

U. Warlord 1341

Chapter 1341: Seeking Revenge

Zhang Lie seemed shocked. "Can you optimize this recipe further?"

The recipe for Potion #5 had just been devised in the third realm. How was the airship able to improve upon it? It could hardly possess the recipe for Potion #6—Zhang Lie would never believe it.

The airship's robotic voice continued, "Improvements can be deduced using the airship's artificial intelligence."

In other words, the airship itself didn't have an improved recipe; this would only be a guess.

"Will it be reliable?"

"If the airship operates at minimum functional capacity, without access to high-speed flight and combat abilities, the improved recipe will take 24,000 hours to optimize."

In other words, a thousand days.

"Maintaining high-speed flight and combat abilities will cause the improved recipe to take 240,000 hours to optimize. Would you like to begin analysis and optimization?"

"Do so."

The airship's robotic voice continued, "The airship only has sufficient reserves for a hundred days of operation. This analysis and optimization will take too long at present. Please provide sufficient resources."

Zhang Lie replied, "We'll have a look at other spots in the airship before dealing with the problem of energy consumption."

According to Bu Wentian, the airship could transform the vast majority of resources into energy for itself; it wasn't picky.

Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin walked out of the medicinal research laboratory and into the neighboring plant greenhouse.

There was a little garden in the interior of the airship, within which all manner of plants were being grown. Steel racks lined the walls all around, filled with plants covered in glass.

Next, they went to the airship's living quarters.

Zhang Lie was shocked by the scale of the living quarters. He hadn't expected the interior of the airship to be so large. It was almost the size of a small city, and was larger than the exterior of the airship itself.

The robotic voice explained, "Spatial compression techniques have been used in the interior of the airship to accommodate more travelers. Furthermore, the plants and vegetables grown within the airship allow for self-sufficiency."

Zhang Lie asked curiously, "Why not do the same for the medicinal herbs around here?"

"Spiritual herbs have certain requirements as to their environments, and not all such herbs can thrive in a spatially compressed environment. Weaker lifeforms will have to consume special medication from time to time lest they suffer from repercussions."

After touring the interior of the airship, Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin returned to the command center, then flew toward Lin Lingfeng's settlement.

Because there weren't sufficient energy resources, there was no need to leave the airship on the spot to analyze and optimize a recipe for Potion #6. There would be plenty of time to do so once enough resources had been found.

The airship moved particularly quickly, and it was at Lin Lingfeng's settlement in the blink of an eye. Once again, there seemed to be a commotion. Thick clouds and fog covered the settlement.

The airship's robotic voice sounded, "Energetic fluctuations ahead."

Zhang Lie asked, "Can you scan it?"

"Targets have been displayed on the radar."

Zhang Lie saw a large group of red dots via the radar, including a large red triangle at its center.

"What do the symbols mean?"

Zhang Lie wasn't an airship pilot, and neither had he spent much time in an airship. He was naturally unfamiliar with the display, and wasn't sure how to read it."

The robotic voice continued, "Special energetic fluctuations in white fog detected, with the ability to disrupt vision and magnetosensory organs. Clear the area of fog?"

Li Qianlin asked curiously, "Are we going somewhere special?"

"Lin Lingfeng's settlement used to be an ordinary city," Zhang Lie replied. "It looks like they're in danger again."

Lin Lingfeng and her settlement was indeed in danger, severe danger at that.

The genetic hunters had been repairing their battered city walls when cloud and fog suddenly surrounded them. Huge quantities of fog gushed out. The genetic hunters had no time to react before the fog enveloped the city. Lin Lingfeng assigned some hunters to check out the scene, but none who had been dispatched returned.

Just then, the cloud formed a human face. Its voice resounded across the fog, as though it were a heavenly deity.

"Weak, puny ants, I am the son of Cthaat, member of Eternal Sun. I bear you no enmity, but my brother was killed not long ago. My father is enraged, and has tasked me with finding the culprit."

In order to investigate the death of Cthaat's son, Black Swamp, the sea of clouds, another of Cthaat's sons, had headed to the nearest human settlement to Black Swamp's haunt.

"Hand this person over and I'll let you all go."

The sea of clouds transformed into Zhang Lie.

The black swamp was naturally linked to the nearest human settlement around.

The hunters murmured to each other, making a fuss. Many recognized just who the figure was.

Lin Lingfeng's companion remarked in surprise, "Isn't that...?"

Lin Lingfeng pushed her companion aside and leapt up onto the city walls. She shouted toward the sea of clouds' face: "Sir, we are unfamiliar with this purported murderer you accuse. Even if we did, we would hardly hand over a companion just because you will it. We genetic hunters work together—we're united."

Against such a massive threat, Lin Lingfeng knew that the most important thing to do was to stabilize the situation.

The sea of clouds' face formed a long sigh. "I didn't want to come, but my father bade me do so. You seem to have just sent a few people out of the city. Conveniently, I picked them up."

A few Milky Way hunters were hanging in the sky, the sea of clouds forming a seal around their bodies.

"I'm a pacifist, and I'd rather not fight—nor use any cruel tactics against you. If you hand over the culprit, I'll return these people immediately. One life for the lives of many—it's a good deal, is it not?"

Lin Lingfeng cried out, "Sir, I don't know who this is!"

The sea of clouds asked, "Don't you think it cruel?"

"What?"

"To watch yourself be killed by your companion. Isn't it a regretful thing, a cruel one?" The sea of clouds rumbled. The leftmost person held in stasis suddenly began to shriek. His body seemed to be compressed by an unknown force. His blood burst into a mist of red droplets that seeped out from his skin. He transformed into a parched corpse immediately."

Lin Lingfeng widened her eyes, unable to believe what she was seeing.

The sea of clouds had killed someone, just like that! As it had stated, it considered them nothing more than ants.

The sea of clouds sighed. "What a cruel race. He must be rather upset even in death. You could have saved him with just one piece of information—but you chose not to. Take a look at his despair, his pained gaze. He must have loathed you moments before his death."

Chapter 1342: To the Death

Lin Lingfeng clenched her fists tightly. The assailant was accusing the victim of being the culprit! Even so, what could Lin Lingfeng do? The genetic hunters of the fourth realm were a weak and scattered force. They were weak; they had no choice but to accept the beatings they were given.

[Eternal Sun]

These two words left all genetic hunters present feeling weak and helpless. The hunters of the fourth realm knew a little about the two major organizations within; no one in the gathering point would be a match for them, not even if they fought together.

The sea of clouds gave them an ultimatum. "Hand over this man, and I'll release these friends of yours."

Lin Lingfeng shook her head. "We really don't know."

"You may have some more time to consider. I'll give you fifty seconds. Every ten seconds, I'll kill another member of your race."

Blood seeped out from the orifices of the second genetic hunter from the left. He was pulped into a bloody mist, which dissipated amidst the white fog.

One genetic hunter called out, "Long live the Milky Way! No Milky Way hunter is a coward—we won't bow down to the likes of you!"

He glowed with light as genetic energy surged throughout his body. Then, with a huge bang, he disappeared in a ball of glowing radiance, clearing the immediate area around him of the white mist.

The sea of clouds sighed. "A man of integrity, it seems, to have chosen to self-destruct rather than to suffer an ignoble death. What a pity that his companions don't seem to cherish him—you're the ones who killed him, don't you see?"

"Hunters of the Milky Way!" Lin Lingfeng shouted, her eyes red.

"We're here!" the genetic hunters within the city responded.

"When have we Milky Way hunters grown so cowardly as to bear this disrespect?!"

"Even if we fall, we won't let ourselves be humiliated by the aliens of the fourth realm!"

"We'll fight to our deaths!"

All the hunters within the settlement began to shout. The death of their comrade-in-arms had stoked a raging inferno in their souls.

"We hunters of the Milky Way may die, but we'll die with respect!"

"Eternal Sun, Ancient Gods' Abode—none of us are afraid of you!"

"We've faced countless beast stampedes, and we've never backed down! You're a sea of clouds? Well, we'll pierce you through!"

The hunters of the fourth realm felt a sense of pride and honor at belonging to the Milky Way. Though individually weak, they banded together against their enemies and against disasters. This was what had kept the hunters of the Milky Way alive, like a flame that could not be snuffed out.

Genetic energy lit up within the settlement as radiant light tinted the sky in a barrage of colors.

The hunters launched their techniques all at once, but none of them were able to deal any lasting damage to the sea of clouds. The mist was illusory, evanescent; ordinary attacks had no chance of hitting it.

The face formed by the sea of clouds sighed. "What a pity. I was going to destroy this city after identifying the culprit, but it looks like it'll take me a bit more work."

Mist surged into the city. Hunters shrieked as they asphyxiated, their faces turning blue and purple. They coughed violently, vomiting out blood. The weakest hunters' bodies exploded on the spot and turned into a bloody mist absorbed by the sea of clouds. In an instant, the entire city was covered by cloudy mist.

The opponent was stronger than they could imagine. The hunters turned to mist without even being able to strike at their opponent.

Lin Lingfeng's eyes clouded over with despair. "What are we doing...?"

Just then, one hunter knelt on the ground and begged, "I know where to find the person you're looking for! Please, don't kill me!"

The sea of clouds formed a face that hung in the sky once more.

"Looks like there's at least one intelligent fellow out there, at least."

Lin Lingfeng clutched onto her weapon with trembling hands as she shouted, "Stand up! We hunters of the Milky Way can't submit to these aliens even if we have to die!"

The kneeling hunter yelled out, "I'm sorry, but I don't want to die! I still have friends and family waiting for us in the Milky Way!"

Lin Lingfeng cried back, "Do you think the rest of us are orphans?!"

The kneeling hunter replied, "He was just someone who popped out of nowhere! He has no relation to our gathering point, so what harm does it do to reveal his identity?"

"He saved our whole city! With him in the fourth realm, our lives will surely change for the better—just like how he created the kingdom of Limit for us humans in the second realm, and constructed a whole new world order in the third! He's our brightest hope!"

The kneeling hunter called back, "Who cares about hope if we can't even live until tomorrow?!"

Lin Lingfeng was about to continue arguing when she was caught by a bundle of mist. The sea of clouds said, "Keep talking."

"This man's called Zhang Lie! He left the city a few days ago, and has been gone since."

"Where has he gone?"

The kneeling hunter shook his head. "That—I don't know."

A bundle of mist suddenly caused the kneeling hunter to float into the air. "W-What?"

"I'm very disappointed."

The kneeling hunter struggled in the air, but was unable to break free. The sea of clouds reiterated, "I'm very disappointed. I thought you were a clever man, but..."

The kneeling hunter cried out, "I've told you the truth, all of it!"

Suddenly, he exploded into a bloody mist.

The sea of clouds sighed. "It looks like your race is composed of a bunch of idiots and feckless fools. Well, there's no need for any of you to live on, then."

If he were to kill the entire race, the culprit would naturally also perish.

The hunters of the city finally understood that surrender wouldn't save their lives.

Cthaa's son wouldn't believe them; he was waiting to see Zhang Lie himself. However, Zhang Lie wasn't within the city. There was no way any of them could give him what he wanted.

If Zhang Lie were in the city, they wouldn't have had to suffer.

Only by fighting to their death could they die with honor and dignity.

The sea of clouds continued impatiently, "It's rather troublesome, but I suppose I'll have to use Father's method. I'll kill you all and extinguish your race."

More hunters in the city began to die. The disparity in power between the combatants was immense; any form of struggle was pointless in the face of absolute strength. Just as the hunters in the city were about to despair, a pillar of light pierced through the sea of clouds and the face it formed.

Upon seeing the object that emerged from the sea of clouds, the genetic hunters thought they were suffering from a mass delusion. All of them recognized what they were seeing—but that was precisely why they were all the more shocked.

Chapter 1343: The Starlit Path

"An airship!" the genetic hunters shouted in surprise. Wasn't it the case that you couldn't bring technology into the dimensional world? How could an airship exist in the fourth realm? Was it just something that looked like an airship?

The clouds began to draw close to the airship.

The airship's robotic voice rang out, "A mysterious mist is drawing near. Shall I activate the artillery system?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "There's no need. The airship doesn't have much energy, and I don't want it to be wasted. I can deal with an enemy like this easily."

Zhang Lie headed up to the top of the airship and frowned as he took in the condition of the settlement.

The cloudy mist squirmed. The white, fluffy sea of clouds seemed to be alive. The clouds rose up in the form of a long snake that coiled around the airship and Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie snorted. He clenched his fists tightly. Pale blue genetic energy rippled about Zhang Lie's arms. He flicked his wrists, causing a frightening aura to descend around them. A fish the size of a whale materialized in the air.

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

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

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 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. The cloudy mist around the city was swept clean for a mile around Zhang Lie.

The cloudy mist transformed into a face.

"Oh? I thought it would take me much longer to find you, but here you are!"

Zhang Lie frowned. "I was passing by and saw Lin Lingfeng in trouble, so I thought I'd help her out—but it looks like I was the cause of it."

The cloud face replied, "Whether or not you are depends on your answer. Though I don't quite believe it, were you the one who killed Black Swamp?"

"Black Swamp? What?"

The cloud face smiled. "As I thought, a race as weak as ants—how could any of them have killed my brother, Chtaat's son? Is that what you thought I'd say?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "Regardless, I'm not familiar with this Black Swamp you mention."

The cloud face replied, "You must have heard of Chtaat's sons, then."

Zhang Lie thought for a moment. "I think I've heard of it, but I don't remember where."

The cloud face continued, "You must have been to a large, black swamp recently? Forget it. I can't be bothered to talk nonsense with you. Regardless of whether you were the one who killed Black Swamp, I'm going to kill you and the rest of your race along with you."

Zhang Lie replied, "What a coincidence! I was about to do the same to you."

"Right, what race do you belong to? No, never mind. You're all as weak as ants. There's no need to remember your race." The cloud face dispersed and transformed into large quantities of mist that surged toward Zhang Lie.

"After doing this to one of the Milky Way gathering points in the fourth realm, you won't get away alive!" Zhang Lie replied. He extended his pointer finger like a sword, and water-attuned genetic energy coiled around it like a snake.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!"

With a swing of his finger, a sword slash pierced through the mist. Even more mist surged toward Zhang Lie from all over.

A raging shark swam forth deep into the mist, where it met surprising resistance. The mist was simultaneously real and illusory. It couldn't be caught, and it did no damage when pierced through, but it could exert strength of its own.

"[Ninecarp Transformation]!"

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

Black genetic energy gushed out, forming pitch-black clouds that contrasted against the white mist. It sizzled as it came into contact with the mist.

Zhang Lie's genetic energy spread out all around him, shrouding the airship within.

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

Zhang Lie punched forward, and the black serpent behind him shot forth through the mist. However, it didn't strike anything physical.

With his initial probing attack rendered useless, Zhang Lie couldn't help but sigh. "This mist might as well not exist."

The mist reformed into a face and laughed at Zhang Lie. "Your attack will be fruitless. I've never been defeated, and I'm invincible!"

"Nothing is ever invincible. You seem like a decently strong opponent, however, and I have just the thing to try out on you."

As Zhang Lie activated his monarch-grade limitless universe soulshard,

he glowed with stellar radiance, like a burning star. Starlight flowed through his body in phantasmagorical colors.

Li Qianlin, watching from the airship, was caught by the allure of the starlight.

The genetic hunters in the city were all shocked by Zhang Lie's demonstration.

"What sort of power is this?!"

"It looks like a soulshard."

"What sort of soulshard would cause such a huge commotion..."

Zhang Lie's body transformed into a glaze of the dark cosmos, as though the Milky Way itself flowed through his body. His aura grew tremendously.

"I'm not finished!" Zhang Lie simultaneously activated his dragonwolf soulshard. His russet fur seemed to glimmer with stellar radiance, each hair a shining star, as though he were draped with the entirety of the Milky Way. His four limbs were armored with a dragon's scales, each a burning golden sun. The two soulshards' power combined.

Bu Wentian harbored high expectations for Zhang Lie, not just for the Galactic Rising Stars Cup, but for the good of humanity. He had given him an incredible treasure, a high-grade soulshard that was perfectly compatible with his peak-grade dragonwolf transformation, replacing his original superior-grade blood ant soulshard.

The combination of the two soulshards produced a magnified strength.

A dragon's horns grew out of Zhang Lie's forehead, shining with stellar radiance, surrounded by galactic starlight. To others, he would seem to have the boundless energy of a new galaxy.

Zhang Lie swiped forward with his claws. Starlight flooded forward, splitting apart heaven and earth, and dividing the sea of clouds in twain.

Chapter 1344: An Unexpected Boon

The sea of clouds was divided in twain. Upon seeing the clear sky above them, the genetic hunters were shocked. The sea of clouds trembled violently, clearly shocked by Zhang Lie's attack.

"I wonder if you'll be able to survive the next technique?"

Starlight surrounded Zhang Lie. Countless stars whizzed away from his body. His pitch-black genetic energy seemed like the astral void, with shining stars scattered throughout.

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

His genetic energy condensed into a black dragon, whose scales were each a star. The stars inlaid in its body formed a long stellar river, which shot out alongside Zhang Lie's punch.

The stellar dragon cleared the sky of mist. The sea of clouds formed countless dense palms, attempting to restrict the dragon's movements.

"Is this all you've got?" the sea of clouds called out.

The mist transformed into hundreds of dragons that shot toward Zhang Lie.

The sea of clouds sounded particularly cocky. "You might be able to manifest dragons, but so can I—and more than you can!"

"I've never lost out in terms of numbers."

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 stellar dragons soared through the air.

They obliterated the cloud dragons within moments, then tore apart the sea of clouds.

Even Cthaa's son was unable to handle so many attacks at once. The mist began to retreat as Zhang Lie chuckled. "You wee so arrogant when you approached—and now you're trying to flee?"

The sea of clouds replied in gasps and pants. "I'll come back soon enough, just you wait! I'll bring my brothers with me in the future. For killing my brother, you'll surely perish!"

"As I said, after making such a mess to a Milky Way gathering point in the fourth realm and killing so many genetic hunters, you won't be leaving alive." Zhang Lie snapped his fingers as the energy of annihilation erupted around him.

The stellar dragons all exploded, each with the force of a galaxy. A huge wave of energy spread out around him, forming a black hole that swallowed up everything in sight, including the white mist. Cthaa's son screamed as the mist was completely sucked in, unable to resist the pull of gravity.

As all the mist was devoured by the black hole, the battle ended.

Zhang Lie canceled his transformation and returned to his airship, which slowly landed in the city.

The buildings within the city hadn't been destroyed, but there were countless weapons and torn clothes left behind by the fallen hunters. Zhang Lie commented, "It looks like your gathering point has suffered another disaster."

Lin Lingfeng slowly walked over. "Thank you, Heavenly Monarch, for saving our gathering point once again."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "You had better call me Zhang Lie."

Lin Lingfeng continued, "If you hadn't arrived in a timely fashion, the hunters of the gathering point might all have perished."

"I thought you would hold a grudge against me for luring such an enemy to your gathering point."

Zhang Lie knew very well that this so-called Cthaa's son was targeting him.

Lin Lingfeng shook her head. "No one anticipated it, and no one would have wanted it. Furthermore, you've saved our gathering point twice over, Zhang Lie."

"It might as well have been none. I saved you once, but that sea of clouds came here for me."

Lin Lingfeng glanced at the airship behind Zhang Lie. "Where in the world did you get such an airship? I would never have believed that the technology of the Milky Way could be brought into the dimensional world..."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "This isn't from the Milky Way, but rather from the dimensional world itself."

Lin Lingfeng frowned. "The dimensional world shouldn't have any technology, though?"

The hunters of the Milky Way had once attempted to use materials from the dimensional world to make simple technology, but their experiments all failed.

Zhang Lie shook his head. "They're not using the same sort of science we do—it's a separate system entirely."

The hunters of the Milky Way had stumbled into a pitfall. They thought that technology didn't work in the dimensional world, but in truth, that wasn't the case. It was simply that the science and technology of the Milky Way was incompatible with the natural law of the dimensional world.

In the third realm, for instance, Zhang Lie had seen examples of technological development—the spiritual machines that the death spirit king had devised, or even the cultivation of special plants that the Yeluo chieftain had found in the second and third realms, which represented some bio-organic development. From these examples, it was apparent that a form of science was indeed available in the dimensional world, though one different from that practiced in the Milky Way.

Lin Lingfeng asked, "Where did you get it?"

"It was an unexpected boon."

"I won't ask you to reveal more information," Lin Lingfeng replied. "But I'm sure many people would go crazy upon seeing it..."

The researchers of the Milky Way and ambitious hunters would surely go crazy upon learning about the existence of airships in the dimensional world, and they would surely be tempted to dismantle the airship to understand the principles of its construction within the realm.

Zhang Lie mused, "I hadn't thought about this."

Lin Lingfeng shook her head in exasperation. "You're far too strong."

Zhang Lie's strength was so overwhelming that he could easily ignore anyone within the gathering point.

"Well, it looks like it's too late to hide it now."

Zhang Lie wasn't afraid of trouble—he had the strength to take on anyone and everyone.

However, since he was planning to return to the Milky Way for a while, for the safety of the airship and of Li Qianlin, Zhang Lie intended to take a few precautions. He returned to the airship and added more fuel.

He headed to the airship's furnace, which was scorching hot, and threw all the excess lifeform meat he had into it.

Then, he returned to the command center. He told Li Qianlin, "I'll be leaving the fourth realm for some time. Stay on the airship. I'll authorize you to command it."

Li Qianlin asked, "Approximately when will you return?"

"I'll be gone for about a day, so after the time dilation, perhaps two weeks."

Li Qianlin nodded. "Very well. I'll guard the airship during this time."

Zhang Lie smiled wryly. "Protect yourself first."

Chapter 1345: More or Less

Zhang Lie commanded the airship, "Temporarily cede authority over the airship to Li Qianlin."

A robotic voice rang out, "Li Qianlin has been assigned secondary stewardship of this airship. When the primary steward is not present, Li Qianlin will be in charge of this airship."

Zhang Lie continued, "Whenever any lifeform approaches a range of twenty meters, shoot it down immediately."

"Understood."

Zhang Lie then told Li Qianlin, "While I'm gone, if you feel bored, you can pilot the airship and have some fun."

With everything prepared, Zhang Lie left the airship and told Lin Lingfeng, "I'll be heading back to the Milky Way for some time. Don't let any of the hunters approach within thirty meters. I've instructed the airship to shoot down any lifeform within that range."

Lin Lingfeng nodded. "Don't worry, I'll let everyone in the settlement know."

Zhang Lie bade farewell to Lin Lingfeng and returned to the hunter's guild in the Milky Way, whereupon he submitted a request to return to Earth.

Before his request was approved, Zhang Lie called Zhang Hong.

Zhang Hong was surprised. "You've returned from the fourth realm?"

Zhang Lie asked, "Aren't I informing you of it right now?"

Zhang Hong rolled her eyes. "You heartless man—do you even still think about me?"

Zhang Lie sighed. "It's fortunate that there's no one around you, or others might get the wrong impression of our relationship."

Zhang Hong asked, "What happened this time?"

"I intend on returning to Earth. Please inform the hunters of the third realm, Zhang Hanxiang, and the members of Team Zenith to wait for me in the dojo."

Zhang Hong confirmed, "You want them to welcome you back?"

"More or less."

"That's not like you. Your usual style is to ignore all manner of custom to prioritize training instead. What's changed?"

Zhang Lie replied, "There are some issues I need to talk to Hanxiang about, as well as the members of Team Zenith at large."

"Is something wrong in the fourth realm?"

Zhang Hong seemed even more perplexed.

What the members of Team Zenith couldn't deal with, Zhang Lie could do so easily on his own. What Zhang Lie couldn't deal with, the members of Team Zenith would be no help.

Zhang Lie replied, "There's something important—a rare opportunity, let's say—so I'm calling them all over."

Zhang Hong nodded. "If you don't want to divulge more details, I won't pry. I'll have the members of the Zenith Dojo in the third realm inform Zhang Hanxiang and the members of Team Zenith immediately."

By the time Zhang Lie finished chatting with Zhang Hong, his application had been approved.

When fourth-realm hunters wanted to travel within the Milky Way, the hunter's guild would have to make a record of that travel, though there were no restrictions of any kind imposed.

After all, fourth-realm hunters were at the apex of strength, and there were few that could control or deter them.

Unlike the third-realm hunters that were prevalent on every planet, there were far fewer fourth-realm hunters in the Milky Way.

After returning back to Earth, Zhang Lie appeared within the Zenith Dojo after no time at all, considering the speeds at which he now moved.

Zhang Lie hadn't returned to the Zenith Dojo for quite some time, but the time dilation between the Milky Way and the dimensional realm meant that he had only been gone for two or three days since his last visit. Little had changed during the intervening period.

After returning to the Zenith Dojo, he didn't have to wait long before Zhang Hanxiang and the members of Team Zenith appeared, along with his four apprentices.

Zhang Hanxiang hugged him tightly. "I've missed you, Brother!"

Zhang Lie returned her hug. Thinking back to the issue with her spiritual avatar, Zhang Lie's gaze couldn't help soften.

Zhang Hanxiang grumbled, "Brother, why did it take so long for you to visit us after you ascended to the fourth realm?"

Zhang Lie laughed. "Didn't I have Hong Tianqi pass you the information immediately?"

Zhang Hanxiang hugged Zhang Lie tightly.

"But I don't feel comfortable unless I can see you in person!"

"Well, I'm right here."

The members of Team Zenith smiled. "Captain, long time no see."

"Master!"

Hong Xi, Jun Jiuxiao, Ye Xianchen, and Hong Xiao all greeted Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie smiled at them. "You're all here too? Have a seat. Have you eaten?"

Zhang Hanxiang replied, "Brother, we're not hungry."

Zhang Lie turned to Hong Xiao.

"Considering the changes to your aura, Hong Xiao, I'm guessing you've ascended to the third realm too?"

Hong Xiao nodded. "As more and more disciples of the Zenith Dojo ascended to the second realm, the foundations of the kingdom of Limit were stabilized. Even without me, the kingdom of Limit would continue functioning as per normal, so I chose to ascend."

After his period of training in the second realm, Hong Xiao had grown calmer and more disciplined, and he was starting to give off the aura of the strong.

"I've since maxed out my disaster gene fragments."

With the resources that Zhang Lie left behind in the third realm, Hong Xiao had accomplished this feat quickly after his ascension.

Yang Ze asked directly, "Captain, did you come back for some reason?"

Li Feng laughed. "Perhaps our captain misses us?"

Fang Yi scoffed. "He's already paired up with Li Qianlin. He'd rather have us all be gone so he doesn't have to manage us, I expect."

Sun Xiaowu coughed dryly. Fang Yi immediately shut his mouth and made a zipping motion with his lips.

Zhang Lie asked, "If you have time to joke about me, I'm sure your training and cultivation must be going well."

"We haven't wasted a single day!" Yang Ze announced.

Li Feng nodded seriously. "We've been working hard on cultivation, without skiving off."

Fang Yi continued, "In order to catch up to you, Captain, we could hardly go easy on ourselves."

Sun Xiaowu added, "We've been working on our shortcomings based on the training session we had with you, Captain."

Hong Xi nodded. "Master, I've grown far stronger than you were when you ascended!"

Zhang Lie glanced at the hunters gathered around the room. "Very good. Considering your auras, you've indeed worked very hard—and you are all stronger than I was when I ascended to the third realm."

Even this casual affirmation of their hard work was like high praise to the members of Team Zenith, who all beamed.

Zhang Lie continued, "Mengmeng, Sun Xiaowu, Fang Yi, Yang Ze, Zhou Ying, Li Feng, you six older members of Team Zenith all pass in terms of strength. It's time for you to ascend to the fourth realm."

Sun Mengmeng cried out, "Captain, we can finally ascend now?!"

Chapter 1346: Two Strongest Organizations

Zhang Lie continued, "I wanted to set up this meeting for two reasons: first, I hadn't seen all of you for a long time, and second, to inform you that you're all ready to ascend now."

Sun Mengmeng cried out, "Captain, we can finally ascend now?!"

She had been waiting for this moment for far too long.

"You've all worked hard to remediate your shortcomings, and you won't improve much further in the third realm. Better that you ascend to the fourth realm—everyone says the fourth realm is hellish, which means it'll spur your growth to a considerable extent."

Yang Ze asked, "Are hunters in the fourth realm suffering?"

"That's part of what I'll be discussing."

Hong Xia asked expectantly, "Master, what about us?"

Zhang Lie frowned. "You're still lacking in terms of strength. The fourth realm is extremely dangerous, and hunters there might die at any moment. Considering your current strength, it would be impossible for you to develop rapidly in the fourth realm, so keep working hard instead. Especially you, Hanxiang. You've been slacking off lately, haven't you?"

Zhang Hanxiang folded her arms. "What? No! I've been working very hard."

Zhang Lie replied, "You might have grown, but your growth rate is still slower than everyone else's!"

Zhang Hanxiang grumbled, "I'll keep working hard, Brother."

Zhang Lie continued, "Let me tell you all about the fourth realm so that you can be mentally prepared. Unlike the third realm, the fourth realm is filled with danger. It's difficult for the average hunter to survive in the fourth realm; it might as well be an apocalyptic world."

Yang Ze asked, "In that case, how can we Milky Way hunters gain a foothold for ourselves?"

"Genetic hunters have to group up and work together if they want to live, but even if they do so and form a gathering point, they frequently encounter beast stampedes that can easily take down their buildings."

Zhang Hanxiang asked, "If the fourth realm is so dangerous, why do we hunters keep ascending? The third realm's conditions aren't bad—or you can even stay in the Milky Way!"

Zhang Lie explained, "There are plenty of reasons. First and foremost, pioneers are necessary in order to explore the dimensional realm. Without any pioneers who lead the way with a sacrifice of blood and life, the fourth realm would have been a dead end. Second, attempting to grow stronger is in our nature."

Sun Mengmeng explained, "To use the four prime races of the Milky Way as example, when one of the starbeasts ascends to the fourth realm and obtains some benefit there, the starbeasts as a whole will surpass the other three prime races. What will the other three races do then?"

Zhang Hanxiang murmured thoughtfully, "They'd naturally be upset—there was a balance, which the starbeasts broke."

"And that would cause them to send members of their own kind into the fourth realm," Sun Mengmeng continued, smiling. "In other words, it's essentially all a competition."

Zhang Hanxiang understood now. "I understand the theory, but why do people all want to be stronger? Can't we all just bow down toward the strong?"

Zhang Lie rubbed his sister's head.

"If the entire universe were like you, without any incentive to grow strong, then we wouldn't have so many wars. The universe would long since have been at peace—though of course we'd lose out on development and innovation, too."

Everyone laughed.

Zhang Hanxiang hmped. "I don't need to grow strong when you're around, Brother!"

Zhang Lie returned to the main topic at hand. "What you have to watch out for most within the fourth realm are the beast stampedes. In addition, there are two ancient organizations in the fourth realm of considerable strength: the Ancient Gods' Abode, and Eternal Sun."

Zhang Hanxiang commented, "From their names alone, they sound really strong..."

Zhang Lie continued, "The Ancient Gods' Abode and Eternal Sun are the two strongest organizations of the fourth realm. In addition, there's a recent newcomer that's said to be very strong as well, though I don't know much about it."

Of course, Zhang Lie didn't know much about the Ancient Gods' Abode and Eternal Sun either; he had only heard of their names.

Yang Ze asked curiously, "How strong are these two strongest organizations?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I fought a member of Eternal Sun recently, but it wasn't particularly strong."

Everyone laughed. "Against you, Captain, no one would be particularly strong."

Zhang Lie asked, "How's it going in the third realm?"

Sun Mengmeng replied, "Do you still care about the third realm even after ascending to the fourth, Captain?"

"I'm just asking."

"Nothing's really happened since you left—you haven't been gone that long, after all, Captain. Right, the council's decided that everyone's going to study the research material left behind by the death spirits to see if we can get anything out of it."

"I look forward to what they can do with it," Zhang Lie replied.

Sun Mengmeng continued, "In addition, using the farm you left us, we've all maxed out our monarch gene fragments."

Zhu had access to the unified world's energy, and it was far easier to cultivate monarch-grade lifeforms now than it had been during Zhang Lie's time.

"Zhu keeps asking about you," Sun Mengmeng added.

Sun Xiaowu took over. "The Zongming, Lie, and draconian kingdoms, along with our own Milky Way coalition, are still essentially the same as before. We're in the honeymoon period and cooperating on just about everything. The third realm's very peaceful at the moment, without the constant war and strife among the three thousand worlds. All this is thanks to you, Captain."

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "I did very little. When the unified council was formed, world peace wasn't one of the priorities, either."

Sun Mengmeng replied, "Regardless, Captain, you've changed yet another realm."

The hunters chatted with each other about various subjects. It had been a long time since they returned to Earth, and there were plenty of regional specialities that they had a craving for. They left together; Zhang Lie had Zhang Hanxiang stay behind.

Zhang Hanxiang asked, "Is something the matter, Brother?"

Zhang Lie made a few abortive attempts to speak, but he didn't know just how to broach the subject. He thought for a moment, then made up his mind.

"I found information about our parents in the fourth realm."

Zhang Hanxiang stepped forward and clutched Zhang Lie's shirt in shock.

"You've found our parents?!"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "They left a message behind. I can confirm they're not in the fourth realm, but I don't know where they are. There's a very good chance they're still alive."

Zhang Lie couldn't be sure whether his parents were still in the fourth realm, but he couldn't tell Zhang Hanxiang that.

If Zhang Hanxiang learned that his parents might be in the fourth realm, she would surely do her best to ascend immediately. Zhang Lie knew this as a certainty—because that was what he would do.

The dangers of the fourth realm notwithstanding, Zhang Hanxiang had the strength to ascend to the fourth realm and protect herself, but it would be very difficult to grow strong quickly. Furthermore, there was still the issue of her spiritual avatar.

Chapter 1347: As Long As They're Alive

Zhang Hanxiang relaxed. "As long as they're alive, as long as they're alive..."

Zhang Lie didn't intend to tell Zhang Hanxiang about her body, nor the fact that their parents' disappearance had to do with her body as well.

"I'd like you to remain in the dojo for the short term."

The issue of Zhang Hanxiang's body was related to her growth, but Zhang Lie wasn't certain if it had anything to do with her strength or age. Regardless, it would be safer for her to remain in the Milky Way for now.

Zhang Hanxiang didn't understand why. "Isn't Zhang Hong in charge of the dojo at the moment?"

To be frank, Zhang Hanxiang wasn't very interested in managing the dojo.

Zhang Lie replied, "Actually, something might be happening to the dojo in the short term."

Zhang Hanxiang asked, "Has something happened?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "I'm not sure myself, so I'd like you to check on it." Of course, this was only an excuse that he had come up with on the spot.

Zhang Hanxiang suddenly seemed to understand something. "So this is your intention, Brother! I understand now."

Zhang Hanxiang was very pleased with herself for figuring out what was going on. "Brother, you're trying to test my skills! Success in the fourth realm will depend not only on strength, but also on wits, too!"

Zhang Lie had no such intention, but this certainly suited his plans. "You can understand it that way."

Zhang Hanxiang patted her chest. "Don't worry. I'm very smart, you'll see! This trial won't stymie me—just you wait and see!"

"Well, if that's the case, I'll make it harder. Before you uncover the problem, you can't enter the dimensional world or seek assistance from anyone else."

Zhang Hanxiang nodded sagely. "You're afraid of me uncovering the answer immediately, aren't you, Brother?"

"Show me what you've got."

"Very well. I accept your challenge!"

Zhang Lie enjoyed a delicious meal with the members of Team Zenith. When they were finished and returned to their respective hometowns, Zhang Lie and the others came back refreshed and full of energy.

Zhang Lie said, "Once you all ascend to the fourth realm, I'll bring you somewhere good."

Sun Mengmeng nibbled on the skewer of meat in her hand. "How will we inform you when we've ascended, Captain?"

Zhang Lie replied, "I've already thought about this. I intend to remain in the Zenith Dojo for a day. Ascend quickly—don't disappoint me."

The members of Team Zenith replied, "Understood!"

After they returned to the Zenith Dojo, the hunters returned to the third realm via the teleportation apparatus, leaving the Zhang siblings behind. Zhang Hanxiang was off to investigate clues to a non-existent problem, whereas Zhang Lie was back to check up on the dojo.

It had been a long while since he last checked on the dojo, and he had been in the dimensional world all this time. Even when he returned to the Milky Way, he had only communicated briefly with Hong Tianqi before returning to the dimensional realm once more. Zhang Hong had been the one in charge all this time.

It had been too long since Zhang Lie had taken a good look at the dojo.

Although Zhang Lie hadn't been gone from the dojo for too long and there hadn't been many changes since, the disciples of the dojo had changed considerably. There were far more now than at the beginning, and they had all grown considerably stronger.

There were even a few newbies in the dojo. The more experienced disciples were largely in the dimensional world, only rarely appearing in the dojo, and Zhang Lie was unable to get a good sense of the entire dojo as a whole.

The Zenith Dojo's fame had spread worldwide, even galaxywide, and it had the best equipment and technology.

After surveying the entire dojo and taking a short break, Zhang Lie returned to the hunter's guild.

After returning from the fourth realm, hunters would reappear within the guild, unlike in the first through third realms.

Zhang Lie awaited the members of Team Zenith there.

As the teleportation apparatus lit up, Sun Mengmeng, Sun Xiaowu, Fang Yi, Yang Ze, Li Feng, and Zhou Ying stepped out. From the changes to their aura, it was apparent that they were now fourth-realm hunters.

"How do you feel?" Zhang Lie asked.

"Much stronger than before," Sun Mengmeng replied.

Sun Xiaowu grumbled, "What are you talking about, Sis? We are much stronger than before—we're monarch-grade lifeforms now!"

The members of Team Zenith had been disaster-grade lifeforms when they ascended to the third realm. After maxing out their monarch gene fragments in the third realm, they had transformed into monarch-grade lifeforms.

Zhang Lie asked, "How do you feel about the fourth realm and your current circumstances?"

Sun Mengmeng replied, "We're not doing too well, but not too poorly, either. Perhaps because you've already given us some details, Captain, we were mentally prepared."

Zhang Lie asked, "Where are you located?"

Sun Mengmeng retrieved a map from her extra-dimensional storage. "We got this map from the gathering point, but we don't know where we are ourselves."

Zhang Lie had spent half a day in the Milky Way, but that corresponded to twenty days for the members of Team Zenith. Not only had they ascended to the fourth realm, they had also gathered plenty of information there.

Zhang Lie glanced at the map. "I roughly know where you are."

Zhang Lie held a relatively complete map of the fourth realm. It had been assembled through puzzle pieces, but it provided an expansive view of the entire realm. Glancing at Sun Mengmeng's map was sufficient for Zhang Lie to identify their location.

"And the rest of you?" he continued.

Sun Xiaowu replied, "Before we ascended, we had Zhu communicate with the will of the unified world to ensure that we would all be sent to the same location."

Yang Ze replied, "That's why we're all together."

"Good, that'll save me time. I'll head over to find all of you."

Sun Mengmeng suggested, "Should we find somewhere more convenient to meet?"

"First, you're not strong enough to be wandering through the fourth realm on your own. Second, I'm much more familiar than you all are with the terrain of the fourth realm. I'd be able to find a meetup location far sooner than the rest of you, who might lose your way. It'd take me longer to find you at that rate. We don't have much time."

Sun Xiaowu asked, "Is there something urgent, Captain?"

Zhang Lie replied, "We need to arrive somewhere within the fourth realm in half a year. Assuming it takes us two months between now and returning to the fourth realm, we only have four months left."

Sun Xiaowu didn't seem concerned. "Four months is plenty of time, isn't it?"

Zhang Lie replied, "Four months could pass in the blink of an eye. To prevent any accidents from happening, it's better to have some extra time available."

"Is this important?" Sun Mengmeng asked.

"Very much so."

Anything that could affect Zhang Hanxiang, his sister, was of utmost importance.

"Come on, I'll help all of you register."

After the registration was complete, Zhang Lie brought Sun Mengmeng, Sun Xiaowu, Fang Yi, Yang Ze, Li Feng, and Zhou Ying all around the guild to familiarize themselves with it. Zhang Lie was just about to return to the fourth realm and meet up with the hunters when his transceiver suddenly rang.

Chapter 1348: Where's My Airship?

Zhang Lie glanced at the caller: Hong Tianqi.

He picked up as Hong Tianqi grumbled, "Why didn't you inform me that you'd returned to the Milky Way?"

Zhang Lie replied, "You're exceptionally busy as the highest authority of the unified world federation. How could I dare to call you if it isn't exceptionally important?"

"Haha, Heavenly Monarch Zhang Lie, you truly are one to joke."

"You must be busy, Authority Hong. What's the matter? Is there something urgent at hand?"

Hong Tianqi replied, "Recently, many Milky Way settlements of the fourth realm have been attacked."

"That seems to be the case. Was it Eternal Sun at work?"

Lin Lingfeng's settlement, for instance, had been surrounded by a sea of clouds.

"You're aware?"

"The settlement I was at, before I returned to the Milky Way, was attacked by some son of Eternal Sun."

"Cthaaat's son," Hong Tianqi informed him. "As far as we know, from the records that the Milky Way keeps on Eternal Sun, Cthaaat is one of the top members of Eternal Sun, and his children are those that have been produced via parthenogenesis."

"Are they genderless, then?"

"That's not the priority right now."

Zhang Lie continued, "What are his children like?"

"According to the hunters who escaped from the fourth realm back to the Milky Way, what they saw was smoldering lava in the form of a gigantic beast, with thunder rumbling through the sky."

"Sounds imposing."

"In addition, the hunters who escaped from the fourth realm said that Cthaaat's sons seemed to be looking for a culprit of some sort—one that looks very much like you."

"And? You're not here to castigate me or hold me responsible, are you?"

Hong Tianqi laughed. "All those hunters who reported the culprit looked like you were given a harsh scolding. It's hard enough for genetic hunters to survive in the fourth realm, and we certainly can't afford to be pointing fingers at one another."

Zhang Lie replied, "So why have you contacted me?"

Hong Tianqi's face turned serious. "The children of Cthaat are extremely powerful, and no genetic hunter in the fourth realm is a match for them. They all seem to have gone crazy—they're clearing away Milky Way settlements all over the fourth realm, specifically picking out the ones in which human hunters reside. If this is allowed to continue, the Milky Way will surely suffer—it might be wiped out of the fourth realm entirely."

Zhang Lie replied, "I understand your intention now. You want me to prevent, or even to kill, the children of Cthaat—but are you aware of an important problem?"

Hong Tianqi nodded. "Of course I understand."

"If you do, then why bring it up?"

Hong Tianqi sighed. "I don't have a better option. You're the only one I can think of who can deal with the children of Cthaat—at least in the fourth realm."

Zhang Lie replied, "But you must be aware that I'm alone. There are so many gathering points for Milky Way hunters all over the fourth realm, and I can hardly protect them all myself. I don't even know where the children of Cthaat are. What would you have me do?"

The fourth realm was exceptionally large, and it was no trivial task to identify where the children of Cthaat were located. Even with Zhang Lie's airship, he would have to know where the children of Cthaat were to take them down.

Hong Tianqi replied, "Having you guard all the gathering points is, of course, an impossible task, and one that I would never assign you. I simply want you to head to a specific one."

"Which one, and why?"

Hong Tianqi's tone turned serious. "Do you remember the gathering point I told you about, the one I constructed while in the fourth realm?"

"You did, and you even told me to have a look if I had the time."

"I was responsible for helping to construct two gathering points in the fourth realm, one by the ocean, and the other within a mountain. One of them is currently under attack by one of Cthaat's children, and the only one I can think of who can do anything about it is you. It's close to the gathering point you're at, too."

"I'm happy to go, but I don't know if your gathering point will still be around by the time I do."

Hong Tianqi smiled. "Don't worry—my gathering point won't be so easily destroyed. Even against a child of Cthaat, it would be able to hold out for a month or two. The reason I constructed that gathering point was because I knew it would be extremely defensible."

"If you're so confident, I'll head over and have a look. I hope that I won't go there just to construct graves for the fallen. Do you have an approximate set of coordinates and direction to head towards?"

"I have a map here."

Hong Tianqi sent a map over the transceiver. Zhang Lie took a look. "It really is rather close by. I'll head over now and have a look."

Zhang Lie turned off the transceiver and looked at the black screen, as well as his face reflected in it. Hong Tianqi sighed wearily. "I hope there's still time..."

Zhang Lie stepped into the teleportation apparatus and returned to the fourth realm. It had been three months since he left. Lin Lingfeng's city, which had been in ruins by the time he left, was now pristine once again.

Zhang Lie returned to where his airship had been, only to find that it had vanished.

"Where's my airship? How could it have gone missing?"

Zhang Lie immediately headed into the city proper.

He found that the hunters of the city were giving him strange looks.

He headed straight to Lin Lingfeng; no one dared to stop him.

Lin Lingfeng raised her hands in surrender. "Stay calm, Mr. Zhang! No one stole your airship. Your girlfriend flew off with it."

Only then did Zhang Lie relax. "In other words, Li Qianlin's flying around with it to relieve her boredom?"

Zhang Lie had been gone for three months, and it was unrealistic for Li Qianlin to remain in the airship patiently waiting for him all this time. It was only natural for her to take it out for a drive.

Lin Lingfeng continued, "Let me explain slowly, please. Actually, not long after you left, there were quite a few hunters in the city who were upset and angry at you."

Not only was Zhang Lie not angry, he seemed almost interested. "Who would dare? I'd like to meet them."

Lin Lingfeng replied diplomatically, "Now that you're back, they won't show themselves, of course."

Although there were quite a few upset and disgruntled hunters, they had to keep their thoughts to themselves. Many had witnessed Zhang Lie's fight against the sea of clouds. It would be trivial for him to take down a small gathering point, too.

"That sea of clouds, an alien who called himself a son of Cthaa, manifested your appearance. Everyone in the city saw it, and they believe that you were the one who roused its attention."

"And you?"

"Well, even if it is the case, you saved our gathering point twice over during two respective beast stampedes."

Zhang Lie glanced at her thoughtfully. "Given what you've told me, it doesn't seem as though Li Qianlin's simply driving the airship around to relax."

Chapter 1349: You Didn't Hold Back

"The sea of clouds showed your appearance, and I think we can all agree that it attacked this gathering point because of your presence. Many hunters' friends and comrades-in-arms, and even family members, perished in this battle, and they need a target to vent their emotions against," Lin Lingfeng told Zhang Lie.

"And I became that target."

"Fortunately, there were few hunters who had family here, or many would have tried to seek revenge against you."

Zhang Lie frowned. "And they targeted Li Qianlin too?"

"To be more precise, they targeted your airship, demanding compensation from you but in truth hiding their greediness. I expect there were a few masterminds behind the commotion with the eventual aim of stealing your airship."

Zhang Lie asked, "How many died?"

Zhang Lie didn't think that a group of weak hunters who couldn't even beat Cthaat's son could take over his airship.

Lin Lingfeng replied, "After the first wave killed five of them, they began protesting outside the shooting range. I expect Li Qianlin was so annoyed by their antics that she flew off."

Zhang Lie asked, "You didn't stop them?"

Lin Lingfeng shrugged. "Not too many people died. Why bother?"

Zhang Lie narrowed his eyes at her. "And because you stand to benefit too, I'd imagine."

Lin Lingfeng stilled, then laughed. "As you said. There were quite a few hunters dead in the gathering point, and the rest of them need a target to vent their frustrations on. If they can't do so, something will happen sooner or later. I apologize that I haven't been proactive about this."

"When will Li Qianlin return?"

Zhang Lie didn't intend to push matters further—he hadn't lost anything, after all.

Although Zhang Lie didn't intend to take responsibility for what had happened, it was true that Cthaat's son had come targeting him. It would be pointless to try to pin the blame on someone.

Lin Lingfeng replied, "Li Qianlin returns about once every ten days to see if you've returned from the Milky way. She told me to hang a red banner from the top tower of the city when you're back. It'll be about another week before she returns."

"Very well. I have some matters to take care of, so I'll come back in a week."

"Is something the matter?" Lin Lingfeng asked.

Zhang Lie waved a hand. There's no need for you to worry about it. When Qianlin returns, let her stay in the gathering point and wait for me. I'll be back soon enough."

As the hunters of the gathering point watched on, Zhang Lie left the gathering point and headed along the coordinates that Hong Tianqi had left him. Along the way, he found a peak-grade lifeform to use as mount, which he controlled with his disaster-grade mistmeld clam soulshard. In less than half a day, he had arrived at the gathering point that Hong Tianqi had constructed in the fourth realm.

According to Hong Tianqi, he built this gathering point within a mountain, and there were plenty of escape routes.

When Zhang Lie headed over, he saw no mountain, caves, nor escape routes. The air was filled with dark clouds and endless lightning.

He was just about to approach when lightning struck from the heavens like a dragon.

Zhang Lie frowned. He aimed a fist at the heavens and shattered the bolt of lightning, but more fell toward him.

"Annoying..."

Zhang Lie snorted. He clenched his fists tightly. Pale blue genetic energy rippled about Zhang Lie's arms. He flicked his wrists, causing a frightening aura to descend around them. A fish the size of a whale materialized in the air.

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

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

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 space and striking the bolts of lightning in the sky.

The world reverberated with force. As the waves burst apart, the air filled with echoes of Zhang Lie's signature genetic energy, shattering space and swallowing up all life in its vicinity. Light and shadow danced in the air, dispelling the clouds and restoring clear skies once more.

Within the mountain, one human hunter fretted. "It's been thundering for three whole days now! Our mountaintop has been exploded clean off, and half the mountain's gone! We won't be able to hold out for long."

"I can't bear the sound of thunder anymore. My ears are ringing!"

One Milky Way hunter murmured respectfully, it's a good thing the martial sage built the gathering point so deep within a mountain, or it would never have lasted this long."

Another Milky Way hunter laughed. "Ha! No, Cthaaat's son is toying with us like a cat with mice—it has the ability to level the entire mountain, but it's doing it bit by bit to enjoy the feeling of driving us all to despair."

Another human hunter sighed. "I've already sent a report to the highest authority of the united world federation, and the Heavenly Monarch said that we'd be getting reinforcements soon. Just hold out a bit longer."

If Zhang Lie were here, he would immediately recognize the human hunter who had spoken—General Yan Long of China.

General Yan Long asked, "How are our men doing?"

One hunter replied, "The majority have evacuated through the teleportation apparatus, leaving just us defenders behind."

What Cthaat's son wasn't aware of was the fact that the hunters of the Milky Way were able to return to the Milky Way via the teleportation apparatus.

Yan Long lit up a cigarette and nodded. "Very good."

The cigarette was made of ersatz components found within the dimensional world.

For smokers, not having access to cigarettes was an arduous thing, so many industrious hunters had found similar herbs that could be used as a replacement for tobacco.

Cigarettes were able to calm smokers down; to hunters who had to fight with their lives on the line, it was a necessity—though of course, like tobacco, these substitutes would damage their bodies in the long term.

"Everyone's fine, but it's a pity about this gathering point that's survived for so long..."

The remaining hunters still harbored a ray of hope in case the situation were to change.

Another human hunter said, "If only the reinforcements could send Cthaat's son packing..."

The Milky Way hunter frowned. "Who among the hunters of the Milky Way could take down Cthaat's son?"

"Zhang Lie!" General Yan Long replied proudly.

The Milky Way hunter shook his head. "I've heard of his name before—supposedly, he's made miracles happen in the second and third realms, but the fourth realm is different. It's full of such characters."

The other Milky Way hunter agreed. "How many pioneers have given their lives and blood just to create a bit more breathing room for us all? This Zhang Lie might have made waves in the second and third realms, but can he alone do more than our predecessors?"