

U. Warlord 1271

Chapter 1271: A Dead Knot

"You're even willing to copulate with a mammoth— isn't that bestiality?"

Li Feng cried out, "How many times do I have to say it? She's an alien, no different from Li Qianlin and the others!"

"Can your body handle it?"

Li Feng grinned. "She's not as strong as I am."

Everyone glared at him disdainfully. This meant that they really had tried to have sex, then!

Fang Yi asked, "So what exactly is going on between Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin?"

Li Feng had a sip of alcohol. "How else? Li Qianlin's probably in a hurry."

"A hurry?"

Li Feng explained, "Our captain's right about to ascend, and we all know that he's going to be leaving for the fourth realm sooner or later. Li Qianlin can't keep him here, and she wants him to do something about their relationship. However, our captain won't do that."

Fang Yi wondered, "Is our captain such a trashy man?"

Li Feng rolled his eyes. "Be careful that he doesn't hear that, or you might find yourself doing some special training with him to check up on your progress."

Sun Mengmeng sighed. "It's the opposite. Our captain's a very responsible man, which is preventing him from giving Li Qianlin an answer."

Li Feng added, "From our captain's perspective, he's about to ascend to the fourth realm, and they're about to be split up. Why not enjoy some time together while they can, before forces beyond their control separate them? However, Li Qianlin isn't satisfied with that."

Sun Mengmeng shook her head. "It's not that she isn't satisfied with that, but rather that women think about things differently than do men. Our captain thinks that, because he can't give her the happiness she wants, he shouldn't bother solidifying their relationship at all; on the other hand, even if the relationship ends up falling apart, Qianlin wants to know just how he feels about her."

Sun Xiaowu gaped. "You know a lot about this, Sis!"

Sun Mengmeng sighed. "I'm only thinking about things from her perspective. If I were Qianlin, even if I knew that I wouldn't be able to remain with him for life, I'd want to hear those three words from Zhang Lie. I frequently wish I were Qianlin—after all, our captain dearly loves her."

The woman whom he loved couldn't accompany him; the woman who could accompany him, he didn't love.

Zhang Lie, Li Qianlin, and Sun Mengmeng formed an unhappy trio. Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin loved each other but were unable to be together, whereas Sun Mengmeng had more than sufficient

strength to ascend to the fourth realm immediately and remain by his side, but her love would never be reciprocated."

Sun Mengmeng sighed. "Sometimes, I envy Li Qianlin so much that I wish I could exchange her body with mine."

"And yet Qianlin covets your strength, the strength that would allow her to stay by his side forever." Dong Mingxing and Zhou Ying had returned, and Dong Mingxing had been the one to speak.

Sun Mengmeng asked, "How is Qianlin?"

Dong Mingxing replied, "We've brought her to a room to rest for the moment. She had us leave because she wanted to be alone."

Li Feng murmured, "There's nothing we can do about all this, is there? It's a dead knot..."

Zhou Ying wondered, "One of them is the person I respect most, and the other is a good friend. It hurts me to see two such people so upset. Can't our captain ascend to the fourth realm with Qianlin?"

Dong Mingxing seemed rather surprised. "That's true! But is it feasible?"

The hunters were silent.

The members of Team Zenith knew how they might be able to do so—with the disaster-grade dragonwhale soulshard. Zhu, the current ruler of the third realm, hadn't ascended naturally; Zhang Hanxiang had brought her along as a stowaway.

That method could be replicated when ascending from the third to the fourth realm.

Li Feng said, "Our captain's probably thought of that too, hasn't he? He just won't do it."

Sun Mengmeng nodded. "He's a very responsible man, and he knows how dangerous the fourth realm is. He doesn't want Qianlin to be in any danger whatsoever."

Li Feng warned, "We can't speak of this matter in front of our captain and Li Qianlin."

Dong Mingxing seemed confused. "Why not?"

Li Feng sighed. "We all know Li Qianlin isn't that strong. Bringing her to the fourth realm would be a debacle—it would harm her and our captain."

"There's nothing else we can do, I suppose."

The crowd went silent as Li Feng turned and asked, "Sun Mengmeng, won't you go comfort Zhang Lie?"

Sun Mengmeng sighed. "Let him rest."

Li Feng shook his head. "Don't regret this in the future!"

"What's there to regret?"

"Love is war, not a fight or a match. If you're too virtuous and play by the rules, you'll lose out."

Sun Mengmeng blinked.

Li Feng thought that Sun Mengmeng was refusing to take advantage of Zhang Lie while his relationship with Li Qianlin was suffering. In truth, despite Sun Mengmeng's thoughtfulness, she had never been in a relationship. She had spent her youth fighting and training, and she wasn't adept at knowing when to take her chances.

The members of Team Zenith chitchatted with each other idly before they finally departed.

The next day, the day of the draconians' founding ceremony, a five-colored dragon soared through the air. The whole kingdom could see this magnificent sight, and the citizens of the kingdom gasped in awe.

Zhang Lie's lips twitched. The older generation really liked putting on these shows, didn't they?

Unlike Li Zongming, who had tricked his citizens with illusions, the giant five-colored dragon was real. It fell from the sky, smashed into the stage, and transformed back into the draconian sage.

The dragon was the draconian transformation effected by the draconian sage.

After the three thousand worlds were unified, the three remaining superior kings had all received a great deal of strength via the realm's blessing, and the draconian sage had grown significantly younger.

The entire draconian kingdom was in cheers.

There were countless people present at the draconians' founding ceremony, many of whom belonged to races that had decided to join the draconian kingdom, and a large group of races from the Milky Way, humans forefront among them. The draconians themselves, who were supposed to be the star of the show, ended up as one of the smallest groups instead.

The draconian sage said, "Thank you for coming to witness the draconian kingdom's founding ceremony, everyone. I still remember when the draconians were a small race that had managed to acquire their own world through strife and struggle, something that had happened far in the past. When aliens from another realm first appeared, we allied with the humans and developed relations with them.

The draconian kingdom's founding ceremony was very different from the Zongming and Lie kingdoms'. The Zongming kingdom's ceremony was held on Mt. Tian, and only the rich and influential had been invited.

On the other hand, the Lie kingdom's ceremony had been attended by officials and citizens alike, but the attendees were segregated by importance. Only the most important could be within the ceremonial hall; the ordinary officials were forced to remain outside, and the citizens couldn't even enter the palace.

On the other hand, the draconian kingdom, just like the Zenith Alliance, had a ceremony held out in the open, allowing all interested citizens to attend.

This distinction spoke of the differences between the four kingdoms' history, power structure, and governance.

The Zongming kingdom was a monarchy in which those with influence had a say in politics, whereas the Lie kingdom was more of a classic monarchy, with power concentrated on court officials and the royalty.

The Zenith Alliance was a classic democracy, a band of people who formed a loose kingdom, whereas the draconian kingdom was entirely different.

Chapter 1272: The Eternal Draconian Kingdom

The draconian kingdom had once been nothing more than a small tribe, with just a limited number of draconians. They had always worked together in classic tribal fashion; although the draconian sage was the king of his world, he was in effect little more than a tribal chieftain of sorts. As such, compared to the Zongming and Lie kingdoms, the draconian kingdom seemed to emphasize ordinary civilians far more.

In a kingdom with significant individual strength, the draconian kingdom nonetheless managed to maintain law and order.

"We never expected that our alliance with the humans would transform the draconians for good, nor what strength lay within the humans' small bodies."

The human hunters raised their heads in pride.

"We were once beset by foes all around us, eight different races in all—but because we were united, and because of the help of our allies the humans, not only did we manage to repel the invasion, we even assimilated those worlds into our own. This was a miracle that all of us working together managed to create."

The draconians all proudly recalled the scene of the conflict, the faces of the dead who had perished then, and the members of Team Zenith who had shown up at the last minute and fended off the invasion.

The draconians all gave thanks to Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith once more.

"We once faced a foe stronger than anything ever seen to date, but by working together, we successfully evolved into a superior world, only to find ourselves beset by even stronger opponents: the superior worlds of antiquity."

The draconian sage recalled the might of the solar king and his ten thousand suns.

During that fight, the draconians didn't have to rely on the members of Team Zenith and on Zhang Lie. They managed to fight off the solar king and his minions based on the draconians' own strength—assisted by the human hunters that were still on the world at the time.

"We have always prided ourselves on united, communal strength. By working together, we managed to defend ourselves even against a superior foe, then created another miracle by toppling the reign of the superior kings of antiquity."

The draconians cheered; their excitement, thumping hearts, and irrepressible joy welled up once more.

"We witnessed the destruction of the realm together—"

All the draconians had believed that they were doomed.

They could still sense the despair that they had felt during that apocalyptic crisis, one they had thought unavoidable, but miraculously, that fate had been averted.

"The realm itself seemed about to collapse, but we bridged the difficulty and managed to patch up the realm, ultimately resulting in the creation of this unified world. All this is thanks to our cooperation and hard work."

When the new world was born and the superior kingdoms received the blessing of the realm, everyone felt as though they had just survived a monumental crisis. The joy that they had felt afterwards was something unforgettable, that they would carry with them for the rest of their lives.

"All that we have experienced, we have done so together with the humans—and I think this alliance will continue even in the future."

The draconians and humans had forged ties that couldn't be broken; some draconians even felt that the humans had become wholly integrated with them.

"We have experienced trial and tribulation together—and we have overcome them all! Nothing can stop our advance."

The draconians and humans thought back to the challenges they had overcome, many of whom an ordinary lifeform might not encounter once in a lifetime. Even so, they had overcome them all.

"As they say, heroes are forged out of necessity. The more challenges befall us, the more heroes we'll need to overcome them. We've established a realm far beyond what any of us could have imagined, that we might not even have dared to imagine."

The draconians had gone from a medium-sized world to a large one, and then a superior one.

Many draconians had thought that they could die without any regrets upon witnessing their world evolve once—but less than two years later, it evolved once more to become a superior world. That rate of progress never stopped. In the blink of an eye, all the worlds had unified, and they were now the draconian kingdom.

"Our efforts have been recognized by the realm itself."

The draconians thought back to what they had managed to accomplish in the span of just a few years.

"We have gained the awe and respect of countless worlds."

Of course, these worlds were more fearful of the human hunters rather than the draconians.

The members of Team Zenith had been extravagant in leading the warlords to take down world after world, so much so that, even after the formation of the unified world, many aliens grew fearful upon seeing a human. Fearful memories had been embedded deep in their psyche.

"In accordance with the times, the draconian world has now been transformed into the draconian kingdom."

"Long live the draconian kingdom!"

One person started a chant; the others all followed suit.

"Long live the glorious draconian kingdom!"

"May the draconian kingdom shine for eternity!"

"May the draconian kingdom shine for eternity!"

"May the draconian kingdom shine for eternity!"

Wave after wave of sound echoed through the air.

"There will be even more challenges in the future lying in wait for us. Brave, steadfast, and intelligent as all of you are, I believe that none of you will be stymied, that you'll create miracle after miracle."

The draconians cheered, and the draconian sage nodded in satisfaction at seeing the citizens' morale soar.

Zhang Lie was just about to leave when the draconian sage noticed his movements. He hurriedly said, "Zhang Lie, hold up!"

"What's the matter?" Zhang Lie asked.

"I have important business with you," the draconian sage replied. "After the founding ceremony, can you come see me at the palace?"

"Is something wrong?"

He didn't think there was anything else in the third realm that he had to accomplish; with the king of chaos' departure, there were no enemies left for them to face.

"It's something very important," the draconian sage repeated.

After the ceremony, Zhang Lie headed to the palace.

The draconian sage had been unused to living in the palace, considering that the nuclear structure of the draconians were tribes. Even after the draconian sage had become the king of the world, his living quarters were just a little better than those of the average draconian.

However, the king's quarters had to be majestic to reveal the kingdom's strength, and the draconians had all petitioned for a palace to be built in the draconian kingdom.

The palace was something that the draconians and humans had worked hard together to construct; on the human side, it had been led by chief architect Chu Feng.

Chapter 1273: Collection Complete

Chu Feng had manifested impressive construction ability in the second realm. Under his leadership, along with the powerful bodies of the draconians and genetic hunters, and the help of large numbers of superior-grade lifeforms, it took only ten days to construct a magnificent palace.

Because the construction had been accomplished in just ten days, the palace couldn't be compared to that in the Lie or Zongming kingdoms, but it did perfectly combine the architectural styles of the draconian kingdom and China.

The draconian sage had arranged for a guide, and Zhang Lie quickly found his way toward the sage.

"You asked me to head over right after the founding ceremony. Is something the matter?"

The draconian sage placed a bar of gold on the table. "Have a look at this."

The gold was giving off radiant light, as though it had been processed with special effects. Zhang Lie looked at it carefully and remarked to his surprise, "There's incredible energy within, even more so than the black gold that we discovered beforehand. Where in the world did you find this?"

The draconian sage stroked at his lower jaw with his hands. "This is precisely that black gold—or rather, a mutated version of it."

"How did you accomplish such a feat?"

The black gold harbored immense energy and had a surprisingly stable structure. It would be difficult to cause a mutation, and any accidents could lead to a tremendous explosion instead.

Zhang Lie thought for a moment. "No, that can't be. I know the draconians aren't that skilled technology-wise, and you shouldn't have the ability to generate such mutations at will."

To be able to cause stable mutations to the structure of this unusual black gold was beyond what a superior king could accomplish.

"That would be the realm of gods..."

The draconian sage stood up and clasped both hands behind his back. "It was indeed a god who manifested such a transformation."

"Don't joke with me!" Zhang Lie cried out laughing. "You're stronger than a superior king. Do you really believe that gods exist in the third realm? Why didn't it show itself when the third realm was suffering from a crisis, then?"

The draconian sage stared at Zhang Lie. "A god does exist in this realm."

"Does it? I'd like to see it!"

The draconian sage stared at Zhang Lie. "You should be aware of its presence."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "If I were, I'd have punched that deity in the face already."

He had always been an atheist. If there were such a thing as a deity, he'd punch it in the face.

Zhang Lie continued, "Sage, how have you suddenly become so superstitious? Was your transformation from superior king to a kingdom's king so extreme?"

"There hadn't been a deity in the third realm in the past, but one was born with the birth of the unified world," the draconian sage replied patiently.

"What, a deity popped out after realizing that the third realm was in good condition now?" Zhang Lie joked.

"What existence is closest to a deity within the third realm?" the draconian sage then asked.

Zhang Lie finally understood to whom the sage referred.

"Hold on, you're talking about the will of the realm?"

The draconian sage smiled. "You were the one who restored the will, too. How could you have forgotten?"

"If it's the will of the realm, then everything makes sense. It can do much that we can't."

After all, fundamentally speaking, the will of the world wasn't a lifeform.

Zhang Lie lifted up the glowing piece of golden metal in his hand. "When did the will of the world have time to mutate all this black gold?"

The draconian sage explained, "It was all an accident, something that happened when the will of the realm's blessing was imparted on the unified world. The black gold was transmuted into a higher form of energy then."

"Just like when the draconian world ascended to a superior world..."

The draconian sage continued, "I've begun calling this mutated metal rainbow gold."

"Simple and crude, I have to say..."

The draconian sage asked, "How do you think we should handle it?"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "How else? The same way we dealt with the black gold."

The draconian sage frowned. "This rainbow gold is far superior to black gold, and possesses at least a hundred times its energy density. Is it really fine for us to treat it in such a cavalier fashion?"

It could very well be a weapon of war, one that could revolutionize the present if they were able to use it as a power source for the death spirits' battleships.

Compared to the conversion of spiritual matter to energy that the death spirits had pioneered, this fuel could provide even more strength.

"The only difference is that the energy content has increased dramatically, isn't it? It's still as much a danger as before. There's nothing to worry about—we're the ones in charge of the third realm now. If anyone's unhappy about it, summon Yun Bing and the Lie king and discuss a solution with them."

The draconian sage thought for a moment. "That's true."

What the draconian sage feared was none other than the Zenith Alliance.

The Zenith Alliance, a kingdom of hunters led by the members of Team Zenith and Zhang Lie, could very well overwhelm the third realm all by themselves. Even when Zhang Lie ascended to the fourth realm, the members of Team Zenith would still be around. Until they all ascended, the aliens wouldn't be able to catch a break—the pressure they exuded was like that of a mountain, pressing down on their heads.

The draconian sage had been asking for Zhang Lie's response not based on him as an individual, but as a spokesperson representing the members of the Zenith Alliance. It was clear that Zhang Lie paid no heed to the incredible material, that he even disregarded it.

The draconian and Zongming kingdoms both knew about the existence of the black gold. Once the draconian sage reported the matter to Li Zongming, he would be aware of the existence of the

rainbow gold shortly as well. With two kingdoms securing the strategic resource, even the Lie kingdom and the Zenith Alliance had to be careful with their actions.

The draconian sage thought that Zhang Lie didn't care because he was about to leave the third realm for the fourth. What he didn't know was that Zhang Lie had just had a big fight with Li Qianlin, and his brain was little more than paste at the moment.

"If there's nothing else, I'll be heading out first."

"Do you need me to send you out?"

"No, there's no need. I can shatter space on my own."

The draconian sage sighed. "If I were still a king of the realm, I'd have stopped you right then and there."

It was an uncomfortable feeling to have space shattered in your demesne, as though someone had drilled a hole in your backyard that you would have to repair.

However, the draconian sage was no longer a superior king, and the shattered space would heal on its own thanks to the will of the realm.

Zhang Lie returned to his residence, only to find a slender figure pounce on him in an embrace.

"You're back, Zhang Lie! Do you want food, or a bath, or me first?"

Zhang Lie rapped Zhu on the head. "Who's been teaching you this nonsense?"

Zhu clutched at her forehead as she laughed mischievously. "I learned it by osmosis from the others, I suppose."

While in the second realm, lots of genetic hunters had brought cultural artifacts from the Milky Way, like manga and literature, into the dimensional world. Zhu had watched and read quite a few when she was bored of tending to the lifeforms in the farm.

Zhu puffed out her chest. "Zhang Lie, I've gathered all the materials you wanted!"

"That quickly?"

Zhang Lie didn't look happy like she expected; instead, his expression was downcast and even crestfallen.

Zhu asked cautiously, "Are you upset, Zhang Lie?"

Chapter 1274: Preparation to Leave

Zhang Lie's stare was somewhat vacant. He looked in a direction where there was nothing to be seen, murmuring to himself, "Better that it be fast. If it has to end, it might as well be quick."

Zhu asked, "I worked hard to get everything on your list for you quickly, Zhang Lie, and I wouldn't have succeeded if not for the fact that the will of the realm's blessing caused herbs to spawn all over. However, it seems like you're somewhat upset. Did I do something wrong?"

Zhang Lie patted Zhu's head. "No, I'm very happy. Thank you for your hard work, Zhu."

Zhu replied, "But Zhang Lie, you don't look happy at all! What happened?"

"Nothing. I'm just a little unwilling to end things like this."

Zhu grabbed Zhang Lie's hands. "I'll miss you too, Zhang Lie! I wish I could leave with you."

Zhang Lie patted Zhu's head. "I'll miss you too, Zhu, but you're the ruler of the third realm now, and you can't head off with me before things have stabilized. You need to remain here to maintain law and order, and the fourth realm is very dangerous. I wouldn't be able to guarantee your safety there."

"I know you don't belong here, Zhang Lie, so I won't try to keep you behind. I hope you'll be able to move forward without any burdens, that you can proudly puff out your chest as you continue forth in your journey. We'll always be watching you from the back."

Zhang Lie kneaded her head, causing her to scream and giggle.

"It's way too early for you to be consoling me!"

Zhu smiled.

Zhang Lie continued, "I won't be leaving just yet. There are some preparations I'll need to make ahead of time, and I'll need some time to carry out the research for producing these limit-breaking potions as well."

Zhu instantly beamed. "Excellent! I was worried that you would ascend to the fourth realm immediately after I found the ingredients."

Every additional day that Zhang Lie remained in the third realm left Zhu at ease. Even if he weren't by her side, the fact that he was somewhere she could sense and touch calmed her.

Along with Zhu, Zhang Lie headed toward the medicinal research laboratory of the draconian kingdom, which Zhang Lie had requested the draconian sage to construct.

Zhang Lie turned to her. "I heard that the high council of the third realm is about to be founded. As the council head, don't you need to be preparing?"

Zhu seemed gobsmacked. "What does the high council have to do with me?"

"Aren't you the head of the realm?"

"That's right."

"And didn't the draconian sage, Li Zongming, the Lie king, and Yun Bing all nominate you as the council head?"

"That's right."

"And you haven't been doing anything at all when the high council's about to be founded?"

Zhu replied naturally, "Why, being by your side is far more important than any of that!"

She knew that Zhang Lie was about to ascend to the fourth realm, and every additional second she spent with him was inordinately precious.

Zhang Lie grumbled, "You shouldn't shirk your duties like that..."

"Even if I did attend, I wouldn't be able to contribute anything. I know little of governance; on the other hand, the draconian sage, Li Zongming, the Lie king, and Yun Bing are easily able to take care of everything."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "You're just going to let everyone else do all the work, then?"

"I learned from the best, after all!"

Zhang Lie had united the three thousand worlds and then tossed her the position of ruler of the unified world as he prepared to ascend to the fourth realm.

The governance of the third realm had been established by Zhang Lie and his allies, but Zhang Lie himself hadn't had to do a thing. He was precisely the role model whom Zhu had learned.

Zhang Lie himself knew that he didn't have any right to criticize Zhu, and the two of them walked into the draconian kingdom's medicinal research laboratory.

The laboratory was far more crowded than it had been previously. Because of the unification of the world, the entire world had received the blessing of the realm, and all sorts of miraculous herbs had popped out of the ground, never before seen or recorded in history. Some herbs thought to be extinct had even made a reappearance.

All the pillmasters and herbalists of the unified world were working hard to research these herbs, and the laboratories all over the world were fuller than they had ever been.

As they entered the laboratory, Zhang Lie headed straight for the Yeluo chieftain.

The Yeluo chieftain had been the one to construct the medicinal research laboratory, and he was also the head scientist in charge.

His hair was in disarray and sticking haphazardly upward, and his eyes had huge bags. It was apparent he hadn't slept well for a long time, but he was clearly brimming with joy and excitement.

After the sudden, bewildering rise in the growth of herbs all over the world, the Yeluo chieftain had encountered herbs that he knew nothing about and had never seen before day after day, and the possibility of new discoveries invigorated him.

Upon seeing Zhang Lie, he grew even happier. "You're here now, Your Majesty! I've been looking for you and the draconian sage!"

Zhang Lie replied, "As I've said before, after ascending to the third realm, I'm no longer the king of the kingdom of Limit. There's no need for you to address me as royalty."

The Yeluo chieftain replied, "We might be in the third realm, far away from your kingdom, Your Majesty, but the kingdom of Limit has remained in my heart all along. I frequently dream of it, of conquering the world with you, and you'll always be my king at heart."

Zhang Lie couldn't help but chuckle. "You've really learned how to flatter me, haven't you?"

Conquering the world—why, ever since the Yeluo clan joined the kingdom of Limit, they had focused all their efforts to researching the properties of plants and herbs. The number of battles they had participated in could be counted on a single hand.

The Yeluo chieftain smiled. "Blame those newbies. We've had a batch of new researchers recently. They're not very skilled at anything but flattery, though."

Only then did Zhang Lie notice the newcomers.

"This laboratory has really grown famous, hasn't it?"

The Yeluo chieftain's smile grew wider. "It's all thanks to your endowment, Your Majesty, along with the chance at development the draconian sage granted us. Otherwise, we would never have been able to build this laboratory or ascend to the third realm."

"As the head of the laboratory, you must manage over a thousand people now, yes?"

The draconian kingdom's medicinal research laboratory had produced significant and considerable results under the leadership of the Yeluo chieftain, and the laboratory had expanded to a significant extent since then. The fact that it controlled so much space within the capital itself was testament to its importance.

The laboratory was now a resource fully intertwined and integrated with the draconian kingdom.

Chapter 1275: Zhou Ying's Restorative #3

The Yeluo chieftain smiled wryly. "The newcomers are physicians and herbalists from among the Milky Way, as well as apprentices whom the draconian sage keeps sending my way."

The Yeluo chieftain had only accepted the former group of people because of Zhang Lie's influence, and they would receive training by working with the members of the Yeluo tribe.

"It shows that the draconian sage truly values you."

The Yeluo chieftain nodded. "I understand. As long as it doesn't affect my research, I won't mind. Would you like to have a look around the research laboratory, Your Highness?"

Zhang Lie waved a hand in refusal.

"No, there's no need, and you have lots of things to be working on. I'm not too interested in the research at the moment, so let's get to the point."

The Yeluo chieftain glanced at Zhang Lie seriously. "Your Majesty, what's the matter?"

"My own affairs aren't too urgent. You mentioned that you wanted to find me and the draconian sage. Has something happened?"

The Yeluo chieftain replied, "Recently, after the sudden, bewildering rise in the growth of herbs all over the world, I'm easily encountering herbs that I knew nothing about and have never seen before. The draconian research laboratory has been collecting these herbs and researching them."

Zhang Lie raised a hand to stop the Yeluo chieftain. "Cut to the chase, please."

"Through significant research, I've made a tremendous breakthrough and created a refined version of Zhou Ying's restorative, which I've called Restorative #3 for now."

Zhang Lie asked, "How much of an improvement is it over #2?"

"You can recover more quickly, and the regenerative effects have been enhanced."

"Can it be mass-produced?"

"At any time."

Zhang Lie nodded. "Thank you for your hard work. I'll have Zhou Ying come over soon. She's also made massive breakthroughs in the third realm, and the transformation to her energy reserves may be fruitful to your research."

The Yeluo chieftain was immediately elated, but he quickly cut short his celebration. He recalled that Zhang Lie had come over to find him; he had surely done so for a reason.

"What brings you here, Your Majesty?"

"I've been trying to research a brand-new potion. I already have some ideas and thoughts, but you're more experienced a potioneer than I am. You might not be familiar with all the herbs and plants of the third realm, but you're certainly the closest to that stage than anyone else around. I'd like your expertise. Would you help me out?"

The Yeluo chieftain was overjoyed.

"Of course, Your Majesty!"

Even with Zhang Lie's research materials and ingredients, along with a whole past life's worth of research, he had only given himself a 50% chance of success at developing Potion #5. With the Yeluo chieftain's help, however, he believed that that success rate had improved by at least 30%, that there was at least an 80% chance that he would be able to create Potion #5 within a year.

The Yeluo chieftain asked, "What sort of potion are you interested in, Your Majesty?"

"A potion that can help me break through my limits."

"That sounds very general. Your Majesty, you likely aren't looking for something to boost your power in the short-term, so..." The Yeluo chieftain suddenly noticed that everyone around was sidling closer as to listen in on the conversation.

The Yeluo chieftain shouted, "What are all of you looking at? Have you watered the herbs? Finished writing research reports? Collected and organized data? Performed your cross-validation studies on herb interactions? Identified possible synergies and dysfunctional pairings? If you haven't done any of that, what are all of you doing standing around here waiting for gossip?!"

The crowds immediately fled and dispersed.

The Yeluo chieftain smiled wryly. "Sorry for the disturbance, Your Majesty. You had better come chat with me in my office."

The Yeluo chieftain brought Zhang Lie down a long corridor, where he was treated to the view of jade-green fields in which all sorts of herbs and plants were being cultivated. Researchers were patiently and carefully tending to them all.

Zhu seemed very surprised. "You're using all this land for growing herbs and plants?"

The Yeluo chieftain smiled. "The best way to understand the use of a herb is to witness it growing in a suitable environment. Its surroundings dictate, to an extent, its special properties and efficacy. Planting and growing these herbs is thus a crucial part of research."

Zhang Lie nodded. "The Yeluo clan was known for its potion-making and herb-cultivating abilities, after all."

The Yeluo chieftain sighed. "Unfortunately, I'm not an expert in cultivating herbs. I do miss the wood spirits' company from time to time. I've been to many of the worlds in the third realm, but unfortunately I've found no traces of wood spirits or any races that are particularly skilled in this area. I expect that there were such races in the past, but they fell prey to other, more martial races in the meantime."

The Yeluo chieftain murmured, "Not having such experts around might hinder our research. Is it possible that such experts do exist in the realm?"

Zhu closed her eyes. After a long pause, she opened them again and replied, "I can guarantee that no such race is currently present in the third realm."

The Yeluo chieftain turned to Zhang Lie. "I've been wanting to ask for some time, Your Majesty, but is this... your new concubine?"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "For one thing, I don't want to be tied down, and for another, what's with this 'new'? I'm single, alright?"

The Yeluo chieftain continued, "Have you not established a relationship with anyone yet, Your Majesty?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Zhu raised a petite hand. "I'm Zhang Lie's child bride!"

Zhang Lie clutched his face. "What in the world have you been watching... Zhu, don't joke like that. Grooming children is punishable by at least three years in prison and goes all the way up to the death sentence, alright?"

The Yeluo chieftain nodded. "Is that so? As expected of Your Majesty..."

"Let's stop with the jokes, please." Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "This isn't my child bride, or anything of the sort. She's the ruler of the realm."

The Yeluo chieftain reared back in shock. "The ruler of the realm?! I apologize for the discourtesy. Your Majesty, you are truly impressive, to have taken the ruler of the realm herself as your child bride."

Zhang Lie pretended not to hear the last sentence. "Since the ruler of the realm has generously confirmed that no such race exists, it surely does not exist."

"What a pity..."

As the three of them talked, they arrived at the Yeluo chieftain's laboratory.

Zhu glanced all around her, at the jars that filled the shelves, with interest.

The Yeluo chieftain had prepared three seats and was starting to brew some medicinal tea.

He poured a big cup of tea out for each of them, then said somewhat embarrassedly, "I don't much care for creature comforts, so I don't have much to present you with. I hope you won't mind—but I grow my own tea, and I'm confident of its quality. You won't be able to buy its like elsewhere."

Zhu sniffed the tea, then pushed it aside as she plugged her nose.

Zhang Lie said, "Let's begin."

Chapter 1276: Shameful Sculptures

Zhang Lie explained his goals to Zhu and the Yeluo chieftain. The Yeluo chieftain steepled his fingers. "Is that so? Research on the limit-breaking Potion #5..."

Potion #4 had been jointly developed by Zhang Lie and the Yeluo chieftain working together, and the members of Team Zenith had benefited from that collaboration.

Actually, the Yeluo chieftain had undertaken the majority of the work.

The Yeluo chieftain began, "I've had a look at the recipe for the last few limit-breaking potions, and have some confidence in being able to develop a skeleton for Potion #5. To be frank, as someone who has spent his entire life studying and researching potions, I can definitively claim that the idea of limit-breaking potions themselves is genius. To dream of breaking the restrictions imposed by one's genetic code itself!"

Zhang Lie then retrieved the research documents from the limit-fragment research laboratory, including the most recent research that the Milky Way had performed on limit fragments, along with various Potions #1 that other Milky Way races had developed for their respective hunters.

He was the honorary president of the limit-fragment research laboratory, and it was trivial for him to obtain any research reports he wanted.

The Yeluo chieftain said, "I need to study these reports carefully so that I can be of assistance in developing the potion."

Zhang Lie replied, "Coincidentally, the high council of the unified world of the third realm will be founded tomorrow. Zhu will be there, and I intend to attend as well. Why don't I come back in two days?"

"Very well. I'll use the intervening day to finish my current tasks and then devote all my attention to helping you with Potion #5, Your Majesty."

Zhang Lie and Zhu left. The next day was the day the high council of the third realm was about to convene for the first time.

Yun Bing, the draconian sage, Li Zongming, and the Lie king had all finished their preliminary preparations ahead of schedule. The council headquarters had been constructed by none other than Chu Feng himself, right beside the dragon palace.

This was a symbolic decision; Zhu and Zhang Lie had saved the three thousand worlds and performed the unification process that had restored the third realm.

The headquarters was in the shape of a pentagon, with huge doors embedded in the wall.

A number of statues stood upright before those doors; the one in the center, with the most majestic appearance, was none other than Zhang Lie.

He wore golden armor, with the sword Guicang in his left hand. His right hand blazed with fiery scales.

Zhang Lie frowned. "Who did this?"

Below the statue was carved a line of words: Hope has never been extinguished—our savior, Zhang Lie.

Zhu saw a sculpture of herself beside Zhang Lie. She was hanging in mid-air, her hands outstretched toward the sky. Countless fragments of various worlds were assembling between her hands. Beneath her statue was another line of words: For that man, I reach toward the skies—the ruler of the world.

Zhang Lie's lips twitched. "I thought my inscription was embarrassing enough, but yours..."

The sculpture had been displayed prominently before the high council of the third realm, but Zhang Lie didn't mind—because someone was suffering worse than he was.

As long as he didn't have to suffer alone, he was perfectly happy with what had been done.

Behind the high council's headquarters was a mountain on which four giant heads had been carved out: Yun Bing, the draconian sage, Li Zongming, and the Lie king.

"Naruto...? No, this is supposed to be a parody of Mt. Rushmore?"

Just as Zhang Lie was wondering who had done something so ridiculous on such a grand scale, Chu Feng suddenly emerged from the bushes. "Long time no see, Zhang Lie!"

"Who dares launch a sneak attack on me?!" Zhang Lie kicked Chu Feng away.

Chu Feng rolled across the grass as he landed. Zhang Lie had held back, and he naturally wasn't injured. If Zhang Lie had put some actual force behind his blow, Chu Feng would be nothing more than a pile of flesh by now.

Zhang Lie relaxed his foot. "I was wondering who would emerge from the brush like that—and it turned out to be you, Garen!" [1]

Chu Feng cried out, "I'm not Garen—I'm Chu Feng!"

"That's what I said, Garen."

"I told you, I'm Chu Feng..."

Zhang Lie pointed at the two sculptures before the high council's headquarters, and the facsimile of Mt. Rushmore behind it.

"Is this your work?"

Chu Feng grinned. "Well? What do you think? I've grown far stronger after the trials of the second realm."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "You really aren't scared of what might happen, are you?"

"Scared of what?"

"If genetic hunters from a certain country find out and cause trouble for you back in China..."

Chu Feng smirked. "There's nothing for me to worry about. Everyone knows that the Zenith Dojo's backing me up—who in the Milky Way is willing to rouse its ire? Furthermore, if I don't say anything, no one will know that I'm responsible. You might not know this, but the aliens were very

pleased with my design. In fact, the draconian sage, Li Zongming, and the Lie king all applauded and have decided to emulate this construction."

Zhang Lie:...

"Where's Yun Bing?"

Chu Feng rolled his eyes. "She's going crazy with work. There are a lot of affairs from the Zenith Alliance she has to deal with, as well as the high council. She doesn't have time for anything like this—and she wouldn't care, at any rate. You should know—you were the one who pushed so many things onto her plate to begin with!"

That... was eminently reasonable.

Yun Bing certainly didn't have time to relax.

After she became the prime minister of the Limit kingdom, she seemed to have grown besotted with power to some extent. Rather than improve her stagnating cultivation, she had decided to focus on political power instead.

In this respect, Chu Feng and Yun Bing were the same. They had both worked hard on cultivation as first-realm hunters, but the competition had grown stiff in the second realm. Even among the aliens, there were many that were able to suppress them, and they witnessed true strength in the form of the members of Team Zenith and Zhang Lie.

Chu Feng and Yun Bing both realized that the members of Team Zenith and Zhang Lie were far beyond their reach.

If they couldn't compete in terms of strength, they would focus on other fields instead, like governance and architecture. Both hunters were skilled in their respective domains, and their talents quickly blossomed.

Everyone had decisions of their own to make, and not everyone was destined for the battlefield. By striving toward auxiliary roles, they too could change the dimensional realm.

Of course, everything was founded on strength. If Chu Feng and Yun Bing hadn't thrown in their lot with the members of Team Zenith and Zhang Lie, no matter how talented they were, they wouldn't have a chance to display that talent.

Chu Feng was very pleased with himself. "Are you happy with the sculpture of you, Zhang Lie?"

"It's acceptable." All I can promise is that I won't shatter it.

Chu Feng continued, "I had no clue what to inscribe at the base of your statue, and I ended up asking the members of Team Zenith as well as many others. In the end, I adopted what Li Qianlin said, which I felt to be the most admirable aspect of your legend. When the three thousand worlds were about to collapse, you said, 'Hope has never been extinguished.'"

"That's what Qianlin said?"

Chapter 1277: Not Me!

Zhang Lie ran his fingers over the words engraved on the statue. Even he himself had forgotten whether or not he had truly made such a statement—but Li Qianlin had remembered it firmly.

Zhang Lie couldn't hide the smile on his face.

Caressing those words was like interacting with her across space. It had been the first time they had "spoken" in a few days. The fact that she had remembered his words so comprehensively...

Chu Feng said, "If you're upset, Zhang Lie, we can change it. I have a list of quotations others gave of you. Fang Yi said, 'If you fear someone else's strength, you'll never be able to improve. You might not be able to beat them now, but you still have to make them your target, to work toward that goal with all your heart.' "

Zhang Lie did remember this—he had mentioned it when giving Fang Yi advice after combat practice.

Chu Feng retrieved his notebook. Yang Ze said, 'Everything pales in comparison to absolute strength, and no skill and strategy can bridge the gap.' "Sun Xiaowu said, 'Did you intuit something?' "

"Ha."

In the future, when he met up with Sun Xiaowu again, he would certainly have to have a chat with him to see what he had intuited.

Chu Feng continued, "Li Feng said, 'Don't emulate me, but rather learn from me.' "

This was something Zhang Lie had told him back in the second realm.

"Sun Mengmeng said, 'This is why we have to master our emotions, rather than to let them control us. Take advantage of the strength they provide, but never lose control.' "

Zhang Lie couldn't help but smile. What he had forgotten, others firmly remembered.

"Zhou Ying said, 'Tactics are fair play.'"

Zhu commented, "This could very well form the basis of a book of quotes from Zhang Lie."

Chu Feng laughed. "That was my plan! I'm intending to publish a book of quotes from Zhang Lie. It would surely sell well in the second and third realms, as well as the Milky Way."

Zhu pledged, "Let me know when you do. I, the ruler of the realm, will advertise for you personally."

Zhang Lie laughed, buoyed by the warmth that had resulted from others taking his advice to mind. "I don't mind, but don't make it sound like it's going to be something deep."

Chu Feng continued listing off the quotes that others had contributed.

"Zhang Hanxiang said, 'You can't remain a child forever.' "

He was certain that he hadn't said that; rather, it was what Zhang Hanxiang wanted to tell him. Zhang Lie could only sigh and shake his head at his sister's antics.

"Hong Xi said, 'What do you think of those lions? They seem quite compatible with the Zenith Dojo.' "

Zhu seemed perplexed. "What does this mean?"

Zhang Lie nodded to himself with a smile. This was around the time when he had first met the young woman who would become his disciple, Hong Xi.

At that point, the Hong clan had just been crushed by the Musi clan.

She was reticent then—or rather, possessed of a dull and brooding personality. When Zhang Lie slaughtered a few genetic lifeforms to help Hong Xi max out her gene fragments, in order to lift the gloomy atmosphere around her, he had cracked a few jokes, and then...

"Master, what do you think of those peacocks? This must be a meeting of fate."

"Master, do you see those tigers? I don't think they have long to live. Why don't you do them the honor of sending them off?"

"Master, Master, have a look at that lone superior-grade mantis! It's so ugly that it must be living a life of abject misery. Why don't we help it out?"

Hong Xi had changed since then; the disciple that had blindly followed behind him had grown a little cruel. Subsequently, after interacting with the members of Team Zenith and Zhang Hanxiang for so long, she had become entirely corrupt.

Hong Xi's bookish, reticent personality faded away, never to return. It was a pity, but Hong Xi's brooding nature and heavy burdens had likewise vanished. Zhang Lie felt that this was more than a worthwhile trade.

Chu Feng continued flipping through his notebook. "Dong Mingxing said, 'Scumbags die early.' The draconian sage said—"

Zhang Lie interrupted, "That's quite enough. I like the words you've chosen."

Chu Feng kept his notebook. Zhang Lie asked, "Who chose Zhu's inscription?"

Zhu murmured, "I did say something like that, I believe."

Zhang Lie recalled what had happened when the third realm was nearing its end. The fate of the entire realm rested on a young woman's shoulders.

Only a native of the dimensional realm could become a king of the realm. Although it was cruel, Zhang Lie nevertheless chose Zhu to bear that responsibility.

Zhu hadn't grumbled, and neither had she been crushed by the mounting pressure. She smiled in an impossibly pure fashion. "Since it's a task from you, Zhang Lie, I'll handle it to the best of my ability."

Zhang Lie sighed and looked up into the sky that was as pure as Zhu's gaze then.

"Zhu, have you ever hated me for choosing you to be the ruler of the third realm?"

Zhu shook her head. "As I've said before, without you, there could hardly be a me. If you hadn't saved me from that fishing village, I might be nothing but fertilizer by now. I could hardly blame you."

Chu Feng interrupted their conversation. "I intend on hanging up a portrait of you, Zhang Lie, at the top of the headquarters, to represent your importance to this unified world and the high council."

Zhu immediately applauded. "Excellent!"

Zhang Lie rejected the idea immediately. "There's no need for all this. I'm about to ascend to the fourth realm, and the third realm will belong to all of you thereafter. I'm not all that important—leave this position to Zhu."

Zhu immediately shook her head as well. "No, no, that'd be too embarrassing for me!"

"Let's shelve that idea, then. I'll bring the two of you inside the headquarters and show you what I've done in the meantime."

Chu Feng brought them down a long stretch of corridor, which were adorned with paintings. The first one they saw was a huge oil painting depicting the scene of a battle.

On the left was Zhang Lie, his whole body glowing with light, looking like a warlord, followed by a group of fighters. Zhang Lie found that Zhang Hanxiang and Hong Xi had also been represented in the image. In the sky was a black bat, grinning as though it were mocking the world, with a single fiery red eye—Nightdemon.

The enemies on the right were painted black and clearly evil. They were wrapped up in bandages and led by a gigantic black shadow.

"This is the war against the death spirits, isn't it?" Zhang Lie asked.

Chu Feng gave him a thumbs up. "You identified it instantly, Zhang Lie."

On the opposite wall was hung another oil painting.

All sorts of strange and unusual existences were having a discussion at a long table, and the mood seemed to be rather tense.

There was a clam with suction cups, revealing a sliver of chaos within the crack between its shells; a man in golden armor with ten golden suns to his back; a frost spirit queen; a bundle of black fog; a black skeleton; and a vile amorphous gray blob that quivered and swelled, as though it were the source of all filth and waste.

Chapter 1278: Hanging on the Wall

The gray fluid of the amorphous blob roiled. More and more mutated growths and abominations were visible within the main body's flesh, crying out shrilly.

Finally, there was also a golden-haired loli. The painting was done from the perspective of an ordinary-seeming man in light of these fantastic existences. Behind the man was a young man, clearly with martial might.

The man was Li Zongming; the young man was Zhang Lie.

From the perspective and shading of the image, the man in golden armor, the frost spirit queen, the black fog, the black skeleton, and the amorphous gray blob were located in darkness, while Li Zongming and Zhang Lie were illuminated by the light. The giant clam stood at the intersection of light and darkness.

Around the long table were no walls or ceilings, only a huge pillar from which the skies beyond could be seen. The sun hung in the air, and dark and stormy clouds besides. Black rain and snow challenged each other for domination; the entire scene seemed apocalyptic.

The mood of the meeting was quite tense, and Li Zongming and Zhang Lie seemed about to start a fight with the others.

Neither of them were afraid, and nor were they about to retreat. Their eyes were filled with heroism and will; it was apparent that they were meant to represent the side of justice.

The golden-haired loli flipped a coin through the air. Colorful orbs wound round her neck, her eyes were like a stellar river, and her face was cold and desolate.

The man in golden armor, the frost spirit queen, the black fog, the black skeleton, and the amorphous gray blob were clearly antagonistic, whereas the golden-haired loli was standing by the giant clam's side.

Zhang Lie immediately recognized that this oil painting depicted the superior kings' meeting.

The man in golden armor, the frost spirit queen, the black fog, the black skeleton, and the amorphous gray blob represented the superior kings of antiquity, respectively the solar king, the ice queen, the king of black fog, the king of black rain, the unclean king. The golden loli was none other than the king of keys, whereas the huge black clam that straddled the intersection of light and darkness was the king of chaos.

Zhu cocked her head curiously. "And what's described in this image?"

Chu Feng replied, "I have no clue. The Zongming king sent someone to request that this painting be hung here."

Zhang Lie explained, "This is the scene of the superior kings' meeting, which occurred right before the war against the death spirits."

The third oil painting they saw was one of four worlds. The first possessed countless suns and had a golden mulberry tree at its center. The second was covered with ice, snow, blizzard, and hail. The third had deep abyssal trenches brimming with poisonous gas. Vile amorphous gray matter quivered and swelled all over the surface of the world, as though it were the source of all filth and waste.

The gray fluid of the amorphous blob roiled. More and more mutated growths and abominations were visible within the main body's flesh, crying out shrilly.

A fourth world was covered in black fog; a fifth had a huge door of light.

Zhang Lie recognized the worlds of the superior kings of antiquity.

Each world was heralded by a gigantic figure. Before the world of countless suns was a golden figure with a sun to his back, representing the world of blazing sun and the solar king.

The world shrouded by ice, snow, blizzard, and hail lay behind someone who looked like a frost spirit queen, representing the white world and the ice queen.

Before the world of black fog was none other than a vaguely humanoid-shaped pile of fog, which seemed to have merged with the world of black fog to form one cohesive whole, representing the world of black fog and the king of black fog.

The world of abyssal trenches represented the unclean world and the king of evil.

Before the door of light was a silver giant, representing the king of keys.

Behind Li Zongming was Mt. Tian, corresponding to the Zongming world.

Behind the draconian sage were the draconians and humans, corresponding to the draconian world.

Behind the Lie king were all sorts of different races, corresponding to the scaleman world.

The worlds were divided into up and down. Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith were facing off against the superior worlds of antiquity, depicting the war of the worlds.

On the other side of the corridor was hung another painting.

Zhang Lie had lifted the sword Guicang high into the air. Behind him were the members of Team Zenith, Red Comet, and then a massive group of humans and aliens: the troop of warlords, and the fighters and warriors from the draconian world, the Zongming world, and the scaleman world.

Zhang Lie asked, "This painting was painted by someone from the Milky Way, then?"

Chu Feng seemed surprised. "I'm shocked you were able to recognize this, Zhang Lie."

Zhang Lie's lips twitched. "Anyone who's seen it before would recognize this as 'Liberty Leading the People'."

Chu Feng gave him a thumbs up. "Even so, Zhang Lie, you recognized it immediately!"

"You drew this?"

"I hung it here."

The fifth oil painting was of a cataclysm. The realm itself was collapsing. In the backdrop, a spatial rift was emerging from a black hole, which was sucking countless worlds within. Beneath the rift was a palace. Zhu floated in the air, a five-colored draconic orb manifesting behind her, as she held onto a gigantic jade seal with both hands.

This was a scene of the collapse of the three thousand worlds.

The painting that hung opposite it was a close-up of what was happening within the palace. Zhu was floating in the air, and above her head was a scene right out of an apocalypse. Countless boulders and world fragments had been sucked into the spatial rift, but Zhu was holding onto what she could.

The sculpture of Zhu outside seemed to have been taken directly from her appearance in this painting.

The sixth oil painting was a depiction of the formation of the unified world, and the joy that filled every living being's face. Plants were growing furiously; this painting seemed to balance out the cataclysmic forces at play in the last two oil paintings, resulting in equilibrium once more. An illusory five-colored dragon scale manifested over the painting.

Zhu pointed at the opposite wall. "Is there nothing here yet?"

"It's a reserved spot to commemorate the premier meeting of the high council of the third realm."

Zhang Lie clapped. "Zhu, you can be in another painting!"

Zhu chuckled at Zhang Lie. "Haha, you've already appeared three or four times in these paintings, Zhang Lie. A third appearance for me is hardly anything worth mentioning."

Chapter 1279: Painted Four Times

There were a few more oil paintings. One was atop Mt. Tian, when Li Zongming founded the Zongming kingdom. Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin were in the background.

In the Lie kingdom's palace, the Lie king sat high and mighty on his throne as his court bowed down to him—the founding ceremony of the Lie kingdom. Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin sat on either side of the Lie king, smiling benevolently.

In the draconian kingdom, the draconian sage pronounced the founding of the draconian kingdom as the citizens beneath the stage cheered in jubilation. Colored dragons flew through the air. Zhang Lie was hidden inconspicuously in the background.

Yun Bing spoke for the Zenith Alliance, announcing that it was officially being founded as a kingdom. The strongest representatives of the races of the Milky Way sat behind her; Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith were present as well.

These oil paintings clearly depicted the scene of each kingdom's founding.

Chu Feng explained, "These are paintings of the founders of the high council, as well as the forces they represent."

Zhang Lie's lips twitched. Zhu sniggered behind him. "It looks like you've been represented four more times in these four paintings, Zhang Lie!"

Chu Feng continued, "Each painting records a major event that happened in the third realm, and we intend on carrying this tradition into the future, so as to let our descendants understand the price we had to pay for their freedom."

Zhang Lie grumbled, "So what's the point of having a sculpture of me outside the headquarters? These paintings alone will make me unforgettable!"

He was the only person to ever appear in all of the paintings in the headquarters at once; none could hope to match his deed.

Zhang Lie continued, "Only you would have come up with the idea of decorating the high council's headquarters as though it were an art gallery."

Chu Feng smiled in embarrassment. "This is a mark of culture," he protested.

Zhu beamed. "I like this corridor very much, especially the fact that I can see Zhang Lie everywhere."

Chu Feng puffed out his chest. "Right? This is my favorite part, too. It bears deep symbolic meaning, allowing visitors to appreciate the art as they learn more about the history of the high council. This is a clear reminder not to forget about what previous generations have done, as well as what newer generations should strive to achieve.

"Let's continue."

Chu Feng led them into the meeting chamber.

The gigantic meeting chamber was arranged with semi-circular tables in a pyramidal structure. The topmost layer had two chairs arranged like thrones. The second layer had four long tables and four

rows of chairs, while the third layer had row after row of tables and chairs. Each table was engraved with the world and kingdom it corresponded to.

Zhang Lie looked at the four long tables on the second row, which were occupied with familiar faces.

By the first table sat Yun Bing and representatives of the races of the Milky Way. The second table contained the draconian sage and his representatives; the third table, Li Zongming and Dong Mingxing, as well as representatives from the Zongming kingdom; the fourth table, the Lie king, his eldest brother, and representatives from the Lie kingdom.

When those gathered saw Chu Feng lead Zhang Lie and Zhu within, everyone turned to the two of them. Yun Bing, the draconian sage, Li Zongming, and the Lie king all seemed overjoyed, while the other representatives whispered to each other.

"This looks like the man in the paintings!"

"It's the savior of the realm, Zhang Lie!"

"To think he would show up himself..."

Yun Bing, the draconian sage, Li Zongming, and the Lie king all stepped forward to welcome Zhang Lie. Yun Bing called out, "Zhang Lie, you've made it!"

The draconian sage urged, "Come, Savior, come, ruler of the realm, please take your seats!"

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "Don't call me Savior—it's too embarrassing."

Zhu cocked her head curiously at everyone. "Why are you all gathered here? Don't you need to manage your own kingdoms?"

The draconian sage replied, "All of us naturally have to be here to witness such a historic moment as the founding of the high council."

Yun Bing added, "Getting everyone on board took us significant time and effort."

Yun Bing, the draconian sage, Li Zongming, and the Lie king led Zhang Lie all the way to the top of the pyramidal semi-circular structure. Zhang Lie frowned. "Isn't there something wrong with this arrangement?"

"Of course not."

Zhang Lie clutched his face. "It's reasonable for Zhu to be on this level as the ruler of the realm, but what am I doing here?"

Li Zongming replied, "We specifically arranged this for you."

Yun Bing emphasized, "Zhang Lie, you saved the whole of the third realm, and all four kingdoms that lead the high council have a deep relationship with you. It wouldn't be wrong to claim that all four kingdoms have only developed to this extent because of you, and the high council is based on the structure you came up with."

The draconian sage emphasized, "Without you, Zhang Lie, there wouldn't be our four kingdoms. Without you, there wouldn't be this high council. You must take this seat."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "It's too lofty for the likes of me. I'd rather sit with the Zenith Alliance."

Zhu replied, "If you don't come up here, Zhang Lie, I won't sit here either. I insist on being by your side!"

Yun Bing chuckled wryly. "Zhang Lie, you're making things very difficult for me..."

The draconian sage asked, "What do you think others would say if they saw you, the savior of the realm, seated with the members of the Zenith Alliance?"

Li Zongming nodded. "We might know why you're doing this, but what about everyone else?"

Zhang Lie would basically be announcing his allegiance with the Zenith Alliance;

it would seem as though they had suddenly gained a weapon of mass destruction.

The Lie king said what they were all thinking. "The Zenith Alliance would instantly dominate over our other three factions."

The draconian sage urged, "Zhang Lie, be more mindful of your actions here. Your status is beyond ours; you cannot sit with us, and we cannot sit with you. Wherever you sit, your actions will affect the balance of the entire council."

Zhang Lie sighed and trudged forward toward one of the two seats at the top of the pyramidal structure. Zhu followed him up and sat by his side, smiling at him as she did so.

Zhang Lie's gaze swept over the gathered representatives, who looked at him with awe.

He had reached heights that no one else could emulate, and his every action would affect the third realm. It was difficult for the third realm to contain him, both physically and metaphorically.

He could only hope that the research on Potion #5 would progress quickly. Once he obtained sufficient disaster limit fragments, he would ascend to the fourth realm.

If he forcibly remained in the third realm, he would only affect its future development.

Chapter 1280: The High Council

As Zhang Lie and Zhu sat on the highest level of seats in the council chamber and the last few straggling representatives wandered in, Yun Bing glanced at the time.

She began, "Sage, Zongming King, Lie King, I think it's about time we begin."

The draconian sage raised his head. "Zhang Lie, Zhu, should the meeting begin now?"

Zhang Lie waved a hand casually. "Let's start. Don't mind our presence."

Yun Bing motioned to one of the guards, who locked the door.

The draconian sage asked, "Who shall have the honors?"

Li Zongming suggested, "Zhang Lie!"

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "No, no, do as you will. I'm just here to observe, not to participate. Let Zhu do it, as the ruler of the realm."

Zhu stood up. "I hereby convene the first meeting of the high council of the unified world of the third realm!"

Yun Bing patted her clothes as she stood. "The three thousand worlds have always been at conflict with each other, but after the unification of the worlds, our four kingdoms, the Zenith Alliance, the draconian kingdom, the Zongming kingdom, and the Lie kingdom have entered into a series of serious discussions. We believe that this unified world cannot be allowed to devolve into a state of anarchy and contention between different kingdoms, that we must learn to cooperate and live in harmony."

The draconian sage continued, "For the proper development of the unified world, we've followed the plans laid out by Zhang Lie to effect the creation of a high council that will rule over the world together."

Li Zongming emphasized, "The unified world will not be a blank slate; rather, together, we will impose law and order."

Yun Bing took over. "Despite our differences, let us aim for unity. These are words passed down from older generations of my people, but I think they apply very well here. We might all come from different worlds, but the moment the three thousand worlds united, so have we.

"We all possess similarities and differences. We think differently, and our cultures are unique to us all—but I'm sure none of us want a world of war and strife." The Lie king stood up. "It is precisely because we are all distinct that we can thrive in this patchwork world; it is precisely because we are all distinct that we can become companions."

The draconian sage stood side by side with the Lie king. "It is precisely because our thoughts and minds are different that we can work together to advance. Differences might divide us, but our dream of a shared future unites us. We all want our races to grow stronger, our citizens to lead happier and more fulfilling lives."

Yun Bing urged, "No man can be an island, entire of itself."

Li Zongming concluded, "In order to work toward these lofty goals, to spur the development of the three thousand worlds, we hereby establish the high council of the unified world."

The representatives all applauded in a thunderous wave of noise.

Yun Bing said, "The establishment of this high council isn't to police the unified world, but rather to effect change and settle disputes, to strengthen us all. World peace will allow humans to become dragons."

The draconian sage blinked in surprise. "What?"

The representatives all seemed perplexed as well.

Without a trace of awkwardness, Yun Bing continued, "Not to become draconians, but rather to grow stronger and more exceptional, to become like Zhang Lie."

The representatives, now understanding what she meant, all clapped.

Yun Bing continued, "We have followed Mr. Zhang's suggestion regarding the high council rather closely, though we have made some changes of our own. Joining this council means that you recognize your kingdom as sovereign territory, and you cede control over the "world" at large."

One representative raised a hand. "What restrictions exist as a result?"

What do we give up by going from a world to a kingdom?"

The draconian sage replied, "There is no distinction and no other restrictions but in name alone. All worlds who recognize their kingdoms as sovereign territory and are willing to submit to the judgment of the high council will have a seat with us."

Yun Bing asked, "Does anyone object to the formation of the high council?"

No one dared protest against the combined might of the Zenith Alliance, the draconian kingdom, the Zongming kingdom, and the Lie kingdom.

The draconian kingdom, Zongming kingdom, and Lie kingdom had all been superior worlds, and they had absorbed quite a few of their nearby neighbors after the unification. They had become kingdoms of superior might and land, and the other kingdoms were afraid of incurring their wrath.

Everyone did want peace and stable development, after all.

To the other worlds, the presence of the high council would curb any hostilities from the superior kingdoms.

What they didn't realize was that the high council was simply a means by which the four superior kingdoms could govern over the entire world.

The reason the three other superior kingdoms had agreed to the plan was because this was Zhang Lie's proposal, and because of what Yun Bing had stated.

The three superior kingdoms couldn't take over the entire world; if they tried to do so and expanded rapidly, the smaller worlds would rapidly band together against them. No one wanted to see a hegemon, and none but the members of Team Zenith could incite hegemony.

However, the members of Team Zenith weren't interested in doing so; they would have to leave the third realm sooner or later, and trying to govern over a large territory in this world in which signals and communication hadn't been developed was very difficult.

It would expend great deals of manpower, resources, wealth, and energy—and even so, that control might not last more than a generation.

In order to govern the various kingdoms, the best choice was to let them govern themselves.

This was the underlying context that led the three former superior kings and the Zenith Alliance to agree to the formation of the high council.

Yun Bing began to explain the division of power among the council.

"All kingdoms possessing a seat on the council will have a right to speak and vote in matters of global concern. There will additionally be an upper chamber consisting of four permanent and four impermanent seats. Impermanent representatives may propose legislation; the four permanent representatives of the Zenith Alliance, the draconian kingdom, the Zongming kingdom, and the Lie kingdom, will each have one veto vote, while the ruler of the realm and leader of the high council will have ultimate veto power."

The high council was patterned off the united world federation of the Milky Way.

Yun Bing retrieved a stack of booklets from her dimensional storage, which the draconian sage sent flying toward each representative.

"The specific rules and regulations have been printed in each booklet. Please read them carefully and study the system that has been put in place."

One representative seemed confused. "What do you mean by veto power and ultimate veto power?"