

U. Warlord 1191

Chapter 1191: Unifying the Realm

Space warped around Yang Ze. He hadn't been lying—after returning from the 24th layer of space, Yang Ze had gained penetrating insight into the fundamentals.

Even so, after twenty minutes had passed, Yang Ze only had a forehead of sweat to show for his labors. Clearly, even manipulating the thirteenth layer of space was no straightforward task.

The members of Team Zenith all looked toward Yang Ze.

Zhang Lie suggested, "If you can't do it, Yang Ze, don't force yourself. It might be faster for me to break through the layers of space with brute force."

Yang Ze hurriedly promised, "I'll be done soon, Captain! I've almost captured the sensation!"

Another thirty minutes passed before Sun Xiaowu grumbled, "Can you really do it, Yang Ze?"

Yang Ze roared, "Stop bothering me! I'm trying to concentrate, and you'll break my focus."

After another forty minutes, as Yang Ze's face took on a startling pallor and sweat had dampened his clothes, Li Feng advised, "Yang Ze, I think you had better stop. Our captain's brute force—"

"No, I'm done!" Yang Ze howled. Right then and there, he spread his arms wide and forcibly manifested a pair of doors in the air.

The other side of the doors was precisely the base layer of the third realm.

Yang Ze whirled around with a manic gleam on his face. Despite his exertion, he feigned leisure. "Hahaha, see? I said I could do it, and I did! Only I could have managed such a feat among all the entities of the third realm!"

Zhang Lie shouted, "Quick, the doors are about to close!"

Yang Ze's understanding of space was clearly inferior to the king of chaos', and his portals only lasted a short duration of time. As the doors closed, the hunters quickly squeezed inside.

They were relieved when they came out the other end and returned to the base layer of the third realm.

They hadn't expected that the king of chaos' banquet would be filled with such eventful occurrences, nor that the king of chaos had always been planning to ascend to the fourth realm with the halls of chaos and had been planning to do so for tens of thousands of years.

The king of chaos had always thought of the three thousand worlds as a source of genius and talent. Perhaps he had initially treated the worlds as a resource repository from which he could harvest the necessary materials for ascending into the fourth realm, but as he finished those preparations, he began to acquire excess.

At that point, the king of chaos began to extract talent from the worlds to form a series of clones, augmenting his personal strength in preparation for taking control of a significant portion of the fourth realm.

Zhang Lie had to admit that the king of chaos was very different from the crowd, from all the other lifeforms of the three thousand worlds, and even from the hunters of the Milky Way. Zhang Lie didn't know whether to praise him for his ambition or his daring; just like chaos, the king of chaos was a difficult existence to pin down.

Sun Xiaowu smirked. "Now that the king of chaos is gone, the third realm belongs to our captain!"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Not quite. We'll have to discuss things with the three newly ascended superior kings as well.

Yang Ze continued, "Taking control of the third realm at large isn't an easy task, and can't be accomplished so simply."

Zhang Lie continued, "Trying to unify the third realm requires that we unify the three thousand worlds, first."

Zhang Lie had been thinking of doing so, but only because it would make it much easier for him to hunt down the map fragments he was missing. Thanks to the king of chaos' help, however, he had now acquired all those fragments ahead of schedule.

He also had a new reason to unify the three thousand worlds—to ensure that human hunters would be able to survive in the third realm even after his ascension, and in order to provide security for the members of the Zenith Dojo who would ascend into the third realm in the future.

Now that the king of chaos was gone, it would be trivially easy for him to unify the three thousand worlds, and since it was possible, Zhang Lie would do so.

There were plenty of advantages to doing so, and chiefly among them was the fact that he would be able to expand his farm of genetic lifeforms and finish amassing his monarch gene fragments.

Zhang Lie continued, "To unify the three thousand worlds, we'll have to combine them all into one cohesive whole."

Yang Ze nodded. "Indeed. It's too hard to govern the three thousand worlds as they are."

Sun Mengmeng asked with worry, "Will the three newly ascended superior kings be willing to give up their status and power?"

Zhang Lie nodded. "They will, because none of them are fools."

Yang Ze snorted. "They wouldn't dare oppose our captain."

Fang Yi stated, "If any disagree, we can show them our might. Against our martial prowess, all will submit."

Zhou Ying disagreed. "Fang Yi, I can't agree with those sentiments. The draconian sage, for one, is a friend and ally of the humans. We've weathered thick and thin with them, and they've been our stalwart allies even when we were weaker."

Zhang Hanxiang added, "And Sister Qianlin's from the Zongming world."

Hong Xi pointed out, "We're allied with the scaleman world, and they even fought with us to resist the incursion of the superior worlds of antiquity."

Li Feng clapped Fang Yi on the shoulder. "Lad, are you growing arrogant because of your new weapon?"

Fang Yi grinned at him with teeth. "You want to fight?"

Li Feng replied, "I'll take you up on that offer once we're back in the draconian world."

Zhang Lie finally jumped in. "I've never considered taking over the three superior worlds by force. What I meant is that the three new kings are all smart and intelligent, and they'll understand the merit of this unification and their own gains from it."

Yang Ze nodded. "Quite so, if they've kept up so far. I've never met the scaleman king, but the draconian sage and Li Zongming are both expert statesmen. They'll understand your plan, captain."

Once the three thousand worlds were unified, more regions would fall to their governance.

Zhang Lie continued, "As our allies, they'll be given even more land to govern, and they'll have access to more authority."

Yang Ze nodded. "Anyone intelligent would realize that it's far more worthwhile to rule over a tract of land in this unified world than just a single superior world."

As for the scaleman king, Zhang Lie didn't think there would be any issues there.

For one, the scaleman king was Zhang Lie's disciple, and he had always listened to Zhang Lie. To him, Zhang Lie was more important than even the superior world he governed.

Zhang Lie never intended to call on that aspect of their relationship,

but he knew that the scaleman king was growing weary of ruling over his world. If there were an opportunity to manifest change, the scaleman king would accept it readily.

If someone else were to make this suggestion, the scaleman king might not listen, but he wouldn't refuse it from Zhang Lie himself.

The draconian sage wouldn't be a problem, either. The draconian sage didn't seek power for power's sake, and he understood very well that letting go would sometimes be more rewarding than tightly holding onto something.

Chapter 1192: Piecing Together the Puzzle

As for Li Zongming... well, Li Zongming could be convinced. He was intelligent and oriented toward the big picture, after all.

"We'll be able to discuss matters with the draconian sage right away."

Zhang Lie shattered space and created a portal leading back to the draconian world.

As they stepped into the draconian world, the draconian sage hurriedly teleported to their side. He asked, "There was a terrible commotion just now. Were you all the ones who caused it?"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "For you to have appeared before us the moment we returned... even if we were to claim ignorance, you wouldn't believe us, would you?"

The draconian sage pressed, "Just what happened?"

Zhang Lie replied seriously, "Unfortunately, we really weren't responsible this time."

The draconian sage cried out, "Don't joke around like this! Just what happened?"

Zhang Lie grumbled, "Why do you blame us for everything that happens in the realm? It's not our fault!"

"The three thousand worlds have had more things happen over the last decade than the last few centuries. How many of those events were ones that none of you were responsible for?"

Zhang Lie couldn't help but go silent.

He had been very active in the third realm these last few years, and had caused a large number of events as a result. Indeed, he did seem to be... responsible... for essentially all that had happened.

Was the death spirit king's sudden invasion unrelated to Zhang Lie? Of course not.

The death spirit king had pushed his plans forward because the black spirits' outposts were slowly being taken over; he anticipated that some of the superior worlds had seen through his plans.

In other words, all those events really were connected to Zhang Lie in some fashion.

The draconian sage continued, "I would believe it if you said that you killed the king of chaos and incited this whole series of explosions, but if you were to claim that none of that was related to your actions, well, I won't believe it."

Zhang Lie sighed. "Unfortunately, I'm not strong enough to defeat the king of chaos, and we really weren't responsible for this series of affairs. The explosion was caused by the king of chaos ascending to a higher realm with the halls of chaos, and we were simply spectators for the show."

The draconian sage seemed to be making an odd expression. "You were only a spectator for the show?"

Zhang Lie scowled. "That doesn't seem to be what you should be focusing on—the important point is that the king of chaos has ascended!"

The draconian sage didn't allow Zhang Lie to change the topic. "You haven't answered my question. You were only a spectator during all this?"

Zhang Lie nodded in confirmation. "Exactly."

The draconian sage opined, "It's not unusual for the king of chaos to ascend with the rest of his crew, is it? After all, he's the strongest superior king."

"Within the halls of chaos were another group of entities as strong as superior kings—about a few dozen of them."

The draconian sage blinked. "The king of chaos ascended with a few dozen others?"

"Exactly so."

The draconian sage experienced a brief moment of shock before he replied calmly, "No wonder there was such a huge disturbance."

"You don't seem to be too surprised?"

The draconian sage shrugged. "I don't know much about ascension, and neither am I interested. All I know is that it's an arduous task. Now that I understand why the entire realm was shaking, I'll bid you farewell now."

Zhang Lie told him, "A while later, I'll be summoning you, Li Zongming, and the scaleman king for another discussion. I have very important news to share."

The draconian sage turned toward him and pursed his lips. "The fact that you have such an earnest expression... I'm feeling a sense of unease."

Zhang Lie didn't respond. Instead, he stretched lazily. "I'll be heading back to rest for now, then. I fought with the Null Source and three of the king of chaos' clones."

The draconian sage's eyes widened. "What? What happened?"

Li Feng turned to leave. "I'll be resting as well."

Yang Ze rolled his eyes. "You're off to find your mammoth girlfriend, aren't you?"

Li Feng chuckled as he waved a hand.

The draconian sage called them back. "Hold on, hold on! What are these halls of chaos, and what happened to the world of primordial chaos?"

Zhang Hanxiang stated, "I'll hand over the hundred superior worlds' worth of energy to Zhu."

The draconian sage's eyes widened. "Hanxiang, what did you say? A hundred superior worlds' worth?"

Zhang Hanxiang nodded. "It was a gift from the king of chaos."

The draconian sage was shocked. "Truly? He gave you a gift just like that?"

Fang Yi gave the draconian sage a thumbs up. The king of chaos was very generous. He forged me a spear stronger than even a disaster-grade weapon."

Fang Yi retrieved the spear of Chaos.

Zhang Lie briefly recounted the series of events that had occurred during the king of chaos' night banquet. Afterwards, he left before the draconian sage could ask him any more questions, heading straight for Li Qianlin.

He informed Li Qianlin of what had happened during his journeys. Li Qianlin responded calmly, but her eyes showed a wealth of emotions.

Subsequently, Zhang Lie headed off to rest.

After that, with a thudding heart, he spread out the map fragments he had received from the king of chaos.

His hands seemed to slap the void as a titanic burst of energy appeared around him. The map fragments rose into the air. Zhang Lie's gaze swept across the fragments and he pieced them together mentally, connecting the physical fragments together as he did so.

The map was swiftly being assembled, but there were so many fragments that it nevertheless took the entire day and night. Zhang Lie never left his room; Li Qianlin and Sun Mengmeng both tried to visit him, but when they saw the room charged with genetic energy, map fragments covering every possible surface, they were both stunned.

Zhang Lie was sweating profusely as he manipulated hundreds of such fragments, murmuring to himself, "No, this piece must have been misplaced..."

Li Qianlin and Sun Mengmeng were partially so shocked because he was sweating profusely—his constitution was such that he could kill a few superior kings without even breaking a sweat.

Clearly, completing a puzzle of this magnitude was far more taxing to Zhang Lie than simple-minded slaughter, and it was less about physical stamina than mental stamina.

It took Zhang Lie quite a while to notice their entrance. He raised his head and asked, "What are the two of you doing here?"

All his attention was devoted to the map—even with his overwhelming strength, he hadn't sensed their approach until they were in the same room as he was.

Sun Mengmeng began, "When I realized you hadn't come out of your rooms for the entire day, Captain, I came over to see what you were working on."

Zhang Lie blinked. "It's already been a day and a night?"

In the past, he had frequently heard that a puzzle of 20,000 pieces could easily take a person three to five days to piece together. He always thought it an exaggeration, but now...

Chapter 1193: The Puzzle's Revelation

Even a 20,000-piece puzzle would be a challenge—but the map fragments were a puzzle consisting of not just 20,000, but rather over 100,000 pieces.

There were no identifying marks on the backs of those fragments, and Zhang Lie himself had no clue what the final product would look like. This drastically increased the difficulty of the puzzle; it would be a Herculean task.

Even so, Zhang Lie had managed to finish half the puzzle within half a day—and perfectly accurately, as well.

Furthermore, a large number of the pieces were identical in size and shape, and even the best supercomputer in the Milky Way would need over 36 hours to accomplish such a feat.

As Zhang Lie continued piecing together the puzzle, however, he felt as though something was amiss.

Li Qianlin said, "I made some porridge. Won't you have a little?"

Zhang Lie frowned. "Once I finish the puzzle."

Ordinary genetic hunters would be perfectly fine even if they fasted for a day, let alone Zhang Lie.

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Is this map important?"

Zhang Lie hedged. "To speak of its importance, it is indeed quite important; to speak of its unimportance, it is indeed quite unimportant."

Sun Mengmeng asked again, "More important than eating?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I've been collecting these pieces for so long. I do want to know the secret they hide."

Li Qianlin smiled. "I'll bring the porridge in, then. Let me know when you're done."

Regardless of what Zhang Lie was doing—piecing together a puzzle, cultivating, even lying in bed and doing nothing—as long as he wasn't out there gallivanting through the wilderness and was staying somewhere she could accompany him, Li Qianlin would be happy.

Sun Mengmeng urged, "You can finish the puzzle tomorrow. There's no need to finish it immediately—it's not going to run off, after all."

Zhang Lie replied seriously, "While piecing together the puzzle, I came up with an idea as to what the answer could be, and I'd like to verify it."

Sun Mengmeng sighed. "Do you need some help?"

Zhang Lie didn't respond. He continued with the puzzle.

Sun Mengmeng suggested, "Why don't we call Yang Ze and Li Feng over? There are just too many pieces."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Too many cooks will spoil the broth. Two or three people would be ideal."

Li Qianlin came back with a bowl of porridge and joined in the fun.

As Zhang Lie pieced together more of the puzzle, an unusual expression came over him, and he began to frown more and more deeply.

When they were halfway done with the puzzle, Zhang Lie murmured to himself, "No, this can't be—something has to be wrong."

As they neared completion, Zhang Lie began to grow faster and faster.

By the time they were three quarters of the way finished, Zhang Lie mumbled again, "Surely not... They must only look alike."

Li Qianlin and Sun Mengmeng stopped as they glanced at Zhang Lie in worry.

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Captain, are you alright?"

Li Qianlin added, "You've been going at this for two days. Isn't it time to rest?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "No, we're almost done. I think I know what this puzzle will end up being, and if I don't confirm it for myself, I won't be able to rest."

Li Qianlin and Sun Mengmeng didn't dissuade Zhang Lie any further.

After all, given his strength and constitution, it wouldn't be a challenge for him to fight for two consecutive days, let alone finish a puzzle. Zhang Lie had eaten something in the meantime, and he had even rested a little near the start. With the two women supervising him, nothing would go wrong.

By the time the puzzle was four-fifths complete, Sun Mengmeng stretched and announced excitedly, "Zhang Lie, we're almost done!"

However, Zhang Lie's face was dark. He was furiously piecing together the remaining parts of the puzzle, as though obsessed.

Sun Mengmeng was shocked by his behavior. "Captain? Zhang Lie?"

As the three of them worked together, the puzzle finally neared completion.

The last stretch took fewer than three hours. As more of the puzzle was completed, it became clearer where the remaining pieces would go.

As they looked at the completed puzzle, a sense of accomplishment welled up in Sun Mengmeng and Li Qianlin's hearts. Just as they were about to cheer in jubilation, Zhang Lie slammed down on the puzzle with a fist and sent the pieces flying.

Sun Mengmeng and Li Qianlin were stupefied.

"What's the matter, Zhang Lie?" Li Qianlin called out.

The two of them found that something really seemed to be amiss with Zhang Lie.

"No, it can't be. There must be something wrong with this map—it has to be fake! That can't be where the map is pointing! Could the king of chaos have done something?"

No, that couldn't be. The king of chaos had mentioned that he had tried to collect the map fragments as well, only to lose his patience.

Could the king of chaos have collected the entire map and then modified it? But there was no reason for him to do so, and no reason for him to lie to Zhang Lie.

"Again. We must have made a mistake. Let's do the puzzle again!" As though obsessed, Zhang Lie scattered the pieces of the puzzle and began redoing it.

Sun Mengmeng and Li Qianlin glanced at each other. In silence, they helped restore the scattered pieces of the puzzle.

Both of them had seen the completed puzzle, and neither thought that there was anything wrong.

Clearly, Zhang Lie knew more than they did, but neither of them tried to assuage their curiosity.

Zhang Lie mumbled to himself, "Perhaps there's a second way to assemble the puzzle? If we do it again, there won't be a problem."

The three of them restored the puzzle as it had been, no different from before. Zhang Lie inclined his head to the ceiling and began to laugh.

Sun Mengmeng and Li Qianlin glanced at each other again in worry.

Li Qianlin called out, "Zhang Lie, don't frighten us so!"

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Captain, there's no need to be so agitated. It's just a puzzle, isn't it?"

Li Qianlin promised, "There really might be a second way to assemble the puzzle. We can try again, if you'd like."

Zhang Lie continued to smile. "No, there's no other way. This time, I contemplated all other possibilities in my head."

The second time Zhang Lie completed the puzzle, he was simultaneously assembling a hundred other cases with his mind.

"I tried all possible combinations, and even different ways of looking at or thinking about the puzzle. In the end, I concluded that this was the only possibility."

Sun Mengmeng and Li Qianlin didn't know what to say, nor what Zhang Lie had found from the map to react in such an adverse fashion.

Zhang Lie consoled them, "There's no need to worry. I'm fine—I just feel a little like a fool."

Chapter 1194: The Truth of the Puzzle

Zhang Lie continued, "To have spent so long collecting these pieces for a map, a map that we can't use at the moment..."

Zhang Lie knew that this was a treasure map, but he hadn't expected it to be an inaccessible one.

"We'll be able to get at the treasure eventually... but not now."

The 100,000-piece puzzle revealed a treasure map, as Zhang Lie had anticipated, but the treasure wasn't located in the third realm.

This was a map of the fourth realm.

Only Zhang Lie, who had been in the fourth realm before, could recognize this as a map of the fourth realm.

If the king of chaos had the ability to collect all the map fragments, could he be unaware of the completed puzzle?

Why had the map fragments lain scattered in the third realm for so long, without anyone bothering to collect them?

Perhaps the king of chaos really did think it troublesome to do so, but it was more likely, in Zhang Lie's opinion, that he had seen the map and not recognized that it was a map of the fourth realm.

Perhaps there were others in the third realm who had collected the map like Zhang Lie, only to find it inscrutable. It was no land they had known;

no lifeform of the third realm would recognize the map as one for the fourth realm. Even hunters from the Milky Way would be perplexed.

Indeed, neither Sun Mengmeng nor Li Qianlin had any inkling of what the map represented.

Sun Mengmeng was a hunter from the Milky Way, whereas Li Qianlin was an indigenous member of the third realm. Sun Mengmeng was one of the most powerful hunters, while Li Qianlin boasted incredible status relative to most of the aliens. If both of them reacted in this fashion, it was clear that others would react the same way.

Only those who had entered the fourth realm would know the secret behind this map.

To obtain a treasure map for the fourth realm in the third... Zhang Lie had to laugh.

To have arduously collected these fragments and not be able to transform them into treasure immediately... Zhang Lie had to laugh.

"Captain, what if we sent the map to the Milky Way and used the best supercomputers to identify it? Sun Mengmeng didn't know the reason for Zhang Lie's strange behavior.

Zhang Lie kept the map. "No, there's no need. This isn't too bad an outcome."

No one in the third realm would understand the map, but those who had gone to the fourth realm surely could.

Zhang Lie told his two helpers, "You must both be tired from helping me. Let's have a good meal."

Sun Mengmeng's eyes lit up. "Really? What?"

Zhang Lie replied, "We'll go find two post-peak-grade lifeforms from the farm and roast them."

Sun Mengmeng sighed. "Ah, that's it? I thought there would be something good!"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "Do you know how many people would want those peak gene fragments? Now that you've gotten some monarch gene fragments, you're starting to look down on post-peak-grade lifeforms... Sun Mengmeng, you're really starting to get snobbish," he joked.

Li Qianlin tutted at him. "You should rest instead—you've worked for so long!"

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "It's alright. My constitution can handle it."

Sun Mengmeng agreed with Li Qianlin. "Right, Captain, you can treat us to a meal at any time. You should rest after your exertion."

Zhang Lie flexed an arm, revealing corded muscle. "I'm perfectly fine. I could even defeat a superior king now as is."

Li Qianlin tugged on Sun Mengmeng's hand as they made to leave.

"We'll come find you about our compensation once you've rested."

Zhang Lie scratched his head. "Alright, then. Have Li Feng and the others join us, too. It'll be more fun with more people."

After Li Qianlin and Sun Mengmeng left, Zhang Lie had a good night's sleep. The next morning, as he walked out of his room, he saw Li Qianlin heading over with breakfast.

Li Qianlin smiled. "I didn't know whether or not I should wake you up. Have some breakfast."

Zhang Lie had a bite of the meal that Li Qianlin brought over and gave her a thumbs up. "It's excellent. You could be a royal chef—I want to eat your cooking forever."

Li Qianlin blushed and smiled as she rapped Zhang Lie's head with her hand. "Don't speak nonsense while eating!"

Just then, Sun Mengmeng headed over to see that Zhang Lie had already woken up. "Ah, you're awake, Captain!"

Zhang Lie smiled. "Have you had breakfast? Why don't you join us? Qianlin's cooking is delicious."

Sun Mengmeng glanced at the meal and said, "I've already eaten. I won't disturb the two of you, then."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes at her. "No, no, it's just a meal. I told you, Qianlin's cooking is delicious. You have to try it."

Sun Mengmeng continued shaking her head. "No thank you, I'm already full."

Zhang Lie nodded. "Will you let the others know to join me at the farm after breakfast?"

Sun Mengmeng nodded, then ran away as though she were fleeing.

Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin headed to the farm. When Zhu saw him, she happily pounced on him.

Zhang Lie asked, "Zhu, how's the farm doing?"

Zhu scowled. "Zhang Lie, are you here to see me or your precious genetic lifeforms?"

"Ha! Didn't I just see you?"

Zhu pursed her lips. "Well, whatever. I'm just a machine here to tend the genetic lifeforms, and I'm not skilled at anything else. I don't suppose I deserve any recognition."

Zhang Lie patted Zhu on the head. "No, of course not. I've never treated you like a machine, Zhu, and you're very important to me."

Zhu nodded. "Thank you, Zhang Lie. The farm's developing well under my care. Hanxiang brought back a huge supply of superior world's energy a day or so ago, and a new monarch-grade lifeform was birthed yesterday."

Zhang Lie clapped his hands. "Excellent! Since we're all here, we'll slaughter that lifeform nad have a feast."

The members of Team Zenith all looked at each other in excitement. They would be able to acquire more monarch gene fragments!"

Zhang Lie continued, "How's that special monarch-grade lifeform doing?"

Zhang Lie was rather invested in its growth.

"It's reached a bottleneck," Zhu replied. "It hasn't grown much recently."

"Were there any special changes?"

"No." Zhu shook her head. "Its growth has slowed down almost to the point of stalling, and I think its potential may have run its course."

Zhang Lie was a little disappointed. He had been hoping that monarch-grade lifeform would advance to post-monarch-grade, and even to the next level entirely, but it seemed as though the realm might not be able to support such a lifeform.

Even so, just in case, Zhang Lie planned to have a look at the lifeform himself.

"Let me inspect the lifeform."

Chapter 1195: Spatial Collapse

Just in case there were issues that Zhu didn't notice, Zhang Lie decided to check on the special lifeform himself.

"...is it pregnant?" Sun Xiaowu couldn't resist asking upon seeing the monarch-grade lifeform's distended belly.

Zhu shook her head. "I considered that possibility, but there's no sign of life within the lifeform's body."

Zhang Lie himself stepped forward to have a closer look at the strange monarch-grade lifeform. Within its body was a fearsome strength beyond the likes of a monarch-grade lifeform, but even so, the lifeform hadn't managed to break through. It was as though there were some impermeable barrier preventing its evolution.

Zhang Lie had no idea how to deal with such a situation, either.

"Is it a restriction of the very realm itself...?" That was Zhang Lie's conclusion.

The special lifeform looked to be in great pain, its body stretched far beyond what was ordinary or normal.

Glowing light pulsed across its belly.

Zhu asked, "Zhang Lie, do you have any idea what to do?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "I don't have a clue, either. If its condition hasn't improved by the time I return next, it might be time to kill it."

The special monarch-grade lifeform lying on the ground keened in agony, but Zhang Lie ignored it. After all, the reason he was rearing these lifeforms was to consume them. The reason he had allowed the monarch-grade lifeform to continue growing was to see if it could evolve beyond monarch-grade. Since its growth had stopped, there was no need to keep it alive any longer.

"Let's slaughter the other monarch-grade lifeform, then."

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 (pinnacle), Blade of the Heavens (pinnacle)

Genes: Basic, 160; Mutated, 150; Superior, 150; Peak, 150; Disaster, 100; Monarch, 45

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

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

[For consuming the flesh of a monarch-grade titanspawn crab, you received one monarch gene fragment. Current total: 54]

[For consuming the flesh of a monarch-grade titanspawn crab, you received one monarch gene fragment. Current total: 55]

Upon consuming the newly evolved monarch-grade lifeform, the members of Team Zenith patted their bellies in satisfaction. They had obtained ten more monarch gene fragments, and their strength evolved once more.

Yang Ze said, "Right, Captain, there's something wrong with the high-dimensional space around here."

Sun Xiaowu frowned. "What? Why?"

Yang Ze replied, "The reason none of you can sense anything is because you don't have sufficient facility with space—and because that instability hasn't spread to the shallower layers."

Zhang Lie asked, "What problem?"

"Rather than describing it myself, it'd be better if we went straight to the source."

Yang Ze modulated his own energy as he opened a portal to a deeper layer of space. He had managed to train and refine that ability further; as long as he were able to enter a deeper layer of space than his opponent, he would never lose.

Yang Ze's mastery of this ability was still relatively weak, however, and it had taken him twenty whole minutes to create such a portal. That said, it was a significant improvement over what had happened last time.

The thirteenth layer of space was filled with cracks, which the will of the third realm was steadily repairing.

Entering that space caused Li Qianlin, who was relatively weak, to experience a bout of discomfort. Noticing this, Zhang Lie immediately stabilized the surrounding space with genetic energy.

Panting, Yang Ze called out, "The problem is on a deeper layer of space. Let me rest for a moment."

After ten minutes, Yang Ze created another portal, this time to the fifteenth layer. Upon witnessing what had happened to the fifteenth layer of space, Zhang Lie turned serious.

There was a huge hole in the fifteenth layer, one that had resulted from the king of chaos' explosion. Space was continuing to collapse around that hole, as though it were a whirlpool leading to the depths of primordial chaos.

The same problem was plaguing the deeper layers of space.

Zhang Lie felt a headache starting to form. "That king of chaos—he's left us with a huge problem!"

Sun Mengmeng murmured, "After all these days, the problem seems to have worsened..."

Li Feng tutted. "What has the will of the world been doing? Is it skiving off?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "No, the will of the third realm can't fix this issue."

"What do you mean?" Yang Ze asked.

"If the will of the third realm were whole, it would have been able to patch up this hole in mere moments. However, what the king of chaos failed to recognize was that the fragmentary nature of the will of the third realm left it incapable of even fixing a hole of this magnitude at all.

Sun Xiaowu grumbled, "So we have to clean up his mess?"

Yang Ze seemed very worried. "We can't just let this hole propagate..."

Zhang Lie squinted. "Given the rate at which the will of the world is repairing the hole and the rate at which it's expanding, by the time the will of the world fixes the shallow layers, the 24th layer of space will have collapsed entirely.

"What will happen in that case?" Sun Mengmeng asked.

"Space will collapse..." Yang Ze replied.

Zhang Lie continued, "These deeper layers of space aren't located above the three thousand worlds, nor below them. Rather, they exist nowhere and everywhere—they're the foundation of space, as well as their barrier. Once these deeper layers collapse, there'll essentially be a sinkhole that forms, destabilizing the shallower layers. The entire third realm might end up being destroyed."

Li Qianlin cried out in panic, "Zhang Lie, is this something you can fix?"

Zhang Lie sighed. "Unfortunately, I have no such ability."

Yang Ze mirrored his sigh. "To be able to repair high-dimensional space... this is something that requires exceptional accomplishment in spatial manipulation. Perhaps the king of chaos might be able to manage it, but it's not something I can do anything about."

Sun Mengmeng's face was serious. "Zhang Lie, Captain, given the circumstances, I believe that the best course of action is to notify the highest authority Hong Tianqi immediately, then to activate the emergency evacuation order in the third realm to send the third-realm hunters back to the Milky Way. We can re-evaluate once everyone has evacuated."

Chapter 1196: Crisis of the Realm

Li Qianlin cried out, "If all of you evacuate, what about the indigenous peoples of the third realm? There are uncountably many aliens and genetic lifeforms around here—you hunters might be able to escape to the Milky Way, but this is our homeland, our only residence!"

Her father was here; her homeland was here. Upon hearing that a calamity was about to terrorize the realm, Li Qianlin almost collapsed in panic.

Zhang Lie comforted her. "Qianlin, calm down. I don't intend on leaving you behind. The third realm is important to all you indigenous peoples, and it's equally important to us. Unless it's absolutely necessary, we won't give up."

Sun Mengmeng continued, "Even so, these layers of space are collapsing at a terrifying pace. Captain, considering how long the evacuation will take, I think we should give that order sooner rather than later."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "The situation isn't quite so hopeless yet. I think there's still a possibility that we can save the realm."

"How?"

Li Qianlin and the others looked toward Zhang Lie with rekindled hope.

Yang Ze frowned. "If you and I can't do anything about it, Captain, I don't think there's anyone in the third realm who can."

Zhang Lie smiled. "No person, perhaps, but what if it weren't a person?"

Yang Ze seemed shocked. "You mean... the will of the third realm itself?"

Zhang Lie nodded. "We can't do so, but the will of the third realm can."

Yang Ze thought about the ramifications carefully before concluding that Zhang Lie's suggestion was sound.

"The will of the third realm doesn't have that ability at the moment."

Zhang Lie nodded. "Because it's fragmented. As long as we restore it to its original form, it would have the ability to proceed."

Yang Ze's eyes shone. "Unifying the third realm!

As long as we can unify the third realm, it'll be saved."

Li Qianlin frowned. "How do you plan on unifying it?"

Zhang Lie tried to avoid any problematic language. "I'll recombine the three thousand worlds into a single entity."

Li Qianlin seemed a little confused. "Recombining the three thousand worlds? How will that save us all?"

Zhang Lie explained, "The three thousand worlds were formed by the fragmentation of a single primordial world, according to the king of chaos. However, as a result of some accident or another, the world shattered into the three thousand pieces we know."

Zhang Lie had already resolved to unify the three thousand worlds, and now he had to speed up the timeline for doing so.

Li Qianlin frowned. "Will Father and the other kings be willing to give up their authority?"

Zhang Lie smiled. "Don't underestimate your father. He and the other two newly ascended superior kings are intelligent men, and they'll realize that this is the only possible plan.

Li Qianlin didn't want her father and Zhang Lie to oppose each other.

Yang Ze invoked spatial authority once more to send everyone back to the base layer of the third realm.

Now that the third realm was collapsing bit by bit, there was no time to waste. The members of Team Zenith sought out the draconian sage immediately.

The draconian sage wasn't hiding his aura, so it was trivially easy for them to identify his location.

The draconian sage cocked his head. "What are all of you doing here? I'm a little worried that there's a disaster on its way..."

As far as the draconian sage knew, there was no one who could oppose Zhang Lie within the third realm, so there shouldn't have been any need for them all to call on him together.

"I want to unify the three thousand worlds," Zhang Lie began.

The draconian sage blinked, then sighed. "So we're finally at this point, are we?"

"You predicted this possibility, Sage?"

The draconian sage stood up and walked toward the window, where he looked out toward the draconian world.

"All men have the same desires. Once all of you acquired sufficient strength to dominate over the third realm, I anticipated that this would eventually happen—though not so quickly."

Zhang Lie continued, "I intend to discuss this with the three new superior kings."

The draconian sage clasped his hands behind his back. "I don't have an issue, but you need to leave enough land for the draconians to survive—and it can't be worse than what we already have."

"That's not an issue," Zhang Lie promised. "I guarantee your living conditions will only improve."

"I accept, then."

Zhang Lie turned to Li Qianlin with a smile.

"I told you, all three of them are smart fellows."

Sun Xiaowu wondered, "Sage, I'm shocked you were willing to agree so easily..."

The draconian sage sighed. "Of course. After all, my position as superior king wasn't obtained through my own efforts. The draconians had initially only possessed a medium-sized world before you all came to the third realm. Our world quickly became a large world, then a superior one. I knew that, whatever I obtained from all of you, I would have to repay one day."

The draconian sage further knew the futility of his struggle. There was too big a gulf between him and Zhang Lie. If Zhang Lie wanted to, he would easily be able to crush even a dozen draconian sages.

If he had no power of his own, neither would he have free will.

Zhang Lie gave him a thumbs up. "That's very logical."

The draconian sage rolled his eyes. "What other choice do I have? It's hardly as though I can beat all of you."

The members of Team Zenith glanced at each other with a sigh.

"Go on, scram!" The draconian sage waved weakly. "I don't want to look at any of you right now."

Zhang Lie began, "There's an affair you should be aware of. If things were to go wrong, all of you will suffer, so just in case..."

Although Zhang Lie could have hidden the information from the draconian sage, the draconian sage was an ally to whom he would have to show some amount of trust. It was only reasonable to reveal

all that he knew—it certainly wasn't because Zhang Lie couldn't help but want to make the draconian sage panic given how calm he was being.

The draconian sage suddenly felt a flicker of unease at Zhang Lie's expression.

"Why are you looking at me like that? Did something bad happen again?"

Zhang Lie gave the draconian sage a thumbs up. "You really are prescient, Sage!"

The draconian sage frowned. "But what in the realm would be able to stand against all of you?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "Combat ability is measured by destructiveness, and it can't resolve all problems."

Sun Mengmeng's face was deathly serious. "Sage, the third realm is about to be destroyed."

The draconian sage gaped. "What are you talking about?"

Zhang Lie explained, "The third realm is about to suffer a crisis the likes of which have never before been seen in its history. My actions were in order to prevent it."

Chapter 1197: Destruction of the Realm

The draconian sage cried out, "I don't believe it! What problem could there be that you hunters can't resolve?"

Zhang Lie recounted what they had discovered to the draconian sage.

The draconian sage was stupefied.

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I really didn't decide to unify the third realm because of my ambitions. It would be a lie to say that I didn't contemplate such an idea, of course, but the more immediate reason is to save the three thousand worlds of the third realm. To do so, we need a complete will of the realm, not a fragmented one. Do you understand?"

The draconian sage sighed. "I was upset with you initially, but after hearing your explanation, I'm feeling a lot better. I'm acceding not to satisfy your ambitions, but in order to save the third realm."

Zhang Lie smiled. "It looks like I'll be able to claim moral rectitude, then."

The draconian sage replied, "I'm a lot more agreeable because of what you've done for the draconian world. In large part, you were the one who made it the way it is today, but I don't imagine Li Zongming would be an easy target."

"I'll do my best to convince my father with Zhang Lie," Li Qianlin pledged.

Subsequently, Zhang Lie and the others rode the multicolored dragon to the Zongming world.

The moment they entered, Li Zongming shattered space and appeared before them. "You all are finally here!"

Zhang Lie asked, "Is there a reason you were looking for us?"

Li Zongming asked, "Why is the third realm quaking? What has happened?"

Zhang Lie was surprised. "You can sense it already?"

Li Qianlin exhaled. "Since you've sensed it already, Father, it'll be much easier for us."

Zhang Lie suggested, "At any rate, let's chat within the palace."

Li Zongming had noticed everyone's expressions. "It looks like this is no minor affair."

Zhang Lie replied seriously, "This is a catastrophe that could destroy the three thousand worlds."

"One that even you can't stop?"

"It'll need your cooperation."

The group walked toward Li Zongming's palace, where he ordered his servants to provide tea and snacks. Zhang Lie shook his head. "There's no need for the pleasantries. We can't waste even a single second. Once we convince you, I'll have to make a trip to the scaleman world, and then back to the Milky Way to submit a report—I might have to borrow its strength, too."

Li Zongming asked, "In that case, make your request directly. What do you need me to cooperate with?"

Zhang Lie hesitated. "You had better hear the whole story. It's not a trivial sacrifice you'll have to make."

Li Zongming frowned. "Think of our relationship! We've gone through thick and thin together, and I do trust you. As long as you're not seeking my life, my daughter, or my world, we can talk."

"I need the Zongming world."

Li Zongming hesitated.

"You're interested in the Zongming world?" Li Zongming asked. As though he had just thought of something, he followed up with, "You're interested in the three thousand worlds?"

As far as Li Zongming knew, Zhang Lie wasn't particularly interested in status and power.

Zhang Lie sighed. "That's why I think it's better if you hear the whole story."

Li Zongming nodded. "Very well."

Zhang Lie explained how he had been invited to the king of chaos' night banquet as a guest, and then the whole series of events that had ultimately led to the king of chaos' ascension to the fourth realm.

Li Zongming couldn't help but gasp in admiration. "When I first saw the king of chaos, I recognized that he wasn't considered the strongest superior king for nothing. I knew he was undefeated among the third realm, but not that he was so strong that he could ascend with the whole of the halls of chaos! How many years would it take me to achieve the same feat? It might take my entire life just to get close..."

Zhang Lie continued, "That's not all."

Upon hearing what trouble the king of chaos had left behind for them, Li Zongming grew so incensed that he broke the armrests of his chair. He stood up in a frenzy. "This damned king of chaos!"

Zhang Lie beckoned for Li Zongming to calm down. "Now's not the time to get mad. The king of chaos himself might be unaware of the trouble he caused. If you really are mad, wait until we ascend and find the king of chaos—you can punch him in the face then."

Li Zongming calmed down a little.

"Zhang Lie, I do trust you, but the Zongming world doesn't belong to me alone. It's my ancestors' dreams, and it's finally been realized during my generation. There are innumerable lifeforms in the Zongming world, and I have to take responsibility for them.

Zhang Lie asked, "What are your concerns? We all know each other, so you can be direct."

Li Zongming asked, "I'd like to confirm the problem with the high-dimensional spaces for myself."

"It's best to be prudent. Yang Ze," Zhang Lie called out, snapping his fingers. "Can you show the Zongming king the issue?"

Yang Ze marshaled spatial force to open a portal into the deepest layers of space, bringing Li Zongming along with him.

Li Qianlin served them tea and snacks as they awaited Yang Ze and Li Zongming's return.

After about half an hour, Yang Ze returned with Li Zongming in tow.

Both their faces were pale. Yang Ze was panting and sweating all over from the exertion, while Li Zongming was either uncomfortable in the deepest layers of space or shocked by the devastation that had been wrought.

Li Qianlin passed them each a cup of tea. Li Zongming, who preferred to enjoy tea in small sips as he sampled its flavor, now drained a whole pot in just a few gulps.

As a bit of his pallor retreated, he asked, "Will what happened in the deepest layers of space occur again among the three thousand worlds?"

Zhang Lie thought for a moment. "That's hard to say. I haven't experienced such a major spatial catastrophe before, and spatial collapse is only the ideal outcome."

Li Zongming's pallor crept back with a vengeance. "The collapse of high-dimensional space is the ideal outcome?!"

Even Li Qianlin was shocked by the admission.

"Spatial collapse? How many worlds would be annihilated, how many lives killed..."

The Zongming world was so large that it would likely be affected as a result.

Zhang Lie suggested, "Well, if the superficial layer collapses, a portion of the higher-dimensional spaces might survive, but even a 10% survival rate would be optimistic. In the worst-case scenario, a spatial rift would destroy the third realm entirely, leaving a 1% survival rate at best."

Li Zongming couldn't remain still upon hearing those words.

Chapter 1198: A Sense of Grievance

Li Zongming was stronger than the draconian sage, and he had been a superior king for longer. The draconian sage might have been unaware of the changes that had occurred in high-dimensional

spaces, but Li Zongming could. Li Zongming hadn't paid the changes any mind initially, but now that Zhang Lie was bringing it up, he realized that he had been far too careless.

Li Zongming told Zhang Lie, "I can hand the Zongming world to you, but on one condition."

Li Qianlin seemed rather displeased. "Father, if the third realm were to fall, all three thousand worlds would be destroyed! Is this really the time to be caring about power?"

Li Zongming held up a hand to forestall his daughter. "Let me finish, please."

Li Qianlin backed down.

Li Zongming continued, "I want you to marry Qianlin."

This time, it was Sun Mengmeng who couldn't sit still.

Li Qianlin's face flushed red. "Father, this isn't the time!"

Li Zongming replied, "It's precisely because of the emergency that I'm making this proposal. The Zongming world isn't just mine—it belongs to my ancestors, who devoted their lives to this plan which came to fruition in my generation. I can't hand it to just any outsider, but if you were to marry Qianlin, you wouldn't be an outsider any longer."

No one knew whether or not Zhang Lie would succeed. Li Zongming had witnessed the hole in the deepest layers of space, and they didn't seem like something that could be fixed by manpower alone.

If Zhang Lie were to fail, given his connection to Li Qianlin, he would surely do his best to protect the Zongming world.

Li Zongming continued, "I know you've been interested in Qianlin, and this isn't something that would be off-putting to you."

Unexpectedly, however, Zhang Lie's response was stark refusal.

Everyone was shocked. Li Qianlin's face turned pale, and she looked as though she would faint at any moment.

Li Zongming thundered, "What do you mean? Is my Qianlin not good enough for you?"

Everyone knew of Zhang Lie's affection toward Li Qianlin, but Zhang Lie had refused the proposal!

Li Zongming was so infuriated that sparks seemed to be emanating from his body. "Oh? You think you're all that because you can take down superior kings, do you? That no one among the three thousand worlds is a match for you? That's why you're looking down on my daughter? Don't think that I won't hit you just because I can't beat you! If you don't marry Qianlin, then regardless of what happens to the third realm, I won't hand over the Zongming world. Take it from me by force if you have to!"

Zhang Lie hurriedly explained, "No, no, you misunderstand me. If I am to marry Qianlin, it certainly won't be because the world is ending, but rather because I, Zhang Lie, have fallen in love with her."

Li Qianlin had already been hurt once by a political marriage, and Zhang Lie didn't want to repeat that nightmare.

"I don't want the happiness between us to be corrupted by politics. Even if the world were about to be destroyed, I don't want to trade for world peace with marriage."

Our love is pure and unfettered.

Marrying Li Qianlin today might not seem problematic at first glance, but that barest hint of coercion could easily warp the nature of their marriage given enough time.

Upon hearing Zhang Lie's words, Li Qianlin's eyes grew misty.

Li Zongming sighed. "I misunderstood you. It looks like you really do value Qianlin very much—and I almost brought about the travesty that had come to pass again."

Fortunately, Li Qianlin's planned marriage had become a fiasco, with Zhang Lie appearing right when he had made a wrong decision.

Otherwise, Li Zongming would have destroyed his daughter's happiness himself.

"I can hand you the Zongming world."

Zhang Lie smiled.

Li Zongming continued, "But I want to have a match with you."

Zhang Lie seemed perplexed.

Li Zongming stood up. "I want to fight you beyond this world."

Zhang Lie hesitated. "Do you really want to do that?"

Wouldn't he just be defeated, and badly at that?

Li Zongming replied, "The Zongming world is something my family has been aiming for for generations, and I've devoted much of my life to improving this world."

In the end, however, it was Zhang Lie that had brought his dream to fruition.

"I can't stand to just give it up so simply—I'd like to at least have a match with you to understand the difference between us, to at least make me feel a little better inside."

Humans were creatures of emotions, and aliens were likewise.

Logic and rationality told Li Zongming that he had to hand over the Zongming world, or there would be nothing anyone could do to stop the impending devastation. Even so, his emotions told a different story.

Zhang Lie understood the complexity of the emotions that Li Zongming was facing.

Unlike the draconian sage, Li Zongming had devoted much of his life to warring against the world of the west in order to merge the two worlds together to form a superior world. That dream had finally been realized, and Li Zongming had worked tirelessly to tend to that world since—but was he now to simply give it up because of an unexpected spatial collapse?

Li Zongming was naturally upset, and he needed a reason to convince himself, even the most laughable of reasons. Otherwise, he knew that he would go crazy.

"Let's do it immediately, then."

Zhang Lie shattered space and teleported beyond the Zongming world. Li Zongming followed suit, and the members of Team Zenith also rushed over. Sun Xiaowu wondered, "How many strikes from our captain do you think Li Zongming can block?"

Yang Ze replied, "Since he's a superior king, and our captain will go easy on him, three to five?"

Li Feng replied, "Even if our captain goes easy on him, I can't imagine he'd last more than two strikes."

Once Li Zongming arrived beyond the Zongming world, Zhang Lie extended a hand to him.

"Please, have the first move."

Li Zongming roared, burning superior world's energy as rainbow-colored flames appeared all over his body. He struck with a flurry of punches.

Zhang Lie stood still without moving, allowing Li Zongming's punches to land like raindrops. His genetic energy spun around him like water, deflecting Li Zongming's strikes.

Li Zongming invoked the energy of the Zongming world in preparation for an ultimate attack as Zhang Lie countered with his specialty.

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

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.

The skies 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 void.

Chapter 1199: The Scaleman World

Li Zongming grew alarmed. Zhang Lie's attack was simply too strong.

A huge rumble shook the heavens, and the void quaked. As the waves burst apart, the air filled with echoes of Zhang Lie's signature genetic energy, shattering space and swallowing up all life in its vicinity.

Amidst the pale-blue storm of genetic energy, Li Zongming tried his best to remain standing, like a leaf being buffeted by the wind.

"Aaaaaahh——"!

Li Zongming howled, sending rainbow-colored flames flaring up all around him. The pale-blue currents were particularly ferocious. They caused his bones to crack and wounds to appear all over his body as Li Zongming continued to howl, as though purging himself of all his grievance, all his exasperation.

After the pale-blue storm swept him by, Li Zongming ended up drifting across the void on his back. Zhang Lie asked, "Do you feel better?"

Li Zongming sighed. "As expected, the disparity between the two of us is too large."

To allow Li Zongming to expel all his grievances, Zhang Lie either had to put up a good fight against Li Zongming, give Li Zongming free rein to strike him, or quash him with overwhelming might.

Given that high-dimensional spaces were collapsing as they spoke, Zhang Lie didn't have the time to have a drawn-out fight against Li Zongming. He had no choice but to choose the third option, to use overwhelming might against him.

Li Zongming floated on the void, his soul seeming to have left him behind. He sighed. "Thank you."

Zhang Lie didn't respond. He allowed Li Zongming to continue floating as he returned to the Zongming world, where he met up with the members of Team Zenith again. Li Qianlin had followed behind the members of Team Zenith and had witnessed Zhang Lie's final blow. She grumbled, "Must you do that to Father?"

Zhang Lie spread his arms. "I made sure to cause only superficial injury."

Otherwise, Li Zongming would have been torn to shreds from Zhang Lie's technique.

"Don't worry. After the three thousand worlds combine, the aliens of the Zongming world will receive more land and more resources, and their lives will improve for the better." Zhang Lie turned around. "We need to head to the next world, now—the scaleman world."

Zhang Lie left almost immediately, giving Li Zongming the time and space he needed to prepare to give up his world. He and the members of Team Zenith headed to the scaleman world on the back of the multicolored disaster-grade dragon.

The scaleman world had developed in peace for quite some time, and it had grown significantly more advanced since Zhang Lie was last there.

The moment he entered the scaleman world, the scaleman king teleported before them. Zhang Lie stepped out of the palace on the disaster-grade dragon's back. The scaleman king cupped his hands, overjoyed, and asked, "Master, what brings you here?"

Zhang Lie replied, "I'm here on serious business."

"Has something happened?" the scaleman king asked.

"I intend to unify the three thousand worlds," Zhang Lie replied.

"Joyous tidings indeed." The scaleman king gestured. "Please come talk inside my palace."

Zhang Lie asked, "Do you understand that this means you'll have to give up rulership of the scaleman world?"

"Of course," the scaleman king replied.

Sun Xiaowu seemed taken aback. "You do?"

Yang Ze asked, "Why are you so calm about all this?"

Zhang Lie introduced, "These are my companions, who helped me fight the superior kings of antiquity."

The scaleman king greeted them warmly. "It's great to finally meet all of you. I learned of you from the Zongming king, and you all are true heroes. It's all thanks to you that the scaleman world could be preserved to the present day."

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Are you really willing to hand over the scaleman world just like that?"

The scaleman king nodded. "The scaleman world might as well have been the creation of my master alone. I'm sure that he'll give back more than he takes."

Li Qianlin relaxed. "You really are a good disciple..."

Zhang Lie raised his head proudly. "Quite so."

The scaleman king glanced at Li Qianlin with some shock. "Is this... your esteemed wife, Master?"

Li Qianlin flushed and lowered her head, but she didn't say no.

Sun Mengmeng snorted. "She's still far from being a wife."

Over the years, the scaleman king had grown up to become a wise and virtuous ruler. Glancing at Sun Mengmeng's aggrieved expression, the scaleman king smiled awkwardly and changed the topic.

"However, I do need to let my brother know about this."

The scaleman king invited Zhang Lie and the others into the palace. Shortly thereafter, the erstwhile crown prince rushed over and bowed to Zhang Lie.

"I greet the grandmaster."

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "No, none of that. Those who aren't in the know might even think me a retired emperor or the like."

The former crown prince's forehead beaded with sweat as he forced a smile. Zhang Lie's status within the scaleman world... might as well be that of a retired emperor.

He began, "I heard about the news from His Majesty. Is there no way around this?"

Zhang Lie sighed. "If there were, I wouldn't be in such a rush."

The prince continued, "Grandmaster, you've elevated this world to its current heights, but the scaleman dynasty has lasted for tens of thousands of years. To submit to your rule would be to end this dynasty with our own hands—how would we be able to face our ancestors in the underworld?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "You have no choice. No lifeform in this realm has a choice any longer."

The prince frowned. "Not even for old times' sake?"

Zhang Lie sighed again. "I didn't make myself clear the first time because of your emperor's trust in me, but it seems that I should. If you refuse, I can leave the scaleman world alone... but it'll be destroyed forevermore."

The prince quailed. His legs trembled, and he fell kneeling to the floor.

Zhang Lie continued, "I'm not trying to scare or threaten you. It's an inevitability.

The prince gulped. "As for the Zongming king and the draconian sage..."

"They both agreed to this."

The prince was silent, not knowing how to respond.

It was clear that he didn't want to accept, but the scaleman king was leisurely sipping tea by the table, as though the matter was already beyond his consideration.

Inwardly, Zhang Lie was very glad that he had chosen to champion the ninth prince rather than the inflexible and small-minded crown prince.

Yang Ze laughed coldly. "Aren't you aware that it's precisely because of old times' sake that our captain's willing to chat with you like this? Otherwise, your world would have been destroyed long ago."

Sun Xiaowu continued, "We were the ones who destroyed the other superior worlds, those that have existed since antiquity. Don't you know what it means that we're all gathered here?"

Sun Mengmeng threatened, "Considering your acquaintance with our captain, don't force our hand."

Chapter 1200: Collapse of the Third Realm

Fang Yi called out, "If you don't agree, we'll settle the matter with force. Regardless of what you decide, we need to and will take control of the scaleman world."

The prince's face was scrunched up; it was worse than if he were in tears. "That's... far too domineering."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Stop bullying him."

Zhang Lie didn't want to take the time to explain, but the situation called for it.

"The third realm is about to be destroyed."

The prince stilled.

Zhang Lie continued, "In the process of the king of chaos' ascension with the halls of chaos, a huge hole was created in the high-dimensional spaces of the realm. The fragmented will of the world is unable to repair the hole quickly enough, so it's been spreading. Soon enough, the high-dimensional spaces of the realm will collapse, directly impacting its integrity."

The prince was stupefied. "Is this a joke, Grandmaster?"

Zhang Lie snapped his fingers angrily. "Bring the scaleman king there."

Yang Ze stepped forward and picked up the prince as though he were a little chick, then headed for the scaleman king. The prince cried out, "Hold it, hold it, what are you doing?"

Yang Ze marshaled his spatial force and opened a portal to the deepest layers of space. After about twenty minutes, the prince, pale-white, stumbled back out and fell paralyzed to the ground. Yang Ze's face was pale as well, whereas the scaleman king seemed unnervingly calm.

"Excellent mental fortitude," Zhang Lie praised.

The scaleman king smiled. "Thank you, Master."

Zhang Lie continued, "The Zongming king's response was much like your brother's."

The scaleman king smiled. "I believe that you must have a solution in mind, Master, or you wouldn't be here right now."

"Trust, is it?" Zhang Lie murmured.

It was easy to say you trusted someone, but far harder to realize that trust in practice.

The scaleman king said, "Yes, Master. I trusted that you wouldn't have asked for the scaleman world for no reason, and I was right. You are trying to save the third realm."

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "No, I'm hardly as kind-hearted as all that."

The scaleman king bowed. "Master, if there's nothing else, I'll need to convene an emergency session of court."

"You aren't going to ask me to stay?" Zhang Lie wondered, with some surprise.

The scaleman king replied, "I do want to ask, Master, but I know you won't agree. I imagine the reason you didn't explain yourself beforehand was because you were in a rush."

Zhang Lie rubbed his nose. The main reason, actually, was that he had already explained things twice and didn't want to do it a third time.

The scaleman king continued, "After seeing the state of the high-dimensional spaces with my own eyes, it's clear that the collapse is growing more and more severe with every passing moment. You need the time, Master, and I won't hold you back."

Zhang Lie nodded and bade the scaleman king farewell, then left with the members of Team Zenith atop the multicolored disaster-grade dragon.

Zhang Lie told them, "Next, I'll be heading back to the Milky Way to inform Hong Tianqi of the news and to get assistance from the Milky Way. We don't have much time—I'm going to have all of you mobilize the human hunters and the warlords of the third realm."

The members of Team Zenith nodded.

"We'll gather all the proofs of kingship as quickly as we can."

"In that case, let our conquest begin," Zhang Lie announced.

The multicolored disaster-grade dragon flapped its wings and returned to the draconian world at its fastest speed. The members of Team Zenith went to assemble the human hunters, while Zhang Lie shattered space, teleported to the teleportation apparatus, and returned to the Zenith Dojo.

When they saw Zhang Lie emerge from the teleportation apparatus, the members of the Zenith Dojo were all astounded. The dojo was in an uproar, but Zhang Lie ignored them all. He immediately headed to Zhang Hong's office, who was waiting there for him upon hearing the news.

"You've returned again. Recently, the dojo—"

Zhang Lie held up a hand. "If there's no immediate danger, hold it."

Zhang Hong noticed that something seemed amiss with Zhang Lie's expression.

"What's the matter?"

"The third realm is about to collapse," Zhang Lie replied.

Zhang Hong visibly inhaled. What? What was happening to the third realm? Was Zhang Lie talking about his political base, or the third realm at large? How could something destabilize such an entity as the third realm?

According to the members of the Zenith Dojo who had returned from the third realm, Zhang Lie was so strong that he could even take down the superior kings of antiquity. How would the third realm suddenly have collapsed?

"There's no time to explain. I need to contact Hong Tianqi immediately." Zhang Lie picked up a transceiver and initiated a call with him.

Hong Tianqi's secretary replied. "Is this Mr. Zhang Lie? Authority Hong is currently in the middle of a very urgent meeting, and you may need to wait. He's instructed to be informed whenever you contact him, so he'll likely contact you back the moment he's finished."

"Very well. I'm in a rush, but it's nothing too major—please help me inform Authority Hong that I'll only be staying in the dojo for ten minutes. If he doesn't call me before then, he should prepare a mass grave for all the third-realm hunters in the Milky Way. The destruction of the third realm is no urgent business, isn't it?"

The secretary on the other end of the call was stupefied. A clatter rang out as though countless objects had just fallen off a desk. The secretary replied, "I'll inform Authority Hong immediately. Please don't drop the call."

If it were anyone else, the secretary would have thought this an idle threat, but Hong Tianqi had specifically emphasized Zhang Lie's importance to his secretary. Any calls from Zhang Lie were of the utmost importance; he was the premier VIP bar none.

Zhang Lie had given her a serious warning. If she were to allow him to end the call, that would be the end of her job.

Regardless of the veracity of Zhang Lie's information, the secretary had no choice but to act. She strode directly into Hong Tianqi's meeting room.

While Zhang Lie was waiting for Hong Tianqi to get back to him, Zhang Hong managed to satiate her own curiosity.

"Just what happened in the third realm?"

Zhang Lie thought for a moment. "Someone tried to satisfy his own desires but left huge trouble behind for us to take care of. If we can't resolve the issue, the third realm will collapse."

Dismayed, Zhang Hong was about to keep pressing him for information when Hong Tianqi rushed to the transceiver on the other end. Zhang Lie turned to her. "Zhang Hong, close the door and activate all privacy measures. I don't want anyone to overhear my conversation with Hong Tianqi."

Zhang Hong belatedly realized that the situation truly was as dire as Zhang Lie had reported, but it still didn't feel real. She executed Zhang Lie's orders in this state of mind.

On the other end of the transceiver, Hong Tianqi called out, "You've been terrorizing my secretary the moment you returned?"

"The third realm's about to collapse."