

U. Warlord 1251

Chapter 1251: Old Tactics

A patch of void and chaos expanded where the horizon had been, tearing apart the pocket dimension.

Zhu grumbled, "Why isn't Zhang Lie paying attention?"

Li Feng shrugged. "Our captain would pay attention if he could, but Zhou Ying's threatening enough that he can't do so completely."

Yang Ze shook his head. "No, she's not at that extent yet. Our captain's already suppressing the might of this blow, and what we're seeing is the result after quite a few limiters. If he had been using that technique at full strength, the new unified world would have noticed the phenomenon.

The treemen were all cleaved in half, and a huge scar stood out on the trunk of the world tree into which Zhou Ying had transformed.

The scar was filled with dimensional energy and prevented vitality and natural energy from repairing the wound.

Instead, fruits grew from the tree, as though children were being gestated within. It pulsed with life, and the fruits fell to the ground and released black humanoid lifeforms.

The humanoids were pitch-black all over, with golden hair and gray fog around them. They pounced toward Zhang Lie like wild dogs the moment they were formed.

Zhang Lie cut them apart with Guicang.

The humanoid lifeforms had surprising control over space, along with surprising vitality and frightening regeneration. Despite being cut apart, their bodies quickly regenerated at the point of injury. They seemed to have no feelings whatsoever; they were dolls of war, who pounced toward Zhang Lie without any residual memory or fear of being cut apart once more.

"The Everbearing Lady really possesses some odd talents, doesn't she..."

Zhou Ying's abilities hadn't advanced considerably after absorbing the golden mulberry tree, and neither had she gained strange and unusual powers as a result. However, she had received extreme resistance against fire, and could now produce golden leaves.

After absorbing the Everbearing Lady's strength, however, Zhou Ying had gained an assortment of unusual abilities.

"[Fifth Form: Obliterating the Stars]!"

Zhang Lie raised Guicang high into the air.

The scarlet water-attuned genetic energy rose into the sky like a gigantic dragon of blood soaring toward the heavens. Even before the sword slash landed, the ground was starting to crack, and the sky itself was shuddering.

The unusual gray humanoids turned to ash.

Upon witnessing the frightening strike, Zhu rapidly grew alarmed. She shouted, "Be careful, Zhang Lie!"

The sword boasted awe-inspiring strength. If it were to land, she was certain that the newly unified world would be entirely destroyed.

The ground quaked, and the aliens and genetic lifeforms of the new world all sensed this frightening slash.

However, the attack never landed. Zhang Lie held it still right above the crown of the world tree; he didn't want to destroy the unified world, either.

The resulting shockwaves were devastating enough. Branches and leaves fell from the tree, leaving its crown bald and desolate. The world tree lost its grandeur and imposing stature, and even Zhou Ying herself didn't dare fight against Zhang Lie any longer.

The wood quickly withered and rotted away, and Zhou Ying stepped out from its remains. She waved her hands rapidly. "I surrender, I surrender! If you were serious, Captain, I would have long since lost my life."

"Did you intuit something?"

Zhou Ying chuckled wryly. "All I saw was your absolute strength, as well as your potential to destroy everything around us."

Zhang Lie asked, "Do you remember the lesson from last time?"

Zhou Ying nodded fervently. "I've never forgotten, Captain. I need to work on improving my own strength and on acquiring techniques to match."

Zhang Lie nodded. "You've done very well. You've worked hard on growing strong, and you use tactics appropriately in battle. To be frank, you almost struck me quite a few times."

Zhou Ying cocked her head. "But am I too prideful?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "You've all grown very strong, almost beyond my expectations, and your techniques have all improved. However, you're too fond of using little tricks, which won't work against the strongest opponents. Tactics are fine, but tricks basically won't be successful."

Zhou Ying lowered her head. "I understand."

Zhang Lie continued, "As for your tactics, I've seen most of them before. I hope you'll work hard on developing newer ones."

Zhou Ying bowed. "Thank you for your advice, Captain."

"You've exerted yourself. Take some time to rest."

Zhou Ying asked, "Captain, can I have a strand of your hair, or perhaps a drop of blood?"

Zhang Lie replied, "It's not a problem. Is this related to your new ability?"

Zhou Ying nodded. "The Everbearing Lady's ability is to create new races. As far as my understanding goes, this sort of ability should really be considered weapons manufacturing. Those dimensional hounds we saw back then, for example, were created by the Everbearing Lady in

conjunction with another alien. By taking advantage of other lifeforms' genetic code and merging it with your own, you can produce a brand-new race that combines the special characteristics of both."

"Can you give birth to them? Don't you need sperm?"

Zhou Ying rolled her eyes. "Don't make it sound like I'm giving birth to children! I wouldn't mind having one with you, Captain, but creating these races isn't something quite as interesting. It's not unlike manufacturing clones, but is somewhat faster."

"Sounds like a very interesting ability."

Zhou Ying sighed. "Not so. I thought it was a somewhat disgusting ability at first, though after this battle, I've realized where my deficiencies lie."

Although Zhou Ying had managed to overcome many a strong opponent in the third realm, when she faced Zhang Lie again, she realized just how weak and helpless she was.

"I'm not strong enough to have the choice to decide which techniques to use and which to give up. This is pride afforded only to the strong—and I'm not strong yet."

"Don't debase yourself," Zhang Lie replied. "You've all grown tremendously strong, and you've taken great strides forward."

Zhou Ying shook her head. "There's no need to console me, Captain. I've realized how weak I am, and I need to take advantage of all my assets to grow stronger. As long as it can do something in battle, and as long as it doesn't go against human morality, so what if I find it rather disgusting?"

Zhang Lie felt as though something was wrong with Zhou Ying's logic, but he couldn't pinpoint where. Rather than respond, he simply pulled out a strand of hair and pierced his skin with Guicang, drawing a single drop of blood.

Because Zhang Lie had maxed out his monarch gene fragments, a single drop of his blood looked as though it contained countless galaxies. A dragon of blood swam around within, as though within the droplet was a galaxy filled with life. Zhou Ying was raptured by the sight.

Chapter 1252: A Solo Battle

Zhou Ying carefully kept the blood and hair, treating it like a rare treasure.

Zhang Lie asked, "Are you able to continuously merge lifeforms by repeating this process? Doesn't that mean that you'll be able to produce the strongest lifeform eventually?"

Zhou Ying replied, "I thought so at first, that I would be able to merge the genes of all the members of Team Zenith to create an incredible biological weapon, but biological paradigms are hard to grasp, and random mutations can lead to stronger or weaker pairings than expected. Furthermore, I also have to make sure that the pairings are compatible with one another. It's a long process, and far more challenging than I anticipated."

"I'll leave you to work hard on it, then. It could be a potent tool in your arsenal. Hong Xi, Zhang Hanxiang, it's your turn."

Hong Xi requested, "I've grown stronger than I was in the second real, and I'd like to challenge you myself, Master."

Zhang Hanxiang added, "I've grown much stronger myself!"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "Who hasn't? We don't have much time, so let's get going."

Hong Xi begged, "I'd like to challenge you alone, Master!"

Zhang Hanxiang nodded. "I'd also like to compare my strength to yours, Brother."

Seeing their determined gazes, Zhang Lie sighed. "If you force me to take a single step, I'll grant this request."

Hong Xi and Zhang Hanxiang nodded seriously as Zhu reinforced the dimensional barriers once more.

Zhang Hanxiang gave off wisps of frost that gathered on the ground.

"[Syzygy]!"

Hong Xi's eyes glowed. Her left eye morphed into a black sun, and her right eye into a silver moon. To her back, a pitch-black sun and a silver moon rose into the air. Their light illuminated the sky. The black sun and silver moon were linked by a golden thread, which brought them into proximity with each other.

The black sun and silver moon began to merge. The black sun turned a deep red, and the silver moon a rusty red.

The two celestial bodies overlapped, the silver moon taking on a blue sheen.

As they overlapped perfectly, the moon absorbed the black sunlight and transformed into a fully realized pale blue moon.

As the light shone down on them, Zhang Hanxiang's cold grew more intense, and the temperature of the pocket dimension dropped.

Zhang Hanxiang whispered, "Hong Xi, we have to give Brother a fright."

Hong Xi nodded, activating all her combat-oriented soulshards in one fell swoop. A fan of feathers materialized in her left hand, and a moonlit sword in her right. Behind her, multicolored light flared. The domain of [Eclipse] spread out beneath her feet. She walked forward, moonlight radiating from her every move. A black sun appeared behind her, sparking where it touched the moonlight at her feet.

Wind howled. The sword in her right hand gleamed like the radiant moon. As she waved her fan, she summoned a twister in the air—but with a wave of his hand, Zhang Lie dispelled her technique.

Meanwhile, Zhang Hanxiang held her palm up and channeled bitter cold. Cold air froze everything around her. A layer of frost covered the ground, and snow began to drift down from the heavens.

"Excellent courage to come at me straight on." Zhang Lie deflected Zhang Hanxiang's palm with his own.

Zhang Hanxiang's frost was completely ineffective against Zhang Lie. Zhang Lie summoned a layer of pale blue genetic energy over his body to isolate himself from the chill.

Zhang Hanxiang frowned. She launched a flurry of attacks at Zhang Lie, channeling the might and intensity of a blizzard, a snowstorm.

Meanwhile, Hong Xi leapt forward with [The Elusive Moon], then activated a superior-grade illusory leopard soulshard to speed herself up further. She appeared behind Zhang Lie, but she was sent flying into the distance despite Zhang Lie not even turning around.

Hong Xi revolved in midair and waved her fan. Her sword glinted with moonlight, and she shot forward once more.

Once again, Zhang Lie waved at his back and dispelled her attack.

A blizzard formed around Zhang Hanxiang. Her hands glowed brightly in blue, freezing heaven and earth and sending the battlefield into the deep of winter. A burst of icy energy emanated from her. Zhang Lie met her fist for fist, causing the chill to dissipate in an explosion of energy that sent the snow all around her blowing up into the air.

Zhang Hanxiang stumbled back, and Hong Xi hurriedly rushed up to support her.

"[The Hidden Moon]!"

Her blade seemed to cut apart a silvery veil in the sky—but Zhang Lie intercepted her attack once more. She didn't see how; he had made his move after hers, but before she could reach him, his palm had already struck her chest.

Hong Xi's spirit-fox robe sent a protective burst of foxflame toward Zhang Lie, but it didn't hurt him at all. His water-attuned genetic energy easily countered it.

Zhang Hanxiang skated over the frozen ground, her body as limber and agile as an acrobat's. Blades of ice formed by her feet, which she shot at Zhang Lie. Zhang Lie countered with a punch, sending her flying.

She revolved in mid-air, dispelling the excess momentum. Just then, a silver shadow appeared beside him. Hong Xi, wrapped in a gale of wind, struck at Zhang Lie with a silver flash.

Zhang Hanxiang struck again with a few spikes of ice. Zhang Lie easily knocked them aside, then swung back around to grab Hong Xi's sword. Zhang Hanxiang barreled forward, surrounded by a whirlwind of ice. As she came close to Zhang Lie, he punched in her direction and sent her flying.

Hong Xi launched an attack, but she was kicked away before it could land.

The aura around Zhang Hanxiang deepened. Her hair began to freeze over, and her fists had turned noticeably blue. Zhang Lie felt a deep chill sweep over him.

"[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 sky began to darken, and a fish the size of a whale materialized in the air.

A howling gale swept over the two combatants. 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 pocket dimension.

Frost and flood collided in a huge rumble that shook the heavens and caused the pocket dimension to quake.

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.

Chapter 1253: Not Bad

The huge storm that resulted from Zhang Lie's attack almost sent Hong Xi and Zhang Hanxiang flying.

Zhang Lie clasped both hands behind his back. "Not bad. I can see that both of you have grown."

Zhang Hanxiang sighed in frustration. "But in the end, it wasn't enough, was it?"

Hong Xi cried out, "Master, please give us another chance!"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "I've seen enough."

Zhang Hanxiang shook her head. "Brother, we haven't demonstrated our full strength!"

"I know. That's why I'm willing to permit you to challenge me individually."

Hong Xi and Zhang Hanxiang went still.

"But didn't you say that we had to force you back a step?"

"It was just a test to get a sense of your growth, and whether or not you have the qualifications to face me individually. I can't say that I'm particularly impressed with either of you, but I've seen clear and noticeable improvement."

Although they still weren't at the level of the members of Team Zenith, they weren't far off.

After obtaining Zhang Lie's approval, Hong Xi and Zhang Hanxiang glanced at each other in happiness.

Hong Xi stepped forward. "Let me go first, Captain."

Zhang Hanxiang took a step back.

"[Syzygy]!"

The pale blue moon to Hong Xi's back transformed. The wheel of flame shone with light. Energy coalesced behind Hong Xi's back and formed a crimson sun.

The moonlight that reinforced Zhang Hanxiang's strength was replaced with sunlight as red as blood. Zhang Lie felt his own strength decrease to a noticeable degree.

The decrease in his strength was greater than he would be able to achieve if he invoked [Eclipse] himself. It was evident that Hong Xi had been working hard on her understanding of [Eclipse] and [Black Sun], and her insight and knowledge had surpassed his by a wide margin. Otherwise, she would hardly have been able to combine the two techniques together.

Hong Xi herself was shocked by the increase to her own strength after seizing a fraction of Zhang Lie's. She felt stronger than she had ever been, as though her body were on fire with the energy that she now possessed.

With a moment's thought, however, Zhang Lie could trigger his own [Eclipse] and dispel Hong Xi's domain.

Despite Hong Xi's advanced understanding of [Eclipse] that went beyond his own, he did possess the same technique, and he too grasped its common principles. It would be trivial for him to dispel her domain, but Zhang Lie didn't do so. He allowed Hong Xi to absorb a fraction of his strength—if he didn't, this fight would be like bullying a kid.

The difference between Hong Xi and Zhang Lie was so immense that it would be a one-sided fight otherwise.

The blood-red domain passed through where the members of Team Zenith were standing, and she also absorbed their attributes. No one protested; Hong Xi was their junior, after all, and they were willing to help her against an opponent like Zhang Lie.

The members of Team Zenith were themselves quite interested to see just how threatening Hong Xi would be against Zhang Lie after having absorbed all their strength.

Hong Xi felt her body burning as though lava were flowing through her veins, as though power was going to erupt from her at any moment. There were no more than ten hunters present, but the strength that Hong Xi received was superior to that which she had obtained in the void battlefields of the third realm from five million disaster-grade genetic lifeforms.

If not for the fact that Hong Xi had grown stronger since then and maxed out her monarch gene fragments, she would already have exploded from overload.

Behind her, multicolored light flared. The domain of [Eclipse] spread out beneath her feet. She walked forward, moonlight radiating from her every move. A black sun appeared behind her, sparking where it touched the moonlight at her feet.

With the fan in her left hand, Hong Xi summoned a twister. The blood-red flames of a blood sun burned around her, glowing with heat and blinding light. The blistering temperature caused the ground to turn to lava, and the twister on her left hand sucked the flames up.

The long sword in her right hand gleamed with a red edge, imbued with concentrated scarlet light. Behind her, multicolored light flared. The blood flames merged with her sword energy, causing each of her strikes to leave behind a long trail of fire.

"[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 energy tore apart the cyclone of blood flames, and his summoned shark bit apart her sword slashes.

Under the illusory moon, her movements blurred. Using her superior-grade illusion leopard soulshard, she put some distance between them. Scarlet slashes filled the arena.

"[Ninecarp Transformation]!"

A black serpent materialized behind Zhang Lie, by now so large and so developed that it resembled the world-swallowing serpent Jormungandr. It let out a threatening hiss as its scales clicked together.

Zhang Lie stood still in place, his body like a pillar that held up the sky, impossible to budge or move. The blood flames and scarlet sword slashes cleaved around him, neither able to draw near.

Pitch-black genetic energy surrounded him. As soon as the scarlet light approached, it disintegrated.

"[The Hidden Moon]!"

Her sword arced through the air in a slash of bloody light. Zhang Lie countered with a casual wave of his blade.

The blade shone with light as Hong Xi's sword slash was sliced in two.

She waved the fan in her hand, causing Zhang Lie's hair to drift in the breeze as she flew toward him. Her silver sword glowed with bloody radiance, and sunlight and moonlight gathered over it.

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

Zhang Lie punched forward, and the black serpent shot forth.

The red sun behind her back glowed with light. Hong Xi's fan likewise shot out beams of light, as though she were a bloody sun about to turn into a supernova. Scarlet moonlight shone from the sword in her right hand. She flapped her feathered fan, causing scarlet flames to roar. Tremendous energy felt like it would burst right out of her body. Energy spread from her core to her arms, which began to crack.

She sent a sword slash through the flames, combining the energies of sun and moon, forming a scarlet halo of light that dispersed all around her.

The members of Team Zenith immediately activated their defenses as the barriers of the pocket dimension began to crack.

Zhang Lie's pitch-black serpent tore apart Hong Xi's red hoops of light, then made to swallow her whole.

Hong Xi waved her left and right hands in synchrony. The scarlet light mixed with the bloody storm and exploded in the serpent's mouth, causing it to disintegrate.

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

As Zhang Lie punched forward, a blood dragon roared in outrage and shot forward.

Hong Xi waved her feathered fan and scarlet sword once more. Sword energy and howling winds surrounded her. A blood dragon emerged, dispelling both sources of energy. Eyes wide, Hong Xi watched the gigantic dragon rush before her and open its maw wide. Just as it was about to swallow her, however, it swooped up and continued flying overhead.

Hong Xi let out a deep breath of relief, then felt a wave of shame overcome her. She had been defeated so easily!

Hong Xi was a bit afraid of Zhang Lie rebuking her for her failure. "Master, do you think that I'm useless? I'm so weak, but I still insist on challenging you one-on-one..."

"It's a good thing that you're intent on improving, and I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing to fight an opponent far beyond your strength. As long as you're willing to challenge your limits, I consider you a good student—whereas if you had remained stagnant and refused to do anything to improve, I would have tossed you out of the dojo."

Hong Xi took a deep breath and smiled in relief. "Thank you, Master."

"Did you intuit something?"

Chapter 1254: Don't Get Upset

Hong Xi replied, "There's a lot of room for improvement on my end."

Zhang Lie advised, "Focus on improving your body. Don't think that it'll naturally grow stronger just by absorbing gene fragments—remember that the core, the foundation of your techniques lies in a strong body. Hone your foundations, and strengthen the concentration of genetic energy in your attacks. Did you see how I dispelled all of them easily?"

Hong Xi nodded. "I understand, Master."

Zhang Lie raised his head. "In that case, Hanxiang will be next."

The pocket dimension had only suffered a few cracks from the shockwaves of the confrontation between Hong Xi and Zhang Lie, unlike when Zhang Lie fought with the members of Team Zenith. Zhu only had a few simple repairs to do before it was time for Zhang Hanxiang to face her brother.

After witnessing Zhang Lie's fight against Hong Xi, Zhang Hanxiang was a little fearful of what she was about to face. Within moments, however, she had mastered that fear and stepped forward. If she feared even her own brother, how would she hope to defeat the enemies of higher realms that awaited her? She had to prove that she wasn't the weak liability that she had been before, a sister that Zhang Lie had to devote time and attention to protect.

Zhang Hanxiang strode forward. She channeled bitter cold. Cold air froze everything around her. A layer of frost covered the ground, and snow began to drift down from the heavens. Frost surged forward like the tide.

"[Ninecarp Transformation: Golden Tiger]!"

The image of a golden tiger appeared behind Zhang Lie's back, and its roar echoed through the air. A golden aura suffused Zhang Lie. A mountain of blades rested atop the tiger's back, and Zhang Lie's body itself underwent a transformation. His hair turned silvery-white, until they became akin to silver needles.

His genetic energy likewise became more honed. Silvery-white genetic energy gathered over his body, and tigers' stripes appeared on his arms. His eyes became those of a tiger's, and steely sharpness erupted from every pore.

The image of the golden tiger behind him roared as his water-attuned genetic energy transformed into gold-attuned energy. The energy thrummed and rippled, hard as steel. As the tiger roared, the chilly air was repulsed. The frost on the ground shattered, and icy shards filled the air.

Zhang Hanxiang pushed forward with a flurry of palm strikes, each stronger than the might of a blizzard.

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

The [Fists of the Silent Sea] formed a fist in combination with the black serpent form and a mallet with the golden tiger. The condensed genetic energy solidified into sharp silver crystal, piercing through the blizzard.

Zhang Hanxiang leapt up into the sky as blades of ice condensed beneath her feet. She blurred as she skated forward like a professional. Frosty air gathered as hundreds of icicles shot toward her brother.

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

A crystal wall appeared behind Zhang Lie, reflecting light in five colors, so dazzling it dazed any who looked at it, so beautiful it sparked their desire.

As Zhang Lie manipulated space, that crystalline genetic energy shot out of the wall behind him in the form of sharp daggers, able to penetrate anything thanks to Zhang Lie's mastery of space.

The daggers tore through space in a storm of silver.

Zhang Hanxiang dodged her way through the stream of daggers.

Yang Ze sighed. "Our captain really takes care of his sister, doesn't he?"

Hong Xi cocked her head. "He's not using his full power?"

Yang Ze rolled his eyes. "Of course not! Could he really stand to do that against his most cherished sister?"

Li Feng commented, "If our captain did that—no, if he used the same amount of strength he does against us, Hanxiang would already have fallen."

Sun Mengmeng shook her head. "However, that's not what Hanxiang wants, is it?"

Daggers of ice shot out of Zhang Hanxiang's palms.

Ice and snow surrounded Zhang Hanxiang like a pristine flower of ice. Zhang Hanxiang launched palm strikes continuously before her, infusing that energy into every strike. Each snowflake became a dangerous projectile.

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

Zhang Lie condensed his genetic energy. Sharp white crystals floated around his body.

As he cocked his fist, dozens of crystalline dragons formed behind his back, roaring in unison and causing the sky to tremble.

The next moment, they shot out through his fists.

Hundreds of crystal dragons criss-crossed through the air, beautiful and dazzling, radiating multicolored light. The snowflakes struck the crystal dragons with metallic clinks, like bullets

striking titanium, to no avail. Even the sharp snowflakes could leave no trace or mark behind on the dragons' bodies.

Chilly air erupted from Zhang Hanxiang and transformed into a blizzard.

Emulating Zhang Lie's actions, Zhang Hanxiang punched forward. Hundreds of dragons manifested within the blizzard, devouring the crystal dragons.

The crystal dragons froze in the sky, turning into dazzling sculptures.

Zhang Lie clapped. "Well done! You've improved tremendously, Hanxiang."

Zhang Hanxiang seemed rather upset. "Don't coddle me, Brother! This is like an insult. Am I worse than the others?"

Her eyes flared with cold, with displeasure and grievance, like burning flames. Cold air continuously emanated from her body as her eyes turned into orbs of ice.

Zhang Hanxiang explained, "I hope you won't go easy on me, Brother. I'll have to face a lot of strong foes and challenges in the future, and none of them will do so. If you do, it'll hurt my future prospects."

Zhang Lie sighed forlornly. "You really have grown stronger, Hanxiang. Very well. If you insist, I'll strike at full strength."

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 ice on the ground melted as the temperature rose again.

"Don't blame me if I hurt you, alright?" Zhang Lie warned her.

"That will make it interesting." Zhang Hanxiang's eyes turned cold. Frost seeped into the sky and the ground, and the temperature that was slowly returning to normal shot back down to negative values instantly.

A wave of frost besieged them all. Sun Mengmeng's black flames ignited around the members of Team Zenith to keep the cold in abeyance.

As more and more frost gathered, flowers of ice manifested underneath Zhang Hanxiang's feet, then spread outward from her.

Time and karma froze from her chilling aura,

but Zhang Lie was completely unaffected. He swiped forward with his claws, sending scythes of bloody light forward to tear apart the frozen domain. The swipes passed by Zhang Hanxiang's body so quickly she couldn't even react.

They left long furrows on the ground, causing Zhang Hanxiang to suck in a deep breath when she saw them. She knew that, if they had landed on her body, she would have been cut apart.

Chapter 1255: Onward Forevermore

Zhang Lie asked, "Would you like to continue?"

Zhang Hanxiang let her arms hang limply by her side. "No, I won't continue. As expected, I can't beat you, Brother."

The happiest spectator was none other than Zhu. Hong Xi and Zhang Hanxiang's trials, unlike those of the members of Team Zenith, hadn't destroyed any of the barriers she had erected. Hong Xi had only cracked them a little, while Zhang Hanxiang lowered the temperature of the pocket dimension below freezing.

Zhang Lie stepped forward and rubbed his sister's head.

"You've improved tremendously."

Zhang Hanxiang asked, "Brother, aren't you supposed to be asking me what I intuited from battle?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "There's no need."

Zhang Hanxiang was taken aback. "Are you looking down on me, Brother?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "You're mistaken. It's just that all of you have grown tremendously compared to when you were in the second realm, and there are no obvious deficiencies for me to correct. I'm only being nitpicky in hopes that you'll all continuously strive to improve on your current fundamentals."

Zhang Hanxiang seemed very surprised. "Does that mean I'm already really strong, then?"

Zhang Lie pinched his sister's cheeks.

"The others might not have major issues, but you'll have to work harder, I'm afraid. Your techniques need more effort—you can't just uniformly focus on chill and frost. My water-attuned genetic energy is able to take on different elemental forms with practice, and as a water-attuned hunter yourself, you should be able to do better."

Zhang Hanxiang pursed her lips. "I'll work hard on it later, then."

By then, Zhu had dispelled the barriers between the pocket dimension and the rest of the third realm. Li Zongming, the scaleman king, and the draconian sage all rushed over.

"What happened, ruler of the realm?"

Zhang Lie answered for Zhu. "There's nothing to worry about—I was just sparring with a few members of Team Zenith, and it looks like we caused a bigger commotion than intended."

Li Zongming, the scaleman king, and the draconian sage all sighed in relief.

The draconian sage muttered, "The skies turned gold and then suddenly darkened. We were all wondering what had happened—but it's just you guys again!"

Li Zongming patted his chest. "I was very worried that we had somehow encountered another crisis."

Li Zongming, the scaleman king, and the draconian sage were all a little spooked considering the massive crises that had just overwhelmed them.

Since encountering Zhang Lie, it felt like they hadn't known a moment's peace.

The draconian sage grumbled, "Zhang Lie, you and the members of Team Zenith know your limits, don't you? If you're careless, you might even destroy this new unified world!"

Li Zongming warned, "The unified world has just been formed, and it's still rather fragile, all things considered. All of you have the potential to break it, especially you, Zhang Lie."

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "I've finished testing all the members of Team Zenith, so this won't happen again. Right, how are matters coming along with all of you? Have you come up with plans for governance?"

The scaleman king replied, "We intend to establish kingdoms on the newly unified world."

The draconian sage added, "In relation to what you have on Earth, these kingdoms are the equivalent of your countries."

Li Zongming continued, "And as you've suggested, we'll establish an overarching committee for the unified world and jointly govern it."

Zhang Lie learned from the three of them that, after many days of discussions, they had decided to form a high council in the unified world.

Below the council would be four primary kingdoms.

Each kingdom would be able to govern itself, in a manner not unlike the individual superior worlds. Issues that concerned multiple kingdoms could be advanced to the high council for deliberation, and the high council also had the authority to oversee each kingdom.

The scaleman king stepped forward. "Master, my kingdom is known as the Lie Kingdom, and I'll be the king of Lie thereafter. The founding ceremony is in two days, and I'd like to extend you an invitation. Please come, Master." [1]

The draconian sage added, "My kingdom will be known as the Dragon Kingdom, and the draconians would also like to invite you and the members of Team Zenith to be present for our founding ceremony."

Li Zongming said, "And my kingdom will be the Zongming kingdom. All of you shall be honored guests."

Zhang Lie nodded. "We'll attend them all."

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Where's Yun Bing?"

The hunters of the Milky Way also intended to establish a coalition in the unified world, to build their own kingdom. Yun Bing came highly recommended by the members of Team Zenith to be the kingdom's representative.

No hunter dared object. They knew that Zhang Lie was backing the members of Team Zenith, and their own strength was emblematic of the power of genetic hunters. The Zenith Dojo had become the strongest organization among the hunters of the third realm.

If you included Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith, it would undoubtedly be the strongest organization—without any qualification.

The draconian sage explained, "Yun Bing intends on establishing a government working together with other forces from the Milky Way."

Li Zongming added, "If I remember correctly, she intends to name it the Zenith Alliance."

Sun Mengmeng sounded rather surprised. "Yun Bing even managed to get the other forces of the Milky Way on board?"

Zhang Lie seemed somewhat surprised. "I thought that the Zenith Dojo would have a kingdom of its own, as would the other forces of the Milky Way, but they've chosen to work together? I really have to figure out how Yun Bing achieved such a feat..."

Li Zongming urged, "Zhang Lie, you have to be present at my founding ceremony! If you don't attend, I won't let my daughter meet you anymore."

"Of course I will."

Li Zongming continued, "Furthermore, our high council needs a council head. We discussed the matter among ourselves, and we believe you're the most suitable candidate."

The draconian sage took over. "The only reason this unified world could form was because of your efforts, and you were the one who identified the crisis and resolved it. We believe you to be the most suitable candidate for the role."

A council head, just like Hong Tianqi? Zhang Lie thought over the offer seriously for a few moments before ultimately shaking his head and declining. "It's not for me, I think."

The scaleman king urged, "Won't you reconsider, Master? It would be difficult for any of us to take on this responsibility effectively, but you're different. Who would dare stand up against you in the third realm?"

Zhang Lie replied, "I won't be able to remain in the third realm for long. I'll have to leave sooner or later."

Li Zongming sighed. "Must you really?"

The scaleman king also seemed upset to see him go. "You won't reconsider, Master?"

Li Zongming asked, "This is an empire that you forged with your own hands. Are you just going to leave it be?"

"My goal isn't to become the ruler of a realm."

If Zhang Lie wanted to do so, he could have achieved that feat in the second realm. Zhang Lie knew very well that this supposed authority was all a facade—that if he really wanted to control his own fate, he would need personal strength.

"You must truly be ambitious, if even the unified world of the third realm is too little for you,"

Li Zongming sighed, out of either regret, worry, or both.

The draconian sage nodded. "You've never stopped moving forward, but I can't say whether that's good or bad."

"All genetic hunters are this way."

"But your footsteps move forward faster than anyone else's."

Chapter 1256: The Founding Ceremony

Li Zongming said, "There are still a few details we have to work out. Don't you dare start fighting again, you hear? If you have the time, go visit my foolish daughter."

Zhang Lie nodded. "I'll head over in a moment."

The draconian sage shook his head as he chuckled wryly. "The disturbance caused by your fighting shocked and frightened everyone in the unified world. Please be more mindful."

Zhang Lie spread his arms innocently.

Li Zongming and the draconian sage flew off. The scaleman king did the same after bowing to Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie turned. "Jun Jiuxiao, Ye Xianchen!"

Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen hurriedly stepped forward.

"Yes, Master!"

Zhang Lie asked, "Why haven't either of you maxed out your monarch gene fragments yet? I won't be able to determine just how strong either of you are even if I gave you a trial. I'll postpone it for the moment, but train hard—before I ascend to the fourth realm, I'll schedule a test with both of you."

Zhu asked, "Zhang Lie, are you ascending to the fourth realm?"

Zhang Lie caressed Zhu's head.

"There should still be some time left, but I'm about ready to do so, yes. The third realm can't handle my strength any longer."

As he saw Zhu's forlorn expression, Zhang Lie smiled and rubbed her head again.

"You can't be showing these sorts of expressions anymore, you hear? You're no longer a young girl, but rather the ruler of a realm."

Zhu took a deep breath. "Before you, Zhang Lie, I'll always be a little girl!"

Zhang Lie raised his head. "Sun Mengmeng, you and the others should take this time to help train Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen. Go through the same sort of hellish training that I adopted with you in the second realm."

The members of Team Zenith turned toward the two apprentices and smiled like demons. Yang Ze grabbed Jun Jiuxiao's shoulder.

"Don't worry, we seniors will demonstrate our love for you two."

Li Feng grabbed onto Ye Xianchen's shoulder.

"It might hurt at first, but you'll get used to it soon enough."

Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen shared looks of unease, as though they had found themselves surrounded by a pack of hungry wolves, looking at them as though they were prey. They felt weak and helpless in front of all these stares.

Zhang Lie intoned, "Don't neglect your own cultivation. You've all grown tremendously, but there's still a long way to go. Once we're all in the fourth realm, you'll all be so far down your own paths that you have to be your own guide."

"Thank you for your pointers, Captain."

Everyone bowed toward Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie then went up to Zhu. "How's the search for the materials going?"

"There are still a few ingredients missing."

"As long as you can find them, that'll be good enough."

To celebrate everyone maxing out their monarch gene fragments, Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith had a feast.

After that, Zhang Lie headed off in search of Li Qianlin.

After the formation of the unified world, Li Qianlin had returned to Li Zongming's side.

The Zongming world hadn't changed dramatically; it had been transferred wholesale from a superior world to a massive part of the unified world.

Compared to the Zongming world of the past, it had grown even more luxurious and prosperous.

After the formation of the unified world, the standard of living in the third realm had risen dramatically. There were far more resources than before, and spiritual and medicinal herbs could be had for impossibly cheap prices. Grain matured instantly during the merger process and was imbued with spiritual energy, providing a boost in growth rate to all the inhabitants of the world.

The aliens' lives had become far more dynamic and vigorous—but not necessarily for the better.

After all the worlds merged together, land borders and boundaries became rather fuzzy. As various aliens began to fight over territory, the aliens had to get used to a whole new way of living.

Zhang Lie didn't mind this, because he knew that whatever chaos existed would only be temporary. After the draconian sage and the others reached a settlement, all would become orderly once more—and very quickly, at that.

Chaos might be brewing all over the unified world, but the original superior worlds' territory would be unaffected. No fool dared to provoke those worlds, and those who really were foolish enough to try were quickly dealt with.

Zhang Lie headed to Mt. Tian, the original capital of the Zongming world, and entered the palace in search of Li Qianlin.

When she saw him, Li Qianlin beamed. "What are you doing here?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I'm here to see you."

"Nothing has happened, has it?"

"What, can't I come see you without a disaster occurring?"

"It seems like every time you do so, it's after something bad has happened, or if you're about to leave for a major event or another."

Zhang Lie replied, "The unified world has been formed, and Zhu is the ruler of the realm. She's on our side, as you know, and the third realm is finally at peace now. No one's an opponent for me, and I have plenty of time for myself now. I don't have to go to war, and neither do I have to deal with sudden crises. I can simply accompany you."

Li Qianlin stuck out her tongue. "Who needs your company? I'm doing just fine on my own!"

"In two days, the four primary kingdoms of the unified world are hosting their founding ceremonies. I'd like to bring you over as my guest."

In the remaining period of time, Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin spent every day together.

Time passed in a flash, and the time for the four kingdom's founding ceremonies quickly came.

Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin first headed to the Zenith Alliance's founding ceremony.

They were located on land originally belonging to a large world, which had subsequently been invaded by the warlords and converted into Zenith territory.

Outside the gates of the capital, all sorts of Milky Way hunters were standing in formation as though they were part of an army.

Zhang Lie praised, "Their footwork is excellent. Have they been specially trained?"

Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith were all seated on the balcony that was part of the original palace. Alongside Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith were representatives that had played integral roles in the formation of the unified world, the representatives of some of the top hundred races of the Milky Way.

Those who weren't part of the top ten strongest races of the Milky Way didn't even merit a seat.

Representatives of the top thirty races of the Milky Way could only stand behind the seated hunters, and the other representatives among the top hundred, along with the warlords under Zhang Lie's command, were all on the second floor. Only Zhang Lie and the others had the best seats.

Yun Bing smiled. "Well? Doesn't it remind you of the second realm, when we established the kingdom of Limit?"

During the founding ceremony of the kingdom of Limit, Zhang Lie had specially hypnotized disaster-grade lifeforms using his mistmeld clam soulshard to serve as steeds. It was truly a memorable and magnificent sight, but all Zhang Lie remembered was the hassle of setting everything up.

It even had a monarchy, along with systems and institutions in place for the transferral of power.

Now, however, the Zenith Alliance was being managed by a coalition of forces from the Milky Way, and Zhang Lie didn't have to do a single thing. He had the best seat and could snack on fruits as he watched the founding ceremony from the best vantage point.

Zhang Lie asked, "Just how did you manage to get everyone on board, Yun Bing? I wouldn't have expected them to want to work together with you."

The Zenith Dojo was strong enough to found a kingdom of its own, but the fact that Yun Bing had managed to corral the other forces into joining it was wholly unexpected.

Chapter 1257: It's Not a Lie

"The other forces of the Milky Way had already been thinking of allying with the Zenith Dojo—I'm sure you don't need me to tell you why." Yun Bing looked toward Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith.

The reason the forces of the Milky Way wanted to ally with the Zenith Dojo was because the Zenith Dojo was rapidly growing stronger. It had once been nothing more than a dojo on a single planet in the Milky Way, but was now the strongest force in the second realm—and it wouldn't be far-fetched to call it the ruler of it all, either, considering it possessed an entire kingdom.

Upon ascending to the third realm, the members of the Zenith Dojo started out with uncommon combat power, especially after the unification of the worlds of the third realm. No disciple of the Zenith Dojo had fled; they trusted in Zhang Lie's success, and the blessing of the realm had made them two or three levels stronger than their counterparts.

Furthermore, the Zenith Dojo was backed by ridiculous existences like Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith. As long as they stayed in the third realm, the Zenith Dojo would have nothing to fear from anyone.

The forces of the Milky Way weren't foolish. Knowing that the Zenith Dojo was a group with infinite potential, they did their best to try to ally with them.

Zhang Lie's value would only keep rising. In the second realm, he had constructed a kingdom; in the third realm, he had unified a realm; and he had even made such shocking discoveries as limit-breaking potions and disaster-grade lifeforms. No one knew just what Zhang Lie would be capable of in the future.

Working with the Zenith Dojo was akin to working with Zhang Lie. In the future, if there were any more discoveries, they would surely learn about the matter before anyone else.

"It was that simple?"

"The other forces already wanted to ally with us, but their relationships with each other can be complicated. Allying with us could mean working together with their enemies—so I simply came up with a strategy that would give all the forces of the Milky Way an excuse for cooperation."

"What excuse?"

"That all the alien kingdoms, along with three superior kings and the ruler of the realm, would be working together with each other."

Zhu frowned. "I'm on Zhang Lie's side! I'm his companion!"

Yun Bing nodded. "We know that, but the forces of the Milky Way don't."

Zhang Lie scrutinized her thoughtfully. "I understand. You're telling the forces of the Milky Way that there's a coalition of forces arranged against them, that they would have to band together in order to survive against such disadvantageous odds, especially when I and the members of Team Zenith can't remain in the third realm forever."

Yun Bing smiled slyly. "That's exactly right. You and the members of Team Zenith won't be able to stay here for good—but even if you leave, the foundations that you've established, along with the members of the Zenith Dojo, will still be around. The superior kings would be wary of the Zenith Dojo's strength and have developed a close relationship with you, so it would be safe no matter what."

Sun Mengmeng came to the same realization. "But that doesn't apply to the forces of the Milky Way, does it?"

Yun Bing nodded. "After all, the Milky Way hunters are much like invaders, whereas the three other kingdoms are formed of indigenous races. It would only be natural for them to ostracize the hunters."

Zhang Lie continued, "That means the hunters of the Milky Way will naturally feel outnumbered and isolated."

"I'm not lying, after all." Yun Bing smiled. "The three kingdoms were originally three superior worlds, who had allied together against the superior worlds of antiquity and banded together in an attempt to resolve the crisis of the third realm. Meanwhile, the hunters had almost uniformly fled back to the Milky Way."

Sun Mengmeng gave Yun Bing a thumbs up.

Sun Xiaowu marveled. "Amazing. Yun Bing, it felt like you were telling the truth the entire time—but it might as well be a lie!"

Yun Bing asked, "But have I lied?"

Yang Ze exclaimed, "That's why it's so impressive! All you're saying is the truth, but what you leave implicit is nudging people toward notions that are most favorable to you. It's a waste of your talents not to become a lawyer."

Such was the crux to becoming a good lawyer—to reveal a fraction of the truth and lead judge and jury toward the preconceptions most advantageous for them.

Zhang Lie asked, "So you managed to get all the forces of the Milky way to work together using these tricks and misdirection?"

Yun Bing shrugged. "How am I tricking them? They joined this coalition voluntarily."

Zhang Lie smirked.

"It's true that the three superior kingdoms have worked together in the past, and they did form an alliance. This is factual, verifiable truth."

On the other hand, the Milky Way hunters were clearly at a disadvantage in terms of unity.

Zhang Lie praised her. "You really are sly, to take advantage of their lack of knowledge."

Yun Bing smiled. "Of course, as an ally of the three superior kingdoms, the Zenith Dojo played an important role—perhaps the most important role—during the crisis of the third realm, and you were the one who unified the world. Even if they aren't willing to show you any respect, the contributions

of the Zenith Dojo alone will leave the three kingdoms and the alien races within them unwilling to ostracize us."

Zhang Lie summarized, "So you've manufactured a common enemy out of thin air."

"I just told the others that, if the Milky Way hunters want to get a greater say in the governance of the third realm, that they would have to learn to work together as allies rather than enemies."

Yun Bing truly had a talent for diplomacy.

The alliance between the forces of the Milky Way and the Zenith Dojo would undoubtedly be beneficial for the former. Not only would they be able to develop a relationship with Zhang Lie, they would be shielded from any hostility from the alien races, and Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith would protect them. There were uncountable advantages.

Meanwhile, the Zenith Dojo would be able to obtain a vast source of manpower and connections throughout the Milky Way.

It was a win-win situation.

Zhang Lie asked, "Can you guarantee that the Zenith Dojo will have an important voice in the coalition?"

Sun Mengmeng murmured, "If the Zenith Dojo were to end up getting swallowed up..."

Yun Bing replied, "With all of you around, anyone who attempts to usurp power must be mad. Even without my doing anything, the other forces of the Milky Way would deal with them to claim your favor."

"But we won't be able to remain in the third realm forever," Zhang Lie warned.

Chapter 1258: Simply Disappeared

Yun Bing gave Zhang Lie an unimpressed look. "Have some confidence in me, won't you? All you have to do is remain in the third realm for some time. I'll be able to secure an important position in the coalition by then and stabilize our foundation of power. As long as I remain in the third realm, the forces of the Milky Way will never be able to control the Zenith Dojo."

Zhang Lie asked, "And what about after you ascend as well?"

Yun Bing replied, "Don't worry. Just give me the time I need to solidify our status. Furthermore, who's to say that I'm going to ascend?"

"You're a genetic hunter, aren't you?"

Yun Bing shrugged. "Who knows what dangers the fourth realm possesses? Staying in the third realm and managing a kingdom doesn't seem bad in comparison."

"Don't lust after authority and power," Zhang Lie advised. "Remember that you're not native to the third realm, that you're a genetic hunter from the Milky Way."

"Don't worry, Zhang Lie. By the time you get a firm footing in the fourth realm and need my assistance, I'll be ready to ascend."

"Very well."

To be frank, Yun Bing was somewhat weak in terms of individual strength. She was still stronger than the average hunter, but barely noteworthy to Zhang Lie. His disciples, Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen, had already eclipsed her in strength.

"It's almost time for my speech."

Yun Bing stood up, patted herself down, and walked up to the podium. She shouted, "Today marks the founding of the Zenith Alliance. Thanks to everyone's combined efforts, we have overcome many crises together, not least among them the averted destruction of the third realm. Rather than choosing to retreat, we cooperated and strategized against disaster..."

"...I hereby announce the founding of the Zenith Alliance!"

Fireworks lit up the sky as thunderous applause boomed below.

Yun Bing had specially prepared the festivities, including a fireworks show in which the fireworks had been replaced with hunters' techniques.

The sky sparkled and fizzed, and the overall appearance of these "fireworks" might even have been superior to the real thing.

Because the kingdom was founded by all the forces of the Milky Way, it was officially titled the Zenith Milky Way Alliance, or the Zenith Alliance for short.

"I shall take on the role of Prime Minister of the Zenith Alliance. I pledge that I will build a better foundation for us all on the basis of the hard work and effort that we have all put in. Next up, the guardian deity of the Zenith Alliance, the dojo leader of the Zenith Dojo, the strongest hunter of the third realm, the champion who rescued it in times of need, the scientist who discovered limit-breaking potions and realized how to absorb disaster gene fragments, the true leader of the Zenith Alliance—Zhang Lie."

Yun Bing turned around to see that Zhang Lie had already vanished, as had Li Qianlin.

"Where's Zhang Lie?"

The members of Team Zenith all shrugged.

Yun Bing clutched her face. "What am I supposed to do? There are a few hundred thousand people down there right now!"

Sun Mengmeng sighed in exasperation. "Who would be able to stop our captain from leaving?"

Certainly not anyone from the third realm.

Yun Bing clicked her tongue. "In that case, Sun Mengmeng, you're up!"

From a distance, Li Qianlin asked, "Is it really alright for us to have left so suddenly?"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "It's almost time for the founding ceremony for the Lie kingdom. The ruler is my disciple, so I have to be present punctually."

By then, Zhang Lie had already shattered space and brought them both to the territory of the Lie kingdom.

As important as the Zenith Alliance was, Zhang Lie had no intention of speaking publicly in front of such a large audience. He had prepared nothing;

in order to avoid an embarrassing attempt at public speaking, Zhang Lie had chosen to sneak away beforehand.

Of course, there was another reason besides.

Zhang Lie wanted to diminish his importance and influence in the Zenith Alliance; after all, he was about to ascend to the fourth realm shortly. If he played too important a role and left too strong an impression in the minds of the hunters of the third realm, Zhang Lie was afraid that it would negatively impact Yun Bing's authority and the status of the members of Team Zenith.

As such, Zhang Lie had slipped away. As long as his influence diminished, Yun Bing and Team Zenith's influence would rise.

Li Qianlin asked curiously, "Don't you want to become the leader of the Zenith Alliance?"

"Do you think I've ever cared?"

Li Qianlin hummed. "That's true. If you've endeared the ruler of the third realm herself, it would be trivial to make the world anew."

"Becoming the leader of the Zenith Alliance would be a joke—I don't intend to remain in the third realm for good, after all."

Perhaps a leader in spirit, but an actual leader? Of course not!

Li Qianlin hesitated for a moment. "Are you really going to ascend to the third realm?"

"I'm a genetic hunter," Zhang Lie replied.

Hunters weren't indigenous to the dimensional realm, and Zhang Lie believed that neither should they be beholden to it.

"We can only move ever forwards," he stated resolutely.

"However, I saw quite a few genetic hunters who have remained in the third realm for the long term while in the superior draconian world," Li Qianlin replied.

Not all hunters wanted to advance relentlessly; some were afraid of the challenges they would have to face, the strength of the lifeforms they would have to kill, the allies and friends they would lose along the way, the shame they would feel if they gave up and returned to the Milky Way.

Some simply didn't have the strength to defeat peak-grade lifeforms, and were forced to halt their advance and become merchants instead.

"You've only met a fraction of us hunters."

Even more genetic hunters never feared to charge onward. When their companions perished, they would carry their companions' souls in their heart, fighting every day to hone themselves, to improve, to advance.

It was precisely because of all these pioneers who had given their lives to exploring the dimensional realm that the Milky Way was experiencing such prosperity.

"Only by advancing can I reclaim what I once lost," Zhang Lie stated resolutely.

Li Qianlin opened her mouth as if to speak, but she couldn't force the words out of her throat. In the end, she sighed. "You're always like this, aren't you? Forging endlessly onward. I can't imagine where your finish line would be."

The Lie kingdom was located where the scaleman kingdom had been. Zhang Lie brought Li Qianlin with him to the scaleman king, the former ninth prince, who was now the Lie king.

Despite having lost his superior world, after the unification of the worlds of the third realm, the former superior king had received an incredible blessing, advancing him beyond his former strength. The Lie king should have sensed him the moment he arrived in Lie territory.

Zhang Lie had naturally permitted this signal to reach the Lie king himself.

When he saw that Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin were approaching, the Lie king was very excited.

He had been preparing for the founding ceremony, but once he sensed their arrival, he dropped what he was working on.

"You're here, Master!"

Zhang Lie smiled. "I'm not disturbing you, am I?"

The Lie king's smile widened. "It's an honor for me to receive you here, Master, not a disturbance at all!"

Zhang Lie replied, "I'll take a stroll around the palace and await your founding ceremony."

The Lie king beamed. "I heard the Zenith Alliance's founding ceremony was today too, and I was worried you wouldn't show up."

Chapter 1259: Strolling and Stopping

Zhang Lie smiled. "You're at least half a disciple to me. Although I didn't teach you very much, how could I not attend your founding ceremony?"

The Lie king replied, "Hardly, Master! Without you, I wouldn't ever have become a king of the realm. Beasts would have eaten me alive, and I would never have survived to witness the glorious history of the third realm. You are the one who made me who I am today, Master, and you've always been the person whom I respect most."

Zhang Lie smiled and dipped his head in satisfaction.

The Lie king continued, "I still have much to do in terms of preparation, Master, so I can't stick around for long. I'll have my brother prepare a reception for you."

"No, no, don't worry about it. I can walk around on my own."

The Lie king fretted. "But it's rare for you to make an appearance, Master! I would be ashamed not to treat you well while you're here. I just mentioned that you were the reason I could be who I am today—and yet I can't even do this paltry thing right..."

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "No, there's no need to worry. Focus on your founding ceremony—you'd lose me face if it went badly."

The Lie king nodded in shame. "I apologize, Master."

Li Qianlin asked curiously, "Why call this world the Lie kingdom?"

The Lie king smiled. "It's a name that's particularly meaningful to me, ma'am."

"Really? Why?" Li Qianlin asked curiously.

The Lie king smiled again. "Lie is from my master's name."

Li Qianlin turned to Zhang Lie in surprise. "It looks like your disciple really does respect you..."

Zhang Lie shrugged, indicating that he was used to it.

They stepped into the palace and witnessed the aliens working hard. Many of the servants and palace maids who saw Zhang Lie and the Lie king kowtowed.

"We greet His Majesty, we greet the grandmaster!"

The Lie king waved a hand at them, motioning for them to continue with their tasks.

Zhang Lie asked, "Do you still not like being king?"

The Lie king sighed. "I've grown used to it by now, but kingship is like a responsibility that weighs me down."

In the end, the Lie king did find a rather high-ranking servant, whom he tasked with the responsibility of showing Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin around.

The next day, the founding ceremony of the Lie kingdom was hosted. Unlike that for the Zenith Alliance, the founding ceremony wasn't completely open to the public. The Lie king sat in an open-top carriage in a procession all the way from outside the capital into the palace, waving to the citizens who had gathered on either side of the route along the way.

The Lie king had also invited Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin to ride in the carriage with him and into the palace, but Zhang Lie had refused.

This was the Lie king's kingdom, and Zhang Lie didn't intend to play any further part in it. He was about to leave for the fourth realm, and it made sense for him to deal with whatever obligations he could now.

He no longer intended to participate in any grand event in the third realm; he would be a spectator, spending the rest of his time here together with Li Qianlin.

The Lie king rode in an ornate carriage wearing majestic armor. As Zhang Lie watched him wave and wave again to his citizens, he felt immense gratification well up inside him.

The carriage arrived at the palace, and the Lie king walked up to the podium.

He lifted up a bejeweled sword and raised its tip to the sky. "Today, the Lie kingdom has been founded!"

A pillar of light shot into the air, and multicolored, rosy hues filled the sky.

This wasn't anything that the will of the third realm had done; the Lie king had conjured such a phenomenon himself.

The Lie king was now an existence beyond the level of a superior king, and he had more than enough strength to accomplish such a feat.

Compared to the original succession ceremony for the throne, this one was far less complex. After all, the Lie king's power was evident, and it needed no acknowledgment from the world. His power was now his own, independent of the realm.

The remainder of the ceremony was perfunctory.

The officials of the Lie kingdom knelt. "Long live the Lie king!"

Despite the fact that the ceremony had grown so concise, there were far more citizens present than when the Lie king had taken the throne.

Those below the stage weren't simply the officials of the Lie court, but also the aliens from various worlds that had joined the Lie kingdom. None were ordinary citizens; these were leaders of the respective worlds and their most trusted advisors. Those of lower status weren't even permitted into the palace, and instead had to kneel outside.

As he observed the Lie king ascend to the throne, Zhang Lie yawned. "The funerals were more entertaining to watch..."

Initially, he was gratified to have seen his disciple take on such an important role, but as the ceremony dragged on, he couldn't help but feel bored.

Li Qianlin nudged Zhang Lie with her wrist, then glared at him.

"This is your disciple's founding ceremony! What nonsense are you talking about?"

Zhang Lie whispered back, "You've never seen the burial ceremonies of the scaleman world, have you? Especially when the princes buried their king!"

That ceremony was something to behold—I can't help but want to see it again."

Li Qianlin glanced all around her before sighing in relief. "If anyone else had heard you say that—no matter how good your relationship with your disciple, he'd fall out with you for sure. How thoughtless do you have to be to say something like that on such an auspicious occasion?!"

If Li Qianlin had heard Zhang Lie say the same thing about her father, she would have slapped him immediately.

Zhang Lie waved a hand at her. "Don't worry. If my disciple were to hear me, he'd organize a funeral immediately."

Li Qianlin rolled her eyes. "I don't know where you get your confidence from..."

"I'm not an idiot—I wouldn't have said it if anyone else were in earshot."

By then, the Lie king had sat down on his throne, and an old official was carrying out formal rites.

Zhang Lie yawned again. "It's far too boring. Let's go watch a funeral."

Li Qianlin rolled her eyes. "What are you thinking? You're not even going to bid your disciple farewell?"

"If I do that, he'll certainly keep us behind. Better to leave silently—as a king of a newly established kingdom, there's more than enough to fill his plate. We shouldn't bother him any more."

Zhang Lie tugged on Li Qianlin's hand, then left in a burst of shattered space.

However, there were no funerals to be found anywhere in the kingdom. Because of the founding ceremony, all funerals had been prohibited from occurring for three days. Conveniently, Zhang Lie had three free days in his schedule, so he brought them both wandering about the Lie kingdom...

Chapter 1260: A Familiar Face

Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin spent a few days enjoying themselves in the Lie kingdom. In the past, because there was always something he had to do, Zhang Lie hadn't availed himself of the sights and scenery of the kingdom, but now he had plenty of time.

Zhang Lie headed to a certain city.

The city was clearly prosperous, and the scent of alcohol filled the air. Zhang Lie puffed up his chest proudly. "This city was built by me and the Lie king, my disciple whom you saw."

Li Qianlin asked curiously, "Why did you suddenly decide to build a new city here?"

Zhang Lie replied, "While the struggle for succession was ongoing, the Lie king didn't have a base of power. To avoid unnecessary trouble, we chose to distance ourselves from the capital, where the fighting and scheming was most vigorous. We decided to build a foundation and conserve our strength before returning, only to find..."

Li Qianlin asked, "Only to find what?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "Only to find that nothing had gone to plan. The original king had dropped dead—assassinated by the Jinghun clan. The Jinghun clan then manipulated affairs so that the eighth prince could take the throne. The crown prince, shocked by the sudden coup, attacked the capital with his standing army, only to be routed and forced to flee. He ended up coming to us, instead."

By then, Li Qianlin had already guessed what happened next.

"And then you, the current king, and the crown prince all headed back to the capital, where you defeated the nascent coup?"

"You could guess?"

Li Qianlin rolled her eyes. "Anyone could have guessed. Everyone knows who you are—if you were able to destroy even the superior worlds of antiquity, how could a large world hope to stand up against you?"

Zhang Lie smiled. "I wasn't as strong then as I am now, and I had to take even a king of a large world seriously. Only after I had maxed out my disaster gene fragments did I dare to head over to where you were. This world was where I started my journey in the third realm, and it was the most important step in that journey. It does bring back some fond memories..."

Li Qianlin asked, "What made you choose this location? Was it famous for its alcohol?"

"This used to be a desolate wasteland—there was no alcohol whatsoever. However, there used to be a dimensional wormhole by that mountain, connected to a medium-sized world. A tribe of brewers had been located there, and they could brew amazing alcohol that could even confer gene fragments on those who drank it, strengthening their bodies." Zhang Lie pointed toward a mountain in the distance.

As a princess, Li Qianlin had the education expected of royalty, and she quickly understood the economic implications.

"No wonder. You wanted to take advantage of that dimensional wormhole to set up a trading post in this town, to sell the alcohol of the alcohol tribe here and amass a profit in the short term."

"Yes, though things didn't turn out as planned. The Lie king had become king before the town was even finished being constructed, and I had left the world by then. Even so, the Lie king followed my original instructions and developed this town to the city you see today. It's clear that they even forged connections with the alcohol tribe—and they've brought that miraculous alcohol here."

Li Qianlin was very curious about everything around her, and her gaze darted all over as Zhang Lie brought her through the city.

She was fascinated by anything that had to do with Zhang Lie.

"This time, I intend to bring some of the alcohol back with me as a small gift—ah, that's..." Zhang Lie had just stepped inside a tavern when he saw an alien carrying a vat of alcohol.

Li Qianlin asked, "Who's that? Someone you know?"

Zhang Lie raised a hand and yelled out, "Mu!"

Mu turned around and, upon seeing Zhang Lie, revealed a puzzled expression that turned into one of delight.

"Zhang Lie? Is that you? What are you doing here?" Mu gave Zhang Lie a warm hug, which Zhang Lie reciprocated. He then introduced him to Li Qianlin.

"This is Mu, a brewer from that wondrous tribe I told you about."

"Is this your wife?" Mu asked.

Li Qianlin lowered her head, flushing.

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Not yet."

"Oh? Not yet, eh?"

Zhang Lie asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Why, this is my tavern!"

Zhang Lie laughed and patted Mu's arm.

"Not bad, not bad! You've certainly come far since the last time we spoke."

Mu scratched his head and laughed. "It's all thanks to His Majesty. His men came to the tribe one day and sought out cooperation with us, exchanging all sorts of resources and riches for our alcohol."

Subsequently, when the worlds merged, there was no longer any need to traverse a dangerous dimensional wormhole, and transporting alcohol became much simpler. Many of the younger members of the tribe brought alcohol over here and started businesses."

Upon glancing at how crowded the tavern seemed to be, Zhang Lie smiled. "It looks like you're doing well."

Mu scratched his head and laughed. "Everyone's doing well. Those of us who left the village to do business in the city have prospered. It's all thanks to His Majesty and the grandmaster for allowing us to ply our trade here. If not for the scaleman world—ah!"

Mu realized that he had made a mistake and quickly corrected himself.

"It's the Lie kingdom now. Who else would have taken us all in? Many of my clan is here now, and almost two-thirds of the people in the city are from my world. We were able to make ourselves at home here very easily, and I can't thank His Majesty and the grandmaster enough."

Mu clearly didn't realize that he was speaking to the grandmaster himself.

"Don't just stand there—come on in! Let me buy you a drink."

Mu dragged Zhang Lie into the tavern.

The two of them had two flagons of alcohol. Mu asked, "How have you been recently, Zhang Lie?"

"Not too bad. I'm almost at a bottleneck in strength."

Mu seemed excited and curious. "You must be very strong, Zhang Lie. Have you ever met the Lie king?"

Zhang Lie nodded. "Of course!"

"Is he really as impressive as the rumors say? That he has a warrior's physique, a scholar's appearance, a golden dragon coiled around him, clouds of fortune by his feet, a mortal god?"

Zhang Lie couldn't help but laugh. "Who has been spreading these sorts of rumors?"

Mu asked, "Is he really not like that?"

"He isn't."

"What's the Lie king like, then?"

"He's a young lad in his prime. Usually, he's a little unassuming, but he can play the role well when it counts. He's been a king for quite some time now, and he does give off the impression of the strong at this point."

"And the grandmaster?" Mu asked.

Li Qianlin countered, "Have you never met the grandmaster?" Do you not even know of his identity?

Mu seemed a little embarrassed. "I'm just a small brewer, nothing more. I've never met the Lie king, so how could I have met the even more mysterious grandmaster? Apparently, many of the court officials haven't ever seen him either."

"After all, the grandmaster isn't frequently in this kingdom," Zhang Lie replied.