

U. Warlord 1331

Chapter 1331: Parents Again

Zhang Yangyan was a heroic figure. He seemed simultaneously domineering and transcendent, as though he were a god from a higher dimension projected down onto the mortal world.

His eyes seemed surrounded by starlight. Though he was composed only of light and shadow, he seemed somehow more real than the other eidola before him.

Golden flames wreathed his arms as the sky shone with white light. Golden flames roared as Zhang Yangyan punched forward, forming a firestorm that spread across the sky.

Pale blue genetic energy rippled about Zhang Lie's arms. He flicked his wrists, causing a frightening aura to descend on the stage. The stage seemed to darken, and a fish the size of a whale materialized.

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

A howling gale swept over the two combatants. As more and more genetic energy gathered around Zhang Lie's arms, it looked as though he were at the heart of a whirlpool.

A huge wave soared into the air. As Zhang Lie punched forward, the fish slammed its huge tail on the ground and sent a torrent of water surging.

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

The golden flames and boundless ocean clashed in the middle of the arena, which split neatly in two, one side golden and the other blue.

A huge roar echoed through the sky. The arena shook as the tides burst apart. A golden firestorm was set loose like a beast on a rampage. The clash between water and fire almost demolished the arena entirely.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!"

Zhang Lie extended his pointer finger like a sword, and water-attuned genetic energy gathered around it. As he waved his finger, sword energy erupted like a wave.

Zhang Yangyan's halberd stemmed the flow of sword energy.

A raging shark swam forth along the current that Zhang Lie had created, opening its bloody maw wide.

Zhang Yangyan's halberd gleamed. Initially dark, it turned a bright golden-yellow as ripples of force emanated from it.

He swung the halberd down as it emitted a fearsome light, like a stellar river. The shark burst in an explosion of water.

"[Ninecarp Transformation]!"

A black serpent, which resembled the world-swallowing serpent Jormungandr, appeared. It let out a threatening hiss as its scales clicked together.

Pitch-black genetic energy spread over the arena in corrosive dark clouds.

The golden halberd seemed to come to life like a ferocious beast, gleaming with golden scales, the horns on its head a fearsome sight to behold.

With his halberd soulshard activated, Zhang Yangyan grew even stronger.

The beast's howl blew the dark clouds away.

Zhang Yangyan swung his halberd forward as the golden beast roared and barreled forward in the direction of the swing. Its sharp, shining horns seemed to be overlaid atop the halberd.

Zhang Lie shifted to the side and avoided a direct confrontation. He leaned and rolled away. His finger struck the side of the halberd with a ringing echo that almost tore the sky apart.

The next moment, he shot toward his father's eidolon in a bolt of light and began to strike at full strength.

As Zhang Lie activated his blood ant and dragonwolf soulshards, he transformed into a dragonwolf with russet fur and limbs covered with dragons' scales. His aura became magnified as a hurricane of blood spawned around him.

Zhang Yangyan pointed his halberd toward Zhang Lie. An illusory golden halberd floated around him. As he waved his halberd in elegant arcs, countless illusory halberds transformed into golden dragons that rushed toward the sky like meteors.

Zhang Lie swiped forward with both claws, shattering the golden dragons in a metallic clash.

Zhang Yangyan's body flashed as he shot straight forward. A burst of golden light emanated from his body, as though a thousand arrows had been shot out.

He swung his halberd in a wide arc, forming a golden wave.

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

As Zhang Lie punched forward, a blood dragon roared in outrage and tore the golden wave apart.

Zhang Yangyan's eyes glowed with starlight. Golden rays of dawn light bubbled forth as Zhang Yangyan retreated and tossed his halberd forward like a javelin. A golden sun ignited as the skies turned golden. The halberd pierced through space and time, smashing into and obliterating the blood dragon.

A wave of annihilation exploded around the dragon. Pitch-black energy swallowed everything in the vicinity like a storm at sea. Pulses of energy spread over the arena.

The explosion was like a black hole that consumed everything in sight, but Zhang Lie and Zhang Yangyan had both retreated in time. Neither was injured.

Black genetic energy burst forth from Zhang Lie, as though there were hundreds, thousands of dragons surging throughout his body.

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

A horde of dragons launched out of Zhang Lie's left arm as he expended half his genetic energy in one supercharged attack.

Howling with the force of thunder, the hundred dragons soared through the air. They were fierce and domineering, and all hundred of them boasted the power of annihilation.

Zhang Yangyan's eyes gleamed with stellar might. As though he could predict the future, he evaded one dragon after another.

"Hold on, the ability to predict the future...?"

Zhang Lie could see temporal power spinning in Zhang Yangyan's eyes. Upon recalling what Bu Wentian had mentioned, he had an uncertain guess as to his father's power.

Sword energy flew toward the air and burst apart like a phoenix's feathers, holy and transcendent.

Zhang Yangyan struck with his halberd, launching one perfect swing.

The two attacks clashed with one another. In terms of strength, Zhang Yangyan's eidolon was quite a bit weaker, and he was sent flying.

"[The Boundless Blade: the River Lethe]!"

Zhang Lie raised the blade in his hand high into the air, encircled by black genetic energy. The temperature of the air dropped to sub-zero values, and a strong wind buffeted the two combatants present.

An underworld river materialized in the air. As though the doors to hell had just been thrown open, tens of thousands of serpents rushed out in a flood.

Zhang Yangyan swung his halberd once again, slicing apart the universe itself. Thousands of stars glimmered with light, an expanse of space vast without end. The halberd cut apart the netherworld river, and the starlight vanquished one serpent after another.

Though the serpents were almost infinite in number, replenished quickly as they were by the pitch-black genetic energy surrounding Zhang Lie, the might of the stars was itself limitless. Each beam of starlight was like a blade that cut through the serpents.

Chapter 1332: His Father's Strength

Zhang Yangyan's halberd pierced through the netherworld river. Zhang Lie raised Guicang once more as pitch-black genetic energy began to spread over the arena.

"[The Boundless Blade: the River Lethe]!"

A huge sea of genetic energy covered up the skies, the clouds, the black rain in the sky.

The two combatants looked up at the void, whereupon they found it wholly replaced by a pitch-black ocean.

Waves surged forward, sounding like peals of thunder, like stampeding hooves. The surface of the sea frothed with angry waves, like dragons emerging with the tide. The entire sea roiled, and lightning crackled amidst the void.

Countless serpents swam across the raging sea as lightning flashed ominously overhead, a scene right out of an apocalypse.

As Zhang Lie struck, an underworld river hurtled into existence, roaring into the sea. The sword energy roiled like black waves.

The sea had morphed into a boundless battlefield. The sea breeze was as a horn to action, and the serpents, thousands of courageous soldiers heeding its call.

The netherworld river struck Zhang Yangyan's stellar river in an explosion of pitch-black genetic energy. The halberd pierced through the netherworld river, but not deeply enough.

The netherworld river transformed into a netherworld sea, causing no end of annoyance for Zhang Yangyan.

Starlight glowed and formed golden dragons which exploded in the netherworld sea like blazing suns. Stellar fusion released tremendous amounts of energy as the golden dragons broke through the netherworld sea by brute force. Golden lightning flashed over the sea.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!"

Guicang unleashed a barrage of sword energy in the form of a blood dragon.

A dragon's roar shook the void as the pitch-black genetic energy turned blood-red. The underworld river roiled, forming a gigantic blood-colored hurricane.

The golden dragon and blood dragon sword strikes clashed against each other in the air. A blood tornado tore apart the stars. Golden radiance shone down on the arena as Zhang Yangyan swept his halberd horizontally through it, summoning golden waves.

"[First Form: Parting the River]!"

Bright sword energy radiated from Zhang Lie like brilliant rays of sunlight. A frightening force descended, energy rumbling and rippling around him. As Zhang Lie swung the blade in his hand, a huge slash of sword energy shot downward.

Zhang Yangyan's eyes glowed with starlight. As though he could predict the future, he avoided the attack and counterattacked with his halberd. Stars surrounded him, falling toward Zhang Lie like meteoric dragons. So bright was the attack that it seemed as though the sun itself were exploding.

Tremendous quantities of energy were condensed on Zhang Lie's blade, forming a metaphysical extension to it thousands of meters long. The white broadsword met the halberd strike for strike.

The ground quaked and space shattered. Ripples of force spread out all over.

The sturdy arena had been reinforced once and again by incredible workings. Despite the earlier four clashes, it had yet to be damaged—but after the confrontation between Zhang Lie and Zhang Yangyan, it began to crack. Stone tiles were flung up into the air.

After the clash of Zhang Lie's sword and Zhang Yangyan's halberd, Zhang Lie then attacked with Hanguang using his other hand. Zhang Yangyan's eyes flared again as he narrowly evaded the attack.

"As expected." Though he had no proof for it, the spar left Zhang Lie all but certain that Zhang Yangyan had made tremendous inroads with respect to time, that he had the ability to predict the future.

"[Shadow and Light]!"

Zhang Lie whirled around. Time suddenly sped up in the vicinity of Zhang Lie. His sword flashed time and time again each strike like a raindrop. Zhang Yangyan's eyes opened wide as he evaded them easily.

A dense forest of sword slashes seemed like nothing more than a gentle breeze to Zhang Yangyan's eyes. He struck with his halberd, like the explosion of the radiant sun, each scintillating beam of light like a sharp blade.

"[Syzygy]!"

A pitch-black sun appeared behind Zhang Lie, and a blood moon by his feet. His aura was magnified tenfold, and a halo of black sun appeared above his forehead. Natural law seemed to warp around him. Runes likewise appeared on the bloody moon by his feet, forming an intricate array.

Struck by the bloody moonlight, Zhang Yangyan's radiance grew dim. Under the black sun, the fluctuations in Zhang Lie's genetic energy were enhanced.

Zhang Lie crossed his twin blades. The blood moon resonated with the blade in his left hand, and the black sun with the blade in his right. He simultaneously slashed forward with both blades, forming a huge celestial web.

"[Blade of the Heavens: the Sea Swells]!"

Energy poured out of Zhang Lie in waves, honing the edge of his blade. The pulses of energy struck the sea like a tsunami, devouring everything within.

Zhang Yangyan struck again with his halberd, tearing apart the technique. Guicang, poised and hidden, thrust at Zhang Yangyan's throat.

Guicang was deftly positioned in a blind spot, and anyone else would have found the attack hard to counter, but Zhang Yangyan still managed to counter Zhang Lie's hidden attack.

Zhang Yangyan blocked the blow with his halberd, knocking Guicang aside. As the blade scraped across the haft of the blade, sparks were sent flying. He turned his body to avoid the trajectory of the blade. Guicang swept past his neck, leaving a faint scar on it.

Zhang Yangyan had barely avoided Zhang Lie's killing blow.

Those hunters who could view the future were immensely troublesome to deal with, being able to resolve all manner of feints and killing blows.

Zhang Lie was certainly several levels stronger and more powerful than his father, but Zhang Yangyan had avoided several blows that would have taken anyone else of his status down.

He was as slippery as a mudskipper, and persistent and agile enough to be able to avoid attacks until his opponent made a crucial mistake.

"If technique and strategy both don't work, then I'll ignore them and focus solely on brute strength!"

Zhang Lie's rich combat experience meant that he didn't lose his fighting intent. He chose the simplest, most basic strategy.

Zhang Lie extended his arms, his twin blades pointing at heaven and earth. Guicang and Hanguang shone with blazing light, like the sun and the moon, the yin and the yang. The energy that radiated from the two swords transformed into a heavenly raiment of yin and yang.

"[Blades, Reverberate]!"

The flames of the black sun and light of the bloody moon formed a garment over his body.

A blood dragon materialized around Zhang Lie. Energy poured out of him in waves, honing the edge of his blade. The pulses of energy struck the realm like a tsunami, devouring everything within.

The twin blades Guicang and Hanguang emitted a fearsome aura, shining as brightly as the sun and moon.

Chapter 1333: Predicting the Future

A blood-red and a black dragon manifested, bearing down on his opponent with the might of Zhang Lie's spiritual sea between them. The two blades shone in unison, then gave off dazzling light as the twin dragons shot forward in unison like a twister.

Zhang Yangyan's pupils contracted as he attempted to run, but the twister moved so rapidly that he was physically unable to do so.

He had no choice but to defend against the blow. His halberd glowed as brightly as the sun, then shone with incandescent light. Stardust revolved around him as he brought the stars, the infinite galaxy, down to the arena. His halberd transformed into the fiercest golden dragon, shining with might and force.

Despite his strength, Zhang Yangyan, who was only an eidolon, naturally lost out—and even the slightest disadvantage in a fight against two phenomenal talents was lethal.

The blood and black dragons twined around the golden sun, obliterating it and causing the energy within to explode. Zhang Yangyan was sent flying, his halberd almost sent flying from his hands. The eidolon turned dark, as though it would vanish at any moment.

"[Second Form: Piercing the Soul]!"

Zhang Lie's disaster-grade mistmeld clam soulshard activated as he infused its energy into his swords, causing them to shine radiantly with multicolored light.

He could see that Zhang Yangyan didn't have a soul of his own; this was some illusory manifestation, nothing more.

A rainbow arc accompanied Zhang Lie's slash, as though an aurora borealis were visible in the sky. It shone in all the colors of the rainbow, momentarily hypnotizing anyone who looked at it.

With Guicang in hand, Zhang Lie flew through the heavens. His sword shone as brightly as the auroras overhead, bringing him momentarily out of the physical into the intangible.

Zhang Yangyan blocked with the halberd held horizontally before him.

Metal struck metal as Zhang Yangyan barely held back Zhang Lie's sword slash.

Zhang Lie's [Second Form: Piercing the Soul] was a spiritual attack at heart. Although the physical component of the attack was still a strong one, it only served to cover up the damage that it dealt to his opponent's very soul.

Even so, against an opponent whose soul did not exist, [Second Form: Piercing the Soul] was easily nullified.

"[Ninecarp Transformation]!"

Red scales formed a natural suit of red armor around Zhang Lie. He was surrounded by what looked like scarlet flames, but was actually steaming, blood-red water-attuned genetic energy. A black sun rose behind his back, and a blood moon shone at his feet.

A long tail grew out of his back. His black hair took on a red tint, as though they were lit up by an inner fire. Interlocking rings of black and red that warped natural law surrounded his body, and a domineering aura exuded from him.

Red water-attuned genetic energy surrounded Zhang Lie, manifesting in the shape of a dragon.

Red energy of chaos exploded from Zhang Lie as the moonlight and sunlight combined, then drifted into the air like water vapor.

Zhang Lie's genetic energy took on fire-attuned qualities as it gushed out. Zhang Yangyan's halberd was suppressed by Zhang Lie's blade.

Hanguang sent the halberd flying, leaving his guard wide open.

Zhang Yangyan, however, still possessed his prescience. The moment Zhang Lie struck, he gave up on the halberd and retreated at full speed.

"It's pointless to retreat now!"

Guicang gleamed brightly in Zhang Lie's hands as he infused more and more spiritual energy into it. From the surface of his spiritual sea came waves charging forward, sounding like stampeding hooves, like raging dragons.

"[Blades, Extinguish]!"

Zhang Lie's spiritual sea expanded greatly, past the confines of his own body. As the mistmeld clam soulshard's energy was infused within the blade, it began glowing with multicolored light, simultaneously illusory and real. A sea seemed to rest in the crack between the two domains, unable to be touched or otherwise sensed.

The transient, illusory nature of the light would captivate everyone who saw it.

The sword in Zhang Lie's hands burned with scarlet water-attuned genetic energy. Billowing clouds of red-tinted steam surrounded him as though he were a burning pyre.

The high-temperature steam was so hot that it visibly glowed an alarming shade of red.

Zhang Lie's domain of scarlet steam looked less like a domain than a red sea, one which overtook the void. Any lifeform in the vicinity would spontaneously combust.

The temperature around Zhang Lie grew so hot that his surroundings began to warp. Mirages formed all around him.

One of Zhang Lie's blades glowed with radiant light; the other shone scarlet with water-attuned genetic energy.

The illusory sea combined with the scarlet ocean of reality, the attack simultaneously in the boundary between the real and the illusory, linking together the physical and metaphysical, the real and the abstract.

The two halves of the attack clashed with each other.

The spiritual sea began to burn, as though it had been ignited by the scarlet steam, forming spiritual flame. The scarlet steam, bolstered by the spiritual sea, grew even hotter. Contact with the steam seemed to sap at one's very soul.

Zhang Lie had allowed these two disparate sources of energy to combine, and their merger was so intense that the distinction between the real and illusory began to blur.

The surface of the sea frothed with angry waves, like dragons emerging with the tide. From afar, the waves looked like a coven of flaming phoenixes spreading their wings and taking flight; from close up, they looked like flaming dragons.

Chapter 1334: Father's Letter

These manifestations all drew from Zhang Lie's immense spiritual and genetic energy reserves, along with the sword techniques and willpower that he had honed over countless battlefields.

The spiritual sea seemed to belong to a separate dimension altogether, whereas the scarlet water-attuned genetic energy was in Zhang Lie's current dimension. The two sources of energy were linked and made manifest by Zhang Lie, and they both surged forward as Zhang Lie swung his twin blades.

The two blades combined spiritual and genetic energy, willpower and time. All that melded into a tsunami which surged toward Silver.

The combination of these disparate energies was so potent that it could destroy any lifeform's body and soul.

The entire arena was swamped by Zhang Lie's attack, which was so wide-ranged that Zhang Yangyan wouldn't be able to escape no matter what he did. The battle ended thusly.

Zhang Lie released a deep breath.

Even with only 30% of his strength, Zhang Yangyan was truly an incredible foe. With the ability to predict the future, he would be able to counter the vast majority of strategies. If his eidolon had been able to channel more of his strength, this wouldn't have been the end of the battle.

Zhang Lie now had a greater understanding of his father's combat power.

He hadn't expected that his missing father would have been so strong.

Bu Wentian clapped. "What an exciting battle. If not for the fact that Zhang Yangyan were pitted against his wife, whose ability directly countered his, he too would have been able to pass through

this last and final trial. If he truly is your father, then you've done something that even he failed to accomplish."

Zhang Lie didn't care for small talk. He flashed up to Bu Wentian and extended a hand. "Where's the letter?"

Bu Wentian handed him a letter, which Zhang Lie looked at skeptically. "You're not going to try to mess with me again, are you?"

The letter was made of ordinary paper, and it was addressed to "my son"—that was, Zhang Lie himself.

Zhang Lie was shaken. He had wondered whom the letter was meant for—perhaps one of his father's erstwhile friends, a familiar face, an enemy—but never did he imagine that it would be for him.

Bu Wentian shrugged. "I had no intention of tricking you. Zhang Yangyan left me a letter, requesting that I hand it over to someone like him. I asked what characteristics he would have—and he replied, "If he can defeat all the past eidola, hand him the letter."

Zhang Lie grew even more curious about the contents of the letter.

Had Father known that he would be able to pass through the trials and defeat all previous challengers, including himself? Was he that confident? His father did have the ability to predict the future, after all, but was it so strong that he could even catch glimpses of the far future?

Bu Wentian continued, "Although I don't know if you are certainly his son, the fact that you've passed through all the trials means that I'll hand the letter to you."

Zhang Lie broke the seal and began reading the contents of the letter.

[Son, by the time you read this letter, you'll have defeated all the eidola of past challengers. As expected of my son! I will no longer be of the fourth realm, nor even in the Milky Way. You must be curious as to how I knew that you would arrive at Heavenly Monarch Wentian's trial-taker's chamber.]

[I'm sure that you must have seen during your fight with me that I have the ability to predict the future, that I've spent long hours pondering the meaning and structure of time. I can instantaneously see the near future, and may occasionally catch glimpses of the far future. It was through this ability that I managed to survive in the dimensional realm—and also to meet your mother.]

Zhang Lie frowned. Father had seen him arrive at the trial-taker's chamber through a vision? But he must have known that there were no guarantees when it came to fate. Father had seen only a single possibility, but in his past life, he had never managed such a feat. Neither was he aware of the treasure.

However, Zhang Lie didn't understand why it was that, despite his parents' strength as genetic hunters, that he and Zhang Hanxiang lived a life of such poverty and lack of renown.

After all, his parents were strong enough to be famous even by the standards of the fourth realm.

[Strong though your mother and I might be, we chose not to improve our living conditions compared to those of ordinary genetic hunters. This was a subject of long conversation; we thought it would be detrimental to your growth if that were the case. Furthermore, I had seen a vision of the future that suggested you would be in danger if you had been brought up in riches.]

[Your mother and I still have unfinished business, and we cannot remain by your side for eternity. Furthermore, as hunters of the fourth realm in our own right, we don't particularly want to see you tread down this perilous path. We know its dangers and difficulties; we know how easy it would be to lose our lives.]

Under ordinary circumstances, even if his parents wanted him and Zhang Hanxiang to grow up like regular children, they would surely be renowned throughout the Milky Way. Why hadn't Zhang Lie read about their exploits, their strength, their names anywhere?

Zhang Lie had always thought that his parents had been unremarkable hunters, but that seemed not to be the case. Rather, someone had deliberately censored that information within the Milky Way. Zhang Lie had to investigate this matter when he returned.

[As genetic hunters, we hoped that you would not follow in our footsteps. Being hunters is no happy affair.]

If Zhang Lie had read this letter before he became a genetic hunter, he wouldn't have understood what his parents meant—but now, he did appreciate their concerns.

Hunters put their lives on the line each and every day in an attempt to improve themselves, and no parent would be happy to see their children brave such dangers.

[But I have seen the future. After our disappearance, you two will continue on this path—you are, after all, our children.]

Despite having seen this future, his parents had still chosen to leave.

It seemed as though they truly had an important task ahead of them.

[There are matters that I cannot divulge to you, answers that you must seek out on your own. Don't try to find us—just keep advancing. Sooner or later, we will reunite again. The reason your mother and I couldn't stay by your side is because we have to find a way to save the Milky Way, and because we have to save your sister.]

Zhang Lie was startled.

Chapter 1335: Saving His Sister

To save the Milky Way? What could possibly threaten it? And as for his sister, Zhang Hanxiang... Considering his father's ability to see the future, could his parents be trying to rescue the Milky Way from a fate that had not yet passed? A crisis that would involve his sister?

[The Milky Way has long since been in a state of crisis; you will learn more upon ascending to the fifth realm. As for your sister, that's unrelated. Her weakness came from birth. When your mother was pregnant, she suffered an attack that left her with a persistent malady.]

[Considering the infusion of spiritual herbs with which we treated her, an ordinary child would have grown up hale and healthy, but your sister is different. She inherited your mother's spiritual avatar

of frost—and even a purer, more concentrated version of the bloodline at that. The attack that struck your sister in the womb made it difficult for her to control her spiritual avatar.]

[That lack of control would have hurt, more than help, your sister. As she grows, the power of her spiritual avatar might very well blossom, eventually turning her into a sculpture of ice.]

Put simply, the power of the spiritual avatar was so immense that, owing to her injury in the womb, she had become incapable of controlling it fully.

[In order to allow your sister to live a normal life, your mother and I decided to seal her spiritual avatar so that we might find a way to save her. Disabling her legs came as a side effect of the seal.]

Zhang Lie stilled. His sister's paralyzed legs was because of the seal? In that case, the fact that he had helped his sister stand again—had he hurt his sister inadvertently?

[I believe that, after we depart, you and your sister will grow particularly close to each other, and you will surely find a way to help her in the dimensional realm. I believe you have such capabilities. Do not criticize or feel guilt for yourself—your sister's problem has persisted for many years, and the paralysis of her legs is only a side effect. Even if she regains the ability to walk, it won't affect the seal.]

[As she matures, your sister's spiritual avatar will only grow stronger. Our initial seal will weaken; we anticipate that, by the time your sister turns 23, the spiritual avatar of frost will come unsealed. Her body will freeze and turn to eternal frost.]

Zhang Lie's eyes widened. His sister had fewer than five years left!

[Don't worry about your sister. Your mother and I will attempt to find a solution. If you're interested, ask Heavenly Monarch Wentian about the Galactic Rising Stars Cup. It's a curious competition. Your mother and I swept the rankings, in case you'd like to do the same.]

[Take care. From your father, Zhang Yangyan.]

Zhang Lie folded the letter as he took a deep breath.

Although his father's letter hadn't mentioned where his parents had gone, the wealth of information contained within was more than he could easily handle. The most important point was that his sister's condition wasn't looking good.

Zhang Lie asked, "Heavenly Monarch, can I confirm that I have two unclaimed rewards?"

Bu Wentian nodded. "That's quite right."

"Are you aware of the spiritual avatar of frost?"

"I know about spiritual avatars, and I heard about the spiritual avatar of frost from that couple."

"My sister seems to have suffered an injury to her spiritual avatar in the womb, and she's unable to control her avatar fully. Do you have any medicine that would be able to resolve such a problem?"

Bu Wentian shrugged. "That couple asked the same question countless years ago, and my answer remains the same: I haven't done enough research into spiritual avatars, and I don't have any medicine of a high enough grade to achieve such an effect."

"Then do you know of any potential treatments?" Zhang Lie continued.

"What you can think of, that couple already did. They didn't manage to solve the issue here, and you won't be able to achieve the same. I advise that you choose a different reward."

"Is there truly no recourse?"

"As far as I'm aware, there is no solution within the Milky way or the dimensional realm."

Zhang Lie deflated. "Then there's nothing else I'd like."

He had immediately lost interest in the rewards that Bu Wentian could provide.

After his parents' disappearance, he and his sister had relied on each other for survival. Upon learning that Zhang Hanxiang didn't have much longer to live, Zhang Lie felt as though his world had suddenly shrunk.

Bu Wentian continued, "There's no need to be so discouraged. Perhaps there is a solution, after all. When that couple heard my words, the husband of the pair remarked, if there were no solution within the Milky Way or the dimensional world, then one might exist beyond the Milky Way."

Zhang Lie's eyes reignited with hope. "You mean, I might be able to rescue my sister if I searched outside the Milky Way!"

Bu Wentian smiled. "That's a different answer than your father gave. Have you heard of the Galactic Rising Stars Cup?"

"My father's letter mentioned it. What sort of contest is it?"

Bu Wentian replied, "I can't speak of the specifics. The sixth trial is patterned off of what I faced when I participated in the Cup."

"My sister's remedy is related to this Cup?"

"The Galactic Rising Stars Cup is held once every decade, and one of the championship prizes this year is the flower of universal life."

"I've never heard of such an herb..."

"It's an incredibly rare flower that grows out of the ruins of a shattered galaxy after perhaps ten thousand years, a beacon of life where before there was only death. Allegedly, it can even bring a dead man back to life. It's a panacea able to heal essentially all maladies; your sister's spiritual avatar would be a minor issue in comparison."

Zhang Lie's heart thumped. "So I just need to acquire this flower of universal life?"

"Not only that, it'll even allow her body to transform and evolve to the next stage of being. A regular body would turn into a spirit one, a spirit one into a holy one, and a holy one into a divine one."

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "I don't care for such transformations—I just want to save Hanxiang."

Chapter 1336: Model Airship

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "I don't care for such transformations—I just want to save Hanxiang."

Bu Wentian replied, "Even if it can't fix the problem entirely, her situation will surely improve considerably."

"When will the Galactic Rising Stars Cup be held?"

"Not every lifeform will be able to participate. One of the reasons for constructing this trial-taker's chamber is to select existences that might be able to participate in the Cup. Of the six challengers who have passed the trial, only you and that couple would even have a chance. The husband of the couple did participate, but performed terribly."

"What requirements are there for participation in the Cup?"

"Participants must be fewer than fifty years old—well, you're not even thirty—and they must meet minimum qualifications in terms of strength. You easily meet both criteria, and you can certainly participate. The Cup boasts lavish rewards, and the flower of universal life is only one among many."

However, Zhang Lie wasn't interested in the other rewards.

"When is the next Cup?"

"A week later, in Milky Way time."

"That quickly?!" Zhang Lie raised an eyebrow.

"Considering the time dilation of the fourth realm, it's a year later for us."

Zhang Lie asked, "Are there restrictions on the number of people who can participate?"

"At most ten, as long as they're strong enough."

Zhang Lie nodded. "Let's see what they think, then."

Bu Wentian was clearly very excited that Zhang Lie was intending to participate.

Zhang Lie then asked, "Do you know what crisis the Milky Way is currently facing?"

Bu Wentian's smile vanished. "This isn't something you can learn about at the moment. Do you understand?"

Zhang Lie frowned. "Why are you all so mysterious about this purported crisis? What's the problem here?"

"By the time you ascend to the fifth realm—no, by the time you return from the Cup, you'll likely have an idea already."

"And if I want to know now?"

Bu Wentian shrugged. "Then I regret to inform you that I won't be able to help."

"If I remember correctly, I still have two rewards left."

"To be accurate, one arbitrary reward. The other reward, for defeating the past challengers, is fixed."

"Very well. I'd like to use my arbitrary reward to exchange for information about the crisis that the Milky Way is currently facing."

Bu Wentian crossed his arms. "Unfortunately, the prize must be a material good, not information."

"Forget it, then."

Zhang Lie could already hazard a guess as to the nature of the crisis based on what his father and Bu Wentian had divulged. Clearly, there were other galaxies beyond the Milky Way—and it had to be from those galaxies that the crisis emanated.

Zhang Lie intended to investigate these mysteries fully when he returned to the Milky Way. There were too many questions that he had. Why had his parents' names and accomplishments been censored throughout the Milky Way, and whence came the crisis the Milky Way faced?

He also had to chat with Zhang Hanxiang. For the time being, he intended on hiding the information about her spiritual avatar of frost.

Further, he had to inform the members of Team Zenith to ascend. Once they did so, he intended to bring them toward the trial-taker's chamber.

The trial-taker's chamber boasted large quantities of disaster-grade lifeforms, and it was valuable merely for the disaster gene fragments that it gave to the trial-takers, let alone the additional prizes.

If they could pass the trials, he would bring them toward the Galactic Rising Stars Cup. Once again, just like when he participated in the Void Cup, he would sweep the championship with them.

As he pondered these problems, he turned to leave.

Bu Wentian called out, "Don't you want your rewards?"

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "I'm not too interested."

Bu Wentian continued, "The Galactic Rising Stars Cup will have plenty of strong opponents for you to contend with. If you're not strong enough, you'll quickly be suppressed. I have something that will allow you to grow stronger by leaps and bounds."

Zhang Lie developed a spark of interest. "What is it?"

"Considering that you're still using a superior-grade blood ant soulshard to boost yourself, how about this?" Bu Wentian retrieved a soulshard.

The soulshard looked like a galaxy, like an endless expanse of starlight.

"This is a monarch-grade limitless universe soulshard."

Zhang Lie was shocked. "A monarch-grade soulshard..."

"It'll take down any disaster-grade lifeforms easily. All the opponents you face now will be disaster-grade or higher, and it's far too humiliating for you to still be using a superior-grade soulshard. It's time to improve your equipment. Take this monarch-grade soulshard—I look forward to your performance during the Galactic Cup."

Zhang Lie picked up the soulshard that looked like a miniature universe. Is this all you're giving me? Don't you have an emperor-class soulshard on hand?"

Bu Wentian gave him a skeptical look. "You're aware of emperor-grade lifeforms?"

"I cultivated one myself."

Bu Wentian gaped. "Really? The dimensional world hasn't fostered one for countless years! How did you do it?"

"It was a rather unusual lifeform to begin with, and it developed rapidly as a result of the blessing of the world upon the unification of the third realm. I expect it won't be reproducible."

Zhang Lie took the soulshard. The will of the realm announced in his head, [You have obtained a monarch-grade limitless universe soulshard.]

Bu Wentian replied, "I do have one such, and I'll give it to you as a bonus reward if you can win the championship."

"Then you'd best be prepared," Zhang Lie announced confidently.

"Furthermore, for winning against all five previous eidola, you've won a diamond chest." Bu Wentian handed Zhang Lie a gleaming chest that reflected light.

Zhang Lie opened it to reveal a model airship.

Zhang Lie was speechless. "You're giving me this as a commemorative gift?"

Bu Wentian replied, "This isn't a commemorative model. It's a real airship, which will transform into actual size when you leave this chamber."

Zhang Lie frowned. "If I remember correctly, no technology is allowed within the dimensional world."

Bu Wentian replied, "More accurately, it's technology that exists in the Milky Way. This airship uses technology that lies beyond it, and is compatible with the dimensional world. There's a furnace inside, a gigantic training room, as well as a research laboratory. Small though it might look, it fulfills three of your wishes."

"It doesn't sound very realistic..."

"It does consume quite a bit of fuel, but you can essentially use anything as fuel, including the meat and flesh of genetic lifeforms."

Chapter 1337: I Await It

The largest sea in the fourth realm roiled incessantly, its surface transforming into a giant's face.

"I can sense that my son is dead! Who did it, who did it?!"

The sea shook in rage. Waves charged forward, lapping the shore, sounding like peals of thunder, like stampeding hooves.

The surface of the sea frothed with angry waves, like dragons emerging with the tide. The entire sea shifted, and lightning crackled amidst the void.

The sea had morphed into a boundless battlefield. The sea breeze was as a horn to action, and the waves, thousands of courageous soldiers heeding its call. Boulders on shore, weighing thousands of tons, were sent sinking into the sea.

The surface of the sea frothed with angry waves, like dragons emerging with the tide.

A whirlpool formed, distorting space and time. Karmic power extended outward and traced images on the surface of the water.

Cthaat's son shouted, "I'm an envoy of Eternal Sun, son of Cthaat!"

"You've said that before," Zhang Lie replied, his eyes cold.

"If I perish, my father won't ever forgive you. Eternal Sun itself will be your enemy!"

"I'll look forward to it."

The pitch-black genetic energy expanded as it swallowed up the sky, replacing the dark clouds above the swamp with black genetic energy.

As Zhang Lie struck, an underworld river hurtled into existence, roaring into the sea. The sword energy roiled like black waves.

A dense cloud of serpents swallowed up the mud and killed the black mudman bit by bit.

This was the scene of Zhang Lie killing Cthaat's son. The giant face that manifested from the sea was none other than a core member of Eternal Sun, Cthaat.

Upon witnessing the ignoble death of his son, Cthaat couldn't remain calm. He howled, "My sons, kill this murderer!"

In all corners of the fourth realm, boiling-hot lava began to crack. Waves of lava formed, looking like countless volcanic beasts from afar.

The sky spun and the air distorted, forming a huge, swirling whirlpool in the air.

In the center of the whirlpool, waves roared through the skies like galloping steeds, like thundering dragons.

The waves crested in mid-air. The whirlpool was like a mirror into the far end of the sea. The near end continued to seethe and roil.

The lava transformed into a human face. "Father, what's wrong? Who has angered you?"

A face appeared over the roaring sea. "Black Swamp has died!"

Lava spewed as the volcanoes all around began to erupt. Lava sprayed into the sky, dyeing everything in sight red. Huge numbers of genetic lifeforms appeared from amidst the lava, bathing in it like fiery dragons. Each was at least peak-grade.

"Who! Who dares kill my brother? Do they not respect you or the might of Eternal Sun?!"

The face formed from lava was none other than one of Cthaat's sons. In truth, Cthaat was genderless; his children were born via parthenogenesis. None of his sons had proper names. Rather, they were named after their respective habitats.

Violent lava coursed through the air and the ground, like thousands of unbridled horses. Huge pillars of lava fountained into the air as fire and brimstone rained down.

"Is it our old enemy, the Ancient Gods' Abode? Or the new rising star, the Halls of Chaos?"

"He is the one who killed your brother."

The whirlpool in the air transformed into a human face, that of Zhang Lie.

The lava scrunched its face. "I have never seen this lifeform before."

Cthaat continued, "The Ancient Gods' Abode and the new Halls of Chaos have been keeping tabs on me, and I cannot easily make a move. If I do so, so will the Ancient Gods' Abode, and I don't know what havoc the Halls of Chaos will cause. I will leave Black Swamp's revenge to you."

The face of lava replied, "Don't worry, Father. I won't let any who disrespect Eternal Sun live."

"I'll leave it to you, then." The whirlpool in the air winked out as the face of lava shouted, "March! We seek revenge for my brother!"

The surface of the sea frothed with angry waves, like dragons emerging with the tide.

Of the lifeforms that emerged from the lava, some looked like lions wreathed in fire, with lava rolling over their bodies. Others were fiery-red dragons that looked like salamanders. Yet others were wolves with sharp, steely claws, and dark red birds that flew overhead.

A hundred thousand troops emerged from the lava—and the weakest among them was superior-grade.

Cthaat's son didn't know where Zhang Lie was located at present, but that wasn't a problem. He knew what Zhang Lie looked like now, and he simply had to exterminate all such members of that species he came across.

Before Zhang Lie departed, Bu Wentian specially reminded him, "Don't forget that three days in the Milky Way corresponds to a year in the fourth realm."

"I'm aware!"

Zhang Lie left the trial-taker's chamber. Bu Wentian's flying airship was sealed away in a glass ball. He didn't know what sort of technique Bu Wentian had used, and neither was he in a hurry to find out. Rather, he immediately entered the disaster-grade dragonwhale soulshard.

Li Qianlin was overjoyed to see him. She wanted to hug him, but resisted the temptation.

"So you've finally come back? I thought you had forgotten all about me."

Chapter 1338: Finally Come Back

At the same time, the same conversation happened elsewhere.

There was a green lake in the fourth realm which the local aliens stayed far away from.

The vast majority of lifeforms that drew near to it would keel over. The nearby trees had turned black, all having wilted.

No one could imagine that this idyllic jade-green lake would be so frightening, like a god of death continuously reaping the lives of lifeforms nearby.

The lake was so acidic that an ordinary hunter who touched it would have the skin melt from their bones. The air itself was saturated with formless poison, and even a bird flying overhead would drop dead.

What the aliens didn't know was that a special lifeform existed at the heart of the lake.

The sky spun and the air distorted, forming a huge, swirling whirlpool in the air. In the center of the whirlpool, waves roared through the skies like galloping steeds, like thundering dragons.

The waves crested in mid-air. The whirlpool was like a mirror into the far end of the sea. The near end continued to seethe and roil.

As the sky shifted, the surface of the lake transformed into a human face.

"What's the matter, Father?"

If the aliens around could see this sight, they would have been shocked that the lake was alive and possessed of will. The lake was none other than one of Cthaat's children. To be precise, Cthaat's son wasn't the lake itself, only an entity that had merged with the lake to form a terribly potent acid.

"Black Swamp is dead."

The lake's face gaped. "Who would be so bold as to kill Black Swamp? Do they not respect Eternal Sun? Is this a provocation? Are they intending to wage war against us?"

The whirlpool in the air transformed into a human face, that of Zhang Lie.

The lake replied, "I've never seen this face, nor this species of lifeform. Do you know what lifeform this is, Father?"

"A foreign invader."

The lake's face turned fierce. "We haven't had the time to deal with these cockroaches. Perhaps it's past time we did something about them."

Cthaat continued, "The Ancient Gods' Abode and the new Halls of Chaos have been keeping tabs on me, and I cannot easily make a move. If I do so, so will the Ancient Gods' Abode, and I don't know what havoc the Halls of Chaos will cause. I will leave Black Swamp's revenge to you. I want the culprit's entire race to suffer alongside him."

The lake's face snorted. "They're nothing more than a group of cockroaches living on borrowed time, surviving in nooks and crannies all over the realm. I'll clear them out."

As the whirlpool winked out, the jade-green lake began to froth, transforming into the form of a large humanoid figure. "It's been centuries since I last traveled..."

At the same time, the same conversation happened elsewhere.

One of the more unusual locations of the fourth realm was at the site of a perennial thunderstorm. So concentrated was the lightning in the area that it had formed a lake of electric plasma.

Thunderclouds swirled in the air, transforming into a huge sea. Electric serpents sparked amidst the clouds.

The sky spun and the air distorted, forming a huge, swirling whirlpool in the air. In the center of the whirlpool, waves roared through the skies like galloping steeds, like thundering dragons. The whirlpool was like a mirror into the far end of the sea. The near end continued to seethe and roil.

As the sky shifted, the surface of the lake transformed into a human face.

The lake of electric plasma exploded as pillars of lightning soared into the air, causing a forest of lightning to manifest out of thin air. The lightning sketched out a humanoid face. "Why the sudden appearance, Father?"

"Black Swamp is dead."

"So?" the figure of lightning asked.

"Seek revenge for him."

The whirlpool in the air transformed into a human face, that of Zhang Lie.

"I have never seen this lifeform before."

"It's a member of a foreign race, an invader."

"How should I find it?"

Cthaat replied, "I can track him with a karmic link, but that's not enough to quell my rage. His entire race must die with him.

"As you will."

The lightning transformed into a giant that began trudging toward civilization.

At the same time, the same conversation happened elsewhere.

In the fourth realm, there was a region in which cloudy mist drifted in the manner of a sea.

It was a rather famous location in the realm, and known appropriately as the Cloudy Sea.

The sea of clouds was harmless. Unlike the acidic lake, it was free of danger, but all the lifeforms that entered the sea had never left again. It grew larger bit by bit with each passing year, as though intending on devouring everything in sight.

That day, a strange scene could be seen among the sea of clouds. The sky spun and the air distorted, forming a huge, swirling whirlpool in the air.

The waves crested in mid-air. The sea roared in anger and frustration.

"Black Swamp is dead."

The clouds formed a humanoid face. "Who did it? The Ancient Gods' Abode, or the new Halls of Chaos?"

No one else had the capacity to cause such damage except for the two premier organizations of the fourth realm.

"Neither."

The whirlpool in the air transformed into a human face, that of Zhang Lie.

The face of clouds asserted, "I'll find this lifeform."

The sea of clouds, which had formed over the course of tens of thousands of years, moved for the first time.

Within the disaster-grade dragonwhale soulshard, Li Qianlin frowned as she folded her arms. "So you've finally come back? I thought you had forgotten all about me."

Zhang Lie smiled. "What's the matter? Do you miss me after just a few days?"

Li Qianlin blushed. "Who cares about you? I'm just worried that you suffered an accident outside, trapping me in here!"

Zhang Lie's smile deepened. "So you do care about me!"

Li Qianlin's face turned redder. She hurriedly waved a hand. "Well? Give me the lifeform meat, then."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I don't have any today."

"What's the matter?" Li Qianlin asked in worry.

"I've already maxed out my peak gene fragments, so I don't have to specially hunt down genetic lifeforms anymore."

Li Qianlin seemed doubtful. "So you're here just to visit me?"

Chapter 1339: You're Too Weak

Li Qianlin seemed somewhat disappointed.

If Zhang Lie didn't need to consume any more genetic lifeforms, there would be far less opportunity for the two of them to meet and interact. Perhaps in the future, she would only be able to see him once every few days—maybe even once every few months. This wasn't something that Li Qianlin could accept.

All of a sudden, she had become useless to Zhang Lie.

But what could she do? Disappointed though she might be, she was unable to leave the sanctuary of the soulshard.

"Do you want to leave this place and have a look at the fourth realm proper?"

Zhang Lie handed her a white potion, the potion of metamorphosis that he had retrieved from the trial-taker's chamber.

Li Qianlin asked, "I can leave?"

Weren't the lifeforms of the third realm supposed to be incapable of adapting to the natural law of the fourth realm?

"This is a potion I obtained from a certain location that allows lower-realm lifeforms to undergo a metamorphosis: a first-realm lifeform can transform into a second-realm one, and so on."

Before he departed, Zhang Lie learned about the specific effects of the potion of metamorphosis from Bu Wentian.

Otherwise, he certainly wouldn't have handed Li Qianlin a mysterious potion of unknown provenance.

Li Qianlin gaped. "Are there truly such miraculous potions in this realm?"

"Try it and see. If I'm not mistaken, it's not a potion that came from the dimensional world proper."

Li Qianlin hesitated. "Such a precious potion for me? It's a little..."

"If you don't want it, I'm going to pour it out. It's useless to me, anyway!"

Li Qianlin didn't hesitate any longer. She took the proffered vial and drank it down right in front of Zhang Lie.

As she swallowed the milky-white liquid, Li Qianlin felt an incredible warmth suffuse her body. Her skin began to glow, then turned fiery red, almost like when Zhang Lie had absorbed a disaster-grade core. She felt as though she were burning up all over, an indescribably unpleasant sensation, but she bore it with great fortitude in hopes of being able to accompany Zhang Lie into the fourth realm.

Zhang Lie saw Li Qianlin's cells and genes undergo a transformation. The feverish sensation faded quickly, leaving behind an overwhelming sense of comfort. Her body glowed with light as her skin turned even whiter, as though she had just shed a layer of old skin.

She grew even more beautiful than before, as radiant as a chrysanthemum blooming in the summer heat, as lush as a pine tree whose branches unfurled in a spring breeze, She looked like the radiant moon, like snowflakes falling through the winter air.

From afar, she seemed as pure as a rising sun at dawn, as fresh as a lotus flower blooming amidst a patch of verdant green.

She wore no makeup; she didn't have to. Her long eyebrows were thin and long, her plump red lips fresh and luscious, her teeth snowy white. She looked like a fairy from the heavens.

Li Qianlin's eyelashes fluttered as her eyes opened wide. Her eyes were as bright as the moon. When she saw Zhang Lie staring at her, her cheeks suddenly turned rosy. The flare of color made her beauty mature.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

Zhang Lie laughed. "To appreciate your newfound beauty, of course—to familiarize myself with it once more."

Li Qianlin's blush spread up to her ears.

"How do you feel?" Zhang Lie asked.

"What do you mean, how do I feel?"

"Did the potion of metamorphosis have any lingering effects on your body? Any discomfort?"

"So that's what you're talking about... I thought..."

"Thought what?"

Li Qianlin waved a hand. "No, nothing! I feel just fine. I haven't cultivated, but I feel like my strength's just grown by leaps and bounds. I expect I could even take on Father in a fair fight now."

Zhang Lie laughed. "You underestimate your father. He has far more combat experience than you do."

However, Li Qianlin's perception wasn't mistaken. She was beyond a superior king's level in strength; this was the natural state of a fourth-realm lifeform, as imposed by the natural law of the realm.

Zhang Lie extended a hand as Li Qianlin took his palm. "Come, let's see if we can head into the fourth realm proper. With me around, even if an accident occurs, you'll be able to return to the dragonwhale soulspace immediately."

Now that Li Qianlin was above a superior king's level of strength, she could barely avoid being constrained by the natural law of the fourth realm.

In the blink of an eye, Zhang Lie had brought Li Qianlin into the fourth realm proper. As she felt the wind caress her face, Li Qianlin opened her tightly shut eyes and looked around. "Is this the fourth realm?"

Zhang Lie let go of Li Qianlin's hand and bowed down to her. "Welcome to the fourth realm."

Li Qianlin sucked in a deep breath. She felt as though she hadn't seen sunlight and fresh air in ages. However, she quickly pursed her lips. "It doesn't seem any different from the third realm."

Zhang Lie asked, "Do you feel any discomfort?"

Li Qianlin frowned. "Now that you mention it, I do feel a little uncomfortable. It's as if I'm having trouble breathing, and I can't seem to move myself as smoothly as before. It's almost as though there's a lock on my body."

Zhang Lie replied, "That's normal. After all, you need to acclimate yourself to the fourth realm, as well as to the metamorphosis you just underwent."

Li Qianlin stretched her arms and legs. "Does that mean I can accompany you now, then?"

Zhang Lie nodded. "You can, but I don't particularly recommend it."

"Why?"

"You're too weak."

Li Qianlin visibly deflated. "So it's still the same as before..."

What was the difference? She might as well have remained within his dragonwhale soulshard!

"Well, you can have a look at the scenery all along by my side," Zhang Lie offered.

Li Qianlin wasn't particularly interested in the scenery.

Zhang Lie smoothly changed the topic. "Conveniently, I just obtained something interesting. Come, take a look!"

Zhang Lie retrieved the glass orb containing a model airship, which he had obtained from the trial-taker's chamber. He shattered it in front of Li Qianlin, causing the model airship within to inflate and spread out. Li Qianlin's eyes were raptured by the unfolding airship—or, to be precise, not ruptured, but very scared. The sudden appearance of a metallic object the likes of which she had never seen caused her to grab tightly onto Zhang Lie's wrist. Zhang Lie couldn't help but grin. She looked somewhat cute when she was scared.

"This is an airship, used for transportation."

Li Qianlin asked, "So it's like one of those wormhole shuttles?"

"Not quite. Wormhole shuttles only work in wormholes, whereas this flying airship can fly through the sky with essentially no restriction. It's like a peak-grade lifeform."

"Are you sure this isn't a genetic lifeform with plated metallic armor?"

"You could understand it that way, I suppose, but it's actually a crafted tool."

Li Qianlin gaped. "This sort of tool can be produced?!"

Chapter 1340: Made in the Milky Way

"There are many such constructs in my homeworld," Zhang Lie told Li Qianlin.

Li Qianlin was shocked. "Doesn't that mean that your homeworld is really formidable, if it's able to make these sorts of metallic lifeforms?"

"More or less. Compared to the third realm, it's quite strong."

The hunters of the third realm had to work together in order to defend against the indigenous aliens of the third realm, but this was largely because the truly powerful hunters, such as Hong Tianqi, had already gone past it. Hong Tianqi and other hunters like him boasted strength incomparable to those of hunters—and aliens—in the third.

In terms of military might, they even boasted galactic battleships.

Zhang Lie thought for a moment. "The military might on Earth isn't particularly strong."

Li Qianlin knew a bit about Zhang Lie's homeworld.

"But the Zenith Dojo is there!"

"The Zenith Dojo might be strong as a whole, but there are plenty of top hunters in the Milky Way. In terms of supreme power, Earth has only one hunter worth speaking about: Heavenly Monarch Hong Tianqi."

Li Qianlin asked, "How about you?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "I'm nowhere close, not until I ascend to the fifth realm, at the very least."

"This airship is more impressive than modern technology and advances from the Milky Way," Zhang Lie concluded.

After all, the technology of the Milky Way couldn't be transported into the dimensional world. Zhang Lie touched the airship's hull, only to find that although it looked metallic and lustrous, it felt like stone. This was a material that the Milky Way did not possess.

The airship was outfitted like a battleship and possessed some combat ability, though exactly how much remained to be determined.

"I'd like to understand how this airship works... well, let's take a look." Zhang Lie found the entrance to the airship, but didn't see an obvious way to get in. Just then, a large camera mounted on

the door scanned him with a red laser. A robotic noise rang out, "Scan beginning. Lifeform of the Milky Way; race: human. Owner of this airship. Permitted to enter."

The door to the airship slid open. The moment Zhang Lie stepped inside, the robotic voice continued, "Welcome home, owner. The original owner of this airship, Bu Wentian, has transferred his authority to you. From today onwards, you shall be my captain."

Li Qianlin followed curiously behind Zhang Lie. "This metallic lifeform can even speak?"

A red laser scanned Li Qianlin. The robotic voice rang out, "Scan beginning. Lifeform of the dimensional world. Warning! Warning! Warning! You are not permitted to enter. Please leave immediately. Please leave immediately."

A number of guns and other weaponry appeared by the entrance to the airship, pointed straight at Li Qianlin. Zhang Lie hurriedly stepped before her. "This is my companion."

The robotic voice continued, "You have been granted access to enter the airship. Welcome."

Li Qianlin cocked her head and asked curiously, "Was this metallic lifeform about to attack me?"

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "It's alright now."

"Can this metallic lifeform speak?"

Zhang Lie replied, "I think it's artificial intelligence."

He raised his head. "Aren't you going to introduce yourself?"

The robotic voice didn't respond. Zhang Lie suggested, "Let's go to the control room."

Clearly, the artificial intelligence aboard the airship wasn't comparable to the orb of light in the trial-taker's chamber, whose artificial intelligence had been so advanced that it almost seemed like the real thing. The airship's intelligence was rudimentary; it could only answer things in a robotic fashion, and Zhang Lie's earlier question clearly wasn't in its programming.

At the entrance to the airship was a map on which the control room, in addition to all sorts of facilities, were labeled. Zhang Lie quickly arrived at the control room, which doubled as the ship's command center. The robotic voice rang out again. "Welcome to the command center, my captain. I am pleased to serve you."

Zhang Lie asked, "Can you introduce yourself now?"

"I am Battleship #1073 constructed within the Milky Way. I was produced on..."

Zhang Lie sucked in a deep breath. "Hold on, you were constructed in the Milky Way? The same galaxy I know?"

The airship didn't respond.

Zhang Lie asked, "How much do you know about the place you were produced?"

"It lies outside the dimensional realm."

Zhang Lie rubbed his temples. "Alright..."

He didn't know whether the airship was lacking intelligence or information; it wasn't able to provide an adequate response to Zhang Lie's question.

He was very disappointed in the airship's AI, and had to constantly remind himself not to think of it as the orb of light from the trial-taker's chamber.

Zhang Lie headed to the medicinal research laboratory, where he found all sorts of advanced laboratory apparatus. "I wonder if I can research Potion #6 here...?"

Potion #6 corresponded to monarch gene fragments.

Given Zhang Lie's current understanding, Potion #5 was the limit of his abilities—and that was only with the help of the Yeluo chieftain. If he wanted to research and come up with a recipe for Potion #6, he would have to bring the Yeluo chieftain up to the fourth realm, then give him sufficient time to familiarize himself with the herbs and grasses available in the fourth realm.

The Yeluo chieftain had essentially reached a limit in the third realm, and Zhang Lie hadn't harbored high hopes that he would be able to ascend. With the potion of metamorphosis now known to him, however, it was possible that Zhang Lie really could help the Yeluo chieftain out.

Once the members of Team Zenith all ascended to the fourth realm, he would have them enter the trial-taker's chamber and obtain more potions of metamorphosis there, then use those potions to bring the Yeluo Chieftain into the fourth realm. That would significantly increase the likelihood of coming up with Potion #6.

It was no longer a wholly impossible notion.

The robotic voice explained, "The medicinal research laboratory can help analyze all manner of potions and potion-making ingredients. The medicinal repository has recorded information about all known herbs and medicine of the fourth realm. If a recipe is input into the system, it can be optimized using the airship's artificial intelligence. Captain, the device in front of you is a potion analyzer. By placing a potion into the device, you can identify its core components and a sketch of a recipe."

Zhang Lie considered the device before him. "You mean that this device can be used for reverse engineering?"

"It can aid in reverse engineering, my captain."

In other words, the device alone was insufficient; it had to be complemented with talents who were familiar with medicine and pillmaking.

Zhang Lie was very curious about the facilities within the medicinal research laboratory. He sat before the computer and input the recipe for Potion #5 within.

"Can you optimize this recipe?"

The robotic voice rang out, "Would you like to convert the potion ingredients listed here into their fourth-realm equivalents?"

"Indeed."

"Please wait for three minutes."

After three minutes had passed, a brand-new recipe for Potion #5 appeared on the screen. A whole third of the ingredients had been swapped out for new ones. Zhang Lie frowned and scrutinized the recipe carefully—the new recipe did seem to be workable.

The robotic voice rang out, "Would you like the recipe to be optimized further?"