

U. Warlord 1351

Chapter 1351: Long Time No See

General Yan Long had been startled by what was going on outside. Cthaat's son had brought down thunder and lightning for three whole days, but never had there been a commotion of this sort. Even deep within the cavern, they could hear the thunder rumbling from afar, as though the sky itself were about to be torn asunder.

Very quickly, however, the sound stopped. Silence reigned once more. Even the persistent thunder had stopped.

One human hunter asked, "General, what do you think is happening outside?"

General Yan Long rolled his eyes. "How should I know?"

A Milky Way hunter said, "Listen up! It sounds like someone's calling out!"

"I'm Zhang Lie! The highest authority of the united world federation sent me. I've dealt with Cthaat's son, the enemy outside. If there are still genetic hunters within, you can relax."

The mountain was filled with caves and cellars which spread throughout its bulk. Anyone unfamiliar with the terrain would easily get lost—unless you demolished it all like Cthaat's son.

Zhang Lie was naturally unaware of the interior structure of the mountain, and he didn't intend to step inside. He shouted a few times deep into the mountain to inform any hunters still within, then prepared to leave.

When General Yan Long heard the voice, he was instantly overjoyed.

"Did you hear that? It's Zhang Lie! He's dealt with Cthaat's son outside!"

The hunters of the Milky Way all grabbed hold of General Yan Long. "Hold on, General!"

General Yan Long frowned. "What's the matter?"

The hunters replied, "I know you must be growing tired of the endless darkness after three days of being trapped here, General, and we feel the same way—but do you really think Zhang Lie can take down Cthaat's son?"

General Yan Long frowned. "You think this is a joke?"

Another hunter added, "Even if Zhang Lie could chase Cthaat's son away, wouldn't it take a prolonged fight? Think about how long you heard the commotion for!"

General Yan Long seemed perplexed. "Do you think this is a ploy, then?"

The Milky Way hunter replied seriously, "It might be a ploy from Cthaat's son."

Zhang Lie shouted again, "I'll be leaving now!"

General Yan Long shouted, "Hold on, Zhang Lie!"

The remaining hunters hurriedly clamped their hands over his mouth.

They thundered, "What are you doing, General? Didn't you hear that this might be a ploy?"

General Yan Long broke free. "Of course I did—but if Zhang Lie really has taken down Cthaat's son for us, then we have to thank him in person. He was a hunter that I looked very favorably on in the past, and I'm willing to take that risk. Or do you think we should skulk like cowards without even thanking our savior? This isn't the style of the Chinese people."

The hunters of the Milky Way looked at General Yan Long as though he were an idiot.

"I don't understand you Chinese at all. You'd prioritize custom over your life?"

"My second point," General Yan Long continued, "is that Cthaat's son is clearly one for brute force. It's been trying to demolish our mountain for days, enjoying the feeling of toying with us. Why would it suddenly change its strategy?"

The hunters of the Milky Way still seemed doubtful. "Just in case..."

General Yan Long held up a hand to cut them off.

"All of you can stay here. I'll go have a look at the situation."

He stepped toward the face of the mountain through a hidden path, from which he could see clear blue skies. The storm clouds had dissipated, and General Yan Long's thumping heart was finally at ease once more.

Zhang Lie smiled. "Since you've come, you might as well show yourself."

General Yan Long climbed out from the hidden tunnel. "Long time no see, Zhang Lie."

Zhang Lie gaped at General Yan Long.

"You?!"

General Yan Long sighed. "How time passes. I remember that, the first time I saw you, you were nothing more than a hunter from the first realm who was just starting to make a name for yourself. In the blink of an eye, you became known across the galaxy for your exploits in the second realm, for becoming the king of Limit, and then the savior of the third realm. Now, I too have been saved by you."

Zhang Lie smiled. "To think you would be in the gathering point that Heavenly Monarch Hong Tianqi once built..."

He had interacted with General Yan Long quite a bit when he first handed the recipe for the limit-breaking potion to China.

General Yan Long replied, "Thanks to the Heavenly Monarch's blessing, I'm currently in charge of this gathering point."

"No wonder. Of all the hunters in the fourth realm, only a handful would be trusted by the highest authority of the united world federation, and you're surely one of them."

General Yan Long replied, "Would you like to have a tour of the gathering point?"

Zhang Lie thought for a moment. "Why not? I do have time at the moment."

General Yan Long led him into the mountain, half of which had been sloughed off by Cthaat's son.

From the outside, it looked like a mountain within which countless tunnels had been excavated. From the inside, it looked far more complex, with interconnected routes and tunnels all over, which would cause anyone unused to the gathering point to lose their way.

Zhang Lie praised, "This really is a good location for a gathering point."

Since entering the fourth realm, Zhang Lie had been to two different gathering points, one underground and one mainly aboveground, but neither was higher than Hong Tianqi's gathering point up in the mountains.

"This sort of labyrinthine design prevents any large lifeforms from entering and small lifeforms from leaving. Even with a beast stampede, we'd be able to weather them by turtling down within the mountain. Considering the twisty and branching paths, even the largest group of lifeforms would have to split up. At that point, with a concentrated defense, you'd easily be able to handle the entire stampede."

General Yan Long explained, "The Heavenly Monarch discovered this mountain in the fourth realm, when it was being occupied as a lifeform's lair. The Heavenly Monarch expended great effort and sacrifice in clearing it out. Back then, very few understood why he chose to do so."

In this sort of complicated terrain and environment, the lifeforms that had made this mountain their home would be far more accustomed to their surroundings than Hong Tianqi and his party of hunters.

General Yan Long continued, "Back then, the Heavenly Monarch stated that, as long as we could take down this mountain, we genetic hunters would be able to establish a firm base of operations henceforth, that nothing would stymie us again. We wouldn't have to worry about beast stampedes, and we would have the ability to start trying to resist the aliens in the fourth realm."

Zhang Lie replied, "Without a doubt, Hong Tianqi was right."

General Yan Long laughed bitterly. "But now..."

Half the mountain was gone.

Zhang Lie could sense a few auras coming from within the mountain. Evidently, the genetic hunters of the gathering point were coming out to check on the disturbance.

Chapter 1352: It's Too Late

At that moment, in Lin Lingfeng's city, a group of genetic hunters were taking part in a secret discussion.

"This is our last opportunity to steal the airship. I heard from Lin Lingfeng that the alien was the one who asked for a red banner to be hung from the watchtower."

"What does it mean?"

"When Zhang Lie returns to the fourth realm, Lin Lingfeng will hang up a red banner from the watchtower to inform her that it's time to return. Once the airship returns to Zhang Lie's control, he'll never come back. That's why this is our last chance."

The hunters were clearly plotting to steal Zhang Lie's airship.

They too had realized that the airship returned to the city roughly once every ten days.

The hunters cried out, "Zhang Lie's far too selfish. The airship clearly has important technology that exists within the dimensional world and massive research value besides. It's more than sufficient to change the dimensional world completely. If we can figure out that technology, we'd be able to build one of our own! This can't remain anyone's private property—it has to be shared publicly like the limit-breaking potions!"

Another hunter gritted his teeth. "If not for Zhang Lie, our city wouldn't have suffered such tremendous losses. This is fair recompense."

This group of hunters had clearly forgotten that, if not for Zhang Lie, their city would have been overrun by a beast stampede far before the arrival of the sea of clouds.

Another hunter asked sternly, "Have we confirmed whether or not Zhang Lie is still in the city?"

Everyone held their breath for a moment.

They had witnessed Zhang Lie's fight against the sea of clouds, and he possessed frightening might.

Another hunter replied, "According to our investigation, he left the gathering point after asking Lin Lingfeng about the airship. There's likely something important that he's doing, and he hasn't returned since."

The other hunters exhaled.

The first hunter warned, "If Zhang Lie returns midway through our plan, we'll drop it immediately. No one wants to deal with a monster like him."

For better or worse, Zhang Lie didn't return to the gathering point immediately to await Li Qianlin's return. He wandered around the fourth realm for five days in an attempt to find disaster-grade lifeforms nearby, but he didn't see a single one.

Although there were many disaster-grade lifeforms in the fourth realm, they didn't exist in such great quantities as to be found just wherever. He was still missing forty disaster gene fragments, which was somewhat regretful.

The five days passed quickly. When it was time for Li Qianlin to return, Zhang Lie secretly headed back to Lin Lingfeng's city, not wanting to cause a commotion. The last time he had returned, he felt as though the other hunters were eyeing him strangely, a mix of fear and respect.

Zhang Lie intended to return secretly to the city, meet up with Li Qianlin, and then meet up with the other members of Team Zenith.

It was straightforward for Zhang Lie to sneak into the city through the use of his disaster-grade mistmeld clam soulshard.

Using it, he would control any hunter who saw him as he walked cloaked through the city.

He found that there weren't many hunters roaming throughout the streets.

Chapter 1353: The Smell of a Conspiracy

"I smell a conspiracy brewing..."

Zhang Lie was curious as to what it could be, but he didn't want to cause any further disturbances. The members of Team Zenith were still waiting for him, so he would rather make them his top priority.

Li Qianlin didn't make him wait for long. Zhang Lie heard a whirring noise from the air as the airship came within sight.

The airship landed in a clearing within the city. Zhang Lie smiled and clasped both hands behind his back as he approached the airship. He was just about to greet Li Qianlin when a few figures suddenly appeared and laid out a web just as the airship was about to land.

The web was made of some unusual materials, clearly peak-grade or higher in origin. The airship's defense system immediately activated, tearing apart the web with all sorts of lasers. A group of hunters rushed out from the city and destroyed the airship's weaponry, causing it to activate its shield to deflect external attacks.

However, the hunters quickly destroyed that, too.

The airship's offensive and defensive systems were only the equivalent of a disaster-grade lifeform's, and rapidly fell to the attack of a hundred hunters.

The hunters of Lin Lingfeng's settlement had been preparing for this for quite some time, and they naturally took down the airship in one fell swoop.

Zhang Lie was enraged. He struck at once. "Daring to try to steal my airship...!"

Blue genetic energy gathered around Zhang Lie as space vibrated. The ripples spread out over his arm. He flicked his wrist. The skies darkened. A fish the size of a whale materialized in the air.

The hunters froze in shock and fear, but it was too late.

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

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.

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 and obliterating the hunters.

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.

Zhang Lie rose into the air and set his sights on the nearby hunters.

"Please calm down, Mr. Zhang!"

Lin Lingfeng emerged with a group and attempted to corral the fleeing hunters.

Zhang Lie slowly landed before Lin Lingfeng.

"Lin Lingfeng, it looks as though you haven't been controlling your hunters properly."

Lin Lingfeng's forehead beaded with sweat. "I am truly sorry. I didn't expect that these hunters would dare to strike after knowing that you've returned from the Milky Way."

She would have evicted the hunters from the city had she known! Zhang Lie was a man who could destroy the entire city with an errant thought—did these hunters not remember how he had dealt with the sea of clouds?

Lin Lingfeng could still remember the sight of the hundred dragons' explosions as clear as day.

Chapter 1354: Needs to be Publicized

Lin Lingfeng was, at the moment, regretting her decisions very much. She regretted that she hadn't paid enough attention to the discontent hunters of the city, causing the situation to devolve to this extent. She should have stopped them the moment she learned that they had been trying to attack the airship.

She was hoping to give the hunters' stress and pressure an outlet, but had ignited the bomb called Zhang Lie instead. She thought that she was able to control the hunters of the gathering point, but she had lost control entirely.

The hunters who had made a move were regretting their actions as much as Lin Lingfeng herself. If they had known that he were here, they would never have struck.

Zhang Lie was a monster—trying to take down his airship in his presence was akin to committing suicide! Everyone present had witnessed how he had taken down Cthaa's son.

However, by this point, it was too late for regrets. The hunters who had made a move had already been restrained by Lin Lingfeng's group. Their wrists were tied up as they were flung to the ground.

Without a choice, the hunters could only hope for clemency in the court of public opinion. They shouted, "Zhang Lie, you selfish bastard! You should know that the technology of this airship would revolutionize the living conditions of all hunters in the fourth realm!"

This was no crime they had committed, only justice!

"All that we did, we did for the good of the Milky Way! If we can figure out the airship's technology, we'd be able to build one of our own! This can't remain anyone's private property—it has to be shared publicly like the limit-breaking potions!"

"Zhang Lie, I learned of your name very early on in my career, and I always thought of you like a hero. You rescued humanity in the second realm and was the savior of the third, ending the perennial wars that raged on there. I didn't expect you to be so selfish in person."

"If you give up the airship, we hunters won't have to worry about the threat of beast stampedes any longer, and we'd have the ability to establish ourselves in the fourth realm. Hunters all over the Milky Way would thank you."

Zhang Lie turned to Lin Lingfeng as he narrowed his eyes. "Did you plan this?"

Lin Lingfeng immediately shook her head. "No, of course not!"

Shocked, she immediately shouted, "Don't let these hunters say anything more!"

The hunters struggled. "Are you afraid that I'm right? That I'm calling you a selfish bastard because you are one?!"

Quite a few hunters had gathered by the scene to watch the spectacle unfold.

"So these hunters were really trying to improve our living conditions?"

"It does make sense for Zhang Lie to give up his airship for the good of the Milky Way, doesn't it?"

One genetic hunter rolled his eyes. "There are so many single men in the Milky Way, many of whom are virgins! Why don't you think of the good of these virgins and sacrifice your wife? There are countless orphans—why not sacrifice your mother? There are countless impoverished people—why not sacrifice your wealth? You're nothing more than a bunch of opportunistic fools."

"That's hardly the same thing! Exploring the fourth realm is the program set out by the Milky Way and the responsibility of every hunter. Why is it that we can't enjoy lives of comfort in the Milky Way and are forced into the fourth realm? It's all so future generations can have it better!"

"Right, haven't you heard the united world federation's new policy? Hunters of the fourth realm can't remain in the Milky Way longer than three months at a time, and they have to spend at least fifty times more time in the fourth realm. In other words, if they want to spend a day in the Milky Way, they'll have to suffer through forty in the fourth realm!"

"All our predecessors have sacrificed their time and lives—why can't Zhang Lie?"

"So many people have donated money and blood to various causes—why don't I see you doing the same?"

The hunters of Lin Lingfeng's city began arguing with each other. Some felt that Zhang Lie's actions were perfectly reasonable, but most were in support of the hunters.

"It was appropriate for them to try to take the airship, but doing so by force was not."

"They're no different from thieves."

"If they didn't take it by force, do you think Zhang Lie would give it up willingly?"

Zhang Lie folded his arms and laughed. "I don't have to explain myself, but I'm disgusted by the fact that you'd try to steal my possessions and justify it in the name of the common good. First, the airship wasn't built using the Milky Way's technology, and if I release information about it without careful consideration, it'll surely start a galaxywide conflict."

The restrained hunters frowned. "That's just an excuse! Spreading the technology will only allow us all to grow stronger. Don't the recipe for the limit-breaking potion and the information about disaster gene fragments demonstrate that?"

Zhang Lie raised a second finger. "Secondly, and most importantly, I'd like to ask you why you ascended to the fourth realm."

"To explore it, of course!"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "You've already forgotten why you ascended due to the harsh conditions of the fourth realm."

The hunters hesitated.

"The reason you did so is to grow stronger. Our goal isn't to establish gathering points for future generations, but to grow stronger ourselves."

The restrained hunters cried out, "How are we supposed to grow stronger? It's difficult enough for us to survive!"

"There are more strong fourth-realm hunters than third-realm ones, aren't there?"

The restrained hunters retorted, "That's because only the elites of the third realm can make it into the fourth!"

"I don't disagree, but the harsh environment of the fourth realm will spur your growth and allow you to develop strength via adversity. The reason we ascended to the fourth realm wasn't to explore it, or to establish ourselves, but rather to ascend to the fifth."

The restrained hunters were quite upset at Zhang Lie's defense.

"Are you looking down on our predecessors' hard work?! What's more, the airship's technology isn't in conflict with our growing stronger!"

"These predecessors you keep talking about are all weaklings. The strongest hunters have ascended to the fifth realm. Why didn't they stay behind to help usher in a time of peace and prosperity for those hunters to come? It's because they know that living in safety would only cause subsequent hunters to lose their will, their sharpness, their strength to overcome adversity."

Zhang Lie had said the same thing many, many times over in the second realm, and it was one of the reasons he hadn't been interested in the kingdom of Limit.

"We ascend so as to grow stronger, to keep ascending. Genes are what we should rely on—our bodies themselves! This airship technology would only cause subsequent hunters to grow complacent and slow us all down. For instance, if we had access to guns or high-tech weaponry here, who would train their bodies?"

This was why Bu Wentian had reminded Zhang Lie not to divulge the airship's technology before he left.

Chapter 1355: Be More Honest

"This sort of airship would be destroyed by one punch in the fifth realm. Do you think it'd be meaningful?" Zhang Lie asked. This was what Bu Wentian had told him too—it was a difference in perspective.

If you were to get to Lv. 30 with a game character, then restart from scratch, you would know what skills and abilities are important; if you were to get to Lv. 100, you would have a different perspective.

"As long as it's useful in the fourth realm. Furthermore, the Milky Way started by focusing on technological development! If this sort of construction can be replicated in the real world, after centuries, perhaps millennia, of progress, it wouldn't be superior to our scientific achievements."

Zhang Lue scoffed. "By then, I'd long since have swept through the fourth realm.

The gathered hunters were speechless at Zhang Lie's confidence and domineering aura. As they spoke, the airship landed and Li Qianlin walked out. Her face lit up upon seeing Zhang Lie, but as she walked over, she pretended to be mad.

"So you've finally decided to return?"

Zhang Lie reached out and rubbed Li Qianlin's cheeks. "Did you miss me?"

Li Qianlin's face flushed red as she pursed her lips. "Who would miss you?"

"Be more honest, would you?"

Li Qianlin gave him a tight hug. "I did miss you a little, but just a little!"

Zhang Lie rubbed Li Qianlin's head. "Let's go."

"Where?" Li Qianlin asked.

"To see the members of Team Zenith."

Li Qianlin's eyes lit up. "Sun Mengmeng and the others have ascended?"

"Indeed."

Li Qianlin tugged on Zhang Lie's hand as she walked off toward the airship.

"What are you waiting for, then? Let's go!"

Li Qianlin was very excited to be able to see her friends from the third realm again.

"Do you think they'd be shocked to see me?" she asked.

"Probably," Zhang Lie replied.

As he returned to the airship, the airship's robotic voice greeted him. "Welcome back, Master."

"Thank you. Has anything eventful happened over the last few days?"

The system's robotic voice replied, "No, except for the sneak attack from Milky Way hunters in the gathering point.

Zhang Lie smiled. "You've done very well protecting my Qianlin."

Li Qianlin rolled her eyes. "Who's yours?"

Zhang Lie asked, "How much energy is left in the airship?"

Li Qianlin replied, "On the airship's suggestion, we've been roaming around the city to hunt down genetic lifeforms. Not only is there a small peak-grade farm on the airship, the airship's battery is quite improved."

Zhang Lie asked in surprise, "Is there sufficient energy to deduce the recipe for the subsequent limit-breaking potion?"

The system's robotic voice rang out, "The energy the airship currently possesses, along with the peak-grade lifeforms on the farm, would allow me to function for 500 days."

About half the energy was still missing, then.

"Forget about it. We'll set off immediately."

Li Qianlin hurriedly asked, "Where are Sun Mengmeng and the others?"

Zhang Lie instructed, "Show a map of the fourth realm."

The airship's system revealed a map. Zhang Lie pointed at a certain location on it.

"Let's set off, then!"

The airship flew off at full speed. Not long later, they reached the gathering point where the members of Team Zenith were located. However, by the time they got there, they saw nothing but a flaming ocean of burning red lava.

Li Qianlin, in fear and fright, grabbed onto Zhang Lie's hand. "What in the world happened...?"

The sea of lava seemed endless. It extended for thousands of kilometers, and Li Qianlin couldn't help but shudder at the sight.

The airship's robotic voice sounded. "Large quantities of lifeforms are present within the lava."

The monitor showed that the lava harbored a large group of lifeforms, the weakest of which was peak-grade.

Li Qianlin was very worried. "The members of Team Zenith will be fine, won't they?"

Zhang Lie consoled her. "Don't worry. You're aware of how strong Sun Mengmeng and the others are. They wouldn't die to a disaster of this magnitude."

The lava roiled as a pillar of fire shot into the sky. The airship's energy barrier activated, protecting it from sustaining any injury.

The airship's robotic voice rang out, "Warning! The airship has suffered some damage. Counterattack system has been forcibly activated."

As a few genetic lifeforms flew toward the airship, the airship shot them down.

"Let me go have a look outside."

Zhang Lie left the airship and headed toward the depths of the lava. At the heart of the sea, he could see a gathering point which was barely holding on for dear life at the heart of the lava. The members of Team Zenith were all fighting, each facing two disaster-grade lifeforms at once.

Sun Mengmeng and the others were in the midst of a crisis. They had been waiting at the gathering point for Zhang Lie to head over, only to receive news that lava and a beast stampede were in the midst of rushing over.

Allegedly, the lava had swept through the south as it headed north, destroying countless gathering points along the way.

Where the lava came from, no genetic hunter knew.

The members of Team Zenith, as genetic hunters in their own right, naturally participated in the defense of the gathering point.

However, this particular beast stampede and the lava were far harder to deal with than the members of Team Zenith had anticipated. The weakest among them was a peak-grade lifeform, after all.

The lifeforms moved throughout the lava. Not only did the genetic hunters have to block the lava, they also had to kill the genetic lifeforms hidden within. Some even suggested giving up on the gathering point and returning to the Milky Way.

The members of Team Zenith certainly couldn't let that happen; they had already given Zhang Lie the coordinates to their gathering point.

Peak-grade lava salamanders leapt out of the lava and attempted to scale the walls of the gathering point.

Just then, with a shout, a figure holding a spear dashed forward. He launched his spear, crackling with wind and lightning, with incredible force. It sent wind howling and lightning flashing through the sky.

With his spear, he invoked chaotic energy in the form of lightning and raging wind. The spear left a dozen afterimages in its wake, piercing the peak-grade lava salamander's head.

The genetic hunters fighting for their lives were shocked by the sudden display of strength. What impeccable spear technique!

"We had someone this strong in the settlement?"

"They're the members of Team Zenith, who swept the Void Cup!"

"Associated with the Zenith Dojo?"

"Have they already ascended to the fourth realm? This quickly?"

"Who was the one who struck just now?"

"If I'm not mistaken, that was Fang Yi!"

Scorching-hot lava swept toward the gathering point like a wave. The hunters' faces fell—they didn't have enough genetic energy to prevent an attack of this magnitude.

"[The Boundless Blade: Ersatz Yawning Wave]!"

A sword flashed, the strike forming a long river through the skies. The genetic energy burst apart in a shower of droplets.

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

The genetic hunters glanced at a sword-wielding figure standing atop the city walls.

"It's him! I saw him on the Void Cup broadcast before. He uses [The Boundless Blade], and his name is Yang Ze!"

Chapter 1356: Exhilarated

Lava continued seeping toward the settlement as the beast stampede drew near.

"[Blinding Flash: Thousandfold Echo]!"

Sun Xiaowu's body split into over a thousand clones, so many they seemed to fill the sky.

The thousand clones all used [Golden Divide] simultaneously, coloring the sky in gold and raining down golden feathers in such numbers that it seemed as though a thunderstorm had just formed out of thin air.

A golden storm struck down the lifeforms that were traveling with the lava.

"It's him! [Adamantine Aegis]—that's Sun Xiaowu!"

The members of Team Zenith certainly couldn't let this gathering point vanish; they had already given Zhang Lie coordinates, so what would they do if they had to evacuate? How could Zhang Lie find them then?

The members of Team Zenith all struck simultaneously.

"[Light Dragon's Remnants]!"

A figure shrouded in light rose into the air and leapt outside the city walls. Then, his hands blurred into a series of afterimages, sending countless arclight dragons flying through the air, in conjunction with Sun Xiaowu's golden storm. Their combined attacks, shining in gold and silver, were sufficient to stymie the beast stampede.

"This is the user of arclight dragons, Li Feng!"

Just the four of them had turned the tides of the battle.

A beautiful figure held a greatbow in hand. As she drew the arrow, the scorching-hot air ignited in flame. All the heat in the atmosphere seemed to have gathered around her. The flames formed a whirlpool. She was beautiful, her long hair flying in the wind, like a burning ember, beloved by stars.

Three arrows, brimming with purple flame, flew toward the enemy like tracking missiles.

"[Lunarflame Shot]!" The three purpleflame arrows struck the crests of three waves in the distance, forming three bursts of resplendent light.

"This is the Lady of Netherworld Flame—Sun Mengmeng!"

Just then, another figure appeared above the wall. Her long hair fluttered in the wind, the color of crystalline jade. It gave off motes of vitality. She was so beautiful no one could take their eyes away, and golden leaves whirled around her. The tips of her hair produced gray fog.

The gray power gathered around Zhou Ying's forehead, which cracked apart. A gray eye budded from her flesh. It opened up to reveal a chaotic opal iris, which seemed to be able to penetrate flesh, soul, and space.

Each leaf was like a miniature sun, orbiting around the woman's body. To her back was a pair of golden wings. Above those wings was a glowing sun, giving off a radiant, holy light.

Her jade-green eyes were flecked with gold, and she seemed to have become one with the land. The vitality radiating from her was visible to the naked eye. Stellar light surrounded her as though she were a goddess given form.

Black energy formed a gauzy dress around her, sticking closely to her limbs and revealing her curvaceous features—no, making them even more curvaceous than they originally were.

Two root-like tendrils writhed under her dress; her body radiated a seductive charm.

Zhou Ying seemed to simultaneously exhibit the charm of a holy priestess and a charming succubus.

"[Avatar of the Fae: Earthbound Prison]!"

She released all her stored vitality at once, causing the ground to quake as thousands of jade-green wood dragons rushed out of the earth. Each dragon was about six hundred meters wide, with skin flecked with golden radiance.

Thick, heavysset wood dragons surrounded the city gates and blocked the lava from entering.

Though they were wood dragons, they had near-immunity to fire and even seemed to be absorbing heat from the lava in order to grow further. They quickly grew thicker and longer, past the hundred-meter walls in no time, to form a whopping five-hundred-meter-tall palisade.

"That's the Greenwood Priestess, Zhou Ying."

Zhou Ying shouted, "Everyone, there's no need to worry about the lava. As long as I'm around, not a single drop of lava will strike the settlement!"

The members of Team Zenith all gave her a thumbs-up. "Well done, Zhou Ying!"

The members of Team Zenith fought hard to block the lava as they simultaneously killed the lifeforms that had appeared from within it.

Everyone was overjoyed to see that their settlement's defense holding up—until twelve disaster-grade lifeforms emerged from the lava to face off against the members of Team Zenith.

The members of Team Zenith split up to tackle the lifeforms. Waves of lava surged forth. From afar, the lava looked like a horde of lions furiously rushing forward, like roaring dragons.

Under the continuous battering of lava, Zhou Ying's wooden palisade began to crack. However, she had constructed it out of special wood, which regenerated in an instant. More concerning was the incredible number of genetic lifeforms that arose from the lava, forming a slope with their bodies that seemed poised to allow the majority over the palisade.

The lava itself seemed to be living. It transformed into a giant hand that stretched over the wall and made to crush the settlement whole.

The members of Team Zenith worked hard to beat back the disaster-grade lifeforms and protect the gathering point, along with the thousands of hunters within it, but the disaster-grade lifeforms seemed stubbornly persistent, even despite the heavy wounds they sustained.

Just then, the skies suddenly darkened. A fish the size of a whale materialized in the air.

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

A howling gale swept over the space. More and more genetic energy gathered around Zhang Lie's arms. A huge wave soared. As Zhang Lie punched forward, the fish slammed its huge tail on the ground and sent a torrent of water surging.

Upon seeing the familiar skill, the members of Team Zenith displayed identical expressions of delight and surprise.

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 palm of lava.

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.

Water-attuned genetic energy struck the sea of lava in a burst of steam.

"Run and hide!" the members of Team Zenith shouted.

As the steam exploded and covered up the entire gathering point and battlefield, the bark was stripped off the wooden palisade.

As resistant to heat as the wooden palisade was, it was no match for the superheated steam. Fortunately, the hunters reacted quickly, finding cover before the steam could strike them. Even so, quite a few hunters had been seriously burned.

The lava around the gathering point turned into black volcanic rock.

"Captain!"

Sun Mengmeng, Fang Yi, Yang Ze, Li Feng, Zhou Ying, and Sun Xiaowu simultaneously revealed identical expressions of relief and joy upon seeing Zhang Lie in the air.

Just then, two more genetic lifeforms rushed out of the lava and pounced toward Zhang Lie.

Chapter 1357: Stellar Dragon Transformation

One of the lifeforms that struck at Zhang Lie was leonine, wreathed in fire all over, its mane like an inferno around its head. The other genetic lifeform was a fiery-red salamander.

Both genetic lifeforms were disaster-grade.

Zhang Lie extended his pointer finger like a sword, and water-attuned genetic energy coiled around it like a snake.

[The Boundless Blade: Expulsion]!"

Zhang Lie swung downwards with a heavy blow, striking down the leonine disaster-grade lifeform.

A raging shark swam forth and crashed against the fiery salamander in an explosion of steam.

"[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, thick and cloying like storm clouds, surrounded Zhang Lie.

The fiery lion emerged from the lava and shot out a bullet of lava from its mouth. It sizzled as it came into contact with the pitch-black genetic energy. The fire and heat began to dissolve on contact.

Meanwhile, the fiery salamander had broken past the superheated steam and had spat out a long tongue of flame.

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

Zhang Lie punched forward, and the black serpent shot forth through the flames, tangling with the salamander in a melee.

The fiery lion's mane blazed like an inferno. Its claws slashed forward with fiery light. Zhang Lie moved faster, kicking it aside with a leg.

As it was sent flying, the lion's mane began to rotate rapidly, and it spat out a blazing torrent of fire from its mouth.

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.

Sun Mengmeng, watching from afar, 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 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.

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 transformed into a beam of light. Stellar light tore apart the heavens as the flaming lion was bisected vertically. Zhang Lie shot through the air like a meteor.

[You successfully killed a disaster-grade flamingheart lion. By consuming the core of the disaster-grade flamingheart lion, you may receive one to ten disaster gene fragments.]

Zhang Lie retrieved a flaming-red core from the lion's carcass.

The fiery salamander sacrificed its own flames to obliterate the serpent, but after the prolonged battle, much of its skin had sloughed away, leaving just its crystalline interior behind. If not for the fact that disaster-grade lifeforms had a crystalline interior, the serpent's poison would have been more than sufficient to take down the fiery salamander.

Before the fiery salamander could relax, however, Zhang Lie struck.

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, transforming into a dragon that shot out alongside Zhang Lie's punch.

The fiery salamander, whittled down to half its original size, rushed toward the lava. As long as it were able to submerge itself within the lava, it would be able to hide and save its life.

Zhang Lie, however, seemed to have predicted its actions. He was waiting where it was running towards, smiling and waving at it, causing the fiery salamander to despair. Right then and there, Zhang Lie's arm punched through its head, and the will of the fourth realm's voice rang out.

[You successfully killed a disaster-grade lava salamander. By consuming the core of the disaster-grade lava salamander, you may receive one to ten disaster gene fragments.]

As he retrieved the disaster-grade core from the lava salamander, the entire sea of lava began to shake. As though it had been given life, the lava soared into the sky and surrounded Zhang Lie from all over.

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, tearing apart the lava that surrounded Zhang Lie.

The lava swirled in a whirlpool and transformed into a face whose voice was like the eruption of a volcano.

"I remember you."

This was a very familiar scene indeed.

The lava face said, "You are the killer of my brothers."

Indeed...

"Cthaat's son."

The lava face continued, "Father has ordered me to take revenge for my brothers. I headed north, destroying any settlement of cockroaches I came across. I thought it would take me longer to find you, but you've saved me quite a lot of time!"

Initially, Cthaat's son hadn't recognized Zhang Lie—not because of any changes to Zhang Lie's face, but because this particular son of Cthaat wasn't good at recognizing faces. To it, all the genetic hunters were like ants, which it couldn't tell apart.

Zhang Lie laughed. "I killed your brother? Which one? I seem to have killed quite a few of your brothers."

"I'll kill you!"

The lava rose up. Rows of crimson lava flowed toward Zhang Lie, sounding like peals of thunder, like stampeding hooves. The lava was as a horn to action, and the waves, thousands of courageous soldiers heeding its call.

Zhang Lie snapped his fingers, causing the stellar dragons to self-destruct.

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. The energy of annihilation ate at the lava, devouring it all. A shriek could be heard from the formless being whose body was being consumed bit by bit. Countless lifeforms that had been within the lava were likewise sucked in and destroyed.

Chapter 1358: Syzygy

As Zhang Lie's energy of annihilation consumed the lava, the will of the fourth realm's announcements repeatedly dinged in his head.

[You successfully killed a peak-grade flamingheart lion. By consuming the flesh of the peak-grade flamingheart lion, you may receive one to ten peak gene fragments.]

[You successfully killed a peak-grade lava salamander. By consuming the flesh of the peak-grade lava salamander, you may receive one to ten peak gene fragments.]

[You successfully killed a peak-grade flamefur wolf. By consuming the flesh of the peak-grade flamefur wolf, you may receive one to ten peak gene fragments.]

The lifeforms hidden within the lava perished to Zhang Lie's energy of annihilation, disintegrated and atomized. The flesh was completely obliterated; Zhang Lie wouldn't be getting any gene fragments out of this.

The lava struggled, attempting to free itself from the black hole, transforming into hundreds, thousands of hands that attempted to reach for Zhang Lie, but Zhang Lie wouldn't allow himself to be caught so easily. Guicang appeared in his hand. With a slash, he tore apart the countless hands.

The energy of annihilation spread all around him, but Zhang Lie curtailed it and cut it off. After all, a gathering point was right in the vicinity, and he didn't want to imperil it. With a wave of Guicang, he cut apart space and time, causing the energy of annihilation to dissipate.

If not for the nearby gathering point, Cthaa's son would already have been destroyed whole by the energy of annihilation.

Smoking remnants of lava gathered together into a humanoid face.

Cthaa's son had lost its former arrogance, but not its pride.

"I'm Cthaa's son! Aren't you afraid of having to go up against Eternal Sun?"

Zhang Lie responded with his sword. He raised the blade in his hand high into the air, encircled by black genetic energy.

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

The temperature dropped to sub-zero values, and a strong wind buffeted the battlefield. The lava cooled.

A stellar 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.

Each serpent was pitch-black like the abyss, like the dark of night, and speckled with starlight, a miniaturized version of the Milky Way. The serpents were guides and ferrymen both, leading departed souls into sky and space, freed from the mortal coil.

As Zhang Lie's sword swung down, the stellar river struck the mortal world. The lava gathered together and formed a pillar of light, a long river of flame, clashing against Zhang Lie's stellar technique. Starlight exploded with a sizzle, and flames illuminated the firmament.

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

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

Day turned to night, and stars twinkled in the night sky. The genetic hunters were gobsmacked by the scale and immensity of the technique.

The night sky morphed into a raging sea. Waves surged forward, sounding like peals of thunder, like stampeding hooves. The universe itself seemed to shake, as though the stars were shifting positions.

The surface of the stellar sea frothed with waves, layering and texturing it. Auroras hung in the air, veiling the night sky.

From afar, stellar dragons seemed to roar. The pitch-black dragons were like the night sky made manifest. Thunder and lightning crackled in the air as the dragons unfurled their wings amidst a storm of lightning. The auroras stretched on for thousands of miles, so beautiful they captivated the gathered hunters.

Zhang Lie struck. An underworld river hurtled into existence, roaring into the sea. The sword energy roiled like black waves, like a meteor shower, causing the very stars to shake.

The entire night sky shifted as a thousand stellar dragons descended, as though a crack had broken in firmament. A flood that could destroy the world itself rained down on the lava.

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 river of lava was completely obliterated, destroying Cthaa's son in a massive explosion.

The ground cracked, the air shook, and the stars dispersed. The wooden palisade outside the gathering point trembled violently as all the hunters in it gazed at the devastation in shock, including the members of Team Zenith.

They knew that this was an attack that none of them would be able to block.

The destruction left only ruined ground outside the gathering point. The air smoked with ash; the heat hadn't dissipated fully. The cracked ground was smoldering with fiery light.

Zhang Lie was just about to sheath his blade when the airship flew over. Li Qianlin called out, "Zhang Lie, there's a high-energy reaction coming from underground!"

Zhang Lie reacted instantly. The black dragons' phantasmal figures soared into the air. Zhang Lie thrust forward with Guicang in a flash of blinding starlight.

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

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

The stellar dragon's howls shook heaven and earth, shattering the ground and sending fragments of lava spraying all over. There was a great deal of moving lava underground.

Zhang Lie smiled. "Found you."

Bright sword energy radiated from Zhang Lie like brilliant rays of sunlight, illuminating the entirety of the world.

"[First Form: Parting the River]!"

A frightening force spread out from Zhang Lie, energy rumbling and rippling around him. As Zhang Lie swung the blade in his hand, a huge slash of sword energy shot toward him, carving out a gully in the ground and revealing the fiery lava.

The lava, exposed, formed a humanoid face. "Damn it!"

Cthaa's son had retreated underground during the earlier attack against the stellar dragons, knowing that it was no match for Zhang Lie. It pretended to have been defeated by his final attack, but had actually burrowed underground to flee via a lava vein. At the same time, it would be able to replenish its supply of energy.

Though seemingly boorish, with lava for brains, this son of Cthaa was far more crafty than the previous two that Zhang Lie had met.

If not for the airship's ability to sense energy, or for Li Qianlin's reminder, Zhang Lie would have fallen for the deception. Now, however, it wouldn't be able to escape.

"[Shadow and Light]!"

Light and darkness flashed. Time and space revolved, then sped up in the vicinity of Zhang Lie. A rain of swords fell, causing the lava to roil. The humanoid face shouted, "I'm one of Cthaa's sons. Killing me would be going against all of Eternal Sun. /my father won't forgive you!"

"I've heard that more than once by now. [Syzygy]!"

Runes appeared on the bloody moon by his feet, forming an intricate array.

Chapter 1359: Guicang and Hanguang

"I've heard that more than once by now."

This wasn't the first time he had killed one of Cthaa's children, at any rate.

Cthaa's son, knowing that it wouldn't be able to escape, that Zhang Lie didn't fear a confrontation with Eternal Sun, fought to its death. Lava burst out from underground like a volcanic eruption.

Hanguang appeared in Zhang Lie's hand, slashing apart the lava with a huge swing.

"[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, the lava's radiance grew dim. Under the black sun, the fluctuations in Zhang Lie's genetic energy were enhanced.

Cthaat's son roared, "What have you done to me?!"

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.

The black sun's flames strengthened Zhang Lie's attacks and burned away Li Feng's. As the realms of reality and illusion inverted, Zhang Lie simultaneously slashed forward with both blades, forming a huge celestial web.

The web wrapped around the lava, causing the ground to split and scar. The lava turned into rubble.

"[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.

White steam rose up from the ground as the lava was quenched to form volcanic rock, which shattered.

Cthaat's son had finally been killed! The hunters within the gathering point cheered as Zhang Lie landed on the ground. The members of Team Zenith rushed over, their faces full of smiles.

Yang Ze exaggerated, "Captain, perfect timing! If you'd been just one step slower, all of us would have died!"

Zhang Lie scoffed. "Nonsense! The fact that you were almost crushed—it looks like you didn't work as hard as you claimed to in the third realm, it seems."

The members of Team Zenith laughed with some embarrassment.

"No, Captain! The enemies in the fourth realm are simply too strong. We haven't finished acquiring our gene fragments yet, and we barely have any disaster-grade ones."

Zhang Lie asked, "How are your genes looking?"

"We've maxed out our peak gene fragments and uniformly have twenty disaster gene fragments each."

The members of Team Zenith reported the number of gene fragments they possessed.

While Zhang Lie was dealing with Cthaat's son, they had conveniently dealt with the disaster-grade lifeforms that had arisen from the lava.

"It's acceptable, I suppose."

As the airship landed, Sun Mengmeng asked curiously, "What's that, Captain?"

Yang Ze wondered, "Isn't this an airship...?"

Sun Xiaowu asked, "Isn't it the case that technology can't be brought into the dimensional world?"

Fang Yi asked, "How could there be airships in the fourth realm?"

Zhou Ying wondered, "Could there be a rule of the dimensional world that we don't know about yet?"

Li Feng asked, "This isn't alien technology, is it?"

Sun Mengmeng: "I saw you come alongside the airship, Captain. Does it belong to you?"

Sun Xiaowu cried out, "That explains everything, then!"

Yang Ze agreed. "If it's our captain, then everything makes sense."

Fang Yi said what they were all thinking. "Our captain makes the impossible possible."

Zhang Lie sighed and shook his head. "This airship's appearance is an exception. To be honest, I haven't studied the details, either. As far as I'm aware, the airship uses technology from beyond the Milky Way, and the dimensional world only rejects Milky Way technology, not technology elsewhere."

Sun Mengmeng gasped. "So those scientists really were right?"

Sun Xiaowu murmured, "There's life outside the Milky Way..."

Yang Ze glanced at him in a strange manner. "Isn't that obvious?"

Li Feng nodded. "Don't forget where we are now."

Zhou Ying asked, "Does that mean that the dimensional world counts as being beyond the Milky Way?"

Zhang Lie shook his head with a laugh. "I can't answer these questions yet, but I'll try to work toward the truth with all of you."

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Is this related to the location you're bringing us to, Captain?"

"That's right."

"What kind of place is it?"

Zhang Lie replied, "A trial, as well as a competition."

The airship landed, and Li Qianlin stepped out. She spread out her arms with a smile. "Mengmeng, Ying!"

"Qianlin!"

Sun Mengmeng and Zhou Ying immediately took her hand.

"Is this the king of Limit?"

Just then, a hunter stepped forward from the gathering point. Yang Ze immediately introduced him. "This is the leader of this gathering point."

The leader took Zhang Lie's hand and gave him a firm handshake. "It's an honor to meet you! I truly am blessed to be able to encounter you here."

Zhang Lie smiled awkwardly as he replied, "Thank you."

The leader realized that he had been too excited, to the point of making Zhang Lie uncomfortable. "I apologize. I simply couldn't control my emotions after seeing my hero in the flesh."

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "No matter. I don't much mind."

The leader continued, "I truly have to thank you for your assistance. Without you here, our gathering point would have been destroyed. I hope you'll stay for a while here as a guest. We'll host you lavishly."

Zhang Lie shook his head with a smile. "Thank you for your generosity, but we can't stay. We have tasks to do."

The leader continued, "No, surely not! You're the savior of this gathering point, and I insist that we show you our gratitude!"

"I'm afraid we have something urgent on our plates. We'll have to take off now." Zhang Lie quickly fled into the airship. The members of Team Zenith bade their farewells, then followed suit.

The hunters were very curious about the interior of the airship, and they wandered around poking and prodding at everything they could see.

Zhang Lie commanded the airship, "Set off toward the trial grounds."

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Are you in a rush, Captain?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Not quite. There's about one or two months before our deadline, but I'd rather head there sooner. I don't know how long you all would take to finish the trials."

Yang Ze asked curiously, "If we have the time, why not stay longer at this gathering point?"

Zhang Lie replied, "I feel as though there's something strange about how the leader of this gathering point looks at me..."

Yang Ze replied, "He simply reveres you, that's all. Once he realized that we were members of Team Zenith, he treated us very warmly."

Sun Xiaowu cried out, "Rather than that, show us around this airship, Captain!"

"Of course."

Chapter 1360: Immediate Explosion

After Zhang Lie gave them all a tour of the airship, Sun Xiaowu murmured, "To think that the airship would have so many features..."

Zhang Lie instructed, "Find a room for yourself and start absorbing your disaster-grade cores. Get strong as quickly as possible—I wouldn't want to see you fail the trials."

Sun Xiaowu asked, "Captain, just what are these trials that you keep bringing up?"

Since he was bringing the members of Team Zenith there anyway, Zhang Lie had no intention of withholding any information.

"A special arena meant to weed out the weak and select the strong. There's an initial trial and a series of six trials within, all combat-related."

Sun Mengmeng seemed flummoxed. "To select the strong? What for?"

"You'll see once you enter," Zhang Lie replied.

To be frank, he didn't have a clear answer either, only guesses.

The members of Team Zenith each selected a room of their choice. When he noticed auras surging, Zhang Lie could tell that the members of Team Zenith had begun absorbing their disaster-grade cores, leaving Li Qianlin and Zhang Lie behind.

Zhang Lie told Li Qianlin, "I'll also be absorbing my disaster-grade cores, and I expect some unusual phenomena might happen while I do so..."

Just then, the hunters' rooms began to vibrate. Hot air billowed out of one, stormy winds of another, and the airship began to shake violently. Zhang Lie shook his head as he smiled wryly. "It looks as though I'll have to wait, then."

Red flames gushed out of the various rooms. Sun Mengmeng's room stood out most: the flames coming out of her room were black.

Zhang Lie clenched his fists tightly as blue genetic energy gathered around him, then spread throughout the airship.

His genetic energy quelled the heat, preventing it from spreading to the rest of the airship and causing damage.

Considering their experiences from the second and third realms, the members of Team Zenith were quickly able to finish the absorption. They were now sensing their own strength and attempting to stabilize their cultivation.

The excess energy that they had vented from their bodies during the absorption had likely left their rooms in cinders; the airship would need to spend quite some time repairing them.

Zhang Lie turned to Li Qianlin. "The members of Team Zenith are alright now. I'm going to go absorb my disaster-grade cores too, Qianlin, so please watch over me from the command center in case anything unusual happens."

Li Qianlin nodded.

Zhang Lie headed to his room and initiated the absorption process.

Zhang Lie cut his palm with his sword, then dripped blood onto the core. The moment it touched the core, the blood was quickly absorbed into its interior.

It sucked up more and more of Zhang Lie's blood until it turned blood-red.

Zhang Lie opened his wounds again and again until the core became perfectly transparent. Then, he closed his eyes and began pouring concentrated blue genetic energy from his body into the core.

Lava swirled within the orb, so beautiful it looked almost like a work of art. Zhang Lie felt a keen sense of familiarity with it, as though it were already part of his body.

As the core slid down his throat, Zhang Lie felt a fiery, numbing sensation spread throughout his body. Zhang Lie's face took on the color of a boiled prawn.

Zhang Lie's blood boiled. Energy ran rampant throughout his body, causing blood to seep out of his pores and boil in the air. Lava seemed to fill his body, and his skin caught on fire.

The next moment, his body turned fire-red, as though he were molten steel. His blood boiled, his body swelled, and the floor beneath him started to melt. A pillar of flame burst into the air as the disaster gene fragments reformed his body from the inside out.

Under Zhang Lie's careful control, the energy from absorbing the disaster-grade core was held in isolation so that it didn't affect the airship proper.

The members of Team Zenith didn't have such precise control, but Zhang Lie could easily do it, venting the energy but simultaneously isolating it from its surroundings.

Genetic energy circulated through his framework, faster and faster. As he assimilated the disaster gene fragments into his body, Zhang Lie gave off stronger and stronger beams of light.

He circulated genetic energy through his body at an incredible pace, his framework fully activated to capture and transform his newfound strength.

His evolution was spurred further and further onward by the energy of the disaster-grade core.

The temperatures reached an apex. The floor had largely been melted away. Flames roared out of Zhang Lie's eyes and mouth, and a vortex of hot wind formed around him—but even so, it was corralled within the room.

Zhang Lie then took out a second disaster-grade core.

To him, absorbing these disaster-grade cores was an ordinary affair, nothing more.

Zhang Lie cut his palm with his sword, then dripped blood onto the core. The moment it touched the core, the blood was quickly absorbed into its interior...

Following the usual routine, while floating in the air, Zhang Lie absorbed the second core.

Blood-colored radiance surrounded him, as though a dragon were coiled around his body.

The energy of lava, of molten rock, exuded from him. It was as though a flaming whirlwind were growing to life within his body. His blood turned molten as it flowed through his body.

He circulated [Ninecarp Transformation], merging the two streams of heat together and giving rise to even more incredible strength. Were Zhang Lie not an emperor-grade lifeform, he would long since have been destroyed.

Zhang Lie: an emperor-grade lifeform

Framework: Foundation, Lv. MAX; Ninecarp Transformation, Sixth Form: River Dragon
Techniques: Rippling Walk (pinnacle), Three-Wave Crescendo (pinnacle), Calm Waters (pinnacle), Fists of the Silent Sea (pinnacle), The Boundless Blade (pinnacle), Eclipse (pinnacle), Syzygy (pinnacle), Ninesoul Dragonblade (advanced), Blade of the Heavens (pinnacle)

Genes: Basic, 160; Mutated, 150; Superior, 150; Peak, 150; Disaster, 130; Monarch, 0; Emperor, 0

Soulshards: White Grub (superior), Blood Ant (superior), Potbellied Toad (mutated), Eternalspring Cocoon (superior), Dragonwolf (superior), Moonlight Wyrn (peak), Golden Roc (peak), Dragonwhale (disaster), Mismeld Clam (disaster), Limitless Universe (monarch)