

U. Warlord 1261

Chapter 1261: Suave and Dashing

Mu asked delightedly, "Have you met the grandmaster, Zhang Lie?"

Zhang Lie thought for a moment. "I suppose I have..."

Mu asked, "What is he like? Some people say that the grandmaster has ridiculous skill, that he managed to destroy thousands of troops and horses with a snap of his fingers, that when alien races from beyond this realm assassinated the old scaleman king and took over the capital, the grandmaster appeared and destroyed them all. Subsequently, when the black spirits invaded, the grandmaster appeared again and took care of the invading forces by himself."

Li Qianlin turned toward Zhang Lie. "I didn't know this grandmaster was so impressive!"

"Right? The black spirits that managed to devour world after world were nothing more than ants to the grandmaster!"

The aliens around Mu, hearing that he was praising the grandmaster, added their own takes to his legend.

"No, the grandmaster is His Majesty's teacher. How can he be a mere warrior who only knows how to fight? He has to be a scholar of unbelievable wit! I have a relative serving as a guard in the capital. When the aliens took over the capital, even the crown prince was flustered, and his army of tens of thousands of troops suffered massive losses and was forced to retreat. However, the grandmaster easily resolved the situation."

Li Qianlin asked, "How did the grandmaster do it?"

The alien drank another swig of alcohol. He was red all the way to his neck and was clearly drunk. "The grandmaster didn't even have to move his fingers at all! All he had to do was propose a plan to His Majesty, and the aliens quickly began to quarrel among themselves. He easily secured victory without having to fight—this is true strength."

His companion added, "The grandmaster is truly amazing. Everyone thought that the crown prince would win the battle for succession, but when the grandmaster spoke, even the crown prince had to move aside. How many worlds did they say the black spirits destroyed?"

The first alien swallowed another swig of alcohol. "No other world could do anything about it, and even ours was in danger. The grandmaster, who had gone into seclusion, showed himself once more and extinguished the black spirits in the blink of an eye."

His companion cried out, "I heard that the warriors from every world were drafted by the superior worlds to face the death spirits—the leaders of the black spirits, who struck fear into us all! To think that those black spirits were mere subordinates, and that there were at least ten times more death spirits... We were saved all thanks to our grandmaster, who led the charge against the death spirits and destroyed them all, shocking the entire realm."

Li Qianlin glanced toward Zhang Lie, a playful expression on her face.

"So the grandmaster is an excellent strategist as well..."

Another guest walked over with a flask of alcohol. "What do you mean, strategist? One of my brothers was in the capital as a royal guard, and he witnessed the grandmaster fight against the aliens himself! That day, a storm suddenly manifested by the capital walls, sending clouds of dust into the capital. A flood tore apart the sky."

The guest drained his cup, as though witnessing the scene for himself. His eyes filled with fear at just a brief reminder of that day.

"Are all of you aware of the capital walls?"

Everyone nodded.

The guest let out a long breath. "Then you all know how majestic our capital walls are—thousands of meters tall, witnessing millennia of history. How many enemies had the wall stopped? How much invaders' blood had the wall absorbed? For all that it represented, the wall crumbled to just one punch."

The guest caressed the scar on his face, as though it were a badge of glory and reminiscence.

"Ripples of spatial energy surged toward the aliens, sounding like peals of thunder, like stampeding hooves. Waves rose up in a cataclysmic explosion that shook the earth, causing a section of the wall to explode.

"Everything happened far too quickly. By the time I came to my senses, the walls had begun to crumble, but that wasn't the end of it. Pulses of energy spread from the point of impact. It seemed almost as if a disaster-grade lifeform had gone on a rampage within the capital, summoning wind and rain so strong that some of the guards were blown straight off the walls.

"The storm swallowed up all the infrastructure and buildings close to the city walls, turning them into a pile of ruin and rubble. The whole palace were uprooted and sent flying. Pillars of shattered stone and balconies of wood whipped through the air, and even the palace infrastructure became unstable."

Li Qianlin whispered to Zhang Lie, "Was this one of the guards present on the wall at the time?"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes at her. "How many soldiers and guards do you think were present? How could I remember them all?"

"During that fight, during that attack, I felt my lack of strength more keenly than ever before, as though I were merely an ant in the face of true power. Rubble was sent flying through the air, smashing into the ground like meteors. Countless houses were shattered, and countless people died from the attack. That could have been none other than a blow from the heavens themselves—the grandmaster has to be a god!"

The guest's eyes filled with wild reverence.

Li Qianlin rolled his eyes. "Look at him! He clearly thinks of you like a god, but you can't even remember his appearance?"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes back at her. "You know there are countless people across the galaxy who venerate me—how could I remember them all? They think of me as the pioneer of genetic hunters, the champion of humanity. If I truly were to remember all their names, I'd drop dead of tiredness!"

Mu asked Zhang Lie curiously, "You've seen the grandmaster, Zhang Lie, haven't you? Just what kind of person is he? An amazing swordsman and fighter, or a tactician and master strategist?"

"As I said, he's an amazing fighter, who can summon wind and storm with just a finger!"

"The grandmaster is a tactician, one able to destroy a city with words alone!"

"How could the grandmaster be a mere tactician? He must be physically strong!"

"So what if he's a tactician? Could he become a grandmaster with brute strength alone?"

While the guests of the tavern naturally split up into two camps, Zhang Lie suddenly said, "Actually, you're both right. The grandmaster boasts impressive physical abilities and peerless intelligence, the quintessential combination of both aspects of humanity."

Upon hearing Zhang Lie's words, the crowd quieted down.

Zhang Lie continued, "If I had to describe him with a few adjectives... well, I found him particularly suave and dashing."

Chapter 1262: With Manual Labor

Li Qianlin rolled her eyes. "Shameless!"

Zhang Lie bragged about himself in front of the gathered crowd as they toasted the grandmaster.

The imperial guard stared at Zhang Lie with furrowed brows.

Zhang Lie noticed his stare.

"What's the matter?"

The guard asked, "Have I met you before?"

"Is that so?" Zhang Lie replied. "I don't have any memory of that."

The imperial guard murmured, "Likely within the capital..."

It was clear that the guard had only caught a passing glimpse of Zhang Lie from afar, or he would surely have had his face imprinted in his memory.

The other patrons of the tavern were rather upset at the hubbub that Zhang Lie's group had caused.

"You're all being too noisy! Can't you let us drink our alcohol in peace?"

The imperial guard shouted back, "If you want to drink in peace, bring your alcohol back home with you!"

"Don't you know who the grandmaster is? And who are you, and who's that drunk over there, to comment on him?" Another alien spat a mouthful of saliva on the ground. "The grandmaster's just a petty coward."

The guests scowled at the alien who had just spoken. "Without the grandmaster, none of us would be here today! Our world would have been destroyed by the black spirits—there wouldn't have been a superior world, nor the Lie kingdom of the present."

The imperial guard also frowned. "The scar on my face was, in some sense, caused by the grandmaster himself, but I've never hated him. Without the grandmaster, there would have been no future for us.

Without the grandmaster, you all would be nothing more than corpses buried under the ground. You certainly wouldn't be able to keep drinking here as leisurely as you are now!"

The alien retorted, "So what if I criticized the grandmaster? Who is he to you, your father?"

"Are we wrong, then? We've said nothing but the truth!"

The two sides looked as though they were about to start a brawl.

Mu hurriedly stepped between them. "Calm down, calm down, everyone! We all came here to drink, not to fight. How about I send all of you some drinks on the house?"

Brothers from the Door tribe, I apologize for the disturbance. Have the alcohol on the house."

The two aliens from the Door tribe smirked at each other. "When have we ever had to pay for our alcohol?"

Bring two more casks of alcohol out. We'll be taking them with us."

Mu frowned. "You've already taken twenty casks this month, and you've never paid for any of them. I'm just a small businessman, and I can't afford such an expense."

The aliens from the Door tribe were so arrogant that a guest might well think that the aliens, rather than Mu, owned the tavern.

"As countrymen from the same world, from the same village, you aren't willing to do us even this small favor?"

"Do you really think we care about your alcohol? We're just here to show you face and bolster your reputation."

Zhang Lie asked curiously, "Who are they?"

Mu whispered back, "They're from the Door tribe. Do you remember the tribe that was responsible for guarding the dimensional wormhole?"

"Somewhat."

Mu continued, "After His Majesty took the throne, he sent men to visit our world. The Door tribe was still responsible for guarding the wormhole at that time, but how could a small tribe from a medium-sized world stand up to imperial troops from a large world? The Door tribe lost handily, and the Lie king's troops entered the alcohol tribe's world.

"The Door tribe lost many of its strongest hunters that day. Faced with a foe from a large world, the tribe could only flee in panic, giving up their hold on the entrance to the wormhole that was their livelihood. Furthermore, as a result of their sudden weakness, they were quickly oppressed by the other tribes around.

"On the other hand, the alcohol tribe's status grew day by day, thanks to the trade that the Lie king wanted to set up."

Mu began to frown. "Subsequently, when the worlds merged, all of us from the alcohol tribe came to the Lie kingdom with fat purses. Those members of the Door tribe then began to badger all of us, jealous about our sudden rise and thinking that we don't deserve our good fortune. It's the same reason they loathe His Majesty and the grandmaster—the Door tribe thinks that they're the cause of all their problems."

Zhang Lie patted himself on the chest. "Don't worry. I'll get back whatever these men owe you."

Mu waved his hands urgently. "No, no! Zhang Lie, I know how strong you are, but let's not cause a fuss."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Don't worry, I won't cause a ruckus. Just you watch."

Mu seemed perplexed. "The people of the Door tribe aren't the type to respond to words alone..."

"I have a special trick."

Zhang Lie walked up to the two aliens from the Door tribe, who stared at him.

"What, you want to fight? Don't think you're impressive just because you've seen the grandmaster. Once we make our move, you'll be begging for mercy!"

Zhang Lie didn't say a word. He continued staring at the two men, rainbow light gleaming in his eyes. He had activated his disaster-grade mismeld clam soulshard.

The two members of the Door tribe found their eyes glazing over.

Zhang Lie commanded, "Hand Mu all the money you owe him."

The two members of the Door tribe gave Mu all their money as though they were puppets.

Mu, shocked at the unbelievable sight, didn't know what to do.

"Keep it. This is the money they owe you, isn't it?"

Upon hearing Zhang Lie's reminder, Mu hurriedly claimed the money from the two tribesmen.

After that, the two tribesmen took off their clothes.

Li Qianlin hurriedly covered her face while Zhang Lie frowned. "What's the matter with you?"

The tribesmen replied, "We didn't have enough money, so we're covering the rest with our clothes."

Once they were stark naked, Zhang Lie turned to Mu.

"Is that enough?"

Mu nodded firmly in thanks. "More or less."

"That means it's not enough, then?" Zhang Lie asked.

The two tribesmen from the Door tribe made a stiff about-turn and headed out of the tribe. "We'll bring the money back."

"Let's go." Zhang Lie stood up, and Li Qianlin hurriedly followed suit. "What's the matter?"

"We're headed to the Door tribe to get money."

They followed the two naked tribesmen toward the Door tribe's land.

The Door tribe was located in what seemed like the slums of the city, with dilapidated houses and the stench of sewage. Many of the tribespeople were emaciated.

As Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin walked over, many hostile stares swept over them—over Li Qianlin's body and on her clothes.

"Lad, leave the woman and all your money behind."

Li Qianlin frowned as Zhang Lie activated his disaster-grade soulshard once more.

"Return all the money owed to the alcohol tribe."

Unexpectedly, however, the Door tribe's total wealth was less than the debt they had accrued.

"In that case, you'll pay it off with hard labor."

Given what they had witnessed of the Door tribe, Zhang Lie did realize that it would be implausible for them to be able to pay off their debt immediately. If the Door tribespeople were willing to perform manual labor, their lives would surely improve.

Chapter 1263: Reminiscence

The alcohol tribe was naturally very pleased to have the Door tribe working for them and paying off the debts they had incurred—both for the fact that Zhang Lie had saved the alcohol tribe in the past, and for dealing with their troubles now.

Before Zhang Lie left, the alcohol tribe presented him with a princely gift—a hundred casks of alcohol.

Zhang Lie accepted the gift with a smile. He wouldn't have to purchase alcohol for his comrades as planned, then.

He and Li Qianlin continued to explore the territory of the Lie kingdom.

They headed to the royal farm. Zhang Lie introduced, "Every so often, the royal family has a hunt in this region. The Lie king once took advantage of his authority as king of the realm to speed up time in the vicinity of this area, and the lifeforms' rate of reproduction increased as well."

"There are fewer lifeforms than I would have expected... is it because a hunt has just finished?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "No. It's because the majority of the superior- and peak-grade lifeforms have been transported to the genetic farm in the draconian kingdom."

Li Qianlin gaped. "So this is just an offshoot of that farm?!"

"You can understand it that way."

After Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin toured the kingdom, they finally had the chance to witness one of the Lie kingdom's specialties—their funerals.

"He lay there, as though he were—a fallen leaf, floating in the wind—to his soul we pay our respects, our tears!"

A few youths danced about the town with a coffin in tow, their actions spry and vivacious. The coffin was sent flying into the air.

Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin, amidst the crowd, began to clap following the rhythm.

"As though you had—dreamt a marvelous dream—never to wake up again—your smile as gentle as a breeze. All things change in time—even the stars will move—but our love will remain here, here where you spilled blood—in passion and glory!"

Li Qianlin had to force herself to remain calm and avoid laughing. "What an unusual custom!"

Zhang Lie gave her a thumbs up. "Well? You think it interesting too, don't you?"

"Please, depart with ease—leave your earthly roots behind!" the son of the dead cried out, tears filling his eyes.

The citizens of the town began to sing the familiar song. "A river of tears we might swallow—but tomorrow will be, it will be, a better day! Strive—strive to persevere, to live without giving up! And when our love and hope face the sun—our tears of yesterday shall evaporate."

The singing, dancing youths paraded through the streets with the coffin in tow, their actions filled with remarkable grace.

"Do not give up on the morrow—dream your dreams, wish your wishes, fill yourself with strength and courage—let your love and hope shine by the moonlight!"

They placed the coffin in the center of the town.

Li Qianlin covered her mouth to avoid revealing a smile. "The Lie kingdom's funerals are far more joyous, far more interesting an affair than even the royal dances..."

"Turn back and take a look at your homeland—the future lies in wait, a myriad paths to travel—I opened the window and basked in the welcoming dawn!"

Once the coffin had been placed on the ground, the youth and his family circled the coffin as though they were around a campfire. As they clapped their hands, they sang and danced around it.

Those attending the funeral placed a bouquet of fresh flowers in front of the coffin. Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin did the same, then departed.

Li Qianlin clasped her hands behind her back. As the skies turned dark and the sun set, she raised her head to look at the stars, her steps light.

"How happy I am."

Zhang Lie smiled. "What? How could you be happy after attending someone's funeral?"

Li Qianlin kicked Zhang Lie's foot.

"You were the one who took me to see it!"

Zhang Lie laughed.

Li Qianlin continued, "I feel like I've had far too much fun the last few days. If only they could all continue in this manner..."

Zhang Lie knew that that would be impossible. He would eventually have to leave the third realm and ascend to the fourth.

"Let me bring you back to the Zongming kingdom," he suggested. "The Zongming kingdom's founding ceremony is about to begin, and your father told me to bring you back in advance to prepare."

Li Qianlin turned to him. "I'd love to accompany you out again in the future if there's an opportunity."

"Very well."

"Then it's settled."

Li Qianlin stuck out her pinkie finger.

Zhang Lie smiled. "Is this a custom in the Zongming kingdom too?"

Li Qianlin replied, "I learned it from Sun Mengmeng and the others. You better not renege on your promise!"

Zhang Lie curled his pinkie with hers. With his other hand, he shattered space and brought Li Qianlin toward the Zongming kingdom.

By then, the Zongming kingdom had already reached the last legs of its preparation for its founding ceremony. As Zhang Lie brought Li Qianlin back, Li Zongming waved to him and had the master of ceremonies lead him and Li Qianlin away. The master of ceremonies gave Zhang Lie a change of clothes and informed him as to the details of the upcoming ceremony.

That night, Li Zongming had dinner with Zhang Lie.

"Sorry for the trouble. I hope learning our customs hasn't been too difficult."

Zhang Lie replied, "Actually, nothing would go wrong even if I didn't attend..."

Li Zongming looked at him in astonishment. "How could we do that? You're the reason all this has happened to us, and one of the cornerstones of the Zongming kingdom! You're a hero and the husband-to-be of the princess of the kingdom. No matter what, I'd like you to be present."

Zhang Lie smiled. "All for Qianlin, then."

The founding ceremony occurred two days later.

Just as when the worlds of east and west were combined, the road to the capital had been festooned with flowers in red and blue. The red flowers were a specialty of the west, and the blue ones that of the east.

The trees were arrayed with traditional folk attire of the two worlds. The east favored elegance and subtlety; the west, extravagance and lordliness. The trees were arrayed alternately in the two worlds' outfits, as though they represented citizens from the two worlds holding hands, all the way for ten miles.

This was the founding ceremony for the kingdom, and Li Zongming wanted to express that he had never forgotten the friendship that had existed between the kingdoms of east and west. Without that initial merger, there wouldn't have been the superior Zongming world, or subsequently the current Zongming kingdom.

The Zongming kingdom had been built on the joint cooperation of the citizens of east and west.

The ground had been swept clean, without even a speck of dirt.

Strong citizens had dispelled the clouds in the air, making the sky shine as brightly as a gemstone. Rays of light from the morning sun struck the mountain in its entirety.

Outside the cordon, quite a few citizens had gathered.

"Today marks the day the Zongming kingdom is founded. A few years ago, we went from the world of the east to the Zongming world; now, we go from the Zongming world to the Zongming kingdom. Everything feels as though it has happened in the blink of an eye."

"It really does feel like no time at all..."

"I hear that there'll even be a performance by the east and the west."

"This is a historical moment—and we've seen two of them in our lifetime!"

Chapter 1264: Special Effects

"No, it's not just the second time."

"When the third realm was in a state of crisis, I thought we were about to die."

"It's a pity we won't be able to witness it ourselves. The only ones who can make it into the ceremony proper are the rich and famous."

"I heard that man is here too."

"That man?"

"The one who stole the bride?"

"What do you mean, stole the bride? He was the one who handed us the world of the west—and he's our princess's new groom now!"

"I really want to see just what that man looks like, and whether he really does have three heads and six arms like the rumors say."

The crowd was eagerly gossiping away.

A red carpet led toward the top of Mt. Tian, where the ceremony would take place. Surrounding it on either side were flowers that gave off a pleasant scent. Their rich, fragrant blooms lent an air of elegance to this occasion.

As the guests arrived at the scene, all manner of luxury transportation parked by the carriages drawn by genetic lifeforms, ornate to the extreme, studded with gold and jewels. Each carriage was more extravagant than the last, as though the guests were trying to outshine each other.

Those invited to witness the ceremony were businessmen and politicians all, each influential in their own right, and who would never ordinarily be seen in public.

Suited attendants passed through the crowds of guests, passing them beverages and exquisite hors d'oeuvres.

A gigantic stage stood in the middle of the venue, a temporary construction that was nonetheless as ornate as a palace. Clearly, no expense had been spared for this occasion.

A hundred giant beasts took to the skies, a golden-armored rider on the back of each one, scattering petals throughout the venue.

The beautiful petals danced through the air. Rosy light trailed the back of each flying lifeform, which were uniformly peak- or higher-grade. Behind the lifeforms were two even more massive ones.

Antlers shining in all the colors of the rainbow adorned their heads like crowns. Their aura pressed on the guests despite how far away they still were. The lifeforms on the ground, superior- and peak-grade alike, all lowered their bodies, as though paying respects to the lifeforms from above.

The lifeforms were the size of small cities, and the air shook as they passed through. Their scales glittered with such radiance that even the sun seemed to pale in comparison. One of them had a halo of light shining above its head. Nine pairs of wings kept it aloft, forming strong winds that buffeted the field. It stared at the crowd with an air of disdainful arrogance.

The two beasts carried a lavish palace between them, resplendent in its wealth. Just a jewel studded on its outer walls was comparable to the total wealth that the average guest possessed.

The other disaster-grade lifeform was equally extravagant. The ring of light on its back shone as brightly as the sun. Its huge wings covered up the sky, and its lithe body exuded grace. Its sharp eyes looked as though they could pierce through the sun and stars.

As the disaster-grade beasts flapped their wings, radiant light shone through the sky, spreading out from them like stardust.

As it flew, space seemed to ripple. Its rainbow-colored feathers gave off light in the seven colors of the dawn, and it left a rainbow trail behind it, so beautiful any onlookers would be instantly attracted to it.

Their gigantic wings covered up the skies; their eyes piercing sun and moon, star and sky.

Atop the sunbird was a palace that didn't lose out to that carried by the five-colored dragon, with exquisite architecture and a stream of flowing water. It was a style that harmonized with nature, and the clouds and mist surrounding it made it look like a building of myth and legend.

As the two lifeforms flew overhead, thousands of peak-grade lifeforms surrounded them like foot soldiers. Indeed, atop each peak-grade lifeform lay a team of soldiers, representing the Zongming kingdom's strength.

The two disaster-grade lifeforms landed on stage as the rainbow light they brought with them spread throughout the venue.

The palace they carried between them radiated such light the guests had to shield their eyes. A black figure appeared from its doors. The golden light materialized in the form of stairs. A long sheepskin carpet rolled down the steps, and a rain of flower petals floated down from the top of the palace.

Twenty to thirty aliens dressed in suits strode out and stood at attention on either side of the red carpet, their hands behind their back, their waists straight.

The crowd began to applaud. Thunderous applause filled the air in the span of just a few breaths.

Li Zongming walked down the stairs. With a wave of his hand, millions of stars in the sky began to glow. The sun and moon seemed to shine down brightly, and the images of dragons and phoenixes flitted through the air.

These were special effects that Li Zongming had made specifically for the occasion.

Li Zongming extended a hand behind him. "Let's go, Qianlin."

Following behind him was a woman who seemed to have descended from the heavens themselves, graceful and lithe, as radiant as a chrysanthemum blooming in the summer heat, as lush as a pine tree whose branches unfurled in a spring breeze, as pure as a rising sun at dawn, as fresh as a lotus flower blooming amidst a patch of verdant green.

Her shoulders were narrow, her hips slender, her neck a graceful line that revealed her white, perfect skin. Her brows were fine and thin, her lips red and luscious, her teeth as white as ivory. Her eyes shone as bright as stars, and two dimples appeared on her face as she smiled.

She was graceful and reserved, warm and unassuming, gentle and carefree. She dressed in the elegant attire of the east, with exquisite ornaments that magnified her beauty. Gold and silver hairpins studded her fine black hair, pearls radiant against her skin.

Her accessories and clothing only served to embellish her beauty. She walked down the steps with practiced ease, giving off a fragrant scent that didn't lose out to the flowers around her, her beauty so picturesque that one could get drunk on it. On that day, no one could think of her as anything less than a heavenly maiden.

Li Qianlin took her father's hand and walked down the golden stairs.

Someone clutched his suddenly thumping heart. "She's too beautiful, too beautiful! I've fallen in love. I've heard it rumored that the Zongming princess is the premier beauty of the third realm. I thought it an exaggeration, but after seeing her now..."

A woman bit down on her cherry lips, her eyes filled with grudging envy, jealousy, and malice. "How could it be? How could there be such a beautiful woman in this realm?"

The woman couldn't remain angry for long; her eyes softened, and it almost seemed as though she were falling in love with Li Qianlin herself...

Chapter 1265: Ruined Lives

"To think that I once claimed that Mei'er was more beautiful than the princess herself... Heavens above, punish me!" A young man's arms hung weakly by his side. In comparison to the princess' beauty, his beloved Mei'er seemed like nothing more than the mud against the backdrop of the sky.

Mei'er lifted a cutlery knife to her face. "You've all claimed that I'm more beautiful than any mortal there was, a beauty hardly seen once in a century, even the top beauty of the third realm—but compared to her, I'm nothing!"

Someone who was clearly her elder shouted, "Mei'er, put down that knife! It's far too dangerous!"

"Mei'er, if something's the matter, let's talk it out!"

"Physical appearance is nothing to care about—it's what inside that matters!"

Her elder tugged on the man standing beside her. "Nephew, aren't you on the best of terms with Mei'er? You praise her all the time, your tongue like honey! You always make your cousin smile, so won't you persuade her to stop herself?!"

"Scram! I'm trying to focus on the fairy from the heavens!"

The young man beside Mei'er heartlessly slapped aside the elder's hand.

Mei'er laughed a chilling, desolate laugh. "I was always proud of my beauty, and I even thought myself the most beautiful woman in the realm! To think that I was nothing more than a fool! A true beauty's like a graceful swan, and I'm nothing more than an ugly duckling."

Mei'er's smile grew even more strained. She had wanted to threaten to ruin her own beauty in order to capture the attention of the young men around her, but their attention had been instantly captured by Li Qianlin instead!

It was then that Mei'er saw through the young men that had been wooing her. None of them were truly interested in her, but only in the beauty that she represented, as a trophy. She was nothing more than jewels or an extravagant vehicle.

She thought that she had been toying with all the men around her, but the opposite was true instead.

When Li Qianlin, of peerless beauty and noble birth, appeared, they tossed her aside like she was a ragdoll.

"What's the use of this face, then?"

Mei'er felt a heavy blow strike her heart as she cut herself deeply with her knife.

Mei'er's elder screamed in panic, but no one turned toward her. Everyone seemed to have been captivated by Li Qianlin's beauty.

"This is no mere woman, but rather a fairy from the heavens! I feel as though I've been poisoned with the malady of love!"

"To think she's this beautiful... just sneaking a glimpse at her has made my life worth living. I won't marry anyone else in the world but her!"

"I'd give ten years of my life just for a touch of her hand!"

A middle-aged man laughed at the youngsters around him. "Dream on. Look at the man on the multicolored dragon."

The doors to the palace opened as Zhang Lie stepped out in a sharp Western suit. He stretched. Li Qianlin and Zhang Lie glanced at each other from afar, beatific smiles on each of their faces, as though they were in their own world.

"What right does he have to marry such a peerless beauty?!"

"A hero and a beauty, a perfect match!"

"Could he have saved the three thousand worlds in his past life?"

"Whether or not he did it in a past life, no one knows—but he's done it twice over in this one."

One young man sighed upon witnessing Zhang Lie, as though his soul had left his body.

"Among the three thousand worlds, only he could ever be a match for her." The young man turned to leave, tugging off his tie, as though he had aged thirty years in a single moment.

Beside him, his companion asked, "Where are you headed? The ceremony's just begun!"

The young man smiled mirthlessly. "My life is meaningless now. I intend to become a monk."

His companion quickly followed behind him, causing the first young man to laugh wryly. "If you truly think of me as a friend, don't stop me. I've made up my mind."

"Who's going to stop you? I intend to become a monk with you! The fact that I won't be able to spend the rest of my life with her—rather than marry someone whom I could never love and be bitter for the rest of my life, I'd rather swear a vow of celibacy."

"So be it!"

Other attendees, upon witnessing what was happening, joined the group of young men.

"Wait for me!"

More young- and middle-aged men shrugged off their suits and ties, then followed the growing group.

There were about a hundred of them in all, each of them looking as though their souls had left their bodies. No one stopped them; the crowd simply shook their heads.

"Another generation, ruined..." A middle-aged man shook his head in exasperation, as though he were used to the sight.

Another elderly man, his hair turning white, murmured, "This generation can't take it, it seems..."

The middle-aged man shrugged. "They ruin themselves the moment they see the princess—and to think there are still elders willing to send members of the younger generation over!"

The wizened old man couldn't help but laugh. "Those in the know are smart enough not to—they don't even attend themselves, for fear of being struck by her beauty."

The middle-aged man glanced mockingly at the departing young men.

Chapter 1266: An Exaggerated Response

The Zongming kingdom had grown significantly larger than it used to be after merging with the world of black rain and all number of medium-sized and large worlds. The ranks of the wealthy and powerful had grown significantly larger, and these newcomers had no clue just how dangerous the princess was.

The men headed up to the monastery in the mountains; the women did something even more fearsome.

"I always thought I was pretty, but compared to the princess, I'm nothing but an ugly monster!" A woman ran forward and hurled herself off Mt. Tian.

"Someone jumped down the mountain!" a guest shouted in panic.

Li Zongming had arranged sufficiently many guards around the venue beforehand, who were strong enough to dive off the mountain and grab the falling women.

Before the crowd could relax, however, another woman was lifting up her skirt and charging forward.

"There's no reason for someone as ugly as I am to live!"

She jumped off the side of the mountain, and another guard hurriedly dove after her.

Woman after woman emulated her actions, as if they had all gone crazy en masse. The guards, numerous though they were, found themselves completely beleaguered by the crazed guests.

Furthermore, the women who had been saved were still struggling in the guards' arms. "Let me go! Let me die! After looking at the princess, I can't bear to look myself in the eye anymore! I can't live on!"

The elderly man whose hair was turning white couldn't help but laugh. "This generation really can't take any trauma, can they? They're far too weak-willed—well, better to let them die, rather than waste more resources on them."

The middle-aged man took a gulp of alcohol. "They can't even compare to the nouveau riche of the world of the west."

The old man sighed in exasperation. "Speaking of those nouveau riche, some of them have made their way over, did you know?"

A young man cried out, "What are all of you doing chatting over there? Aren't you going to help stop them?"

The elderly man and middle-aged man turned toward the young newcomer.

"You must be new, then?"

The young man seemed displeased. "So what? We're all ministers in His Majesty's court, aren't we?"

"You must be one of the nouveau riche, then."

The young man nodded seriously. "I was once the king of a large world. After the worlds merged together, my territory was adjacent to the Zongming kingdom, and I decided to join it."

The elderly man smiled. "Understanding the situation is important."

The young man shrugged. "After the worlds all merged together, only one unified world remained, and one ruler for that world. I lost my privileges as king of the realm, and my own power dipped dramatically. I didn't know how many people were lying in wait for me, and if I didn't give up what little power remained, I would have been eaten alive."

After losing the shield of royalty, the ability to control the realm, and even personal strength, there were only two possible outcomes—to be eaten alive by the remaining powers of the world or to be destroyed by foreign powers seeking to expand. Choosing to join the Zongming king was the only possible option left.

The former king of the realm sighed in exasperation. "I didn't want to give up on independence either, but it was far better a price to pay than my life."

The elderly man took another sip of alcohol. "A clever choice."

The former king of the realm asked, "You haven't answered my last question. Why don't you stop the young men and women? Is the Zongming court so xenophobic?"

The middle-aged man laughed. "Don't you think we've tried?"

The elderly man beside him asked in exasperation, "Do you know why I insist on dragging myself to these banquets without bringing even my son with me?"

The middle-aged man shrugged. "Don't you think we've done what you did before?"

The old man revealed an expression of shocking pain. "Last time, I brought my eldest son with me to witness the merger of the worlds of east and west into the Zongming world, so as to allow him to develop connections with the powerful and the mighty in preparation for taking over my position. I destroyed him—and now he's at home under lock and key. I don't dare let him out."

The middle-aged man asked, "Elder Sun, hasn't your eldest son recovered yet?"

Elder Sun sighed. "Recover? The moment I let him out of confinement, he insists on heading up the mountain to become a monk, to free himself from the confines of the mortal world. Do you think I can allow him to do that?"

The middle-aged man sighed. "At least your son is better off than my granddaughter. I brought her over once... she was only fifteen!"

The former king of the realm was shocked.

What had Li Qianlin done to a young girl of fifteen, about to blossom into adulthood?

The middle-aged man sighed again. "We didn't dare bring our descendants with us this time, so worried were we that meeting the princess would destroy them for life."

Elder Sun continued, "And the princess is hardly someone we can complain about. After all, our descendants are the ones who don't have the mental fortitude to live after seeing her—what can we do?"

The middle-aged man seemed equally frustrated. "And if we can't even take care of our own family, what makes you think we'd be able to help others? If we could, we would have done so long ago."

"Who's the princess' companion?"

The former king of the realm could sense the despair that had filled the eyes of the young, that blanketed them and bent their backs with a burden too heavy for them to bear.

These young men and women were all of prestigious birth; they had to be, to have received an invitation to such a banquet. Was there truly no one who could resolve such a problem, even when they were working together?

It seemed as though they had all fallen into despair—especially the two officials in front of him, who were content to let the young women of the banquet fling themselves off the mountain. Just who could the princess' companion be, to cause such overwhelming despair?

Elder Sun murmured, "You're one of the nouveau riche, so it's only natural that you wouldn't know."

"The premier hunter of the three thousand worlds... You're aware of the death spirits' invasion, as well as the crisis that almost tore this realm apart, aren't you?"

The former king replied, "I am aware of the death spirits, and I believe the crisis was related to the unification of the realm. How is this relevant?"

"He was the commander who led the realm against the death spirits. I'm not sure of the details, but all the soldiers of the Zongming world revere him like a god."

The golden-armored warriors leapt down from their peak-grade mounts, surrounding Li Zongming and Zhang Lie.

Chapter 1267: Too Many Clowns

The golden-armored warriors leapt down from their peak-grade mounts, surrounding Li Zongming and Zhang Lie.

Elder Sun pointed at them all. "Do you see these soldiers? They're the elites of the military, all of whom have returned from the war against the death spirits. The ones in the lead are notable figures in the military—and they've all erected statues of Zhang Lie in their homes and pray to him daily."

The warriors and soldiers who returned safe and sound from the war against the death spirits had had their eyes opened to the reality of the third realm and to true power. They ascended through the ranks quickly and became high-ranking officials in the Zongming army.

The nouveau riche blinked. "That's impressive, but what does it have to do with the merging of the three thousand worlds and the birth of this unified one?"

"You might not be aware of this, but I've heard His Majesty occasionally give something away a few times. The crisis in the third realm wasn't a result of the unification process—that's just an excuse for the public so they don't start to panic.

"In truth, the crisis was a result of the three thousand worlds, the realm itself, being near collapse. The person who unified the worlds and saved the realm is exactly that person—the strongest hunter in the three thousand worlds.

"You didn't attend our princess' wedding, did you? She was even more beautiful then, so much so that I'm having trouble expressing it in words. Even a celestial maiden wouldn't have been fit to do more than be one of her attendants." The middle-aged man smiled as though recalling a happy memory.

"You're exaggerating, aren't you?"

The middle-aged man couldn't help but laugh again. "Oh, you don't know how many of our descendants fell prey to her beauty then..."

Even Elder Sun grinned weakly. "The kings of east and west were brokering an alliance—but Zhang Lie snatched her away from under their noses. Tales of that heist are still spreading around the kingdom."

The former king of the realm gaped. "Snatching away the bride on her wedding day? Why doesn't His Majesty do anything about it?"

"His Majesty can't beat him. What could he do?"

The former king of the realm was disgruntled. "But His Majesty's a superior king!"

The middle-aged man shook his head. "Not at that point. To be frank, it was Zhang Lie again who allowed His Majesty to become a superior king. He invaded the world of the west and slaughtered its king as a wedding gift, allowing the worlds of east and west to merge together to form the Zongming world."

Elder Sun continued, "If not for his defending us against the superior kings of antiquity, we wouldn't have survived as a superior world either. This is why no one dares to fight against this powerful man who has lifted us all up to glory. In strength and reputation alike, none are his equal."

The middle-aged man affirmed, "From the bottom of our hearts, we thank this hunter for what he has done in service to our kingdom."

However, the middle-aged man and Elder Sun found belatedly that the nouveau riche hadn't been paying attention to them. Rather, he was walking out of the venue. The middle-aged man called out, "What are you doing?!"

The former king of the realm replied, "I'm trying to follow the young men who have left to go up the mountain. I'm accompanying them there."

Elder Sun and the middle-aged man looked at each other before smiling wryly as they shook their heads.

The reason the former king of the world hadn't headed off earlier was because he thought that his status as a former king gave him some level of competitiveness against Zhang Lie, but upon realizing just how incredible Zhang Lie was, the former king knew that he had no hope of competing against him.

Like the other young men before him, he was about to choose asceticism.

Zhang Lie had saved the Zongming kingdom and the entire realm; he had spurred the Zongming kingdom's growth into a superior world; he had led the soldiers of the Zongming world against the death spirits; he was hailed as the strongest hunter of the third realm.

How could the former king compare to someone so overwhelming in all aspects?

Better that he get used to his new life as quickly as possible.

The golden-armored guards from before lined up and brought Li Qianlin and Li Zongming to the podium. Zhang Lie stepped forward and was right about to step up on stage when he passed by Mei'er.

Mei'er's appearance had grown unkempt in just a few minutes. Her hair was in disarray, and her spirits dejected. The once-proud beauty almost looked like a madwoman, and no one dared to approach her.

The elder standing beside her rebuked her, "How could you be so thoughtless as to harm yourself like this? What would your parents think?"

Her elder didn't dare speak ill of the princess.

Zhang Lie tossed her a Zhou Ying restorative.

"This potion will work wonders and restore her beauty. What a pity it is to ruin herself because of a moment's folly."

The elder beside her picked up the potion and looked at Zhang Lie with gratitude. Mei'er raised her head. "You think I'm pretty?"

From a human's perspective, Mei'er was certainly more dazzling than the average woman. Of course, she couldn't hope to compare with Li Qianlin after the latter had put on makeup, and she was slightly worse than Sun Mengmeng and Zhang Hanxiang. Perhaps at best, she would be comparable to Dong Mingxing.

Beauty was very much in the eye of the beholder; Zhang Lie himself thought most movie stars looked the same, that all beautiful women looked roughly equivalent.

Mei'er's tears continued to fall. "So what if I restore my beauty? I don't even have a thousandth of the princess' beauty. I might as well be ruined!"

"Your looks are one thing—but it looks like you had better treat your head first. This is a restorative for the body, not the mind." Zhang Lie had no intention of wasting his time on this fool.

To be frank, the fact that these women were ruining their own beauty and jumping off mountains just because they weren't beautiful enough—Zhang Lie couldn't help but feel as though there was something wrong with their heads.

The newcomers weren't originally from the Zongming kingdom, were they?

Yes, that had to be the case. The Zongming kingdom hadn't entertained such fools in the past, so these must be newcomers. A portion of them must have joined the Zongming kingdom recently. Zhang Lie was very curious as to where they had come from.

He was just about to step forward when a few words suddenly came to mind.

He stopped short and spoke again. "A few parting words from my homeland: a beautiful appearance is a dime a dozen; a beautiful soul is once in a blue moon."

Zhang Lie stepped up on stage.

Mei'er glanced at the back of the strongest hunter of the third realm, her face flushed. She murmured to herself, "A beautiful appearance is a dime a dozen; a beautiful soul is once in a blue moon. Is it because you don't care for appearances that you've managed to grow so strong?"

The elder beside her urged, "Mei'er, drink the potion. The top hunter of the realm is correct. Physical beauty isn't what matters most, so let's not focus on it, alright?"

Another elder added, "What the top hunter meant was that, perhaps you might not be able to best the princess in terms of appearance, but you can focus on other strengths instead. There's no need to compete based on pure appearance alone."

Chapter 1268: You Haven't Lost Out

Mei'er consumed the Zhou Ying restorative in a single gulp. As natural energy and vitality suffused her, the scar on her face healed instantly without a trace.

The two elders were overjoyed. "As expected of the medicine provided by the strongest hunter of the realm!"

"Would I be able to get closer to you if I ignored my appearance?" Mei'er ignored the elders. All her attention was to Zhang Lie, who was now on stage.

As Zhang Lie walked up to stage, Li Qianlin joked, "So that's the type that interests you, is it?"

"It was a passing gesture," Zhang Lie replied. "Your beauty is truly devastating. I hear you've ruined another generation of newcomers, that many aspiring youths have chosen a life of asceticism after witnessing your beauty."

Li Qianlin sighed. "It's hardly as though I want them to. Only on occasions like these do I end up being reminded that I'm a beauty."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "You've always been beautiful."

Li Qianlin tried very hard not to show her pleasure, but the corners of her mouth couldn't help but curl up.

"Don't think that I'll be happy just because of your random praise, you hear? I'm not that easy to deal with."

Zhang Lie pointed below him. "I'm only mentioning the truth. Look at those young men and women—they're all going crazy."

"And you?" Li Qianlin asked with anticipation.

As she glanced at the crowd below, Zhang Lie glimpsed Mei'er from the corner of his eye.

Mei'er, enraptured, was looking at him; he smiled and waved.

"A little crazy, I suppose."

Li Qianlin saw his gestures and frowned. "I'm right by your side, but you have the time to wave at other women? Those whom I don't like are falling over themselves like puppets, while the one I do is like a block of wood!"

Li Zongming began his speech. "Thank you, one and all, for attending the founding ceremony of the Zongming kingdom. Our world has suffered trial and tribulation—a schism that separated the worlds of east and west, that divided our former strength, before our subsequent reunification into the superior Zongming world."

As Li Zongming began a retelling of events, the crowd quieted down as everyone gathered by the stage.

"With the unification of the three thousand worlds, we can no longer remain a separate, independent world. All the worlds of the third realm have transformed into kingdoms, and we have to change to adapt with the times.

"In order to welcome a new era, we shall become the Zongming kingdom. All that has changed is our name and the times; we, the citizens of the Zongming kingdom, shall remain the same as we always have been, and I the Zongming king. As long as we work together, our kingdom will only become more prosperous than before."

The crowd cheered and clapped.

The image of a five-colored dragon appeared in the air and let out a howl that shook the heavens. The firebird croaked out a call, then flapped its wings and soared into the sky.

Scarlet flames and violet lightning combined in a multicolored explosion, as though a disaster had struck the skies. A radiant, glowing moon appeared, as beautiful as a jewel, shining in five colors like an aurora. Golden light streamed from it like a flaming sun.

Upon witnessing the fantastic sights, the guests who had once attended the merger of the worlds of east and west couldn't help but be reminded of the ceremony then.

The special effects had been conjured by Li Zongming and Li Zongming alone.

The dragon and firebird soared through the skies. The shining sun and glowing moon released scarlet flames and violet lightning through the sky. A radiant outpouring of light illuminated the heavens with a golden glow.

Li Zongming himself began to glow. His body flared with light, and a thick pillar of it shot into the skies and enveloped himself.

The guests cried out in shock, thinking that Li Zongming was receiving heaven's own blessing.

Zhang Lie couldn't help but smile. "Your father really loves his theatrics."

He had to admit that this was a marvelous strategy.

Everyone present would think that Li Zongming's right to rule had been conferred by the heavens themselves, that he had received a blessing from the new ruler of the realm—but none suspected that this was all artifice of Li Zongming's own making.

With his current strength that surpassed that of a superior king, conjuring these illusions was a trivial task.

Zhang Lie would have been able to make the illusions even more majestic, so much so that they could be seen throughout the unified world, but he preferred not to rely on such theatrics.

With this stellar performance, all the guests seemed even more riveted than before.

Li Zongming slowly ascended to the throne. Li Qianlin and Zhang Lie sat on either side of him.

Zhang Lie gave him a discreet thumbs up.

Li Zongming smiled awkwardly. He might have been able to fool everyone else, but he knew he wouldn't be able to do so to Zhang Lie. The gap in their strength was simply too immense.

Zhang Lie said, "Before your speech, a group of young people left the venue proclaiming that they were going to head to the mountains and leave the secular world behind. Some women even jumped off the mountaintop."

Li Zongming couldn't help but smile. "Does even the strongest hunter of the third realm enjoy gossiping? Would you like to hear my opinion on the matter? Aren't you going to ask me how it feels for the Zongming world to become the Zongming kingdom first?"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "What's there to feel? It's not as though you're losing out."

The Zongming kingdom had grown in size, and many nearby kingdoms had chosen to fold themselves into the Zongming kingdom.

Li Zongming shrugged. "Haven't I lost my independence as a superior world?"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "What kind of independence do you need? It's hardly as though anyone will restrict your freedom. Don't avoid my previous question, please."

Li Zongming shrugged, emulating Zhang Lie's tone.

"What else is there to say? I'm a handsome man, and my daughter's far too beautiful. It's my fault."

"You're shameless! Who's asking you how you feel? I want to know where you ended up getting people like these!"

Li Zongming rolled his eyes. "Don't you know?"

"From the subordinate kingdoms nearby?"

Li Zongming sighed in exasperation. "That's right. Every world has different customs and views. At the very least, we all speak a common language, or things would have been much harder for me.

After all, the three thousand worlds were all originally one entity. Later, as a result of some unknown occurrence, it split up into three thousand worlds. Now, millennia later, we're simply reverting things to how they were before."

Because the three thousand worlds had originally been one entity, the worlds shared a common language and writing system for the most part.

Li Zongming suddenly asked, "How are you?"

"What?"

"Shall I take advantage of the occasion to announce your wedding with Qianlin and settle matters once and for all?"

Li Qianlin suddenly blushed bright red, like a ripe apple.

Chapter 1269: The Draconians' Founding Ceremony

Zhang Lie hesitated for a moment, then shook his head.

"I think we had better wait."

Zhang Lie wasn't unwilling to marry Li Qianlin, but he didn't know if he should.

He did like her very much, and had done so even in his past life. He wanted to make up for his past life's regrets, but he would have to leave the third realm sooner or later. Once he did so, what would happen to Li Qianlin?

Li Zongming sounded vexed. "How long are you going to make my daughter wait?"

Li Qianlin stood up. "That's enough, Father!"

Li Zongming turned to his daughter, closing his mouth.

Li Qianlin's face turned dark. "I'm tired, and I'll be leaving early."

Zhang Lie chased after him. "Qianlin, I don't mean to hurt you! It's simply that—"

Li Qianlin cut in. "That's enough. I know what you mean, and there's no need to explain. I really am tired, and I'd like to head back first."

The founding of the Zongming kingdom was supposed to be the most joyous day of his time with Li Qianlin, but Zhang Lie couldn't muster up any joy.

Ever since then, Li Qianlin had hid herself in her room, hiding from Zhang Lie and refusing to see him.

Zhang Lie was trying to restrain himself, but he had already kicked down her door twice, and Li Qianlin had had to get it replaced both times.

This time, Zhang Lie didn't have the courage to keep kicking down her door. He knocked a few times, but Li Qianlin didn't respond. Zhang Lie felt weak and helpless, even more so than he was when he faced the superior kings of antiquity.

Dong Mingxing sidled over. "Someone's made my Qianlin mad..."

Upon seeing a familiar face, Zhang Lie's face suddenly lightened up.

"It's been a while."

Dong Mingxing laughed. "How in the world did you end up angering Qianlin? Tell me everything frankly, and I'll see if I can help."

Zhang Lie was, for a moment, at a loss for words.

Dong Mingxing sighed. "I really don't understand the two of you. You love each other and think of each other daily, but why won't you take that last step? Forget it—leave for a few days for now. Qianlin's probably still angry, and she doesn't want to see you at the moment. Give her a few days' time for her to be in a better mood by the time you return.

"I certainly hope so."

Zhang Lie was very dejected, but he suddenly noticed the sharp glance Dong Mingxing was giving him.

Quickly understanding what it implied, he shouted into the room, "Qianlin, I'll be leaving for a few days for the draconians' founding ceremony!"

Dong Mingxing's eyes lit up. "The draconians' founding ceremony? I'd love to go!"

Zhang Lie seemed rather surprised. "You do?"

Dong Mingxing rolled her eyes. "Don't forget that I lived in the draconian world with Qianlin for some time, and I've made quite a few friends in the meantime. I get along pretty well with Sun Mengmeng and the others, too."

"I don't mind bringing you along, but what about Qianlin?"

Dong Mingxing shrugged. "Qianlin's issue isn't something that will be resolved so quickly. You'll have to wait for her anger to abate anyway, so why don't we head to the draconians' founding ceremony for now? Send me back later and I'll slowly persuade her to talk to you again."

Zhang Lie pretended to hesitate. "That wouldn't be good, would it? I'm afraid that, by that point, Qianlin would be mad at both of us."

Dong Mingxing clutched Zhang Lie's hand.

"What's wrong with it? After all, I was a guest in the draconian world for quite some time. It would be rude to miss the draconian kingdom's founding ceremony."

"That seems reasonable."

Dong Mingxing's voice carried into the room. "And wouldn't it be flattering for you to bring a beauty like me to the draconians' founding ceremony?"

Li Qianlin, clearly having overheard their conversation, slammed a palm on the wall.

Dong Mingxing and Zhang Lie glanced in the direction of the commotion, then smiled at each other. Both of them were trying to stifle their laughter.

Zhang Lie continued intentionally shouting to Li Qianlin, "The draconian sage has always cared for us humans, and the draconian world was where human hunters gathered. To repay the sage's assistance, I have to attend!"

Dong Mingxing feigned displeasure. "Is there a need to say so much? Let's set off. It looks like Qianlin doesn't want to attend—isn't it better if the two of us go together?"

"That's true. After all, Dong Mingxing, you look as beautiful as Qianlin. It wouldn't matter to me whether I were bringing you or her."

"Come on, let's go, let's go!" Dong Mingxing tugged Zhang Lie with her.

Zhang Lie shouted, "I'm leaving now, Qianlin! I'll bring Dong Mingxing back in a few days, and she can tell you all about the splendor of the draconians' founding ceremony then!"

Dong Mingxing and Zhang Lie strode forward rapidly, stomping hard on the ground so Li Qianlin could hear them.

Suddenly, the doors to Li Qianlin's room opened up. Li Qianlin walked out, her expression frosty.

Zhang Lie cried out, "Qianlin, you're willing to talk to me now?"

Li Qianlin's voice was arch. "Aren't you going to the draconian kingdom?"

Zhang Lie hurriedly called out, "Qianlin, listen to me! Without you, I don't actually want to attend the draconians' founding ceremony—"

Li Qianlin squeezed in between Dong Mingxing and Zhang Lie. She interjected, "Let's set off, then."

Zhang Lie didn't know how to react. After waiting for a moment, Li Qianlin whirled around. "If we're not setting off, I'm going back inside."

"We'll set off, immediately, right away!"

Zhang Lie shattered space and brought them to the draconian kingdom.

By then, the draconian kingdom had undergone a massive redecoration. The entire kingdom seemed to be festooned with lanterns; because of the influence of humanity, particularly Chinese culture, the decorations were largely Chinese in origin.

Zhang Lie and the two women went around sampling all sorts of snacks and food, but Dong Mingxing could sense the awkward atmosphere around the two of them.

She could still engage in conversation with Li Qianlin and Zhang Lie independently, and everyone liked to talk about food—but the moment the conversation changed to matters between them, tension descended.

Zhang Lie at least made overtures to discuss the conflict between them, but Li Qianlin refused to speak of the matter entirely.

In the end, Zhang Lie, ever prideful, dropped the matter after being rebuffed multiple times. Dong Mingxing, trapped between the fighting couple, found herself feeling very uncomfortable indeed.

After they all had fun touring the draconian kingdom and saw a group of people gathered by a field dancing, Dong Mingxing suggested, "Why don't we all go dance together?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Let's meet up with everyone first."

Zhang Lie closed his eyes and sensed the whereabouts of the members of Team Zenith via their auras.

Just then, the members of Team Zenith were dining together.

Dong Mingxing seemed elated to see them. "You're all here, too?"

Sun Mengmeng replied, "We're old acquaintances of the draconian sage, after all, and the draconian world has been the base for human hunters from the beginning. It's natural for us to be here, I hope."

The members of Team Zenith were well acquainted with Li Qianlin and Dong Mingxing, and they quickly started chatting in earnest.

Chapter 1270: Bestiality

Dong Mingxing hugged Zhou Ying tightly. "I've missed you all so!"

Yang Ze glanced at Li Qianlin and Dong Mingxing, then smiled.

"It looks like our captain has been enjoying himself without the rest of us, strolling through the streets with two beautiful women..."

Li Qianlin and Dong Mingxing suddenly glared at him simultaneously, causing Yang Ze to sweat. "What's the matter?"

Dong Mingxing growled, "Don't speak nonsense if you don't know what's going on! You don't know how bad I suffered just now."

Sun Mengmeng asked, "What's the matter?"

Zhang Hanxiang suddenly jumped in. "A call from the united world federation, Brother!"

Zhang Lie frowned. "Hong Tianqi should have been informed of what's going on with the unified world. Has something happened to the Milky Way?"

Zhang Hanxiang flushed. "The Milky Way is perfectly fine, but the highest authority believes you're about to ascend. Once you do so, you might lose contact with us like before, so the highest authority would like you to speak with him before you ascend."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "What do you mean, lose contact for some time? When I ascended to the third realm, what happened was an accident. Is he so certain that an accident will befall me?"

Zhang Hanxiang replied, "Who knows what the ascension to the fourth realm will entail? Even if we don't lose contact with you, you'll likely be very busy for quite some time."

Zhang Lie noticed a faint odor of alcohol around Zhang Hanxiang.

"Have you been drinking?"

Zhang Hanxiang pursed her lips. "Brother, I'm not a kid anymore."

Zhang Lie turned to the members of Team Zenith.

"I thought all of you were going to look after my sister for me!"

Sun Xiaowu laughed. "No need for such a big fuss, Captain. Hanxiang's of age, and today's a special occasion. All she's had is a little rice wine."

Sun Mengmeng sighed. "After all, she's never drunk before, has she? Let me prepare some ginger tea."

Zhang Hanxiang hugged Zhang Lie.

"Brother, listen to me! Who knows what the ascension to the fourth realm will entail? Even if we don't lose contact with you, you'll likely be very busy for quite some time. The highest authority wants to meet you for the final time before you depart."

Zhang Lie frowned. "Sister, are you cursing me to die? Do you really want to inherit my possessions and capacity to drink so badly?"

Zhang Hanxiang patted Zhang Lie firmly on the shoulder.

"I think you'll be fine, Brother, and the highest authority thinks so too. However... ah, where was I? However... no one knows what might happen in the fourth realm, and the highest authority wants to impart you with some of his experiences and knowledge."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "Do you think I need his advice?" Your brother's someone who went to the fourth realm in the past and survived! What sort of experience do I need? I have my own experience!

Li Qianlin frowned. "You mentioned that there might be incidents when you ascend to the fourth realm. What do you mean?"

Zhang Hanxiang replied, "Exactly what I stated. No matter how well off you are in a lower realm, no matter your fame, strength, and reputation, hunters who ascend have a chance of refusing to show themselves in public any longer or vanishing off the realm completely. This is a frequent problem, and the hunters who do survive to the end are all unusually lucky, unusually skilled, or both."

Li Qianlin glared at Zhang Lie. "Why haven't you mentioned this before?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "It makes no difference whether or not I do."

Yang Ze hurriedly added, "For us genetic hunters, ascension is dangerous. It's a known fact, and we're all willing to take this risk to advance."

Li Qianlin glared. "But I didn't know, because I'm not a hunter!"

Dong Mingxing clutched her face. "Ah, you've all ruined it!"

Zhou Ying crept up to Dong Mingxing and whispered, "What's the matter with Qianlin?"

Dong Mingxing replied, "She was upset that Zhang Lie wasn't willing to marry her, and now she's even more hurt by this revelation, I suspect."

Zhang Hanxiang explained, "Strong though hunters might be in a lower realm, once they ascend, things can very well change. Their new environment will be different, and they're subject to different rules. Some hunters can't get used to such a change immediately, and they'll be quite a bit weaker relative to the average force in the new realm. As a result, before they adapt to their newfound circumstances and grow into their strength, they might perish. This is a natural phenomenon."

Zhou Ying hurriedly stepped forward to stop Zhang Hanxiang from continuing.

"That might be true, but Zhang Lie, our captain, is different!"

"Everyone knows this? Everyone except me? Why didn't anyone tell me!" Li Qianlin shouted. "I haven't blamed you for diving headfirst into danger, or for refusing to deepen our relationship, or even for being about to depart from the third realm! Even so, you refuse to give me a concrete answer and simply watch me struggle. What reason do you have for doing this? Answer me!"

Li Qianlin wasn't truly angry that Zhang Lie hadn't informed her of such a detail, but rather that he refused to give her a concrete answer about their relationship despite his imminent departure.

His lack of response, and lack of reason for the lack of response, made her feel incredibly upset.

Zhang Hanxiang frowned. She was clearly drunk. "Why are you shouting and yelling, and staring at my brother! Who are you to him? I've never seen you!"

Li Qianlin flinched, as though Zhang Hanxiang's words had struck a nerve. "That's true, isn't it? I'm no one to you. I was just a fool all along."

With tears in her eyes, Li Qianlin fled from the scene.

"Qianlin!" Dong Mingxing glared at Zhang Lie before chasing after her.

Sun Mengmeng returned to the table with steaming ginger tea. "What happened? Where have Qianlin and Mingxing gone?"

Zhou Ying frowned. "I'm a little worried. I'll go after them."

The draconian kingdom was crowded with people. Li Qianlin and Dong Mingxing were strong fighters in their own right, and Dong Mingxing had developed strength on par with that of a king of a large world, but they were in unfamiliar territory in the draconian kingdom. Zhou Ying followed them to ensure their safety.

Yang Ze glanced at the women's backs. "Shouldn't you chase after them?"

Zhang Lie shook his head.

Sun Xiaowu seemed confused. "Li Qianlin has always been willing to go along with you, Captain, and your relationship seemed particularly deep, so why now..."

Zhang Lie sighed. "This was something that would have happened eventually. We're fated to be star-crossed lovers, and this fate can't be changed."

Li Feng patted Zhang Lie on the shoulder. Only he could understand what Zhang Lie was feeling now, because among the members of Team Zenith, Li Feng wasn't a bachelor.

Zhang Lie sighed again. "I'm a little tired, and I'll be heading back to rest."

Glancing at Zhang Lie's lonesome figure, Sun Xiaowu sighed. "What is love? That we be willing to live and die together."

Li Feng seemed very surprised. "What philosophy—and from a bachelor, no less! I suppose it just goes to show that you can be cultured just by reading a lot."

Sun Xiaowu glared at Li Feng. "Are you looking down on bachelors?"

Fang Yi scowled. "Li Feng, your bestiality knows no bounds! Don't think you can start haranguing us just because you have a girlfriend."

"What bestiality are you talking about?!"