

## U. Warlord 1281

### Chapter 1281: The High Council's Representatives

With the Zenith Alliance, the draconian kingdom, the Zongming kingdom, and the Lie kingdom's machinations, the kingdoms who would first be granted impermanent seats in the upper chamber were quickly chosen.

Yun Bing smiled wryly. "I used to hate these political games of trying to make use of loopholes and rules to lie to others or to decide something in secret as part of a cabal—and yet I've ended up doing the exact same thing."

Zhang Lie replied, "Everyone ends up that way. I used to hate the strongest hunters who could easily overwhelm the world and lord over the entire world, but I had no choice but to become whom I once detested."

Yun Bing scowled. "Stop flexing."

The draconian sage murmured, "These impermanent kingdoms possess more power than most, but just like us permanent ones, they bear more responsibilities as well."

Li Zongming explained, "In addition to the important role of preserving the stability of the unified world and ensuring its advancement and development, they'll have to pay dues annually."

Yun Bing expanded, "Of course, everyone does; it's just a matter of how much."

The draconian sage jumped in. "And if they don't have money, they can provide resources instead."

A representative spoke up. "But our coins and currency don't match!"

"That'll be a matter for later."

The representatives were all starting to grumble. They hadn't realized they had to pay any dues!

Another representative asked, "What obligations do we have? Ensuring the stability of the world and promoting its development are far too general aims to be meaningful."

Yun Bing replied calmly, "We haven't ironed out the specifics yet. For the moment, for example, if some pirates or bandits emerge from the unified world, the impermanent representatives will have to report the matter to the high council, and we would vote on whether or not to dispatch troops. The troops would come from the permanent and impermanent kingdoms, and the cost from the council fees."

The representatives understood what they were paying for now—protection.

The high council was an organization whose goal was to stabilize the world, but that security would come at a cost. If your kingdom didn't pay a protection fee and was suffering from a bandit incursion, the council certainly wasn't going to dispatch any troops to help stabilize the region.

Providing these forces would be beneficial to the permanent kingdoms, as well. Not only could these kingdoms improve their control and prestige over the unified world, they would be able to train their troops.

In fact, the entire unified world would pay for the troops' training.

Yun Bing continued, "Next, the permanent and impermanent kingdoms will each present topics of discussion for the council."

Li Zongming stood up with a sheaf of documents he had prepared in advance. "As the representative of the Zongming kingdom, I will present the first topic of discussion."

All the representatives turned toward Li Zongming, toward the first topic brought to the attention of the high council of the third realm.

Zhang Lie was also very curious just what Li Zongming was about to bring up.

"The former third realm faced a terrible crisis."

Everyone subconsciously turned to look at Zhang Lie and Zhu, still seated at the top of the pyramidal structure of the council chamber.

That crisis was, of course, none other than the imminent collapse of the world.

Li Zongming continued, "We faced an unbelievably strong foe, so strong that even I only know of his name, without ever having met him."

The representatives smiled.

Li Zongming continued, "This existence was known as the death spirit king, an entity that dared to dream of devouring the entire realm, an ambitious madman. Countless worlds suffered at his hands."

Zhang Lie didn't quite understand why Li Zongming was bringing up the death spirit king now.

Li Zongming continued, "In order to deal with this death spirit king, all the superior worlds worked together to summon the fighters and warriors of the three thousand worlds. We fought in a historic battle of epic proportions against the death spirit king, and eventually vanquished him with the hard work of fighters all across the realm. Our savior slew him, but what about the countless fighters who perished?"

The atmosphere in the council chamber turned heavier.

Many of the kingdoms represented here had suffered at the hands of the superior worlds of antiquity.

When the war against the death spirit king reached peak intensity, the various worlds were forced to dispatch their fighters and warriors to combat the growing threat.

Some of those fighters returned, whereas others never would.

Li Zongming continued, "We paid a heavy price for our victory. Large numbers of fighters and heroes died on the battlefield, their corpses left unclaimed. Despite the fact that we were unable to preserve their bodies, we have the moral imperative to provide safe harbor for their souls, to ensure that they can remain with us forever in spirit."

Upon hearing Li Zongming's words, the representatives' perception of the high council changed.

They were starting to suspect that the high council was a game manipulated by the four superior kingdoms. From a barebones perspective, that was certainly the case, but Li Zongming's topic of

discussion had been carefully considered. It was selfless and noble, and was a worthwhile topic to discuss by any standards.

It concerned no profit, no conflicts of interest, and simultaneously was a topic of immediate and palpable interest to the entire world.

"At the heart of the world, I wish to erect a cenotaph to commemorate the dead who perished in service to our realm."

Even Zhang Lie had to give Li Zongming a thumbs up at that.

Li Zongming's topic of discussion was more than worthy of being the historical first to pass through the unified world's high council.

Li Zongming continued, "When Zhang Lie and I participated in the superior kings' meeting, we had proposed a similar idea."

The representatives recalled the oil painting they had seen while walking through the corridor. So that was the story behind it!

Li Zongming sighed. "Unfortunately, the superior kings of antiquity weren't too enthused by the idea. They debated it vigorously, and we were ultimately able to convince them of its importance. However, the kings then went back on their word and launched direct attacks on the Zongming world, the scaleman world, and the draconian worlds. As a result, the cenotaph never came to fruition."

Zhang Lie sighed in exasperation. "Too much happened afterwards."

Li Zongming continued, "After the superior worlds perished, we tabled the matter to deal with the other circumstances that had arisen, but I have never forgotten that promise. Today, in the historic first meeting of the high council of the unified world, I make that proposal once more."

Zhu raised her voice. "We vote now."

Yun Bing shouted, "Each table has a flag, one face of which is red, and the other of which is white. If you agree to the motion, hold up the red face. If you oppose, hold up the white face. If you abstain, do not raise the flag. You have one minute to make your decision."

Within thirty seconds, the entire council chamber was a sea of red.

The first motion of the high council of the unified world had passed unanimously.

#### Chapter 1282: Construction of Cenotaphs

The representatives deliberated among themselves and concluded that the cost of the cenotaph would be footed by the high council.

After the success of the first motion, the representatives steadily grew more enthused in the governance of the high council.

The draconian sage then took the stage. "The second topic of discussion is likewise a cenotaph for the dead of war."

Zhang Lie called out jokingly, "Is this a high council or a funeral hall?"

The representatives began to laugh.

The draconian sage continued, "I move to commemorate the fighters and warriors who perished during the crisis of the third realm."

The representatives' cheerful laughter cut off abruptly.

At first, many worlds couldn't bring themselves to believe the notion that the realm could suddenly implode on itself. They tried to resist the trained troops of the four superior worlds and genetic hunters, giving rise to an apocalyptic war, one that was completely meaningless.

The reason that the gathered representatives didn't oppose the fact that the four superior kingdoms each held the power of veto wasn't solely because of their strength, but also because they were the kingdoms responsible for saving the realm in the first place—as well as butchers that slaughtered many of the fighters of each world.

If the war against the death spirits was a crusade for peace and justice, the apocalyptic war was a mess, a farce.

"It was an apocalyptic war that we undertook in order to save the failing realm, forcibly uniting the worlds and restoring the realm. The fighters and warriors that sacrificed themselves in battle are all heroes that did their part in saving the world, and they deserve the title of savior."

The representatives had been touched and excited by Li Zongming's proposal; they now seemed guilty and ashamed by the draconian sage's.

Their respective kings had almost brought disaster down on them all in hopes of retaining what little power they possessed.

In a manner of speaking, the fighters that had perished in battle were suffering the consequences of certain kings' idiocy.

"We vote now. If you agree to the motion, hold up the red face of the flag. If you oppose, hold up the white face. If you abstain, do not raise the flag. You have one minute to make your decision."

Some held up the red face, others the white face, and even more abstained.

Despite knowing that they were at fault, they refused to admit it.

The construction of this cenotaph would be akin to an admission of guilt, of the wrongdoing and foolishness that had led to this unnecessary loss of life.

Because of their foolishness, the realm had almost been destroyed.

They believed that there was no need to share their mistakes, to let others learn from their errors in judgment, and hence that no admission of guilt was necessary.

Yun Bing counted the votes. "Because over fifty percent of the votes are in abstention, we will vote again in ten minutes."

Zhang Lie's face revealed displeasure.

He still remembered that foolish war, incited by those worlds who believed that they were weak after having just fended off the superior worlds of antiquity.

Ten minutes passed in the blink of an eye. The representatives didn't speak much to each other; cold sweat beaded on their foreheads, and their palms were damp and clammy.

"We begin the second round of voting. If you agree to the motion, hold up the red face of the flag. If you oppose, hold up the white face. If you abstain, do not raise the flag. You have one minute to make your decision."

The representatives hesitantly lifted the flags in their hands, but this time, more held up the white face.

Zhang Lie huffed in anger, slamming his arms down on his armrests. A formless aura formed and spread around him, causing the representatives to feel as though a huge mountain were pressing down on their bodies, preventing them from lifting their heads or even to pant loudly.

Zhu, understanding Zhang Lie's unspoken words, called out, "I veto the result of this vote."

Yun Bing announced, "Because the ruler of the realm has announced a veto, we will vote again in ten minutes."

Li Zongming murmured, "I haven't read the booklet completely. Can a veto be used in this fashion?"

Yun Bing shrugged. "We may only do so after a motion is proposed but before the vote is counted, but the ruler of the realm's veto supersedes all of ours."

The draconian sage nodded. "She stands above us all, after all."

Zhang Lie murmured, "When we first sought to prevent the realm from collapsing, there were a few arrogant fools that delayed the process tremendously. Have they not yet learned from their mistakes? Zhu, what do you think?"

Zhu smiled. "You think so too, Zhang Lie?"

Some of the representatives began quaking, their faces pale.

"Because of those people wasting precious time, I had to expend even more resources. Because of their foolishness, the realm was almost destroyed. I hadn't wanted to press the matter, but now I think I will do so. Zhu, when this meeting is over, shall we pay a visit to them all?"

Upon hearing Zhang Lie's words, the stricken representatives were quivering all over, and some had even fallen from their chairs.

Zhu asked, "Where to first, Zhang Lie?"

"Let me think..."

Some representatives, their fingers white with fear and shock, raised the red face of their flags with quivering hands. In fear, others did the same.

Yun Bing coughed dryly. "The vote has yet to be tallied. Please do not announce your vote in advance."

The representatives shook their heads, calmed down, and dropped their flags.

"I apologize, truly. I—I simply wanted to express my position, to inform our savior that I have repented for my actions, that I am deeply in approval of the construction of this cenotaph!"

Most of the representatives present were well aware of Zhang Lie's strength. Destroying a kingdom would be as easy as exhaling to them, let alone with Zhu by his side.

She was the ruler of the realm, who could control the entirety of the unified world! Who could stand against them?

Zhang Lie smiled. "I wasn't the one who made this motion. You should be speaking to the draconian sage."

"Yes, Savior, you're absolutely right!" the representative shouted, quaking with fear. "I fully approve of the draconian sage's motion."

Zhang Lie didn't really care about the cenotaph; he was simply irked by the behavior of some people. If not for their arrogance and foolishness, the third realm would have been saved much more quickly.

#### Chapter 1283: Potion #5

Without the interference of the foolish kings of the world, the unification of the realm and resolution of the crisis would have happened far more smoothly, rather than at the last minute.

"We begin the third round of voting. If you agree to the motion, hold up the red face of the flag. If you oppose, hold up the white face. If you abstain, do not raise the flag. You have one minute to make your decision."

Zhang Lie's pressure naturally decided the outcome of the voting.

The council meeting ended very quickly afterwards. Yun Bing and the Lie king both presented their own resolutions, but after what happened with Zhang Lie, the resolutions passed smoothly. The kingdoms who had impermanent seats on the high council likewise made proposals, but there was nothing exceptional or groundbreaking.

After the meeting, Zhang Lie and Zhu both returned to the Yeluo chieftain's laboratory.

With research from the entirety of the Milky Way, the Yeluo chieftain and Zhang Lie's progress was exceptionally rapid. Zhu, the ruler of the realm herself, was entirely focused on helping Zhang Lie with this task. She identified, sought out, and brought back ingredients, and was even able to nurture the growth of rare or special herbs by invoking the world's authority.

Even so, the process was an arduous one, and Zhang Lie and the Yeluo chieftain suffered many failures. It was fortunate that the unified world's blessing had led to the growth of so many herbs and plants, along with Zhu's authority. Otherwise, the research would have progressed at a much slower pace. Zhang Lie was certain that, had the three thousand worlds not been unified, Potion #5 would never have been researched.

In the laboratory was a vial of potion that glowed with inner light. Zhang Lie and the Yeluo chieftain looked at each other, then at the potion, expectantly.

The liquid was like a burning nebula, and it seemed as though it harbored an entire galaxy.

The Yeluo chieftain announced, "Once we add a superior world's energy into the potion, it'll be complete."

Zhang Lie retrieved the precious crystal of superior world's energy that he had been saving for such an occasion.

This crystal was no mere source of superior world's energy; its provenance was unusual.

This was what Zhang Lie had received as the spoils of war, which he had fought the other superior kings of antiquity to receive. The world's energy within was beyond the level of a superior world, and even the wealthy superior kings had salivated at the sight of the crystal.

In some sense, this crystal was responsible for the subsequent conflict between the superior kings of antiquity and Zhang Lie's posse.

The Yeluo chieftain's eyes were bright with delight. "To think that a superior world's energy could be infused into potions and medicine—this is a genius idea! Only someone like you could have thought of something so novel and exceptional, Your Majesty."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes and was just about to infuse the superior world's energy into the potion when Zhu suddenly said, "Why don't you let me do it, Zhang Lie? I have access to the unified world's energy, and it's of a far higher quality than that crystal you possess."

The crystal of superior world's energy was impressive, and it was of higher quality than even a standard superior world's energy, but even it paled in comparison with the unified world's energy.

The Yeluo chieftain said, "Although we've adjusted the recipe and put in the best ingredients we could find in the third realm, I don't know if the base will be able to support such high-quality energy..."

The best ingredients weren't necessarily the most optimal.

Rather, it was important to strike a balance between dosage and potency. If that equilibrium were broken, even a divine panacea could transform into the most lethal poison.

Zhu asked, "It's a higher-quality version of the same type of energy! Wouldn't that make the effects more potent?"

Zhang Lie replied, "We may as well try both. We made additional vials to test this step of the procedure, after all.

The moment Zhang Lie infused his crystal into the potion, a chemical reaction happened. The glowing liquid suddenly shifted hue and intensity, like a rapidly burning galaxy. After changing colors a few times, it turned into a chaotic rainbow mess.

Zhang Lie glanced at Potion #5 fervently.

He had anticipated that it would have taken half a year, or even a whole year, to finish producing a vial of Potion #5, but with the Yeluo chieftain and Zhu's help, it had only taken three months.

After consuming Potion #5, Zhang Lie would become even stronger than before.

As Zhu infused the unified world's energy into her own vial, the chemical reaction was even more intense than with Zhang Lie's vial.

Light flared; the entire vial of potion was frothing, as though it might explode at any moment. Zhu hurriedly isolated the vial in space to prevent the resulting explosion from destroying the laboratory.

With a huge chain reaction, the vial of potion suddenly exploded, shocking all three people present. A sonic boom echoed throughout the laboratory.

The Yeluo chieftain crawled up from the ground. "As I said, the most important thing is balance."

Zhu's barriers were full of cracks, and all that energy had almost broken through the protective isolation.

Zhang Lie's face turned serious. "Look, Chieftain."

"What's the matter?"

Zhu stripped away the protective barriers. After the explosion had occurred, the potion had transformed into a pool of liquid glowing with rainbow light and floating in midair, like a nascent planet.

The Yeluo chieftain looked disturbed. "I've never seen the likes of such a potion."

He had spent half his life studying plants, herbs, and potions, and he had brewed over ten thousand potions in his lifetime, hundreds of which were novel. He had never seen anything close to the likes of... this.

"Is this still a potion?"

Zhang Lie asked, "Shall we test it?"

The Yeluo chieftain asked, "Who would be our test subject?"

"Who else but me?"

No one else would be suitable or compatible with the potion, after all.

The Yeluo chieftain asked, "Are you trying to kill yourself? Have you been dumped?"

Zhang Lie suddenly thundered, "If you keep joking around like that, I might just start using you as a punching bag!"

The Yeluo chieftain hurriedly explained himself. "Your Majesty, I'm simply worried about your body. I've never seen the likes of this potion before. Who knows what will happen if you drink it?"

Zhang Lie asked, "Is this Potion #5?"

The Yeluo chieftain replied, "It's difficult to say without testing it. From the color and texture of the liquid, it's very similar to what we would expect, though with another layer of special effects."

Zhang Lie asked, "Is this potion at least some sort of off-shoot of Potion #5?"

"Indubitably, Your Majesty."

Even the Yeluo chieftain couldn't be certain of what would happen after infusing the unified world's energy into Potion #5, and whether it had transformed into a lethal poison. On instinct, he felt that the potent medicinal energy contained within the potion might as well have been lethal poison.

"If it truly is Potion #5, then what do we have to worry about?"

The Yeluo chieftain seemed skeptical. "No one knows what might happen if you drink it. You might even explode, Your Majesty!"

"That's why I'd like to try it and see."

#### Chapter 1284: Eruption of Energy

The Yeluo chieftain urged, "After the inclusion of the unified world's energy, no one knows how the potency of the potion has changed. The equilibrium between the ingredients might have been destroyed, and it's possible that consuming the potion will put you in life-threatening danger!"

"But the potency of the potion has certainly increased, yes?"

The Yeluo chieftain nodded. "But this transformation is beyond our expectations, and I'm not fully familiar with the mechanism of infusing a world's energy into these potions. I can't predict what will happen."

"Let's test it, then."

Zhang Lie reached into Zhu's protective barrier, attempting to capture the sphere of liquid potion that lay within.

However, the potion seemed to have developed a rudimentary intelligence of its own. It tried to dodge Zhang Lie's palm, but Zhu's barriers had enclosed it in such a small space that Zhang Lie caught it instantly. Even so, the Yeluo chieftain tugged on his hand.

"Your Majesty, please, wait! It's far too dangerous. You might die!"

"Don't worry. I've a sturdy constitution, one that no one else in the third realm can match."

The Yeluo chieftain confirmed once more, "Are you sure?"

Zhang Lie nodded. "If there's a more potent potion, I certainly intend to choose it."

After witnessing what had happened when the members of Team Zenith consumed Potion #4, Zhang Lie realized that higher-quality Potions of the same kind could grant additional bonuses, as if they had been enchanted.

Zhang Lie forced himself to calm down as he brought the potion up to his mouth—but he didn't swallow it.

Zhu asked, "What's the matter?"

"Changed your mind?" the Yeluo chieftain asked.

Zhang Lie replied, "The last time, when I consumed Potion #4, the second realm was unable to withstand the energy I gave off and forced me to ascend. I think I should bid my farewells to everyone right now.

Zhu smiled. "Don't worry, Zhang Lie. I'm around to help you."

Zhang Lie requested, "At least send me to somewhere isolated, please. I'm worried that the shockwaves will level the newly constructed draconian kingdom.

Zhu teleported Zhang Lie to somewhere isolated, then sealed the space around him just like she had done when Zhang Lie was testing the members of Team Zenith. After doing all this, she wrapped the sealed space up in barrier after barrier. Once the preparations were complete, Zhang Lie swallowed the potion in one go.

As the potion entered his body, it began to burn as though he were about to go supernova. Bright light radiated from his skin as potent medicinal power roamed all over his body, which swelled like a balloon.

Zhu, witnessing the situation from the outside, couldn't help but turn nervous.

"He'll be fine, won't he?"

The Yeluo chieftain frowned. "He's too stubborn for his own good. The unknown transmutation of the potion—who knows what will happen?"

Zhang Lie breathed in the potion's energy and circulated it through his body, as though burying seeds deep within the earth and watching them sprout with life.

He sat cross-legged in that pocket dimension, deep in meditation, his body forging itself anew with every breath.

The potion's energy continuously battered his body, pounding it with the force of stars exploding. Even his reinforced bones began to creak and crack.

Any ordinary hunter's body would have exploded, but Zhang Lie was different. His body had been reforged over and over again, and he had maxed out all his genes from the beginning.

Zhang Lie's statement that his body was the strongest among any member of the third realm was no joke; it was stronger than even any inorganic material he had encountered.

His immense foundation gave him the confidence to weather even the worst of the potion's effects as energy exploded all over his body.

Zhang Lie's face took on the color of a boiled prawn and his blood began to froth and boil.

Multicolored light erupted from all his orifices, making him shine like a gemstone.

This immense, almost unbearable pain made Zhang Lie recall his experience absorbing disaster gene fragments in the first realm, of modifying his own genetic code.

His body had been forged and reforged amidst blinding pain; the more he bore, the stronger he would become.

The medicinal strength of the potion was breaking through the limits of his genes once and again.

However, it was far stronger than Zhang Lie himself had anticipated.

He felt as though a hundred suns were exploding within his body, that his blood was turning to lava. His body radiated an incredible quantity of light.

Rainbow mists surrounding Zhang Lie spun, burned, puffed up, and hissed. The mists moved like ribbons fluttering in the sky, dyed with all the colors of the rainbow. They spun around Zhang Lie

like skeins of thread, soft as silk, in an explosion of color that was at once captivating and bewitching, as though all of life's mysteries could be captured in that glowing, resplendent light.

Zhang Lie circulated his [Ninecarp Transformation]. With his body filled with energy, each revolution of the framework took mere moments—Zhang Lie seemed to experience ten thousand lifetimes in a single moment, as though he were seeing himself in parallel worlds.

In one world, he became the king of chaos' subordinate and conquered the fourth realm.

In another, he didn't manage to save the third realm in time. In the vast expanse of chaos, he slowly collected fragments of the world, hoping to restore his third-realm body.

In yet another, Li Qianlin was killed by the king of the west in a sneak attack, and he turned into a crazed asura dedicated to slaughter...

Countless Zhang Lies of parallel universes manifested as one, then combined into one body.

Zhang Lie's body glowed; he seemed to be having an out-of-body experience.

Having passed through countless universes without losing himself in any one, Zhang Lie finally came to understand his id, his ego—to glean understanding and experience from all the worlds that he had gone through in other lives, just like when Sun Xiaowu used his Echo of Origins.

However, this transformation went beyond even that. The goal was to marshal the strength of a warlord with one's own body, to walk through life's evolution.

With blood as the sea, bones as pillars, the soul as the sky, the flesh as the ground, arteries, veins, and capillaries as rivers and seas and waterways, and genetic energy as the aether that filled the world...

An indeterminate amount of time passed, but Zhang Lie remained perfectly in harmony with his environment the entire time. Without anyone to disturb him, without any sudden fluctuations to his emotions, he gradually began to smile, a reflection of his heart and inner being.

Chapter 1285: The World's Blessing

Light began to shine from his body. He was surrounded by a glowing ball of light, and the skin beneath that was revealed was a pearlescent white, supple and smooth.

A spiritual glow suffused him. His bones cracked as they became even stronger and sturdier, taking on a metallic luster. A membrane of crystalline light formed over their surface, strengthening them, improving their ductility and hardness. His body was being reforged from the inside out and the outside in, as though becoming that of a deity.

Muscle, flesh, skin, and bone merged together in a flash of blinding light, which coalesced into a skin-like membrane that gave Zhang Lie a holy, immaculate appearance.

He looked like a man from the heavens above, one untouched and unsullied by mortal contact.

Membranes of diaphanous light brimmed with vitality.

In that transcendent state, time passed in the blink of an eye. He spent a week in meditation, freed of worry, freed of strife, freed of turmoil and dissonance. There he found an intrinsic joy.

Zhang Lie breathed out with a puff of light. The air that was sucked into his body took on the shape of dragons. He breathed with a particular rhythm, neither quick nor slow, ever following the pulse of the world.

The air that Zhang Lie inhaled took on the form of dragons. As he exhaled, those dragons coiled around his body and transformed into genetic energy. Behind Zhang Lie appeared swimming pale blue fish, an ink-black serpent, a resplendent golden tiger, a heavysset dragonturtle, a flaming hed lion, and an electrified wymm.

These unusual manifestations and concentrated aura of genetic energy surrounding Zhang Lie made him seem mysterious indeed. The transformation of his physical body fused his flesh, organs, and bones together, combining them into a single entity.

After half a month passed by, Zhang Lie slowly opened his eyes. His pupils were bright and filled with vital energy, with a spiritual glow that made him look like a supernatural entity.

Spirituality illuminated him from within and without. He sat cross-legged like a deity, with a luminous haze surrounding him and seeping into his body.

The remaining dregs of potion evaporated in the sunlight and vanished, leaving behind the essence of divinity, as though an entire nebula had merged with Zhang Lie's body and was converted into even more astounding strength.

Zhang Lie howled, causing heaven and earth to quake. The barriers that Zhu had woven cracked like eggshells, then burst apart in a wave of energy that surged throughout the unified world.

A storm suddenly befell the world, so strong the heavens themselves quaked. Everyone turned subconsciously to Zhang Lie, only to find radiant light filling the skies and all sorts of celestial phenomena in effect.

In the draconian kingdom's palace, the draconian sage had been looking through some documents. He glanced in the direction of the disturbance and then squinted. Then, he sighed. "Zhang Lie, once again..."

In the Zongming kingdom, Li Zongming took one glance before ascribing the problem to Zhang Lie. "No one else could cause such a fuss."

The officials of the Lie kingdom were all shocked by the sudden quake. The former crown prince cried out, "What's going on?!"

The Lie king smiled and raised a hand. "Everyone, there's no need to worry. It must be the grandmaster at work. No one else could cause such a scene, not even the ruler of the realm herself."

The former crown prince sighed in relief. "The grandmaster? That's alright, then. Let's continue with our session of court, then."

One official seemed particularly flummoxed. "Your Majesty, do we need to be concerned by the grandmaster's actions? They're causing the entire world to quake..."

"If it affects the Lie kingdom, it might be somewhat problematic."

"I think we had better pay attention."

The Lie king rolled his eyes. "We'd die of overwork if we had to pay attention to everything that Master did. I don't intend on doing anything so taxing; you're all welcome to do so if you'd like."

The officials who had spoken hurriedly shut up.

The members of Team Zenith, sensing the overwhelming light, realized that it had to be Zhang Lie at once.

They glanced toward Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen, who were still training hard. Sun Mengmeng shouted, "The two of you had better work hard! Zhang Lie will be on his way here at any moment."

Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen did as they were told.

Li Qianlin stood right outside her door, staring at the colored lights filling the air in a daze. It felt that even the will of the world was congratulating Zhang Lie for his advancement.

She was happy for his success, but couldn't help but feel a pang of pain and desolation.

This meant that Zhang Lie was almost about to leave.

Zhang Lie had taken another great leap forward in his advancement. Runes floated beyond his body, and light radiated from him for thousands of meters. Behind Zhang Lie appeared swimming pale blue fish, an ink-black serpent, a resplendent golden tiger, a heavysset dragonturtle, a flaming red lion, and an electrified wyrm, manifestations of his [Ninecarp Transformation].

His cells and genes had morphed tremendously, and had unspooled into nebular clouds.

The structure of his new body was unlike the crystallized form of disaster-grade lifeforms, nor the galaxy-encompassing cells of those hunters with maxed monarch gene fragments. His atavistic body hadn't weakened him; rather, he seemed to be approaching the universal template from which all life was built.

His cellular structure alone differentiated him from ordinary hunters, and it wouldn't be an exaggeration to call Zhang Lie a new form of life, one which had never before appeared in the universe, a singular existence.

The metamorphosis didn't end there. The swimming pale blue fish, an ink-black serpent, a resplendent golden tiger, a heavysset dragonturtle, a flaming red lion, and an electrified wyrm, manifestations of his [Ninecarp Transformation], began to swirl around him.

The transformation to Zhang Lie's body was catalyzing the growth of his [Ninecarp Transformation]. Zhang Lie directed his remnant strength toward his framework, successfully breaking through to the next level as all his energy transformed into a huge egg.

Chapter 1286: Disaster Limit Fragments

Ripples emanated from the pale blue fish, waves of genetic energy flowing like the tide. The ink-black serpent was surrounded by corrosive genetic energy. Gold radiated from the golden tiger. Mud-yellow genetic energy rippled from the black dragonturtle, and four runic tablets manifested around it.

Arcane runes glowed with light, and the tablets trembled as light cascaded forth.

The runic text, abstruse and incomprehensible, floated out from the tablets and surrounded Zhang Lie.

The flaming red lion manifested out of crimson flames so hot they twisted air and space, melting the land. The region all around Zhang Lie turned into a sea of lava.

Roaring flames emerged from the lava like a volcanic eruption.

Lightning forked through the air, and thunder rumbled.

A storm had taken over the sky, with huge dark clouds that crackled with lightning. The lightning morphed into a serpent that roamed among the clouds.

These different types of strength all gathered together and transformed into a giant egg.

The egg boasted a sea of rippling water-attuned genetic energy, ink-black corrosive genetic energy, resilient gold-attuned genetic energy, mud-like yellow genetic energy, steam-like scarlet genetic energy, and lightning-sharp genetic energy. The disparate sources of energy each fed into the egg, causing it to grow bloated.

The egg was much like a furnace. The swimming pale blue fish, an ink-black serpent, a resplendent golden tiger, a heavysset dragonturtle, a flaming red lion, and an electrified wyrm all melded together within the egg, allowing for a further breakthrough.

The energies clashed with each other in the tightly confined space, causing the egg to crack. With a triumphant shriek, a tornado emerged from the egg, blowing away the storm clouds.

The tornado unfurled its wings and revealed itself to be a phoenix composed of storm clouds. This was the seventh form of Ninecarp Transformation—the phoenix!

The medicinal energy encapsulated within Potion #5 had helped Zhang Lie reach the seventh stage of his framework, bringing him to a whole new level of strength. Radiant light surrounded him, as though his body were covered with a layer of world's energy.

It felt as though he had gained a new sense, something he could yet barely sense, in addition to an overwhelming increase in his strength.

In addition to his new Seventh Form, he seemed to be able to pry at the rules of the third realm, and it became far simpler to gain insights about space and time. It was as though he had become a king of the realm, possessing a certain level of authority over the world itself. He thought for a moment and quickly identified the cause.

Potion #5 surely didn't have such an effect; it was all due to Zhu's infusion of the unified world's energy, just like how, when he used xuluo ribs to concoct Potion #4, the members of Team Zenith gleaned insight into karma.

He hadn't received any such insight upon consuming Potion #4 himself; it was clear that the additional benefit was due to upgrading the recipe in some form.

Zhang Lie: a disaster-grade lifeform

Techniques: Rippling Walk (pinnacle), Three-Wave Crescendo (pinnacle), Calm Waters (pinnacle), Fists of the Silent Sea (pinnacle), The Boundless Blade (pinnacle), Eclipse (pinnacle), Syzygy (pinnacle), Ninesoul Dragonblade (pinnacle), Blade of the Heavens (pinnacle)

Genes: Basic, 160; Mutated, 150; Superior, 150; Peak, 150; Disaster, 100; Monarch, 100; Emperor, 5

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

Now that he had unlocked his disaster limit fragments, he would have to fill them up to their capacity once again.

He had prepared for this in advance. From his dimensional storage, he took out a few disaster-grade cores, then absorbed them completely, maxing out his disaster gene fragments.

His body glowed with divine light, and his blood seemed to rumble. His organs gave off light as a rosy sheen appeared over his body. Ripple after ripple emanated from him. His bones cracked and popped; his blood and flesh vibrated.

His body had grown even stronger than before, and the runes of the Keys of the Elder Gods appeared once more.

Zhang Lie opened his eyes. Strands of black hair floated around him. His eyes were like lightning, as though he were a martial god who had descended from the heavens.

He raised a hand and pressed at the void itself.

With a sudden shout, as runes flared all over his body, his bones creaked, and his flesh trembled, his essence transformed into a dragon that soared into the air.

The radiance around him intensified.

Divine light speared through the heavens, and all sorts of seeds and plants began to sprout up around him. Parched trees, withered vines—all were rejuvenated and granted new life.

The citizens of the unified world suddenly felt their aches and ailments leave them. Vitality returned to their bodies.

Even the elderly found their faces flushing red, energy suffusing them, as though they had suddenly grown a few years younger. Incredible energy surged toward his body, lighting it up with countless runes, realizing an astonishing baptism.

At that moment, heaven and earth seemed to go silent. The world stopped revolving on its axis, and everything was still. He felt as though he had returned to a primordial era far into the past, to the creation of the universe itself.

As his mind resonated with the realm, Zhang Lie felt as though he was witnessing the creation of the dimensional world itself. He could faintly see a few black figures who seemed to harbor mastery over creation.

How life panned out, the essence of all things—Zhang Lie saw the Big Bang, the evolution of the universe, the birth of new worlds, the formation of supernovae...

Chapter 1287: Time for Farewell

Zhang Lie's vision wasn't particularly clarified, but even a blurred rendition was shocking enough. He felt as though he could see how heaven and earth had been cleft from each other, how the dimensional world had been constructed by the arcane and remarkable manipulation of a few black figures.

His soul, witnessing the core of these mysteries, widened without end.

Chaos ebbed and flowed. Particles of light transformed into being after being, and the mountain of spiritual fragments nurtured a vast population of spirits after countless years.

The being who had created the dimensional world, sensing the disturbance, glanced at Zhang Lie from across time and space.

Zhang Lie felt his mind being assailed in a fashion he had never experienced to date, as though his brain were about to burst. He immediately withdrew from his ascended state of mind and returned to the present.

The moment in which heaven and earth had been constructed remained in his mind, shocking his body and soul. If he closed his eyes, he would naturally return to that vision of the creation of the universe, an indelible sight that had become ingrained in his memory.

As he thought of that miraculous creation, dawn light shone all around him. His heart and soul seemed to unite with the world all around him, as though he were part of creation itself.

Zhu and the Yeluo chieftain watched on with bated breath. Even the will of the realm had noticed something amiss; the dragon scale's projection was hovering in the air.

"Open!" Zhang Lie murmured softly, but the sound of his voice carried.

Divine power emanated from him in a rainbow glow, and ripples surged endlessly forth. The world seemed to be on the verge of splitting open from within, transforming everything in sight into chaotic energy.

Zhang Lie was about to revert the world back into chaos, then remake the world anew!

However, Zhang Lie himself quickly realized that something was wrong. He stopped what he was doing at once, then undid his actions. The susurrations of energy around him transformed into dawn light that lit him up from behind, making him seem like a deity in his own right. His corporeal body, silent and motionless, nevertheless began to glow.

His spirit left his body and communed with heaven and earth, yet it formed an unbreakable resonance with his physical body.

Zhu watched open-mouthed, while the Yeluo chieftain only appreciated the special effects that were occurring. As the ruler of the realm, Zhu could see just how frightening Zhang Lie was in that one moment.

With his mind, he had commanded the world to split, to regrow, to revert to chaos, to be nurtured; the world listened. He had done something that even she, the ruler of the realm, was unable to accomplish.

This was the realm of the divine!

Nevertheless, considering that the man in front of her was Zhang Lie, Zhu's doubts and shock were instantly quelled.

Zhang Lie had always been like the sky to her, like a firmament. Even if Zhang Lie were able to reverse time and space, to revive the dead, Zhu wouldn't find it all too unusual.

Amidst the dawn light, countless stars fell, and new pinpricks of light appeared, as though lifeform after lifeform had been created.

As the pinpricks of light fell onto the ground, they scampered all over. Zhu picked up one dot of scintillating light.

The dot harbored tremendous vitality. It looked all around in panic as Zhu grabbed it, causing her immense shock. Each of these dots of light was an independent existence, with its own emotions and spirit.

Zhang Lie had just created a whole new race, the key signifier of gods and deities.

Zhang Lie shut both his eyes tightly, carefully and comprehensively sensing the changes to his body. In every drop of blood, every bone, there seemed to live a holy spirit.

His body had grown countless times stronger than before.

Potion #5 would not ordinarily have such a miraculous effect. It was only thanks to Zhu's inclusion of the unified world's energy that had allowed such a boon.

Zhang Lie: a disaster-grade lifeform

Techniques: Rippling Walk (pinnacle), Three-Wave Crescendo (pinnacle), Calm Waters (pinnacle), Fists of the Silent Sea (pinnacle), The Boundless Blade (pinnacle), Eclipse (pinnacle), Syzygy (pinnacle), Ninesoul Dragonblade (pinnacle), Blade of the Heavens (pinnacle)

Genes: Basic, 160; Mutated, 150; Superior, 150; Peak, 150; Disaster, 150; Monarch, 100; Emperor, 5

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

After filling all his gene fragments, Zhang Lie felt an overwhelming strength suffuse his body.

"[Energy has exceeded maximum threshold. Activating third-realm transferral routine.]

A familiar voice rang out in his mind.

"[Energy has exceeded maximum threshold. Activating third-realm...]

[Energy has...]

The will of the realm's announcement rang out urgently. The next moment, multicolored light wrapped around Zhang Lie like a cocoon.

The energy of the refinement process swept over his body, causing him to feel a sense of unbelievable comfort. Even so, he quickly broke out of his stupor.

"I don't intend to ascend yet."

With a punch, he broke out of the cocoon. The energy of a tsunami wafted from him.

The will of the realm manifested as a multicolored dragon scale. Zhu hurriedly stepped forward.

"Will, Zhang Lie doesn't intend to ascend yet. Can he temporarily remain in the realm?"

The dragon scale "peered" at Zhang Lie, then gave Zhang Lie an answer via Zhu.

Zhu said, "Zhang Lie, the will of the world is willing to give you one more chance on account of the fact that you took part in restoring it, and it'll allow you to stay in the third realm for another month. However, after that, no matter what, you'll have to leave."

"Thank you," Zhang Lie replied, as the scale slowly dissolved into the ether.

The will of the realm knew how strong Zhang Lie was; it couldn't push Zhang Lie into the fourth realm even with force alone. It didn't dare to provoke such an existence.

Zhu smiled. "It looks as though you've grown much stronger, Zhang Lie."

Zhang Lie clenched a fist. "More or less. I'm not sure just how I am now, myself, but I'm certain I would be able to beat the old me in just a second. In addition, I've also gained entirely new insight on the third form of Ninesoul Dragonblade, Separating Earth and Sky."

Zhu asked, "What are your future plans, Zhang Lie?"

"I'll say goodbye to everyone first."

Just as he was about to leave, Zhang Lie understood why the dragon scale had only permitted him to remain in the third realm for another month.

"So that's how it is."

Zhang Lie was far too strong for the framework of the third realm to support, and simple actions on his part were sufficient to cause tremendous damage. If he were to stay, the long-term repercussions would be no better than the crisis caused by the dimensional rift that had opened up.

Chapter 1288: Disciples' Growth

Zhang Lie had no choice but to tread lightly, to treat the world like a fragile object that could easily be destroyed. Zhu helped teleport him to the members of Team Zenith.

The members of Team Zenith had all gathered. Zhang Lie cocked his head curiously as he smiled at them. "You're all present?"

Sun Mengmeng mirrored his smile. "We were wondering what sort of mess you created this time, Captain."

"What sort of mess could I create?"

"The entire world heard and witnessed the commotion you caused."

Zhang Lie didn't deny it any longer. "I've finished preparations for my ascension, so I'm here to say farewell to all of you."

Sun Mengmeng cried out, "You're about to ascend, Captain?"

Yang Ze asked, "This quickly?"

"I've stayed in the third realm for too long, and it can't accommodate my strength any longer." Zhang Lie waved an arm casually, causing space to shatter in the vicinity.

The crowd of hunters could sense just how much strength was contained within a casual wave of his arm, and their faces turned pale.

It would take them all their strength to defend against even such a casual wave—and they might not even succeed.

Zhang Lie asked, "Where are Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen?"

"They're outside," Sun Mengmeng replied.

Zhang Lie headed outside to see Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen being trained by Fang Yi.

He launched his spear, crackling with wind and lightning, with incredible force. It sent wind howling and lightning flashing through the sky. With his spear, he invoked chaotic energy in the form of lightning and raging wind.

Fang Yi attacked the two hunters with Chaos. Against his relentless attacks, Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen were barely able to keep up their defense. Fang Yi thundered, "What's the matter? Is this all you've got?"

Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen were repeatedly forced back.

Fang Yi shouted, "Zhang Lie's attacks will be far more forceful! If you can't even handle my attacks, how will you handle his? Again!"

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

Fang Yi's spear took on the aspect of a dragon of the winds and a storm tiger as he charged forward.

Wind and storm roared around him, and his spear resonated with his genetic energy. The spear which the king of chaos had granted him demonstrated shocking strength, infusing chaotic energy into the mix.

This was only meant to be training, but Fang Yi didn't seem to be holding back.

"[Heaven-Splitting Blade]!"

Wind and storm wrapped around Jun Jiuxiao, condensing on his blade. The silvery-white blade glowed resplendently as it tore apart the heavens.

"[Nightmarish Strike]!"

Ye Xianchen gripped her daggers tightly. As though a demon were descending on the realm, black genetic energy poured from her and manifested in the form of a fierce demonic head. Just as she was about to slash at the bug with her daggers,

The black and white lights twined together in the air, corkscrewing and clashing against Fang Yi's [Tiger's Howl, Dragon's Bellow]. To Fang Yi's surprise, their defense held firm against his attack.

Zhang Lie clapped loudly. "Excellent. It seems as though you've both grown significantly over this period of time."

Compared to their appearances a few months ago, Jun Jiuxiao had grown somewhat thinner, while a dark aura surrounded Ye Xianchen.

Zhang Lie eyed them both. "You've maxed out your monarch gene fragments, haven't you?"

Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen nodded.

"Thanks to your farm, Master, we maxed out our monarch gene fragments last month."

Zhang Lie replied, "I had planned to give you both more time to grow, but I have to ascend soon. Come, let's spar."

Jun Jiuxiao smiled wryly. "We'd better not, Master. We know just how strong you are now, and you could beat us even more handily than before."

Zhang Lie snorted. "As though that weren't already the case! Sun Mengmeng and the others can't beat me, either."

The members of Team Zenith refused to meet Zhang Lie's gaze.

Zhang Lie turned to Zhu.

With a wave of her hand, everyone was transported to a familiar location—where Zhang Lie had once tested the members of Team Zenith, as well as where Zhang Lie had absorbed Potion #5.

"Jun Jiuxiao, Ye Xianchen, choose one of you to start off."

Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen were resigned to their fate. Jun Jiuxiao stepped forward and cupped his hands. "Master, please advise me."

Zhu warned Zhang Lie as she set up barriers, "Please make sure you don't use your full strength."

"Don't worry."

Zhu warned again, "Don't even use a tenth of your strength, or the unified world you worked so hard to help construct will be ruined by your own hands!"

The members of Team Zenith cheered Zhang Lie's two disciples on. "Come on, you can do it! Make sure to give our captain a shock!"

"[Heaven-Splitting Blade]!"

Wind and storm wrapped around Jun Jiuxiao, condensing on his blade. The silvery-white blade tore apart the heavens.

Zhang Lie reached out and pinched the tip of his blade between his fingers. "Is this it?"

Jun Jiuxiao kicked at Zhang Lie's abdomen, but before the kick could connect, Zhang Lie had lifted Jun Jiuxiao higher into the air through the blade that he still held pinched between his fingers.

Jun Jiuxiao immediately gave up on the sword and retreated as he pulled out a new sword from his extradimensional storage.

"Here, back at you!"

Zhang Lie sent Jun Jiuxiao's sword flying back at him and pierced through his wrist.

Without any hesitation, Jun Jiuxiao retrieved yet another sword from his extradimensional storage. Zhang Lie snapped his fingers, causing space to shatter. The force of the snap caused a tornado to spawn in the air.

"[Wind's Spirit]!"

Wind and storm wrapped around Jun Jiuxiao, forming a barrier against the waves of energy that Zhang Lie's snap had caused.

It blocked the bulk of the energy as Jun Jiuxiao prepared and launched another sword technique.

However, Zhang Lie's body seemed to be guarded by a formless barrier. Jun Jiuxiao's sword found itself deflected by a mysterious energy, a barrier he was unable to cut through.

Suddenly, he stepped back, then infused a technique into his blade until it was crackling with wind and lightning, charging it up with incredible penetrating ability.

As he thrust forward, it sent wind howling and lightning flashing through the sky, leaving a dozen afterimages in its wake surrounding Zhang Lie's body.

"Not bad, not bad!" Zhang Lie smiled and nodded, but he hadn't even moved.

The clash of metal filled the arena. Jun Jiuxiao swung his sword again and again, but it stubbornly refused to make contact.

The disparity in strength between them caused Jun Jiuxiao to despair, but he had no intention of giving up.

"[Dragontiger Blade]!" Jun Jiuxiao's sword took on the aspect of a dragon of the winds and a storm tiger as he charged forward.

Wind and storm roared around him, resonating with his genetic energy.

Zhang Lie grinned. "Isn't this Fang Yi's [Tiger's Howl, Dragon's Bellow]?"

Fang Yi, spectating from a distance, shouted, "Well, Captain? I taught him this attack. It's passable, isn't it?"

Because of the similarity in their frameworks, Jun Jiuxiao had specifically sought out Fang Yi for additional training and to learn his techniques.

"Interesting." Zhang Lie struck casually, but his attack had somehow outstripped Jun Jiuxiao's.

#### Chapter 1289: Jiuxiao's Strength

Despite the relative languidity of his actions, Zhang Lie's technique struck Jun Jiuxiao first. He flicked aside the barrier of wind and storm with his fingers, sending the sword careening out of Jun Jiuxiao's reach.

Jun Jiuxiao blanched, but recovered and reacted quickly.

"[Stormwind Kick]!" He kicked forward, his legs imbued with wind and storm. Even so, he remained unable to pose a threat to Zhang Lie.

"[Floating Clouds]!" It looked as though Jun Jiuxiao had morphed into lightning itself. Storms rose up all around him, and he left a flurry of afterimages behind.

Zhang Lie prodded at a certain spot with his finger, causing Jun Jiuxiao to shoot away from the point of impact like a cannonball.

He fell to the ground rolling, his sword making a few turns into the air before sticking into the ground blade-first.

Zhang Lie clasped both hands behind his back. "Did you intuit something?"

Jun Jiuxiao struggled to stand. "I think I can understand everyone's despair now."

Upon sensing the battle intent in Jun Jiuxiao's eyes, Zhang Lie motioned him forth. "If you don't intend to give up, let's continue."

He retrieved another sword from his dimensional storage. Wind howled and lightning flashed. Purple lightning flickered through the air.

"If I were alone, I would long since have surrendered, but I'm not fighting by myself right now. Fang Yi expects great things of me, and I'm fighting with everyone's hopes on the line! [Heaven's Judgment]!"

Wind and lightning twined around Jun Jiuxiao's sword as he thrust forward. The combination of wind and lightning generated a frightening force that seemed to be able to penetrate space.

Jun Jiuxiao's sword attack was very much like Fang Yi's spear attack.

Zhang Lie extended one lone finger, which nevertheless boasted enough strength to break through the barrier of wind and storm. Like an immovable mountain, the finger stood firm against the sword. Jun Jiuxiao sucked in a deep breath and pushed, but was unable to cause the finger to move by even a fraction.

Jun Jiuxiao howled, "I might not be an opponent for you, but if I lose so easily, how will I face Fang Yi? He's taught me far too much, and I can't let all his effort go to waste!"

"[Floating Clouds]!" The wind and lightning formed a loop around his body. Wind and storm surged throughout the loop, providing explosive strength that pushed back Zhang Lie's finger.

Zhang Lie nodded as though affirming his hard work. "You've improved tremendously, and this proves your dedication and effort. However, it's not enough."

Zhang Lie's finger rippled with energy. Like a river, like a dragon, Jun Jiuxiao was pushed away with such force that he was sent flying. He tumbled across the ground before barely stabilizing himself.

Wretched, he stood up arduously once more.

Zhang Lie raised a hand to stop him. "That's enough. I know roughly how much you can withstand now, and there's no need to keep going."

Jun Jiuxiao wobbled on his feet. Even just standing was difficult.

"No, I can't! Fang Yi has spent too much time with me over the course of our training for me to give up now. I don't want to let him down!"

"Enough!" This time, it wasn't Zhang Lie who shouted, but rather Fang Yi. "That's enough. I've seen everything. You didn't disappoint me—the fact that you can still fight at this level against Zhang Lie is more than sufficient."

Zhang Lie praised, "You really have done very well. The members of Team Zenith have far more practical experience, so you won't compare to them, but you're doing almost as well as Zhang Hanxiang."

They had only been training vigorously for a month, and Jun Jiuxiao had yet to master Fang Yi's strongest ability—mastery over time.

If Jun Jiuxiao had control over time, he might have been able to continue the fight, or even to force Zhang Lie to use a tenth of his true strength.

However, a month was insufficient for Jun Jiuxiao to access that power.

After all, temporal manipulation was a rare and arcane technique which not everyone could learn. Within Team Zenith, only Fang Yi and Zhang Lie could do it, and all the members of Team Zenith were at the peak of the third realm. It was evident that temporal manipulation was a rare and difficult ability to obtain.

Jun Jiuxiao, who likewise commanded the forces of wind and storm, might not be a match for Fang Yi in terms of temporal manipulation.

Zhang Hanxiang was very dissatisfied upon hearing her brother's words. "Brother, what do you mean? I'm not weaker than Jun Jiuxiao!"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "How long has it been since you ascended to the third realm, and how long has it been for Jun Jiuxiao? If he ascended at the same time you did, do you think you could beat him?"

Zhang Hanxiang faltered and went silent.

Zhang Lie continued, "You should be spending more time on your cultivation. Otherwise, Jun Jiuxiao and the other members of the Zenith Dojo might catch up to you."

A Zenith Dojo tier list of individual strength might have Zhang Lie as a T0 individual, no one in T1, and the others of Team Zenith in T2. [1]

The reason that there was no one in T1 was because no one could bridge the gulf in strength between Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith; the difference spanned two whole tiers. Hong Xi was in T2.5, and Zhang Hanxiang in T3. There was now a T4 for Jun Jiuxiao as well.

Zhang Hanxiang pursed her lips. "I've already been working hard!"

Zhang Lie turned to Jun Jiuxiao. "It's good to emulate others, but Fang Yi's skills aren't easy to learn. There are so many members of Team Zenith who use a sword, so why learn spear techniques?"

Jun Jiuxiao replied, "Only I and Fang Yi have a wind- and storm-oriented framework."

"Elemental attunement isn't everything. Water-attuned genetic energy can possess qualities of gold, of earth, and even of fire and thunder."

Zhang Lie demonstrated, extending water-attuned genetic energy beyond his fingertips, turning it silvery-white with sharpness and strength, then a dull mud-yellow, then transforming it into flames dancing between his fingertips, which exploded into crackling lightning.

"Fang Yi's techniques aren't particularly interesting besides [Heaven's Judgment]. His true strength is in combining all sorts of different energies together to unleash a massive blow. However, you don't have access to temporal manipulation, nor to his ability to combine disparate energy sources, and you've only learned the superficial instead. Even if you can grow stronger this way, your path will be limited."

Fang Yi seemed quite dissatisfied. "Captain, my other techniques aren't bad!"

Zhang Lie countered, "Perhaps not compared to the ordinary hunter, but what about the members of Team Zenith?"

Fang Yi was speechless. Could he compare to the other members of Team Zenith?

Team Zenith was filled with ridiculously strong hunters. Yang Ze had dimensional manipulation and karmic evasion, Sun Xiaowu had his mechas and Echo of Origin, and Li Feng's abilities channeled divinity itself.

Each member of Team Zenith was at the peak of the third realm; no one could beat them at their respective expertise.

"There are quite a few members of Team Zenith who use swords—Yang Ze or Li Feng, for example. Wouldn't it be better to learn sword techniques from them than spear techniques from Fang Yi that you then have to adapt for the sword?"

Chapter 1290: Manifold Ghosts

Zhang Lie held up two fingers. "As for the second problem, your sword frequently slips out of your grip. This is a direct result of your trying to adapt a spear technique for the sword—your grip will suffer. Have you considered the fact that your weapon is your lifeline in an actual battle? You would have died twice over by now."

Jun Jiuxiao weakly hung his head after hearing Zhang Lie's criticisms.

He replied seriously, "Master, I'll keep your advice in mind. I won't make the same mistake a second time."

"I believe you can do it." Zhang Lie patted Jun Jiuxiao on the shoulder. "Go back and keep training after thinking about what I said. Ye Xianchen, it's your turn."

Ye Xianchen marched forward as the members of Team Zenith cheered behind her. "You can do it!"

Ye Xianchen pumped her fist in the air in response. Jun Jiuxiao patted Ye Xianchen on the shoulder as he left. "I wasn't able to surprise our master—I'll have to count on you."

Ye Xianchen's hands morphed into claws, and pitch-black genetic energy surrounded them like smoke.

"I'm coming, Master!"

"Come."

Pitch-black genetic energy burst forth from Ye Xianchen like smoke.

"[Darkbane Claws]!"

Black smoke surrounded Ye Xianchen, covering up the arena. Black claws spawned from the smoke, but Zhang Lie dispersed the smoke with a casual wave of his arm. By the time he had done so, Ye Xianchen had vanished from sight.

Zhang Lie wasn't surprised. He punched to his back casually, shattering space and sending Ye Xianchen flying.

Ye Xianchen murmured, "To think my [Nightwalker] was seen through so easily..."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "You're still quite a bit weaker than Yang Ze, who taught you about spatial manipulation.

Yang Ze, watching from the distance, called out, "Ye Xianchen, don't be discouraged! You're quite skilled—it's just that Zhang Lie's ridiculously strong!"

"[Nightmarish Strike]!"

Ye Xianchen gripped her daggers tightly. As though a demon were descending on the realm, black genetic energy poured from her and manifested in the form of a fierce demonic head.

Zhang Lie stretched out two fingers and easily pinched the demonic blade between them. Pitch-black genetic energy gathered by Ye Xianchen's feet, morphing into black wind and lightning, as she launched a flurry of kicks.

However, none of the attacks managed to land. Zhang Lie smiled in delight. "Excellent! I just taught Sun Xiaowu and the others this concept, and they've yet to learn it, but you're already getting quite skilled with transforming the nature of your genetic energy. This is [Stormwind Kick], isn't it? You just don't quite have a perfect grasp of the technique yet."

"[Night Parade: Hundredfold Echo]!"

A large number of ghosts suddenly emerged from Ye Xianchen's body, all formed of pitch-black genetic energy. Zhang Lie waved his fingers, dispersing all the ghosts and sending Ye Xianchen flying back.

Ye Xianchen barely managed to stabilize her body as the ghosts all landed atop her. Her eyes turned ink-black as ghostly winds surrounded her, almost as though she were being possessed.

Pitch-black ghosts crawled over her skin. She howled like a banshee, and a demonic shadow appeared behind her.

Right then and there, Ye Xianchen seemed to have transformed into a creature straight out of a nightmare.

She slashed forward, a dark cut filled with ghostly cries.

Zhang Lie rubbed at his lower jaw. "Interesting. This is Sun Xiaowu's Adamantine Aegis, isn't it? Rather than attempting to transform your genetic energy into elemental gold, you've worked hard on capturing the essence of the technique instead."

The sword energy roiled like black waves as the ghosts pounced toward Zhang Lie.

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

The explosion shattered space and sent waves of force rippling all around it. Like a rampaging beast, it devoured everything nearby, shattering space and swallowing up all life in its vicinity. Ye Xianchen was sent flying into the distance, the ghastly figures surrounding her disintegrating away.

The members of Team Zenith each erected their own defenses. They glanced at each other in shock, knowing that Zhang Lie hadn't used any technique whatsoever—it was simply an explosion of genetic energy from his body.

Such an unrefined maneuver already possessed more strength than their full-power blows, as though Zhang Lie walking quickly could traverse a greater distance than if they were to drive.

Zhu sulked. "Zhang Lie, didn't you say you would rein it in?"

Zhang Lie scratched his head as he laughed with embarrassment. "Sorry, I couldn't control my strength."

Ye Xianchen was shocked by the sudden explosion of genetic energy, so much so that she had almost frozen up in fear.

Zhang Lie said, "Ye Xianchen, you've surprised me tremendously, even more so than Jun Jiuxiao. In that final attack, I saw traces of Sun Xiaowu's [Adamantine Aegis], along with my [The Boundless Blade: the River Lethe]. I haven't had time to advise you lately, so the fact that you've managed to emulate my technique to such an extent must be due to Li Feng."

Only Li Feng had performed a deep analysis and study into his techniques and tactics.

Li Feng seemed rather embarrassed. "Captain, your techniques are all very strong. I saw that Ye Xianchen and you shared a lot of points in common, so I advised her to use you as a reference. You don't mind, do you?"

Zhang Lie laughed. "Why would I? As long as you can all grow stronger, I wouldn't mind if you replicated all my techniques."

Ye Xianchen manifested her black sword in her hands once again. Zhang Lie asked, "Are you aware of your problems?"

Ye Xianchen shook her head. "Let's continue, please. I've learned a lot from everyone, and I'd like to get some pointers from you as well, Master."

"Very well."

Ye Xianchen converted pitch-black genetic energy into the energy of wind and storm.

"[Heaven's Judgment]!"

As she infused it into her sword, the combination of wind and lightning generated a frightening force that seemed to be able to penetrate space.

Zhang Lie kicked Ye Xianchen into the air.

"Being able to transform genetic energy at will, and to dual elements simultaneously, means that you're at the level of a genius, but your application of these techniques is still lacking."

Ye Xianchen dematerialized the sword, then transformed the resulting pitch-black genetic energy into countless dragons of black smoke that shot toward Zhang Lie, each the image of a ghostly dragon.

"Well done! You've mastered Li Feng's [Light Dragon's Remnants] to a considerable extent. What do you call this technique?" Zhang Lie praised. With a wave of his left arm, he shattered the dragons.

Ye Xianchen replied, "[Darkbane Dragon's Remnants]."

As she spoke, she snapped her fingers. Arrows of black smoke lit up in midair and shot toward Zhang Lie, transforming into blackflame arrows that exploded in front of him.