianlin and Dong Mingxing walk away, Li Zongming smiled.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Zhang Lie blearily opened his eyes, stretched, and went off to find Li Zongming. He found him seated in front of a table, sipping tea as he ate his daughter's snacks with a rare look of enjoyment on his face. He turned to Zhang Lie.

"Are you rested now?"

Zhang Lie replied, "Ah, it's not my own bed, so I'm a little unused to it..."

Li Zongming:...

Chapter 1037: No Impression

Zhang Lie sat down and poured himself a cup of tea.

Li Zongming informed him, "You slept for a day and a night."

Zhang Lie's eyes widened. "Is that so? Maybe I really was too tired."

Zhang Lie had a sip of tea and reached out for a snack on Li Zongming's platter, but he blocked Zhang Lie's grasp immediately. Zhang Lie grumbled, "Hey, don't be so stingy! It's just a few snacks!"

Even when they were dividing up the superior worlds' energy, Li Zongming had been more generous than this.

Li Zongming explained happily, "My daughter made them."

"Qianlin made them? Then I must insist on having a few," Zhang Lie replied.

Li Zongming pointed at the basket to the side, which had been spatially locked. "Yours are over there."

Zhang Lie walked over and broke the lock. Thanks to the spatial seal, the snacks were still warm.

If anyone else were to see that someone had invoked a spatial lock just to preserve the temperature of a few snacks, they would surely spit out blood. This was the equivalent of killing mosquitoes with a railgun—it would have been more than sufficient to let the snacks cool, and then to warm them up again later.

This was the privilege of a king of the realm, who could do whatever he wanted—even tear apart space just to kill a mosquito.

However, neither Zhang Lie nor Li Zongming found anything wrong with using a spatial lock to preserve these snacks. Li Qianlin herself had made them; so what if they preserved it with a spatial lock? No amount of money or strength could buy such snacks.

Zhang Lie was peckish given that he had just woken up. He stuffed a square of what seemed like cake into his mouth, finding it sweet and fragrant, soft and gelatinous. He hurriedly consumed a few more mouthfuls. Brimming with love, he asked, "Did Qianlin and Dong Husky come over?"

Li Zongming nodded. "To see you, but they left since you were resting."

"Really?" Zhang Lie glanced at Li Zongming skeptically.

Li Zongming asked, "What's the matter?"

Zhang Lie replied, "That's not how I remember it..."

Li Zongming rolled his eyes. "You were sleeping. What's there to recall?"

"Perhaps, but given my strength, I should be able to sense something no matter how soundly I was sleeping."

"Why would I lie to you? Right, what do you mean by Dong Husky?" Li Zongming changed the topic.

"I'm referring to Dong Mingxing, of course."

"Why call her Husky?"

"A husky is a breed of dog we have on Earth. It's very mischievous. The first time I saw Dong Mingxing, I thought she was beautiful; the second time, I thought she was beautiful and with an interesting personality. The third time, I thought she was beautiful and with an interesting

personality, but troubled and problematic. The Nth time, I realized she was a husky disguised as a beautiful woman."

Li Zongming sipped his tea. "Mingxing seems to be interested in you."

"I'm not interested in her!" Zhang Lie replied.

"She's a tremendous beauty, as well as a skilled expert of the Zongming world."

Zhang Lie chuckled coldly. "If I had to be interested in every stunning beauty in the realm, I'd be dead."

Li Zongming laughed. "I mean, she's very, deeply, interested in you."

"I'm not interested."

Li Zongming glanced at him skeptically. "I'm serious. I've never seen Mingxing behave like this with another man. To you, she really might—"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "I have no interest in her."

Li Zongming smiled happily. "It looks as though you really are devoted to my daughter. I'm very satisfied. You've passed my test."

Zhang Lie replied, "There's no need to test me. My feelings toward Li Qianlin, in this life or the last, and even in the future, will never change."

Li Zongming waved a hand. "Alright, you don't have to prove anything to me anymore. To me, you've long since become my son-in-law already."

"I'm serious." He had loved Li Qianlin in his past life, and he would continue doing so in this one.

Li Zongming replied, "It looks like it's almost time for the meeting, and you've already rested. We should set off now. Do you want to say farewell to Qianlin?"

Zhang Lie stuffed the remaining snacks into his mouth, swallowed them all, and then drank a sip of tea. He shook his head. "There's no need. We'll just be a few days—how long could the meeting last?"

"In that case, let's set off." With a wave of his hand, Li Zongming summoned a dimensional portal.

They had been to the superior kings' specialized meeting world once, and they were aware of its coordinates. Now that Li Zongming was a superior king himself, he could open a passageway to it without any external intervention.

Zhang Lie and Li Zongming stepped through the long tunnel and back into that unusual world, in which scarlet flames formed a sea, a skeleton from an ancient graveyard was stomping over the ground, ten huge suns hung over their heads, a mysterious black fog spread through the air, a shower of rain fell continuously through the sky, and cold frost crept over the ground.

All sorts of unusual phenomena made themselves known—none physical, none reasonable, but all following some mysterious harmony.

This unusual world hadn't changed much despite what had happened to the third realm since their last visit. The main difference was a patch of empty land—what remained of the fight between Zhang Lie and the troops of the superior kings of antiquity.

Having been here before, they didn't need a guide to bring them toward the castle held up by nine great statues. In the meeting room at the very top, they found no one at all present.

Li Zongming smiled. "It looks like we're the first."

The moment Li Zongming sat down, the suns in the sky gave off a blinding glare, as though they were about to explode. Zhang Lie turned his head. "They're coming."

A portal opened in the air, through which blinding sunlight shone.

A figure wrapped up in the golden sunlight emerged from the portal. Beneath his feet were scarlet flames, and to his back, ten bright suns. A parade of a hundred suns followed behind him. The ground far beneath him began to smoke and char, and the air turned arid. The temperature rose to a frightening extent.

The solar king was the first to arrive. This time, he didn't bring a hundred suns with him. This meeting, unlike the last one, wasn't designed to impress and suppress Li Zongming with their strength.

Neither did the kings need any bodyguards, since none could guard them but existences on a similar level as they were. The kings did possess such strong subordinates, but they couldn't be moved around or redirected at will.

Zhang Lie turned to Li Zongming. "Your Majesty, look at the solar king's impressive entrance! Don't you want to be like him?"

Li Zongming folded his arms. "I wouldn't do something that wastes so much energy."

Chapter 1038: Shocking Impression

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "Well, perhaps you should! Being able to suppress your opponents' aura with your own upon your appearance isn't a waste of time."

"Maybe next time," Li Zongming sighed.

Instead of flying over, the solar king chose to take leisurely steps. Golden stairs manifested under his feet, each stair burning with solar flame.

The solar king walked over one step at a time, the meeting room gradually burning up like a furnace.

Zhang Lie missed air-conditioning.

The solar king peered at Li Zongming and Zhang Lie. Li Zongming waved. "Long time no see, solar king."

The solar king pursed his lips. "Are you the only newbie in attendance?"

From another direction, a portal to the world opened up. The temperature of the air immediately dropped, and flakes of white snow began to pour in through the portal. The snow formed a white carpet over the ground, and a blizzard descended.

The ice queen of the white world stepped through. A blizzard was her dress, the chilling air her aura, the howling gale her breath.

The world changed once again. Half the world was covered in frosted ice; the other, burning with blazing heat.

"The ice queen, is it?"

With the ice queen's appearance, the scorching-hot air finally cooled down. Zhang Lie thanked her silently.

"Air-conditioning, finally!"

The ice queen, just like the solar king, walked toward the meeting room on steps of ice. The ice queen was clearly an expert at manipulating ice. On either side of the steps rose giant sculptures that knelt and bowed down to her. As she stepped toward the meeting room, a scepter of ice in her hands, a flurry of snow poured down from the skies.

The ice queen arrived in the meeting room and met the solar king's stare with eyes that looked like orbs of ice. Their gazes met, one cool, one heated. A blizzard roared, and sunlight flared. Dark clouds made to cover up the suns, but the sunlight pierced the clouds and splashed golden light onto the land.

The two kings stood facing each other. Where their auras met, snow melted and refroze as they clashed for dominance.

Zhang Lie was no longer thankful to the ice queen. Subject to the two feuding kings, the meeting room was beset by fire and ice, one side so hot that even sweat evaporated instantly, the other side so cold that breaths froze into blocks of ice. The wildly fluctuating temperatures were a nightmare to bear.

This wasn't something that could be dealt with just by removing a few layers of clothing; it was as though they were in a furnace one moment, and an ice cellar the next.

Li Zongming didn't dare speak up, afraid that they would both gang up on him, but Zhang Lie had no such qualms.

"What are the two of you doing?!" Zhang Lie called out. "Aren't you tired of doing this every time the two of you meet?"

The ice queen and the solar king both looked toward Zhang Lie simultaneously. The combination of ice and sunlight combined into a storm of both elements that surged toward him, an amalgamation of a golden solar storm and a silvery-white blizzard.

The combination of the two forces was multiplicative rather than additive—but before Zhang Lie could defend himself, Li Zongming stepped forward, blocking both superior kings' attacks with his aura. They were very surprised that he was able to do so despite having recently ascended.

Even though the world of black rain had yet to merge with the Zongming world, in some sense, Li Zongming already qualified as half a superior king of antiquity.

The reason it was only half was because the world of black rain was simply in such bad shape that it couldn't be considered a whole superior world.

Even so, with an additional half of a superior world in his arsenal, Li Zongming was already starting to catch up with these superior kings of antiquity—but only catching up, for now. Li Zongming struggled against the simultaneous auras of both kings.

The ice queen and solar king glanced at him maliciously. They had chosen to ignore the newbie who had just ascended in their little feud, but if Li Zongming thought he could step in so easily, they'd teach him a lesson.

They'd make him learn that, even though he was qualified to be part of this meeting, he didn't necessarily have the right to speak, or to try to break up their conflict.

What did a newly ascended superior king think he could accomplish? They'd need to teach him that much so he was aware of the rules, at least—he was yet far from being able to contend with the likes of them.

Outside the meeting room, wind howled and clouds formed. Snow and sunlight fell from the skies simultaneously, instantly causing Li Zongming to sweat—both from the heat and from the cold. Just as he was about to be unable to hold out any longer, Zhang Lie stepped forward.

An aura reminiscent of a deepsea abyss exploded from Zhang Lie as a giant whale appeared from Zhang Lie's back. A slap of its tail crushed the solar king and the ice queen's manifestations, dispelling the blizzard and bright sunlight, and restoring the temperature and atmosphere of the meeting room.

The solar king was flung back into his seat, and the ice queen stumbled two steps back in shock at the strength that Zhang Lie had displayed. Both superior kings were stricken with fright.

Zhang Lie whispered to Li Zongming, whom he had shielded, "If you don't have enough strength to take them on, don't try!"

Li Zongming whispered back angrily, "Do you want me to watch my son-in-law get bullied? I have to do it even if I can't!"

Zhang Lie couldn't help but smile.

Meanwhile, the solar king and ice queen were unbelievably shocked that they had lost out in terms of aura to someone who wasn't even a superior king...

#### Chapter 1039: The Spectacle of the Kings

After a momentary shock, the solar king and ice queen were both enraged and supremely embarrassed that they had lost to Zhang Lie.

Fortunately, there was no other person present in the meeting room than Li Zongming, and particularly no other superior kings.

Otherwise, the others would surely make fun of them. Even the fact that Li Zongming had witnessed their moment of embarrassment was enough to make them want to crawl into a hole.

The solar king snorted. "Do you think you're strong just because you managed to take down the death spirit king? Without the king of chaos' clone around, you wouldn't even be able to make it back!"

Another dimensional portal opened up, dozens of times larger than the ones the solar king and ice queen had created.

Countless orbs of light floated out from within, surrounded by a seemingly endless supply of the world's energy. The weather turned calm, and the solar king and ice queen's auras were suppressed.

This strange, unusual collection of orbs seemed to be formed of countless worlds, which grew and perished as the orbs expanded and shrank, encapsulating all things within.

It was part of everything, and everything was part of it. It belonged to the liminal, the limitless—it might have been the source of life itself, so deeply connected as it was to the arcane.

Zhang Lie watched on closely. What entered the world weren't these orbs that represented countless worlds, but rather a door that connected to those countless worlds.

As the door drifted over, the orbs formed a projection: a blonde, blue-eyed loli wearing a bonnet and a black dress bedecked with ribbons. She sat on a chair far too large for her body and swung her short legs back and forth. "Why are you standing, ice queen? Why not have a seat?"

The solar king and ice queen stood up, bowing as they greeted the king of keys.

Li Zongming did the same.

The king of keys belatedly noticed something unusual about the atmosphere. "This is a world that we nine superior kings worked together to construct. Trying to make a new world like this is a very troublesome affair, so I hope you won't fight around here."

The solar king bowed respectfully. "Of course, Your Majesty."

The ice queen shrugged. "Thank you for your reminder, king of keys. I would not be so foolish as to break the agreement we initially brokered."

The king of keys inclined his head. "Very good."

The solar king glared at Zhang Lie, as if telling him, "Brat, you got lucky this time."

"Ha." Zhang Lie smiled coldly. If not for the king of keys' sudden appearance, Zhang Lie wouldn't have minded ridding the third realm of two superior kings.

The king of keys' appearance at this very moment was surely intentional.

Another portal opened up, and black fog emerged from within.

The black fog was so thick and dense that even the bright sunlight was unable to disperse it. Wobbling figures could be seen from within the fog, as though a city were hidden inside. The black fog slowly permeated into the meeting room, but none of the superior kings reacted to its presence.

The superior kings' auras kept the fog at a bearable distance of five meters away.

The black fog condensed into a chair, forming a humanoid figure.

The king of keys announced, "The king of black fog is here."

A human's face appeared amidst the fog.

From another portal came a disgusting stench. A vile, grayish fluid, frightening and formless, spilled out from the portal. It quivered and swelled, as though it were the source of all filth and waste.

More and more mutated growths and abominations were visible within the main body's flesh, squelching as they tried to escape—before they were swallowed back into its interior and digested away. It absorbed everything it touched: black fog, rain, frost, and sunlight.

The grayish vapor it produced spread through the air as the stench grew far, far stronger. Even those at the very top of the castle could smell it. Li Zongming clutched at his nose with an ashen face.

Right after the king of evil appeared, everything became cloaked in darkness. Drums sounded, and what seemed like a kaleidoscope unfolded before them. It then melted away, revealing a deep abyss filled with black worlds and suns.

A portal opened in the air, one essentially as large as that produced by the king of keys.

Even before the portal opened fully, the world was already greatly affected.

A giant clam walked out of the portal—yes, walked out of it.

Cylindrical growths grew out of its interior, like appendages that helped it crawl forward. A face with no mouth and empty sockets for eyes looked out from within. The clam's interior was filled with darkness and chaos. Even given Zhang Lie's strength, he couldn't peer into its interior.

He knew that doing so would cause him to feel a particularly arresting bout of discomfort. It seemed as though there were countless figures blowing flutes by his ear and whispering words of madness.

The boulders on the ground, the frost that had accumulated—all life on the world began to screech shrilly. Tentacles grew out of them, followed by limbs and a massive mouth. The howls accompanied the clam's motion; the clam distorted all natural law, even the basest logic, in its vicinity.

This clam was naturally the king of chaos.

The king of chaos' strength seemed to have increased even further, considering the fact that he was now able to affect even dead lifeforms.

A bone-chilling darkness twisted heaven and earth, warping even natural law. Sun, darkness, fog, and rain swirled around an abyssal wind. Except for the king of keys, everyone bowed down to him.

Zhang Lie's expression was complicated. He had enjoyed chatting with Nightdemon, a clone of the king of chaos, but he had not even the slightest interest in chatting with this giant clam.

With a smooth distortion of natural law, the king of chaos appeared within the meeting room. His voice seemed to emerge telepathically from the clam. "It looks like everyone's present."

The mental transmission caused Li Zongming, the solar king, and the ice queen to wince in pain. Claws and tentacles grew out of the monstrous lifeforms gestating in the king of evil's body, but it swallowed them back.

A weak-willed existence would quickly distort under the corrupting influence of the king of chaos, growing tentacles and becoming an illogical madman.

The solar king's gaze turned to Zhang Lie. "It looks like the decaying king's dead."

"You didn't believe me?" The king of chaos sent another mental transmission at the solar king, who clutched his head in pain.

"No, no, I wouldn't dare." The solar king lowered his head.

Chapter 1040: A Crystal of World's Energy

The king of chaos sent another transmission. "The decaying king disobeyed our original agreement and attempted to launch a sneak attack on Zhang Lie during the war in order to seize the most valuable spoils of war. Zhang Lie killed him on the spot."

All the superior kings turned to Zhang Lie and looked at him seriously.

The solar king asked, "And what of the world of black rain?"

"Zhang Lie shall claim it as his spoils."

The ice queen frowned. "He is no superior king. What right has he to deal with the world of black rain?"

The king of keys smirked. "It looks like someone disagrees with the king of chaos' actions?"

The king of chaos sent another mental transmission. "Zhang Lie performed extremely well in the war, with significant merit from killing the death spirit king and the traitorous blood lord. As the most meritorious combatant of this war, he naturally has the right of the second-best spoils—let alone the fact that he was the one who killed the decaying king himself."

The king of keys remarked with surprise, "King of chaos, it wasn't your clone who took the lead? It looks as though you've been skiving off."

The king of chaos: "A war of that magnitude is little more than a pleasant holiday outing."

For a war of mythical proportions, the largest ever in the third realm, to be nothing more than a holiday outing...

The other superior kings didn't dare refute the king of chaos' words. In fact, they took the king of chaos' proclamation for granted.

The war had been a big deal only from an outsider's perspective. The superior kings were quite certain that either the king of chaos or the king of keys would have been able to deal with the death spirit king themselves.

In that case, just what was the war for? Was it all a game?

The ice queen stated, "This man is no superior king. Despite his merit, what right does he have to join our meeting?"

The solar king added, "Since this is a meeting among superior kings, its participants should naturally be superior kings. Zhang Lie isn't a superior king!"

The king of chaos sent out another mental transmission. "I invited him over. Is there an objection?"

The ice queen and solar king, the main recipients of the transmission, clutched their heads in pain.

None of the kings objected after that.

Li Zongming tried to ease the tension. "Zhang Lie performed extremely well during the war, and he was one of the main fighters on our side. We'll be discussing how to divide the spoils from the war, so having one of the main fighters here will help us understand the details of the war better. Am I correct, king of chaos?"

The solar king questioned, "But didn't the king of chaos' clone participate as well?"

The king of chaos sent another mental transmission. "I would be happy to send a lengthy, complex mental transmission to explain everything in full detail."

All the kings present paled and rubbed their temples.

The solar king hastily replied, "No, king of chaos, don't! You're absolutely right that having another person around can help us understand the circumstances of the war better."

"The king of chaos is truly wise. None of us had considered that problem," the ice queen replied. The solar king and ice queen, at this very moment, looked far more like the best of friends than the worst of enemies.

A human's face appeared within the black fog. The king of black fog commented, "The king of chaos is truly wise. For a superior king to relate the details of the war like a mere messenger would be tremendously impolite, and it makes sense for a person with lower status to do so instead."

With another mental transmission, the king of chaos corrected, "Zhang Lie is a distinguished veteran of war. Implying that he is of lower status is an insult."

The king of black fog dipped his head. "Apologies. I was mistaken."

The king of keys added, "Although the king of chaos' clone didn't seriously participate in the war, he remains an extremely strong combatant. For Zhang Lie to be able to defeat him in merit is a mark of strength."

The king of chaos announced, "If there's nothing else, let's convene the meeting. King of keys, will you host?"

The king of keys, in loli form, crisply replied, "I hereby announce the start of the meeting convened among the superior kings. As everyone knows, the three thousand wars have recently been part of a war of tremendous scale. In the end, our alliance succeeded in defeating the death spirit king, an ambitious madman who sought to swallow up our realm."

The solar king sighed. "The death spirit king might have died, but we paid a heavy price to do so—and the three thousand worlds have all suffered."

The ice queen chuckled coldly. "I recall someone's commander even died on the battlefield, haha, haha!"

The solar king glowed with radiance. The flames that burned over his body flared, as though he were about to explode.

The king of keys raised a tiny fist. "Don't you make a fuss during this meeting, or I'll crush you!"

Zhang Lie found it very humorous that the king of keys was saying all this with the appearance and voice of a loli, but the solar king and ice queen evidently both took this pronouncement very seriously. If they could sweat, their sweat would have drowned half a small world.

The king of keys' words were threatening indeed.

The king of keys continued, "The success of the war is due to all the hard work of those gathered here. Zhang Lie, present the spoils of war!"

Zhang Lie unveiled the cracked crystal he had recovered from the death spirit king's body.

The crystal glimmered with multicolored radiance, surrounded by concentrated world's energy. All the kings present, with the exception of the king of keys and the king of chaos, revealed identical expressions of greed.

The world's energy present in the crystal was precious not because of its quantity, but rather its quality.

All the superior kings present could sense that the world's energy within the crystal was beyond that of a superior world—or rather, the crystal itself was a treasure beyond that of a superior-grade world.

The king of keys explained, "This crystal of world's energy is the largest treasure of this war. As agreed upon, all superior kings can obtain a portion of this treasure, and the kings who made the greatest contribution—I, the Zongming king, and the king of chaos, can obtain another portion each."

The war merit that each king gained would be dependent on their subordinates.

"As laid out in our initial treatise, this crystal will be auctioned off among us all, and the profit from the auction split equally among each portion."

The solar king immediately raised a hand. "There's no need to discuss things any further, king of keys! We're familiar with the rules. I'd like to offer three superior worlds' worth of energy to purchase this treasure!"