

## U. Warlord 1171

Chapter 1171: Gambling with Fate

Fang Yi leveled his spear. Wind and lightning surged forth. Scorching white flames and lightning were sucked into the flames; the lightning turned white. Wind and lightning combined into a devastating attack.

The white flames turned back on their creator, and the Star Devourer caved in.

Fang Yi, his entire body badly burnt, panted loudly for breath, but he never stopped moving.

Meanwhile, the Star Devourer launched yet another attack, drawing flames in and spurning them out in the form of dozens of flaming lances.

"[Wheel of Time]!" Fang Yi's spear took on the aspects of time and age. Temporal winds buffeted the spear, and a mysterious light began to circle the spear like lightning.

A wheel of light appeared behind Fang Yi, taking on the form of a clock. Fang Yi thrust his spear forward so quickly it left dozens of afterimages in all directions, sending the lances flying away.

He launched his spear, crackling with wind and lightning, with incredible force. It sent wind howling and lightning flashing through the sky. Hundreds of afterimages appeared all around him, and his spear thrusts landed like raindrops. The Star Devourer manifested a hurricane of flame to counter the attack.

The hurricane and spear thrusts clashed against each other repeatedly in small bursts of flame. Fang Yi's spear was incapable of handling fights of this level; it had already begun to crack from Fang Yi's sixfold ultimate, and those cracks were propagating as the battle continued.

In truth, even Fang Yi was gritting his teeth and barely holding on.

He had less than half his wind and storm energy left. His sixfold ultimate consumed far too much of his reserves, and Fang Yi had barely had time to rest during this high-intensity fight.

Compared to his previous two fights, he had clearly grown much stronger. It was only because of his improved stamina that he was able to last so long; if he had fought with a similar intensity in the fight against the solar king, he would long since have collapsed.

As his spear clashed against the Star Devourer's flame, a second wheel of time appeared behind him. His spear was filled with cracks, but even so, it took on the aspect of a dragon of the winds and a storm tiger as he charged forward.

"[Tiger's Howl, Dragon's Bellow]!"

A windstorm raged, and thunder crackled.

The boost afforded by the wheels of time caused wind and storm to wrap around Fang Yi's body as though he were a spear. He shot toward the Star Devourer again.

The Star Devourer formed a wall of fire around itself, but Fang Yi tossed his cracked spear forward without any hesitation at all. The firewall burst apart, and Fang Yi retrieved a new spear from his dimensional storage.

The moment he was distracted changing his weapons, the Star Devourer emerged from the flames.

"[Floating Clouds]!" Fang Yi morphed into lightning for mere moments, and the wind swelled around him. He left dozens of afterimages behind as the Star Devourer flew by, trailed by a pack of flames. The afterimages vanished from sight as Fang Yi, bearing with the scorching heat, howled, "Godbane Strike!"

Zhang Lie's eyes widened.

He knew what Fang Yi was planning; that was why he was so worried. Fang Yi's body was on the verge of giving out, whereas the Star Devourer was stronger than before. This was undoubtedly a tremendous risk.

Fang Yi broke through the constraints of time and returned to the frozen world of gray, with him the only spot of color within.

Wind and storm combined and crackled at the tip of Fang Yi's spear, imbuing it with sharpness and penetrating strength beyond measure.

Fang Yi compressed that energy again and again, until even the space around the spear started getting sucked in. The tip of the spear punched through space as though it were nothing more than paper.

The combination of elemental, temporal, and spatial energy at the tip of the spear multiplied the strength of Fang Yi's attack beyond what should have been possible.

Golden threads surrounded wind, storm, time, and space.

Fang Yi combined [Born of Lightning, Swallowed by the Wind], [Tiger's Howl, Dragon's Bellow], [Heaven's Judgment], and the power of karma—transforming his fivefold combination of energies into a sixfold one. Wind, storm, time, space, and now the mysterious power of karma...

All these sources of energy were stacked together, like buff after buff.

A dragon of purple lightning and tiger of green wind, shielded by a barrier of time and shrouded by black spatial energy, slowly began to manifest. Storm winds were sucked into the mix.

The power of his strike transcended both of its constituents, time and karma.

The strike touched the notion of fate, that all things were predetermined in the long, winding river of time.

The combination of wind and storm, spatial force, void lightning, time and space, karma and fate—all of it combined into a hurricane. The eight different kinds of energy stacked on top of each other and were refined into a cocoon.

As Fang Yi infused more and more of his own energy into the attack, the threads of eight different colors began to separate.

The void lightning combined with the spatial rift that was forming and tore apart the space around Fang Yi.

Against the eightfold confluence of energies, even the reinforced high-dimensional space seemed liable to collapse.

The eighteenth layer of space simply made it more difficult to invoke spatial manipulation; it wasn't much more reinforced. On the contrary, it was even more unstable than ordinary space and easier to collapse

The energies combined, somehow managing to stabilize the mix of energies that ran rampant around Fang Yi.

Fang Yi sent a stream of each type of energy swirling and corkscrewing around the tip of his spear.

The confluence of the eight different energies gave birth to a mysterious hybrid. As the forces continued to revolve around each other, the wheels of time behind Fang Yi began rotating more and more quickly as the space around him was strained to its utmost. If not for the king of chaos sealing the space around the hall, the hall would have collapsed.

Even more shockingly to the king of chaos, despite his personal reinforcement that made use of energy from the deepest parts of the abyss, even that energy seemed as though it would be insufficient to handle the shockwaves emanating from the attack.

Chapter 1172: Broken and Averted

The witch of dreams had once stated that the Star Devourer's rank among the guests of chaos was indeterminate. Now, however, after having learned how to compress its flames and gaining some mastery over it, it was surely among the top three.

Fang Yi had no other choice but to use his trump card. "Fate!"

Although he knew that Fang Yi possessed such a technique, it was the king of chaos' first time seeing it in action. Against this type of higher-order energy, even the king of chaos was paying careful attention. "But I wonder if he'll be able to cast it this time?"

The king of chaos couldn't help but feel excited.

As the wheels of time cracked, so too did Fang Yi's spear. Even his brand-new spear was unable to withstand the stress that his skills imposed; after all, it wasn't a disaster-grade spear.

Even a disaster-grade spear would be completely trashed by Fang Yi's eightfold ultimate, let alone a superior-grade one.

Fang Yi's own body, however, fared even worse than did the spear. Blood fountained from all his orifices, and green veins bulged from his forehead. The penalty for forcibly using his ultimate skill despite his exhaustion caused incalculable damage to his body.

As a swordsman himself, the king of chaos naturally hoped that Fang Yi would be able to release the skill, but he simultaneously hoped that Fang Yi wouldn't succeed. Only then would he be able to adopt Fang Yi as a companion, following the terms of the bet.

A swordsman who could unleash such devastation was more than worthy of being part of the halls of chaos, and he would be able to elevate the halls of chaos to even greater heights.

The fated spear was undoubtedly an exceptionally strong attack, even among the hunters of Team Zenith. Zhang Lie himself wouldn't dare to get hit by that attack.

Unless he were able to defeat Fang Yi before he could launch that attack, there was no other recourse. The fated spear was guaranteed to hit.

Such an overwhelming attack naturally incurred a commensurate cost. It would drain essentially all of Fang Yi's reserves even at about 80% of his peak strength, but he had forcibly activated it with 40% of his strength remaining. Fang Yi was putting his life on the line with this match.

His bones creaked and cracked. Having depleted the genetic energy in his body, the skill was exacting its price from his lifeforce and spiritual energy.

The gray world of temporal stasis burned to a crisp under the Star Devourer's flames.

His enemy released from the time lock, his own strength fading away, Fang Yi sensed the impending toll of defeat.

His body trembled. His grip faltered, and golden threads spun haphazardly around him. Many tangled around Fang Yi, trapping him within a golden web. The threads turned black, corrupted with karmic backlash.

Zhang Lie couldn't help but be reminded of Feitian's appearance when he died. Those who took advantage of karma and fate would be killed by those same principles.

Fang Yi had been taking advantage of fate to kill his opponents, and this was the backlash that had been held in abeyance.

Perhaps there had been a possibility that Fang Yi wouldn't have fallen here, but he had twice used the fated spear to kill the solar king and Ghroth respectively.

Both those opponents were ones that Fang Yi couldn't have been able to kill otherwise. Fang Yi, Li Feng, and Zhou Ying, despite having the upper hand in the battle, took far longer than expected to finally win against him.

Against Ghroth, they even had to pay a price and incur a series of injuries in order to finally kill him.

They could very well have died against the solar king and Ghroth; it was Fang Yi's fated spear that had allowed them to avoid this fate.

After employing this technique multiple times, Fang Yi was finally now suffering from its backlash.

The possibility of winning against the Star Devourer had been stripped away, leaving just a single outcome behind: Fang Yi, unable to withstand the expenditure of his fated spear, would die to his technique.

In some sense, karmic backlash was like bad luck; it stripped away the subset of favorable outcomes, leaving only unfavorable ones behind. Rather than cause those unfavorable outcomes directly, the effect of the backlash was indirect. The most frightening part about it was that it could appear at any time and in any fashion.

Lightning crackled like a demon swiping its claws. A storm raged, and space tore apart. Black-and-gold chains criss-crossed and tangled up under the influence of fate.

So chaotic was the energy around Fang Yi that even the Star Devourer didn't dare approach, wary of being sucked into the mess.

The king of chaos frowned. The energy that Fang Yi had summoned was so frightening that the king of chaos wouldn't be able to turn back time and revive him even if he wanted to. This was the incredible power of fate.

Zhang Lie, noticing the badly devolving situation, forcibly broke through the king of chaos' barrier around the arena.

The king of chaos advised, "Give up. It's pointless now—if you approach, you'll just hurt yourself."

"Even so, Fang Yi's my companion. I owe it to him to try."

Pale blue genetic energy rippled about Zhang Lie's arms. He flicked his wrists, causing a frightening aura to descend on the world. The hall began to darken, and a fish the size of a whale materialized in the air.

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

A howling gale swept over the hall. As more and more genetic energy gathered around Zhang Lie's arms, it looked as though he were at the heart of a whirlpool.

A huge 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, flooding the hall.

As though devouring the sun, Zhang Lie's genetic energy swamped the chaotic barrier and broke a crack in it.

Just as Zhang Lie was about to launch another attack, something happened at the heart of the confluence of energies.

Fang Yi thundered, "My fate isn't to perish here!"

Fang Yi burned all his lifeforce and spiritual energy, and even his potential, to break the chains of black and gold that surrounded him.

Dragon-like lightning, tiger-like storm, formless time, timeless space—those four disparate energies combined into a cohesive whole, tied together by a dark gold thread. The energies revolved around each other, summoning a howling gale surrounding a spatial rift.

The spear in his hand exploded, only to be replaced by a revolving spear that manifested out of genetic energy.

The cracks in the air continued to propagate, shattering space and time, devouring and annihilating everything in sight. Unusual pitch-black thorn-like protrusions appeared all around the hall...

Chapter 1173: Spear of Chaos

Fang Yi, calling on nothing but his own willpower, had shattered fate and transcended his own limits. A magnificent construct of energy now appeared between his hands.

Such was the power of that energy that he could barely hold onto it. The muscles of his arms tore, almost to the extent of revealing bone. The entire world seemed to come to a standstill at that moment. A howling storm, void lightning, mysterious temporal charge, the wind of ages—the mishmash of elements exploded. The eight different energies formed a huge vortex.

The Star Devourer burned incandescent with all that remained of its strength as it tried to shoulder the attack.

In the briefest moment before impact, the king of chaos dispelled his shield and shot forward so quickly that no one else could react. With his own body, with his own strength, he forcibly took the blow meant for the Star Devourer.

A howling storm, void lightning, mysterious temporal charge, the wind of ages—the mishmash of elements exploded, but all that energy was absorbed by the power of chaos.

The next moment, all the members of the halls of chaos grew shocked.

The king of chaos had been injured, visibly so, and chaotic energy poured forth from his body.

"Leader!" All the guests present tried to rush up the arena, but the king of chaos shook his head and held them back. "Stay where you are. I'm fine."

The members of Team Zenith were likewise shocked. They knew how strong Fang Yi's fated spear was, so strong that it could kill Ghroth and even the solar king in one strike each. None of them dared to try defending against the attack, but the king of chaos had suffered nothing but an injury—and this wasn't even his main body.

The king of chaos announced, "Fang Yi is the victor of this fight."

The Star Devourer cried out, "Leader, I can still fight!"

The king of chaos retorted, "Had I not made a move, you would have died to that attack—and so completely that I wouldn't be able to revive you."

Fang Yi's attack disrupted time and space, and it killed its targets on a karmic level. This wasn't something that could be reversed.

The king of chaos continued, "Even if you had nine lives, you'd still perish. That's how unreasonable fate is."

After Fang Yi finished launching his attack, his body wavered as though it were about to fall. Fang Yi slumped back, only to find someone supporting him. Fang Yi turned around to see Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie murmured, "In front of outsiders, don't reveal your weakness. You're the victor, and you need to present yourself like one as you receive your just accolades."

Fang Yi nodded firmly as the members of Team Zenith stepped forward. Zhou Ying immediately began healing Fang Yi, regrowing his burnt flesh at a rate visible to the naked eye.

"How do you feel?" Sun Mengmeng asked.

Zhou Ying murmured, "The situation's a bit difficult to deal with. Fang Yi was far too stubborn, and he's depleted all his reserves of energy. Not only are there burn wounds all over his body, he even expended much of his lifeforce, so his internal organs are damaged too."

Fang Yi coughed weakly. "Can you still save me?"

Sun Mengmeng grumbled, "Are you only realizing the extent of your injuries now? You shouldn't have fought so hard to begin with!"

Fang Yi replied, "Not like I could have joined the halls of chaos, could I?"

Zhou Ying continued, "The injuries won't be too difficult to deal with, and I can replenish the lost lifeforce as well. The issue is with the soul and the consumption of potential. Spiritual injuries will recover with enough time and rest, but as for your lost potential..."

The king of chaos suggested, "Let me handle that."

The king of chaos made his move, sending the purest chaotic energy he had access to into Fang Yi's body.

Fang Yi, already weakened, mustered no resistance to the energy. Zhou Ying glanced at Zhang Lie, as though asking whether she should stop the king of chaos.

Zhang Lie shook his head.

After the chaotic energy circulated once through Fang Yi's body, Zhou Ying quickly inspected him. "He's looking much better, and his spirit has been restored as well. The lost potential is no longer a problem. The issue is that there are still traces of chaotic energy left in his body."

Zhang Lie peered at Fang Yi with a piercing stare before nodding his head fractionally. "The remnant energy will obscure Fang Yi's fate and prevent any more of this karmic retribution, at least within the third realm."

The refinement process between the third and fourth realms would likely clear away any remnants of chaotic energy.

After being treated by both the king of chaos and Zhou Ying, Fang Yi's body was in far better condition than before. He could now stand up on his own, though his pallor was still concerning.

"Speak your wish," the king of chaos announced.

Fang Yi hesitated. "I don't really have a wish of my own, but..."

The king of chaos suggested, "I noticed that your weapons have been unable to withstand the might of your techniques."

Fang Yi's eyes widened. "Yes, yes, exactly that! I'd like a weapon that can withstand the might of my ultimate."

Whenever Fang Yi launched that attack, he would destroy a disaster-grade weapon.

The king of chaos mobilized the purest of chaotic energies he had access to once again, which could absorb even a sun into the abyss. That energy condensed once and again, spiraling in front of the king of chaos, then elongating into the form of a spear.

Chaotic energy swirled about the spear. The king of chaos guided the spear, floating on a bed of energy, toward Fang Yi.

Fang Yi lifted the spear and sensed its might. He, who had used a spear for half his life, could identify it with just a glimpse and a touch. "This is amazing," he breathed.

The haft was rigid and straight, the tip of the spear glinting with icy light. Chaotic energy infused the spear, likely the sign of a hidden special ability that Fang Yi would have to discover on his own.

The king of chaos had clearly expended much of his energy. His body remained in a weakened state, with much of the chaotic energy surrounding it having been diminished.

"Let's call this weapon Chaos, then. I hope you'll use it well, and not besmirch my reputation."

The other members of the halls of chaos stared at Fang Yi with looks of envy and jealousy.

Fang Yi began waving around his spear, unable to resist showing off a flashy technique as he nodded fervently. "Very well. From now on, my weapon will be this spear, Chaos!"

The members of Team Zenith and Zhang Lie returned where they stood, as did the king of chaos, as the witch of dreams stepped forward with a smile. "It's finally my turn."

Just then, the All-Mother, who had been by the king of chaos' side, spoke up. "Everyone's having so much fun, but I've done nothing more than spectate. It feels rather upsetting to be ignored, and I'd very much like to find out just how strong these human fighters are to be able to defeat so many members of the hall of chaos consecutively."

The king of chaos looked toward his consort with surprise. "You're interested in these lifeforms?"

The All-Mother replied archly, "I've always been interested in all sorts of lifeforms."

The king of chaos replied, "I should warn you that your interest frequently leads to unfortunate outcomes for those involved."

The All-Mother smiled. "Very well. Let me be truthful, then: the halls of chaos have lost too much of its reputation, and I'd like to at least regain some back."

The king of chaos beckoned. "As you wish, my lady."

#### Chapter 1174: The All-Mother

The All-Mother turned toward the witch of dreams. "Will you allow me the next match?"

Unwilling though the witch of dreams might be, she still forced a smile. "I would be honored, All-Mother."

The All-Mother's three back spines squirmed forward like oars, tugging her heavy, unwieldy body behind. Her beak opened as she released a shrill, chaotic screech. She was draped in what felt like the source of darkness, from deep within the stellar abyss. A gust of cold and the stench of decay swept toward them.

Her large red eyes were the size of rugby balls, and the massive, milky-white blob that formed her body was supported by skeletal, angular legs with circular suction cups at their base. Her head made one nauseous, formed by layers of layers of some white gelatinous substance, covered in swollen, bulging eyes.

At the very center was a massive beak filled with sharp teeth, with the bulbous eyes facing Zhang Lie and Sun Mengmeng.

"Who might my opponent be?"

"Me,"

Sun Mengmeng announced, stepping forward and retrieving her garuda bow from her dimensional storage.

"To kill such a lovely young woman fills me both with pity and excitement." The All-Mother struck immediately, feelers extending from her body, so dense as to form a cloud of darkness around her.

"[Lunarflame Shot]!" Purple flames burned over Sun Mengmeng's fingers, manifesting into three arrows.

The energy in the three fiery arrows was so dense that they took on corporeal form. If not for the unusual heat they gave off, an ordinary bystander would never believe that they had been formed of flame.

Three arrows, brimming with purple flame, flew toward the All-Mother like tracking missiles.

The feelers exploded in three blooming flowers of flame. Even so, they clearly possessed remarkable regenerative abilities, as they restored themselves within moments.

"[Lunarflame Shot]!" Fire-attuned genetic energy burst from Sun Mengmeng's body as her body erupted in flames. She pulled her greatbow taut.

Sun Mengmeng's right hand blurred as countless arrows of purple flame shot out of her bow like a meteor shower that tinted the air purple and gave the halls of chaos a phantasmagorical appearance. The air turned dry and arid, as though a cataclysm was nigh.

The explosions bloomed like flowers amidst a rain of purple meteors, which continuously struck the feelers and prevented their forward advance.

Sun Mengmeng cast [Black Sun], forming a cordon of purplish-black flame around her.

She activated her most impactful soulshards for battle, transforming from a young woman to a fierce warrior with a chitinous carapace, wreathed in black flame.

Her flames were so intense that the armor-type soulshard actually began to crack and split. Black flames seeped out from the cracks, burning so intensely that she looked like a warrior out of hell. They simultaneously flared from her garuda bow and transformed into an undead phoenix.

"[Netherworld's Gaze]!" Hundreds of arrows, like beams of moonlight, shot toward the All-Mother. Their flames felt as though they could destroy everything they touched.

Sun Mengmeng shot out arrows so quickly that all one saw were the afterimages they left behind.

The arrows continuously put pressure on the All-Mother.

"[The Nine Moons of the Underworld]!" Nine flaming moons appeared in the hall, overshadowing the illumination within.

Black flames exploded at the point of impact, clearing away the remaining feelers.

Before her eyes appeared a monster of gigantic proportions, a cloud of roiling, decaying mist. At times, that mist would aggregate to form vile organs and limbs, sticky black tentacles, a mouth drooling with saliva, or distorted legs with cloven hooves like those of a goat.

The mysterious, malformed lifeforms bowed down to the All-Mother. The members of Team Zenith watched on with shudders down their backs.

Zhang Lie frowned. "What's this?"

The witch of dreams explained, "These are the avatars of the All-Mother—her children, if you will."

The All-Mother clambered forward as Sun Mengmeng nocked an arrow. Her entire bow began to blaze. She launched her arrows straight toward the ceiling, where they exploded to form black moons.

"[Lunar Apostasy]!" The black moons covered up the ceiling as blazing moonlight began to fall.

The moonlight was composed of countless such flames. Like a waterfall, the flames splashed onto the All-Mother and the monsters she created.

The witch of dreams murmured, "Your companion stands no chance."

Zhang Lie turned to her. "Thank you."

The witch of dreams cried out again, "I'm not joking! Many among the halls of chaos joined its ranks because of their awe at our leader's strength; or, even if they don't, they fear it. The All-Mother is different from the rest of us."

Zhang Lie asked, "Does she not care about the king of chaos' power?"

The witch of dreams replied, "She joined the halls of chaos in order to bear his progeny."

Li Feng understood immediately. "You mean that the All-Mother just wants the king of chaos' child?"

Sun Xiaowu guessed, "So that's why they entered the banquet together, rather than beforehand like all you guests. She really might as well be your leader's wife!"

The witch of dreams scowled. "What do you mean, wife? I won't acknowledge such a shameless fellow. She's just a little strong, that's all."

Zhang Lie made an 'ahh' of realization. "You have to admit her status as wife because of her strength, don't you?"

The witch of dreams snorted. "She's shameless and sticks to our leader like a limpet. Even he can't do anything about her."

Nightdemon shrugged. "My main body doesn't mind."

"So, did they end up having children?" Zhang Lie asked curiously.

None present believed that the monsters with cloven hooves were the progeny of the All-Mother and the king of chaos. After all, the cloven monsters only bore the aura of the All-Mother, without any chaotic energy whatsoever.

Chapter 1175: Cloven Monsters

Nightdemon shook his head. "Given how strong my main body is, there's hardly any chance of that."

The stronger an entity was, the more difficult it was to produce any offspring. This was a result of evolution at a genetic level. The more advanced and personalized such evolution became, the harder it was to procreate.

Sun Xiaowu joked, "It's reproductive isolation in action!"

Nightdemon asked, "What's reproductive isolation?"

"The fact that different species have a hard time reproducing with each other."

Fang Yi sighed. "Isn't it a bit ludicrous to discuss reproductive isolation in the dimensional realm?"

Zhang Hanxiang suggested, "I think we need to talk to an expert about this."

Sun Xiaowu, Fang Yi, Zhou Ying, Hong Xi, Zhang Hanxiang, and Zhang Lie all looked toward Li Feng at once. Li Feng glanced behind him to confirm that they weren't looking at anyone else in his general proximity before pointing at himself with confusion.

He frowned. "When did I become this so-called 'expert'?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "At the very least, you're the one most qualified to speak of this problem among us."

Li Feng cried out, "Captain, you'd better not point fingers at me—your Li Qianlin's a genetic lifeform too!"

Zhang Lie replied, "She's half-spirit, and the genetic disparity is far less severe than with beastmen."

Li Feng thundered, "So you know enough to comment on it too!"

Sun Xiaowu asked, "Do you understand the problems involved, then?"

Zhang Hanxiang added, "Will there be problems in reproduction between the king of chaos and the All-Mother?"

Li Feng grumbled, "Reproductive isolation applies to normal genetic lifeforms. Do either of them seem like regular lifeforms to you?"

Sun Xiaowu, Fang Yi, Zhou Ying, Hong Xi, Zhang Hanxiang, and Zhang Lie all shook their heads in unison. The king of chaos was a nebulous, chaotic fog, likely not too different from an evolved version of a galactic nebula—and none of them had any idea what the All-Mother was. Even ordinary malformed lifeforms weren't as monstrous as she was.

Li Feng continued, "I think that, before you guys discuss any issues related to reproductive isolation, you should consider whether the king of chaos can reproduce at all."

While the members of Team Zenith murmured with each other, the fight between Sun Mengmeng and the All-Mother reached an apex.

Sun Mengmeng's flaming moonlight struck the cloven monsters, but the latter were equipped with a fearsome regenerative ability comparable to Zhou Ying's own. They were actually able to survive the impact of the flaming meteor shower and even begin charging toward Sun Mengmeng anew.

"[Netherworld's Torrential Flame]!" A frightening fan of flames poured out from Sun Mengmeng's bow, an attack far stronger than the moonlight she had summoned. The intensity of her technique shocked everyone. The flames arced in the air and fell toward the battlefield in a waterfall, obstructing the cloven monsters' path.

The All-Mother spawned even more monsters, forming huge clouds of black fog that rolled toward Sun Mengmeng.

"[Lunarflame Shot: Ninefold Phantasmagoria]." Nine purplish-black phoenixes rose around her and shot toward the All-Mother.

They exploded in the midst of the cloven monsters, causing black flame to rise up into the air. The cloven monsters struggled and screamed as they were enveloped by the flames. Their pained screams echoed throughout the hall.

"[Lunarflame Shot: Might of the Garuda]!" Without any hesitation, Sun Mengmeng launched another technique. Purplish-black flames gathered on Sun Mengmeng's bow once again, forming an arrow of pure black.

The image of a golden garuda, limned in black, appeared behind her. As she loosed her arrow, it seemed to transform into a beam of light, moving so quickly that it bypassed the constraints of time and space, as though it could penetrate anything.

The black arrow pierced through the cloven monsters until it finally struck the All-Mother's chest, leaving a small black dot amidst the milky-white, gelatinous matter that formed her body. The black flames spread out from the point of impact, causing her huge beak to open with a shrill screech.

The All-Mother's regenerative ability was far too frightening. It was so strong that it could suppress the spread of the black flames, resulting in an equilibrium in which she was able to keep them cordoned off.

The All-Mother then dug out the damaged flesh in her chest. Black blood, like an even more viscous analogue of gasoline, sprayed out. The blobs of flesh, as though rotting, spawned countless tendrils, and cloven hooves grew out of their underside.

These cloven monsters were formed out of the All-Mother's flesh, but these pieces of flesh were different from all the rest. Before they could grow to maturity, they were swallowed up by black flame and burnt to nothing but ash.

The black flame continuously sucked away at the All-Mother's lifeforce. Just as the All-Mother cleared all that corruption away, Sun Mengmeng struck once more.

"[Lunarflame Shot: Extirpation of the Garuda]!"

As Sun Mengmeng infused her genetic energy into the bow, the image of a garuda appeared behind her. She released her arrow, which morphed into a human-faced, golden-winged bird in mid-air, radiating red light as it arced through the skies. It began to pulse with red flame, brimming with such energy that it seemed as though it would set the world aflame.

The All-Mother howled, and its three back spines moved furiously.

The All-Mother struck the black flames, and she was strong enough to break through them with brute force. Only then did she realize just how strong these human fighters were. Sun Mengmeng, in particular, was her direct counter.

What the All-Mother feared most were attacks like Fang Yi's, which seemed to have no counter whatsoever. She hadn't expected another example of such attacks from the humans—but Sun Mengmeng's black flames were exactly one such.

The black flames were a perfect counter to her fearsome regenerative ability, curtailing and restricting her ability to spawn more lifeforms.

"[Lunarflame Shot: Extirpation of the Garuda]!" Sun Mengmeng pulled her bow taut once more, infusing the rest of her genetic energy within. The image of a garuda materialized from thin air and shot out along with her arrow.

Even before the arrow landed, the earth and sky alike ignited.

A garuda shot out at mind-boggling temperatures. Upon seeing it, the king of chaos immediately made his move, cordoning off the arena in which Sun Mengmeng and the All-Mother were fighting. The garuda barreled through everything in its path.

Scorching waves of heat spread out from Sun Mengmeng, and the temperature in the hall rose dramatically. Even the king of chaos was unable to isolate that heat. The members of Team Zenith and the guests of chaos, spectating the match, felt blistering heat envelop them. It was difficult to imagine just how hot it had to be in the middle of the arena.

Chapter 1176: Self-Selection

The All-Mother burned amidst the flames, which surrounded her entire body. Despite her fearsome regenerative ability, she was unable to recover from within the heart of the black flames, and she had lost all combat ability.

The king of chaos stepped in, dispersing the flames and treating the All-Mother with the most potent energy of chaos he had on hand.

After the black flames vanished, the All-Mother recovered quickly from her base regeneration and the king of chaos' infusion of energy.

The All-Mother lowered her head and apologized. "I'm sorry I wasn't able to win."

The king of chaos waved a hand. "I've never cared for victory or defeat. You've already done very well."

The king of chaos turned to Sun Mengmeng. "Victor, state your wish."

Sun Mengmeng thought for a moment. Unlike Sun Xiaowu and Li Feng, she stated her wish deliberately and quickly.

"I want to become stronger."

The king of chaos thought for a moment. "Do you want something like what Hong Xi did—no, I don't suppose you would go for that.

Sun Mengmeng nodded once again. "I'd prefer if my path weren't too affected as a result."

"As before, I offer you two choices."

The king of chaos always seemed to provide two choices by which a wish could be fulfilled.

Zhang Lie thought back to what he had witnessed. No, that didn't seem quite right. He would only do so for wishes that had to deal with gaining additional strength.

The king of chaos suggested, "One way is to upgrade your weapon, but I don't believe doing so will lead to a significant increase in strength for you."

Although Sun Mengmeng was due for an upgrade, it wouldn't be a particularly significant one.

"I won't change my weapon," Sun Mengmeng stated bluntly.

Her current bow, the garuda bow, was a gift from Zhang Lie, and held particular meaning for her as a result. If she had wanted to switch to another disaster-grade bow, she would have done so far earlier, without waiting until now to do so.

Furthermore, Zhang Lie's garuda bow was more than sufficient for her.

"In that case, consider the second approach. Your techniques have to do with flame, and I can ignite my own chaotic energy to condense a spirit of flame."

Sun Mengmeng's eyes brightened. "That sounds perfect!"

"Whether you merge the spirit of flame with your current one, digest it, or refine and master it, your combat strength will surely increase."

"Let's go with the second method, then." Sun Mengmeng made her choice instantly.

The king of chaos extracted a portion of the most concentrated chaotic energy from his core, which ignited in the form of pitch-black flame, so intense it might well swallow up the sun. It was a darker shade of black than even darkness, and would devour the darkness and transform it to void.

Upon witnessing the flame that the king of chaos had conjured, even an expert like Sun Mengmeng grew nervous.

As the king of chaos continuously infused chaotic energy into the flame, it flared and burned brightly. Its tip licked the hall's ceiling. The king of chaos transferred energy from its main body to condense the flame and refine it further.

When the pitch-black flames were concentrated into an orb the size of a fist, the king of chaos nudged it toward Sun Mengmeng.

Sun Mengmeng was instantly surrounded by a layer of pitch-black flame. The king of chaos immediately cordoned her off with a membrane, but even so, Sun Mengmeng's flames were still being devoured by the black flame bit by bit. She was very satisfied with the potency of this new flame, and was intending to carefully research whether it would be compatible with her own body.

After Sun Mengmeng left the arena, the king of chaos looked expectantly at Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie stepped forward as the witch of dreams cried out, "It's finally my turn!"

Zhang Lie raised a hand. "Hold on, please!"

The witch of dreams replied, "What's the matter? Your companions have already finished fighting. As the captain, you aren't getting cold feet, are you?"

Sun Mengmeng snorted. "Our captain, afraid? Listen carefully to what he has to say before you comment!"

Zhang Lie continued, "To keep repeating this format, in which we send out contenders one by one, is simply too boring."

The witch of dreams frowned. "You want to modify the rules established by our leader?"

Zhang Lie replied, "How about allowing me to choose my opponent?"

The witch of dreams thundered, "You're looking down on the rules of combat set by the leader himself!"

"Very well," the king of chaos replied.

Her chance to fight with Sun Mengmeng had been snatched away by the All-Mother, and her eagerly awaited fight against Zhang Lie was likewise gone because of a stray comment from him.

Feeling as though she had been insulted, the witch of dreams turned to the king of chaos. "Leader, I've been awaiting this fight for quite some time..."

The king of chaos replied, "I'll compensate you for this later."

Seeing that even the king of chaos wasn't on her side, the witch of dreams turned angrily to Zhang Lie. "Zhang Lie, do you think you're too good for me?"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "Those are ambiguous words, you realize..."

The witch of dreams' eyes filled with tears. "What, am I not good enough?"

Zhang Lie sighed. "No, you're simply too good for me—oh, no, I mean, I have better options I prefer... no, that sounds too trashy... we're just incompatible."

Sun Mengmeng grumbled, "Are the two of you done making eyes at each other?!"

Zhang Lie sighed. "We aren't making eyes at each other!"

The witch of dreams stepped forward as she closed in on Zhang Lie. "Can't we do it once?"

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!" Tired of this ambiguous conversation, Zhang Lie summoned pale blue genetic energy over his arms. He flicked his wrists, causing a frightening aura to descend on the world. The hall began to darken, and a fish the size of a whale materialized in the air.

A howling gale swept over the hall. As more and more genetic energy gathered around Zhang Lie's arms, it looked as though he were at the heart of a whirlpool.

A huge 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.

Ripples of energy spread out from Zhang Lie, warping the space around him. The towering waves looked like enraged black dragons, flooding the hall.

The pale blue flood was like a voracious beast. The witch of dreams' eyes widened. She couldn't even attempt to defend against the attack as it brushed past her.

The flood smashed into the wall behind her with a huge quake that shook the entire hall and set it to trembling. As the waves burst apart, the air filled with echoes of Zhang Lie's signature genetic energy, the tide causing explosions that wrecked the hall.

The witch of dreams' hair unspooled around her face as she stood in a daze.

Thanks to Zhang Lie's extremely precise control of genetic energy, no guest in the hall was hurt.

Even so, the witch of dreams stood dumbfounded for a long while before she swallowed a gulp of saliva. She would have been wholly incapable of blocking the flood from just now.

She couldn't have imagined that the gap between Zhang Lie and the other members of Team Zenith was so immense. If he were on the level of the other members of Team Zenith, she would still have strategies for dealing with him—but Zhang Lie was on another level entirely! That attack was as though a huge mountain was weighing down on her, so intense that she couldn't even fathom the idea of blocking it.

One blow would have ended her.

Chapter 1177: Runic Confrontation

The witch of dreams wasn't particularly strong as far as the halls of chaos went, and against Zhang Lie, who was stronger than even the members of Team Zenith, she had no chance at victory.

If they really were to fight, the witch of dreams was certain that she would have lost with just that one blow. If it had struck her... the witch of dreams didn't want to think about what would have happened.

She would have died, her corpse obliterated.

Although the king of chaos would surely be able to revive her, the fear of death was intrinsic to life.

The witch of dreams wiped at the sweat on her forehead. "Alright. If you have a better option, Zhang Lie, I won't hold you back any longer. If there's ever an opportunity, I'll come back for you myself. You'd better wait for me, Zhang Lie!"

The witch of dreams retreated from the arena with trembling legs.

The king of chaos ignored this drama.

"Whom do you intend to choose as your opponent?" he asked.

"I'd like to fight against Ubbo, the Null Source."

Zhang Lie pointed at the gelatinous-like body surrounded by the Keys of the Elder Gods.

The guests all turned to each other in surprise, none of them having thought that Zhang Lie would choose the Null Source as an opponent.

"The Null Source is the most ancient existence in the third realm apart from the king of chaos himself..."

"Allegedly, even before the three thousand worlds were created, the two of them were already around."

"To have chosen the Null Source... it's the most mysterious existence among us all!"

The guests of the halls of chaos were all murmuring about Zhang Lie's unusual choice with each other.

The witch of dreams' pale face flushed. She was so angry that she stomped around and cried out, "To have discarded me for the Null Source...!"

Sun Mengmeng corrected her, "Our captain didn't discard you, but instead chose the Null Source as his opponent."

Li Feng was more concerned about another matter entirely.

"How strong is this so-called Null Source?"

The witch of dreams shook her head. "I don't know about that. The Null Source has never made a move during all my time here. It might as well be an existence incapable of thought, at this point."

Nightdemon chuckled. "If you consider the Null Source to be incapable of thought—well, you're really underestimating it."

The witch of dreams seemed surprised. "The Null Source can still think?"

Everyone looked toward the Null Source—the members of Team Zenith and the guests of the halls of chaos alike.

If anyone could be said to know the Null Source best among this group of people, it would have to be none other than the king of chaos—and Nightdemon, his clone, standing right beside them.

Nightdemon rolled his eyes. "If the Null Source really were incapable of thought, would it come to the night banquets every time?"

The witch of dreams murmured, "So it's been coming on its own? We've always thought that the leader or one of his clones brought him over each time..."

Nightdemon sighed. "If the Null Source really were unable to think, it would have unleashed a slaughter during the night banquets the last few times. It's simply been occupied thinking of high-dimensional problems, so its body only has the basest of instincts. Its intellect is perhaps on the level of a baby or a child."

Li Feng asked, "Is the Null Source strong?"

Nightdemon raised his head. "Wait and see."

The king of chaos asked, "Null Source, are you willing to participate in the night banquet this time around?"

The Null Source slowly squirmed onto the arena as the guests watched on in shock.

The king of chaos couldn't help but laugh. "To think that even you've developed some interest in our proceedings... it looks like you're curious about our Mr. Zhang Lie, too."

The Null Source didn't speak. It squirmed until it was right before Zhang Lie.

"Please make your move." Zhang Lie bowed to his opponent.

The Null Source neither made a move nor spoke. It remained still and silent, right before Zhang Lie.

"If you won't, then I'll have the first strike. [The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!"

Zhang Lie extended his pointer finger like a sword, and water-attuned genetic energy gathered around it. As he waved his finger, sword energy erupted like a wave, accompanied by a giant shark.

The sword flew toward the Null Source as Zhang Lie probed his opponent's strength.

The sword energy landed on one of the tablets of the Keys of the Elder Gods, causing the tablet to shake. Like a self-defense mechanism, huge quantities of slime-like bugs swam toward Zhang Lie in the manner of tadpoles.

They seemed like fanatics who were swarming to take down an apostate like Zhang Lie, who dared hurt the Keys of the Elder Gods.

"[Ninecarp Transformation: Fourth Form]!"

The image of a dragonturtle manifested behind Zhang Lie, and his water-attuned genetic energy turned heavy, sluggish, and a dark yellow color. Ripples of genetic energy spread out all around him like mud. The slimy bugs ended up stuck in the mud, and their actions turned sluggish, almost stalled.

Zhang Lie's genetic energy was imbued with the power of gravity, and the slimy bugs were particularly susceptible to being trapped in localized gravitational wells.

"[Rune: Gravity]!" Zhang Lie raised a hand high into the air as the image of a dragonturtle appeared before him. The black tablets hovered above Null Source's head. Runes of unknown provenance appeared from the tablets, then floated down and surrounded Null Source.

Everyone in the hall of chaos felt a stifling weight pressing down on their bodies, as though they were mired in a swamp. Every action took dozens, hundreds of times more effort than normal, and even moving a finger was difficult. It was as though a mountain were pressing down on their bodies, one so heavy they could barely breathe, slowing down all their bodily processes.

Even the air turned sticky and resilient to motion. The eighteenth layer of space began to solidify.

The guests present were shocked by the breadth and depth of the attack. They were standing by the periphery, and yet the attack had rendered them almost immobile. How frightening would the gravitational pull be at the center of the arena?

Even a superior king might be pressed into a solid ball within moments.

The witch of dreams found it hard to imagine just what would be the outcome of a battle between her and Zhang Lie. If Zhang Lie had used this technique from the beginning, the witch of dreams would have been pressed onto the ground, frozen stiff, and Zhang Lie would have been able to do anything he wanted to her. The thought was... provocative...

The witch of dreams couldn't help but lick her lips.

Unlike what the guests were thinking, however, the Null Source wasn't suppressed by Zhang Lie's technique at all.

Light refracted over the Null Source's body, rendering it immune to Zhang Lie's attack.

As Zhang Lie infused more genetic energy into the attack, the floor began to cave downwards from the enhanced gravity.

Even so, either because of Null Source's own strength or the effects of the Keys of the Elder Gods' protection, or perhaps even both, the gravity had no effect on Null Source.

Zhang Lie's tablets trembled, as did the Keys of the Elder Gods.

"Useless, is it? I'll try it again, then!"

Zhang Lie raised an arm high into the air once more, and the image of a dragonturtle manifested behind him.

This time, two runic tablets appeared.

Chapter 1178: The King of Chaos' Shock

"[Rune: Control]!" Zhang Lie's two gravity-controlling tablets smashed into the ground. Black ripples emanated from the two gravity-altering tablets, forming a localized region of distorted gravity.

Even so, Null Source nullified the effects of both tablets.

Zhang Lie's tablets, as well as the Keys of the Elder Gods, all trembled.

"[Rune: Control]!" The image of a dragonturtle appeared before him as Zhang Lie raised his hand. Ripples spread out from the two tablets, sealing the lifeform's will and power.

Even those standing by the sides of the arena felt themselves weaken, their thoughts slow.

However, Null Source's unusual fluctuations were able to dispel the effect of these gravitational ripples.

As Zhang Lie summoned the final two tablets, the four dragonturtle tablets hovered around Null Source, causing the Keys of the Elder Gods to tremble even more violently.

The king of chaos was shocked to no end.

If the guests of the halls of chaos were able to think normally, they would surely realize that the link between the Keys of the Elder Gods and the Null Source was growing weaker.

The four runic tablets resonated at once.

As the four tablets appeared simultaneously, a shocking situation unfolded. The tablets and the Keys of the Elder Gods began to resonate together and to vibrate at the same frequency. Once that resonance occurred, the black runes from the dragonturtle tablets appeared in the air and flew toward the Keys of the Elder Gods.

At the same time, arcane runes and diagrams from the Keys of the Elder Gods glowed and appeared in mid-air, linking up with the dragonturtle tablets.

The king of chaos was astounded. His chaotic energy began to run rampant, so shocked was he by the unexpected interaction. The runes from the Keys of the Elder Gods and the dragonturtle tablets looked as though they were chained together as they began to exchange information.

This was an event of unparalleled magnitude.

The Keys of the Elder Gods harkened back to the age of gods, and the records within it could date back to a primordial era. Even the very existence of such an era was unclear; this was simply the king of chaos' best guess.

The king of chaos hypothesized that the Keys of the Elder Gods could very well have recorded the creation of the dimensional realm at large, and even the route to godhood—not just the ability to ascend to a higher realm, from the third to the fourth, but entering the world of the gods themselves.

However, all of this was just a hypothesis. Even the king of chaos' strength was insufficient to read and comprehend the contents of the Keys. If he were to do so by force, he would end up like the Null Source, a monster whose existence was meaningless.

The Null Source had become a guardian of the Keys—or, more rudely, the Keys' slave.

The Keys of godhood were a creation that the king of chaos had naturally assumed to be unique to the third realm, but Zhang Lie's tablets were somehow able to resonate with the Keys.

Did Zhang Lie also possess tablets of that hypothetical era?

Even the king of chaos had grown interested in Zhang Lie's dragonturtle tablets.

When he glanced at the contents of those tablets, however, that desire vanished in an instant.

He couldn't understand the contents of the tablets.

Both sets of tablets were, in truth, incomprehensible.

Zhang Lie didn't deliberately hide the ancient text on his dragonturtle tablets. Despite this, even when the tablets were revealed in their entirety, an existence as old and knowledgeable as the king of chaos was still unable to read them.

The text of the dragonturtle tablets was clearly an ancient script that had been lost to time.

Even after so long, the king of chaos had only managed to decipher a small portion of the text from the Keys. Even if he were to study the dragonturtle tablets earnestly, it would be impossible for him to easily understand their contents.

The Null Source, as if sensing something, amplified the vibrations and fluctuations to new heights, deepening the connection between the two sets of tablets.

Zhang Lie wasn't too surprised about the resonance between the Keys and the dragonturtle tablets.

While glancing at the Keys, Zhang Lie had realized with some shock that the runic script of the Keys and his dragonturtle tablets looked startlingly similar, which was why he had chosen the Null Source as an opponent to begin with.

He wanted to see if there would be any unusual interactions between the tablets and the Keys—a gamble that had paid off even better than he had expected.

"I'll be taking those tablets!"

The dragonturtle tablets began to vibrate even more violently, as did the Keys.

"[Rune: Resonate]!" The four dragonturtle tablets began to resonate as one, sending ripples that melded with the space and forming an absolute domain over all things within and without.

In the region of stopped time, the Keys were slowly rotating to face the dragonturtle tablets.

Meanwhile, the Null Source continued to deepen the connection between itself and the Keys. Its jelly-like appendages grabbed onto the Keys, refusing to let go.

"Let go obediently, now..." Zhang Lie's mud-yellow genetic energy roiled toward the Null Source, which defended itself with its localized fluctuations. "[Fists of the Silent Sea: Quake]!"

The world shook. The hall trembled. The floor beneath his feet quaked.

As he punched forward, gravity changed all around him. Quakes vibrated through the floor, which cracked. The cracks propagated outward through the arena, causing a huge fissure to form by Zhang Lie's fee.

If not for the fact that the hall was reinforced, Zhang Lie's fist would have cracked through the planet's mantle itself, causing a historic earthquake and causing lava to erupt from the planet's very core. All would have been submerged within boiling-hot lava.

Struck by the shockwaves through the air and through the earth, Null Source's localized defensive waves were continuously being suppressed. The cracks in the floor spread further and further. The Null Source had to resist the shockwaves coming at it through two media and maintain a strong tether to the Keys.

In the end, its body shrunk and bounced high into the air.

#### Chapter 1179: The Tablets' Merger

In a region of space sealed by Zhang Lie's four dragonturtle tablets, however, the Null Source's movements were far slower than they should have been. Its body shook violently as it was struck by the shockwaves, and the physical separation between it and the Keys of the Elder Gods grew.

Zhang Lie didn't know why the dragonturtle tablets would suddenly resonate with the Keys. Ninecarp Transformation was a mysterious technique, one whose depths Zhang Lie had barely plumbed.

As the Null Source fought for control of the Keys with the dragonturtle tablets, Zhang Lie made another move.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!" Having invoked the dragonturtle transformation, Zhang Lie's genetic energy had turned mud-yellow. His punches were all but unstoppable, and the heavy blow shattered the defensive waves around the Null Source.

The mud-yellow punch, imbued with gravity, was strong enough to destroy everything in its path.

Waves rippled across the Null Source's body, increasing its weight and making its movement even more difficult.

The Null Source retaliated with waves of its own, which spread toward Zhang Lie.

As Zhang Lie activated his blood ant and dragonwolf soulshards, he transformed into a dragonwolf with russet fur and limbs covered with dragons' scales. His aura became magnified as a hurricane of blood spawned around him.

The next moment, Zhang Lie vanished from sight and evaded the waves.

The Null Source was only conscious on a fundamental level. It knew that it had to get rid of Zhang Lie, or it wouldn't be able to keep its Keys. Only then would the dragonturtle tablets vanish.

The Null Source emitted an intense series of waves, as though a bomb had just exploded.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!" Zhang Lie punched forward, manifesting a blood-colored dragonturtle.

The huge dragonturtle stood in the way of the intense waves. Its strong defenses allowed it to barrel through the attack and smash into the Keys of the Elder Gods.

The momentum from its charge alone caused the gelatinous Null Source's body to cave in. The waves surrounding its body began to ripple, then resonate at high frequency. Quickly thereafter, cracks appeared on the blood-colored dragonturtle's shell.

A dark yellow glow emerged from within the dragonturtle and spread out all over.

The king of chaos, having sensed something, immediately summoned a barrier of the strongest chaotic energy he had access to over the arena.

The mud-yellow energy exploded with devastating force, imbued with the power of gravity. All that energy spread out all over, striking the Null Source with a blow heavier than anything it had sustained during this battle and forcing it to break the link to the Keys.

The four pieces of the Keys were tugged away by the dragonturtle tablets. The Null Source was just about to stop Zhang Lie from doing so, but Zhang Lie followed up with another attack.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring]!"

Mud-yellow genetic energy erupted from Zhang Lie, as though there were hundreds, thousands of dragons surging throughout his body. Each muscle was like another dragon.

a horde of dragons launched out of Zhang Lie's left arm as he expended half his genetic energy in one supercharged attack.

The hundreds of dragons soared into the air, covering up the illumination in the hall. Even the halls of chaos, which might as well have been the size of a world, was unable to sustain the hundreds of dragons.

The dragons swooped down toward the Null Source. Even before they struck, the frightening force of gravity caused the floor to cave in for dozens of meters. The Null Source's body was sent flying.

The four Keys merged with the dragonturtle tablets in a dazzling array of light.

The dragonturtle tablets' text grew more abstruse, and the energy in the tablets grew more and more intense.

The king of chaos interrupted, "We'll end the battle here!"

The Null Source's gelatinous body, which had exploded into multiple pieces, was slowly reforming.

Clearly, Zhang Lie's attack had been insufficient to kill it outright.

After all, the Null Source could hardly be considered living matter at this point, and it was surely far harder to kill. If Zhang Lie weren't mistaken, the Null Source was living parasitically on the Keys themselves. As long as the Keys weren't destroyed, the Null Source would live in an unkillable state—and the tablets that had been created during the primordial era surely wouldn't be easy to destroy.

In other words, the Null Source was essentially an unkillable existence, though it had paid a commensurately heavy price to achieve such an objective. It had only basic intelligence, almost none at all—about the equivalent of a single-celled organism.

Trading its own intelligence for a persistent body was, to Zhang Lie, an extremely unfavorable trade. It was like turning into a tree to avoid being affected by death.

The dragonturtle tablets would take a while to merge completely with the Keys. It looked as though trying to absorb more of the Keys would be impossible—it was likely that the four tablets could only merge with four Keys. Zhang Lie refrained from trying to absorb more of the Keys, but he had no intention of giving up on the Keys that he had already snatched away, either.

The Null Source reformed. Perhaps because Zhang Lie had stolen four of the Keys away, or because it had been dispersed by Zhang Lie, it seemed visibly weaker than before.

Zhang Lie glanced at the reformed Null Source warily, worried that the Null Source would try to snatch the tablets back.

A mouth appeared on the Null Source's body, which opened and closed twice over before it began making noise. "Orange, deux, market, identity, flip..."

As though it were practicing how to speak anew, the Null Source ran through a series of exercises before saying in a halting fashion, "Don't worry, I have no intention of continuing to fight with you. I won't keep trying to wrest the tablets away from you, and I benefit from not having complete control over them, at any rate."

Zhang Lie cried out in surprise, "You can speak?"

The king of chaos seemed equally shocked. "You've recovered? When was this?"

The Null Source replied, "I haven't recovered completely. The fact that I can even speak is a miracle. After four of the Keys were separated from the rest, the seal on my body grew incomplete. The Keys' effect on me has weakened drastically, and I can recover a portion of my intellect and ability to think. I don't know how long this condition will last—but at the least, it's much better than it was before."

The king of chaos asked, "Are the Keys cursed?"

"The Keys need a passionless guardian, but now that I've read and understood part of it, it's impossible for me to return to how I was before." The Null Source might have recovered a portion of its intellect, but the changes to its body that resulted from analyzing the Keys were irreversible. "I'll give you the four Keys. I don't want to continue living like a grub."

Chapter 1180: I Want Map Fragments

"I certainly didn't want to have a bug's intellect forever."

Thinking about how it had been dazed and mindless just a few moments ago, the Null Source shuddered.

Fortunately, four of the Keys had been taken away, freeing the Null Source from that gross indignity.

Zhang Lie continued, "In other words, you didn't end up like this because you managed to decipher the Keys? It was because of the Keys' influence instead?"

The Null Source replied, "This is difficult to explain. It's one of the reasons I ended up this way, but of course, the influence of the Keys is impossible to neglect. Now that you've taken away four of the Keys, that influence is waning, and I can partake in basic conversation. However, anything more complex is still out of the question."

The king of chaos volunteered, "Although i was able to decipher and understand a small part of the information in the Keys, the contents of the tablet are largely far too complex and abstruse. I'm very curious just what is described in the Keys—history about the primordial era, or the path to godhood?"

Information about the primordial era was particularly valuable, and no entity in the third realm knew of it.

The Null Source explained, "The Keys reveal different information depending on how you decipher them. All that information is correct, but what information you get will vary."

The king of chaos continued, "In that case, despite how much time you've spent with the tablets, are you still unaware of their full capacity?"

The Null Source replied, "Not quite. I've managed to decipher a bit of it, but certainly not all. To put it nicely, I'm the owner of the Keys; to put it unkindly, I'm nothing more than a tool."

"Really?"

The king of chaos suspected that the Null Source didn't want to reveal the contents of the Keys.

The Null Source sighed. "Despite how long I've spent with the tablets, I was only able to uncover a bit of information."

Since the Null Source was unwilling to share, there was little the King of Chaos could do.

"If there's nothing else, I'll be leaving now."

The Null Source squirmed toward the edge of the hall.

The king of chaos turned to Zhang Lie. "Zhang Lie, you succeeded in overcoming the Null Source. To be honest, I'm very surprised—and simultaneously regretful. Does someone as brilliant as you really not wish to join me as a companion, to forge the world in our image?"

Zhang Lie refused once more with a shake of his head.

"State your wish, then. Any wish," the king of chaos announced regretfully.

"Any wish?" Zhang Lie clarified.

The king of chaos emphasized, "Please don't question my ability once and again."

"And if I want the three thousand worlds?" Zhang Lie asked.

Everyone in the halls of chaos was astounded, and they began murmuring with each other about Zhang Lie's wish.

The king of chaos began to laugh. "Haha, you truly have a big appetite, don't you? Others have tried making such a wish as well, but winning this one battle isn't enough for a wish of this magnitude."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "So you won't fulfill all wishes in the third realm, then."

The king of chaos warned, "You're not here just to embarrass me or to make my life difficult, are you?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "Forget it. If you're unwilling to grant me such a wish, I'd better change it."

The king of chaos asked again, "What sort of wish do you want?"

Zhang Lie retrieved a map fragment from his dimensional storage, the fragments of the map that he had been diligently collecting within the third realm.

"I want all the map fragments from within the three thousand worlds."

Zhang Lie had once hoped to unify the three thousand worlds, and then to slowly acquire the map fragments scattered about the three thousand worlds. Now, however, since the king of chaos was promising him a wish, why not take advantage of it?

Zhang Lie intended to take advantage of the king of chaos' strength to gather those fragments.

"Ah, those mysterious fragments."

The king of chaos considered the fragments in Zhang Lie's possession.

They had been scattered throughout the third realm for many years, and the king of chaos naturally knew of them.

"I once found that these fragments were very special, but I don't know what they are. Do you know the truth behind them, Zhang Lie?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "If even the strongest king, the king of chaos, is unaware of the true purpose behind these fragments, how would I know? I simply think that they're very interesting, and there might be a large secret hidden within it. That's why I started trying to collect them all."

The king of chaos glanced at him skeptically. "Just out of interest?"

"What's the matter?" Zhang Lie countered. "King of chaos, as the strongest superior king amidst the three thousand worlds, it wouldn't be difficult for you to find the remaining fragments, wouldn't it?"

The king of chaos pondered the situation for a moment. He could tell that Zhang Lie did know about the purpose of these fragments, but that he was unwilling to reveal that information.

Otherwise, Zhang Lie wouldn't have needed to use a precious wish on this goal.

"Or is this something that even you can't accomplish, king of chaos?" Zhang Lie had no intention of revealing the truth behind the map fragments. There was no need to do so, and he was wary of the king of chaos.

"You won't reveal the information you have?" the king of chaos reiterated.

Zhang Lie turned around. "You can't do this, and you can't do that. So your claim of being able to fulfill any wish among the three thousand worlds is nothing more than a joke. Forget it. I won't make things difficult for you. Team, we're leaving."

Sun Xiaowu added knowingly, "Don't be angry, Captain! The king of chaos isn't a god, after all, and he could hardly manage everything. The three thousand worlds represent a huge area, and the map fragments are tiny. It's akin to trying to pick needles out of a haystack, and gathering all the map fragments is no easy task."

"There's no need for this good cop, bad cop routine. It's just somewhat troublesome, hardly impossible. To be frank, I've collected a few of these fragments myself." The king of chaos tore apart space and dumped out a handful of fragments.

He clenched them tightly. Zhang Lie saw thousands, tens of thousands of gold threads suddenly flare to life between the fragments, tangling with each other in the hall.

Only those entities who had some understanding and interaction with karma would be able to see those golden threads.

"Finding these objects isn't difficult, as far as the required power goes. I simply have to make use of karmic strength, to draw on the connections between these fragments."

As the strongest king among the three thousand worlds, the king of chaos naturally was familiar with karma.

To Zhang Lie, the golden threads had gradations in shade, some deep and some faint in color. The fainter ones had less of a connection; the deeper ones had more.

Even if one could see the golden threads, there were differences between each thread that were only visible to those particularly skilled with karma. Zhang Hanxiang, for example, would be able to see a few of those golden threads faintly, but not them all, not their precise shade, and not the shape they formed amidst the hall.