

U. Warlord 1391

Chapter 1391: Ballad of Water and Fire

Resplendent Sun's right hand curved and sketched out a sun. He slammed his palm down, bathing the world in purifying radiance.

Zhang Lie shot forward, his hair fluttering.

"[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.

Pitch-black genetic energy revolved around Zhang Lie like dark clouds, then exploded forth in his vicinity.

The two combatants warred over heaven and earth themselves. The skies shone with radiant solar light, cleansing and scouring.

"[Celestial Convergence]." Resplendent Sun formed the seals of sun and moon with his hands. Stars peeked out from amidst the void and descended on Zhang Lie with incredible might.

Zhang Lie stared up at Resplendent Sun, both hands on his sword.

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

Zhang Lie punched forward, and the black serpent behind him shot forth. Starlight formed its scales, the darkness of night its body, auroras its skin, abyssal darkness its eyes, genetic energy its fangs. It transformed into a python of legends, devouring sun and moon alike.

The sun and moon darkened; the falling stars shattered. The two combatants' battlefield was foundational natural law itself.

Zhang Lie took a deep breath. This was a great and terrible foe.

"[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.

Zhang Lie's monarch-grade limitless universe soulshard was changing the very nature of his genetic energy, transforming it into what seemed like the inky void that made up the universe. The galactic energy shone with twinkling stars, which transformed into dragons that shot out alongside Zhang Lie's punch.

His stellar dragon tore apart the sun and moon's radiance, breaking through Resplendent Sun's seals, Resplendent Sun continued to sit cross-legged in the void, encircled by an eponymous radiant sun, holy and dignified. His eyes closed, he formed seals with both hands and raised them high overhead.

A vase manifested in his hands, red and shining all over. Fiery mist poured out of its top, pointed straight at Zhang Lie. It was an ornate vase with physical form and structure. Just like the silver lotus, it was neither a soul shard nor a piece of technology.

Zhang Lie felt as though he were facing an incredible foe.

Resplendent Sun moved. The vase lit up with light, blowing countless runes toward Zhang Lie.

A firebird flew out of the vase with a loud cry, terrorizing the spectators. Azure fire burned the very heavens as an azure simurgh flapped its wings and bore down on Zhang Lie. The essence of the sun manifested in the form of a golden bird that swooped toward Zhang Lie. A phoenix manifested, its eyes glowing with flame. It bathed in the flames and revived stronger than ever, flying into the air with the authority of a monarch.

Within moments, the vase had spat out countless divine flames, each of which seemed poised to burn the arena down.

Resplendent Sun was even stronger than Radiant Sun had been back during his iteration of the Cup.

The divine flame burned the stellar dragon to a crisp. A wave of annihilation exploded around the dragon. Pitch-black energy swallowed everything in the vicinity like a storm at sea, covering up the sky.

The explosion was like a black hole that sucked up everything in sight.

However, the divine fire possessed shocking strength, and was burning away at the energy of annihilation itself. The sky was filled with a pitch-black hurricane and divine fire.

The two combatants fought with the sky as their battlefield.

Zhang Lie's eyes lit up with divine light.

"[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 blocked the divine birds' attacks and shot toward them.

The firebird swooped down with incredible speed. Starlight illuminated the stage and the stands. The golden sunbird cried out, heavenly monarch that it was. Its wings sliced down like the blades of heaven, its claws sharp and penetrating, imbued with the essence of divine flame.

The stellar dragon obliterated the solar essence, soaring into the skies and smashing into the golden bird's wings and claws with a metallic clang.

The phoenix descended next, its every action filled with echoes of life, death, and rebirth. Divine flames descended.

The stellar dragons exploded in waves of annihilation that were impossible to block.

A chain reaction of explosions formed, each bearing the energy of annihilation. That energy fought for dominance over the sky with divine flame, which fell to the ground in a series of explosions.

The spectators of light shook. To them, the fight was something straight out of an apocalypse. If they hadn't been protected by the rules of this virtual realm, they would have long since turned to ashes.

Zhang Lie sprayed out a breath of essence.

The blade Guicang appeared in his hand, tearing apart the sky, the firmament covered up by the energy of annihilation and divine flame.

The next moment, the sun itself shook. It grew brighter and brighter. Resplendent Sun suddenly shifted, rousing torrential flames all around.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!"

Zhang Lie raised Guicang into the air, manifesting a sword will that rose into the heavens, strong beyond human understanding, vast as the ocean.

The blazing sun shone brightly, burning mountains and boiling seas, shining in resplendent light and capable of annihilating heavens, of scalding the stars, with a will beyond mortal make. It was bright and yet brimmed with destruction, a boundless purgatory, burning everything in sight.

The sun glowed with splendor. Golden runes patterned the air. Starlight shone through the heavens.

Chapter 1392: The Natural Laws Retreat

The arena, consecrated with the might of a golden sun, resplendent and blazing, was so bright that the spectators had to look away.

Many of the spectators were tearing up, not just because of the bright light, but because they were touched by the scale of the fight and the surpassing strength displayed by both combatants.

No matter how blinding the light was, the spectators gritted their teeth and continued watching, refusing to miss even a single moment. Being able to witness this confrontation of the ages, this battle of wills that exceeded the limits of the realm, was worth it.

The spectators found their souls trembling.

Heaven and earth resonated with the will of the sword and the aura of the godlike being within the sun. Overwhelming sword energy, like a sunset sea, swallowed up the sun and suppressed the light.

The vase Resplendent Sun held in his hands suddenly grew larger. It was glazed bright red, almost like the color of blood, and sprayed out flames of even greater incandescence.

The next moment, the firebird, azure simurgh, golden sunbird, and phoenix all merged into one cohesive whole. Firelight swamped heaven and earth.

The divine birds perished together in an attack of overwhelming strength and force.

At the same time, before the divine birds, the color of the flames changed. They turned black, then deep purple, then the color of blood.

The divine birds had vanished, leaving pure flame behind. The flame spread like dripping blood, heading straight toward Zhang Lie with overwhelming strength.

The bright red light seemed to contain some otherworldly, sinister power, enveloping Zhang Lie and turning the skies bright red. It was so hot that even the arena below them was flaming.

Even though the spectators were protected by the laws of the virtual realm, they could feel the scorching heat.

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

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

The temperature had dropped to sub-zero values, and a strong wind buffeted the battlefield. Blood-colored frost appeared around the two combatants.

The blazing flames all over the arena were snuffed out the moment they came into contact with the black snowflakes.

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.

Starlight glowed and illuminated the arena, clashing with the divine fire in the air. The sky turned black one moment, flaming red the next, then glittering silver. The clash of the two energies caused cracks to form in the virtual realm.

Subsequently, incredible aura radiated from Zhang Lie. It looked as though a deity had manifested in his body.

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

Pitch-black genetic energy expanded through the battlefield. The genetic energy looked as though it had come from the abyss, or perhaps from the expanding, limitless universe. Starlight struck the genetic energy in a flash of surprising beauty.

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.

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. 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 stellar dragons shot straight toward the sun hanging in the air. As they smashed into it, it grew more and more cracked, before finally shattering under the stellar dragons' combined assault.

The golden sun was obliterated. Swift as lightning, Zhang Lie charged forward. Guicang slashed at Resplendent Sun's neck, while Hanguang pointed between his brows.

Resplendent Sun's body transformed into fire, resisting Zhang Lie's peerless blow. He defended himself with his bejeweled vase, forming a screen of light before him.

Guicang struck the vase with a clear, resonant ring, a strike targeted at the spiritual rather than the physical. The red vase's light swiftly dimmed. Divine fire was snuffed out as the vase trembled violently.

With the vase handled, Guicang struck at Resplendent Sun's neck, drawing blood with a golden slash.

Resplendent Sun brimmed with flame as he swiftly retreated, a battered sun shrouding him.

The spectators raptly watching the fight were dazzled by the speed at which the combatants moved. Too much had happened too quickly; no one could catch all of what had happened.

Radiant Sun was no longer seated cross-legged as though in meditation. He stood, a frightening wound horizontally across his neck, brimming with blood. He had almost been beheaded. He wiped at his neck with his hand, healing himself as he blazed with fiery light.

Zhang Lie's black hair fluttered in an evanescent wind. He looked like a deity. Stellar light surrounded him as he strode forward in preparation for an attack.

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

The stellar dragons exploded in a burst of starlight.

Guicang unleashed a barrage of sword energy in the form of a stellar dragon. The dragon's howls shook heaven and earth. The stellar energy that filled the battlefield transformed into a massive stellar dragon that took to the skies. Its massive body curled up above the arena, triggering manifold facets of natural law.

"[Solar Null]," Resplendent Sun called out. He stepped through the void, transforming into a solar vine, his actions brimming with dawn light. Golden flames burned overhead like a blazing sun. Flames poured out of him, shielding his body and blocking Zhang Lie's stellar attack.

Chapter 1393: Blades, Extinguish

Resplendent Sun counter-attacked. This time, his flames didn't burn blood-red, but white-gold. Sword energy manifested around him, and the ground seemed to shine with radiant, divine light, as though a sword of the heavens had descended to the mortal world.

His bejeweled vase, like a divine sword, sent out tens of thousands of blades of sword energy that drowned Zhang Lie.

"[Shadow and Light]!" Time suddenly sped up in the vicinity of Zhang Lie.

With Guicang, Zhang Lie countered the tens of thousands of streams of sword energy in the air with a furious clash of metal against metal. Zhang Lie transformed into a beam of dazzling light, piercing through Resplendent Sun's technique and shooting forward.

"[Endless Slash]!" Resplendent Sun shouted, aiming the vase at Zhang Lie and sending a torrential burst of sword energy toward him.

Zhang Lie's clothes shone with light, protecting himself. He held his palms together, causing radiant moonlight and sunlight to explode forth.

"[First Form: Parting the River]!"

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

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.

Zhang Lie's sword, infused with tremendous energy, struck the bejeweled vase with a huge boom, causing it to explode in a burst of golden light, igniting even the heavens themselves.

Both combatants stood amidst a raging sea of golden flames, each focused on the other.

Resplendent Sun cried out, "You've destroyed my clan's relic!"

Zhang Lie waved Guicang. "I've done it before." Indeed, smashing apart something real felt different from smashing apart something virtual.

"I'll kill you!" Resplendent Sun cried out. A divine glow emanated from his body, along with golden flames. He himself transformed into a divine weapon that tore through the heavens, splitting the sky in twain.

"[Limitless Golden Sun Slash]!" Resplendent Sun transformed into a huge solar sword that tore apart the void and shook the very stars.

Light flared as though the sun itself had descended to the mortal world.

Zhang Lie unsheathed Hanguang, sending a huge wave of sword energy into the air. Pale blue genetic energy transformed into a raging sea, cutting apart the world.

The two weapons met in mid-air, golden and pale blue genetic energy transforming into dual, competing hurricanes.

"I've been eagerly awaiting this match for too long!"

Zhang Lie raised Guicang into the air, manifesting a sword will that rose into the heavens, strong beyond human understanding, vast as the ocean.

Resplendent Sun was forced back in the clash.

When Zhang Lie first encountered Radiant Sun, because Bu Wentian was no match for him, the trial ended halfway through the fight.

Although Zhang Lie had passed the trial, he wasn't at all happy about doing so. Without fighting with Radiant Sun for real, he wouldn't be able to identify the limits of his opponent's strength.

He hadn't expected to encounter another member of the Solarvine race during the qualifiers. Compared to Radiant Sun, Resplendent Sun was even stronger.

Resplendent Sun changed tactics. Rather than a sword that could cut through everything, he focused on the aspect of flexibility. Once again, a screen of sword energy covered the air.

Resplendent Sun's swordplay was infinitely flexible, shifting from one moment to the next and keeping his opponent in the dark. Resplendent Sun was, undoubtedly, a swordmaster worthy of the title. Within moments, he had changed sword styles entirely, truly having transformed his body into a sword.

A solar flare blossomed around Resplendent Sun, infusing unadulterated sword energy into his techniques and making them even harder to block.

"[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.

Resplendent Sun's energy was drained as Zhang Lie's energy was magnified.

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 blood moon and black sun's sword energy intersected in the air, clashing directly against Resplendent Sun's solar storm. Neither combatant seemed to have the advantage. Resplendent Sun's flexible sword style attacked Zhang Lie's weakest points of defense in a difficult-to-block manner, but Zhang Lie's attacks were fast, forceful, and without glaring weak spots, allowing him to block the attacks directly.

The solar vine soared into the air. Solar energy emanated from it, transforming into a giant sun. A pillar of golden light shot down rays in the form of sword energy, bolstering Resplendent Sun and augmenting his transformation.

As the solar vine struck, a giant sword fell from the skies, breaking through the cloud cover. It was reinforced by solar might, as though the sun itself were falling from the sky.

"[Blades, Reverberate]!"

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

The twin blades Guicang and Hanguang emitted a fearsome aura, shining as brightly as the sun and moon. Sword energy materialized from Guicang into a blood dragon that revolved around his body.

The blade Hanguang morphed into a black dragon, and the blade Guicang into a blood dragon. The two dragons, coiling together as one, shot out toward Zhou Ying like a hurricane, bearing down on him with the might of Zhang Lie's spiritual sea between them.

Chapter 1394: Time to End It

Infused with the blood moon and the black sun, the twin dragons formed a black whirlpool. Tremendous suction, like that from a black hole, sucked up everything around the two combatants, even light.

The divine solar sword clashed against the revolving black and blood dragons. Shining radiance pierced through the arena, combining golden light, black and bloody radiance, and the convergence of sun and moon. The tri-colored hurricane unleashed a trail of destruction over the arena.

As dragons howled and golden light flashed, a frightening destructive power burst through the air.

Zhang Lie stumbled back a few steps. Resplendent Sun fared even worse. The giant vine that gave off a divine solar light dimmed. The solar vine itself was scarred with countless slashes from Zhang Lie's blades, and sand-like grains seeped out of the wounds. However, Resplendent Sun boasted tremendous vitality, and his wounds healed in barely any time at all.

"[Second Form: Piercing the Soul]!"

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

Radiant Sun's soul glowed like the sun, giving off blinding light.

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

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

His soul glowing as bright and scorching as the sun, Resplendent Sun broke out of the mental hypnosis within moments. When he saw Zhang Lie heading toward him, his sword unsheathed, he blanched. The solar vine formed a shield around him, glowing with blinding light, in an attempt to defend against Zhang Lie's attack.

Zhang Lie's aurora-like sword pierced through the solar defense, striking the solar vine with phantasmagorical light and wounding Resplendent Sun's soul and mind. His radiance immediately dimmed.

Resplendent Sun snarled in outrage, and the solar vine shook.

"I was intending on showing off this technique during the actual Cup, but to think I would have encountered a strong opponent like you in the qualifiers alone... You shall have the honor of witnessing this technique. Watch as I ascend to the peak of the manifold galaxies!"

Radiant light shone from Resplendent Sun's body. The solar vine that pierced through the cloud cover radiated with light. Tendrils and offshoots grew out of the main vine, as though Resplendent

Sun had suddenly developed a few hundred avatars. Although they were no match for the main vine, each offshoot had at least half its strength.

The main vine and its offshoots, like titanic serpents, shot toward Zhang Lie.

"[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 realm like a tsunami, devouring everything within.

With this technique, he managed to block the onslaught of the vines.

The main vine and its offshoots revolved, transforming into hundreds of blades. The blades curved like snakes, their trajectories mutable and impossible to predict, as though hundreds of experts were striking at Zhang Lie simultaneously. They broke the surface of Zhang Lie's sea of genetic energy.

"[Ninecarp Transformation]!"

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

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

Red water-attuned genetic energy surrounded Zhang Lie, manifesting in the shape of a dragon. He sent a sword slash, blazing with fire, at Resplendent Sun. The fiery-red genetic energy was interspersed with radiant light, suppressing the chimera's flames in favor of his own.

"So you've been hiding your skills, too. Well, it's time to put an end to this match. You were a respectable opponent." Golden light blazed from Resplendent Sun, and hundreds of vines shone with light.

The wave of golden light was as though the sun had shot out a million rays of light, each glowing overwhelmingly brightly, splitting the void and the stars beyond, each a divine sword.

"You're right, it's time to end the match—but the victor shall be me!"

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

"[Blades, Extinguish]!"

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

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

The sword in Zhang Lie's hands burned with scarlet water-attuned genetic energy. Billowing clouds of red-tinted steam surrounded him as though he were a burning pyre. The high-temperature steam was so hot that it visibly glowed an alarming shade of red.

This domain of scarlet steam was so dangerous that an ordinary lifeform would likely be vaporized without a trace. The temperature around Zhang Lie grew so hot that his surroundings began to warp. Mirages formed all around him.

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

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

Chapter 1395: Splitting Heaven and Earth

The two halves of the attack clashed with each other.

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

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

The clash between reality and illusion affected the entire arena.

The space distorted like papier mache as the two attacks clashed against each other. The spectators in the stands began to murmur to each other. They could only see a patch of fuzziness before them; the arena had turned distorted.

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

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

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

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

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

It clashed against the storm of golden blades. The intersection of reality and illusion generated a force so extreme it could shatter space, crushing the storm and cutting apart countless golden vines.

Resplendent Sun was near collapse. Sand seeped out of his body and into the void.

"I can't be defeated here. I'm going to surpass my father, to advance from undefeated into invincible!"

Resplendent Sun roared and transformed his invincible will into strength. His body glowed with golden light, burning with incandescent strength like a blazing sun.

If the spectators could see what Resplendent Sun was doing, they would be shocked. He was burning away his mind and soul for temporary, explosive strength.

Although he would be able to obtain thrice, maybe even ten times his usual strength in the short term, the side effects were commensurately intense. His mind and spirit would suffer severe damage, and he was guaranteed not to be able to participate in any match beyond this one.

In effect, Resplendent Sun was giving up his future and the rest of the Cup for a victory in the qualifiers, preserving his title and legend.

"Even if I'm not invincible, I'll remain undefeated!"

The remaining tendrils rushed into the air, twining and protecting the main vine. They formed a corkscrew that soared into the air and burst with scintillating light, tearing apart the papier-mache like space. All that strength condensed into one burning blow reminiscent of the blazing sun.

This was the strongest blow of this battle, penetrating natural law and tearing apart reality and illusion. The two combatants' attacks went beyond what the virtual realm could support, and even beyond what Resplendent Sun's own body could support. If not for the tendrils protecting his body, Resplendent Sun's attack would have torn himself apart before it ever had a chance to strike Zhang Lie.

The tendrils cracked and burned, transforming into fuel for Resplendent Sun's shocking attack.

"No one is ever invincible or undefeated," Zhang Lie replied coolly, his eyes calm. Ripples of energy emanated from him. His bones cracked and popped; his blood and flesh vibrated.

"[Ninesoul Dragonblade—Third Form: Separating Earth and Sky]!"

The runes of the Keys of the Elder Gods appeared once more. Strands of black hair floated around Zhang Lie. His eyes were like lightning, as though he were a martial god who had descended from the heavens.

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

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

As his mind resonated with the realm, Zhang Lie felt as though he was witnessing the creation of the virtual realm itself.

Zhang Lie raised Guicang high into the air. Dawn light shone all around him. His heart and soul seemed to unite with the world all around him, as though he were part of creation itself.

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

A divine chime rang out as Zhang Lie emitted radiant light and cut apart the horizon. The skies split; the black- and white-colored energy that went into the slash erupted like a volcano. White energy drifted toward the skies, and black energy caused the sea to quake.

Part of the virtual realm was destroyed. The sky turned dull; the sword strike was one of primordial genesis, of void and chaos.

At that moment, the virtual realm's natural laws began to shift. The realm itself seemed to have been cut apart from the inside, transforming everything into chaotic energy.

This blow went beyond what could be described as strength. It bypassed structure and power, instead dealing with the fundamental forces of the world, of atavistic regression and subsequent evolution.

Zhang Lie's overwhelming strike snuffed out Resplendent Sun's sword attack. This was a disaster, an apocalypse, an attack from which no one would be able to escape.

Chapter 1396: The System's Destruction

A loud alarm blared through the air as the spectators were dumped from the virtual realm. The screen was a mosaic of black and white with a few pixelated patches of color. The apparatuses all displayed a uniform notice: An unknown error has occurred.

All those spectating the match, as well as all those who had entered the virtual realm, spectators and contestants alike, were unceremoniously dumped out.

Everyone panicked. Just what had happened?

The virtual realm had been active for countless years, a stable construct formed by a group of top-tier existences. The Cup had never been disrupted by a problem of this magnitude—until now.

The spectators, communicating via online platforms with each other, discovered the source of the problem: a single match within the Cup.

As everything before them collapsed, the members of Team Zenith found themselves back in their coffins by the time they regained consciousness. Zhang Lie climbed out to see the members of Team Zenith and Bu Wentian in the hall.

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

Sun Xiaowu asked, "Captain, you were kicked out too?"

Yang Ze said, "Apparently, an unknown error in the system caused us all to get kicked out."

Bu Wentian frowned. "That's unusual. The virtual realm almost never encounters any such problems, let alone during such an important time as the Galactic Rising Stars Cup."

Sun Xiaowu shrugged. "Is it unusual? Any game can have server or hosting issues, after all."

Bu Wentian shook his head. "This is no ordinary game."

Yang Ze didn't seem concerned. "They're more or less the same, aren't they?"

Bu Wentian grumbled, "You don't know about the origins of the space, so you naturally wouldn't be aware."

Zhang Lie replied, "Explain everything, then."

Bu Wentian changed the topic. "How did it go for all of you?"

Sun Xiaowu asked, "The results of our battles, you men?"

Yang Ze grinned. "We dominated over our opponents, of course."

Li Feng nodded. "How could those random competitors hope to overcome us?"

Sun Mengmeng stated, "I was in the middle of my last match when the system collapsed."

"Same here," Zhou Ying added.

The members of Team Zenith all indicated that they were each on their final matches.

Bu Wentian nodded in satisfaction. "I haven't wasted my time, then."

Sun Xiaowu huffed. "As if it's all thanks to you! We were already very strong before that."

The members of Team Zenith all looked toward Zhang Lie, waiting for his response.

Zhang Lie asked Bu Wentian curiously, "Didn't you have a look at my match?"

Bu Wentian replied, "As an avatar, I can't enter the Cup, but my main body did."

Zhang Lie replied, "I don't know if it counts as victory or defeat for me, either."

Bu Wentian frowned. "What sort of response is that? Either you've won or you've lost."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "The system collapsed at the final moment. I don't know what the result was."

Zhang Lie wouldn't mind repeating the fight. His expended resources had naturally replenished once he returned to the dimensional world.

Furthermore, he now had a good sense as to the level of his opponents.

Bu Wentian suddenly shook. As though having just received some news, he grabbed hold of Zhang Lie's shoulder in a moment.

"Just what did you do during the final trial?"

"What's the matter?" Zhang Lie didn't understand why Bu Wentian's attitude had suddenly changed.

Bu Wentian continued, "My primary body just sent me a piece of news. He was watching your final fight against Resplendent Sun, and if he's not mistaken, you two were the culprits behind the realm's instability!"

Zhang Lie recalled that he had just activated Third Form: Separating Earth and Sky before the realm collapsed. Was this really his fault...?

Zhang Lie asked, "They're not going to ask for compensation from me, are they?"

Bu Wentian shouted, "That's not the important part! Just what happened in your fight against that member of the Solarvine race termed invincible? What did you do to cause such a collapse?"

Zhang Lie frowned. "Nothing out of the ordinary. It was just another fight. Were you unable to witness it?"

Bu Wentian shook his head. "During that final clash, none of the audience members could see anything. Your fight was beyond what the virtual realm could support."

Sun Mengmeng sighed. "We know the truth even without asking anything."

Bu Wentian turned to them. "Really?"

Sun Mengmeng shrugged. "There's no need to be surprised. Our captain has always been this way—an 'ordinary fight' is something that goes beyond understood limits and dimensions of strength."

Sun Xiaowu asked, "Captain, what did you think of the opponent?"

Zhang Lie replied, "He was fine. Very strong, about on the same level as all of you."

Sun Mengmeng turned to Bu Wentian. "See? Anyone whose strength our captain acknowledges has to be really strong."

Bu Wentian replied, "But of course. He was conferred the title of invincible, and no one would bat an eye at calling him the strongest competitor in the qualifiers."

Zhang Lie continued, "I did think something was funny. The competitors I met during the qualifiers were exactly like the ones you encountered during your trial. Even the order was the same. Was any of that your doing, Senior?"

Bu Wentian rolled his eyes. "Do you think I have the authority or skill to do so? It's likely a coincidence."

"Really?" Zhang Lie was still doubtful.

Bu Wentian shrugged. "There's not much to it. Zhang Lie, with your strength, you must have finished your matches very quickly."

Sun Mengmeng nodded. "While we were still on our third match, or just barely starting our third match, the realm kicked us all out. By that time, our captain was already finishing up the third match."

Sun Xiaowu asked, "Is there a connection with how quickly you finish your matches?"

Bu Wentian replied, "Not directly, but it does end up being relevant for matchmaking."

Zhang Lie frowned. "What do you mean?"

Bu Wentian replied, "You finished your first match quickly with barely any consumption of energy, so you likely chose to continue with the second match immediately."

Zhang Lie nodded. "That's right."

"In that case, your opponent must be under the same circumstances."

Zhang Lie asked, "So there are specific protocols in place that match you with a competitor of similar strength?"

"Not a protocol," Bu Wentian replied. "I suppose you can consider it natural elimination. Those stronger competitors who finished their first match quickly, without much consumption of energy,

would naturally start their second match quickly. On the other hand, the ones who are defeated would either be under too much strain to continue or would need to rest and replenish their reserves, or reflect on their defeat. They wouldn't participate in the second match immediately."

Sun Mengmeng nodded in understanding. "That's why our captain encountered such strong competitors—they were in the same condition that he was!"

Chapter 1397: Another Hack

Bu Wentian said, "There aren't many competitors at this level of strength among the qualifiers, let alone among the southern universe. Perhaps there might be just two or three, so it was all but inevitable that you would encounter the young prince of the spirit race and the invincible competitor of the Solarvine race."

The matching wasn't ordained by fate, but by the nature of the competition.

But... what about the appearance of the Splitsilver race at the beginning?

Zhang Lie turned to the others. "How about you?"

Sun Mengmeng replied, "My three opponents were a piece of cake, though I ended up facing a Splitsilver."

"Me too! I encountered a Splitsilver and a spirit race competitor," Yang Ze added.

Fang Yi frowned. "I was also matched up against a Splitsilver. He couldn't beat me and tried using a hack, but I beat him anyway."

Sun Xiaowu snorted. "I did the same!"

Li Feng mocked, "How pitiful the Splitsilver are! Even though they tried to gain an unfair advantage, they encountered us, whom they can't defeat even with their hacks. I feel ashamed on their behalf."

Of the six members of Team Zenith, five had encountered the Splitsilvers.

Bu Wentian shrugged. "The Splitsilvers send a large number of competitors to the Cup every year to test the effects of their hacks. It's akin to a showcase for them all."

That resolved all the problems, then.

"The inevitability of a clash of coincidences, or a coincidence of a clash of inevitability...?"

Zhang Lie murmured. "Right, one more thing. Wasn't Radiant Sun a member of the Redgold race? How did he become part of the Solarvine race?"

Bu Wentian replied, "It's been quite a while since that fight, after all. After the appearance of Resplendent Sun, the Solarvine race split from the Redgold race—or rather, they swallowed them up. It's little different from before, really. The Redgold race became a subordinate species of the Solarvine race, though there are hardly any Solarvines at all."

Zhang Lie said, "Doesn't that mean I was very lucky to encounter one during the qualifiers?"

Bu Wentian replied, "Don't you mean, very unlucky?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "How could it be unlucky for me to encounter such a strong race? I'm very curious to see just how strong the competitors will get in the actual Cup."

Sun Xiaowu added, "Me too. I'd like to know just how strong you have to be to skip the qualifiers entirely."

Zhang Lie didn't know that all the spectators of the Cup were discussing his match against Resplendent Sun.

"What happened? Why were we all kicked out?"

"The virtual realm has always been exceptionally stable. It's never shown signs of such collapse..."

"Apparently, it was caused by the Cup."

"How could that be? The Cup's never had any problems before!"

One of the spectators who was present for Zhang Lie and Resplendent Sun's fight quickly added, "It has to be because of the Solarvine's fight against some member of an unknown race!"

Everyone else quickly got interested. "What do you mean?"

"That match was devastating. I just don't know what the outcome of it was..."

"Why?"

Another spectator added, "I watched that match to get a sense of what the new Splitsilver hacks were like, only to find myself following an unprecedented dark horse!"

"The Solarvine's match against the competitor of an unknown race... that was surely the most exciting match I've seen in the history of the Cup, bar none! Both of them were far beyond the level of a new talent, but by the end..."

"What happened at the end? Why aren't any of you saying a thing?"

"Didn't you watch the match?"

"Well, we don't know what happened, either."

"The laws of the virtual realm seemed to have crumbled by then, and we weren't able to identify what was going on."

"Crumbled? As a result of that match?"

"Haha, you're a true jokester, aren't you? It was just a match between two combatants. How could that have caused the collapse of the realm?"

"Right, no matter how amazing the up-and-coming Solarvine is, there's no way he could have caused the collapse of the realm."

"Ah, the result of the match is out! Go have a look. The will of the virtual realm judged that it was the Solarvine's defeat!"

"What? Impossible! Isn't he supposed to be invincible?"

"The will of the realm couldn't have made a mistake, could it?"

"How could it be wrong?"

"What if it was a hack?"

"Right, if the Splitsilvers were able to hack, who's to say that this unknown race can't, either?"

"But we watched the previous matches too, and he's a competitor with tremendous strength! He even defeated the spirit king's son, Ling Jin, who's widely known to be the successor to the throne."

Some of the spectators disagreed.

"Even Ling Jin was no match for him?"

"Perhaps he's been using the hack since the beginning."

"Right? I was shocked to see him overcome the Splitsilver hack with brute force. Who's to say that he hasn't been supported by a hack from the beginning?"

"Hacking to the point that the realm collapsed...?"

"Could that really be it?"

"Do you know what race that competitor is from?"

Deep within a certain galaxy, Resplendent Sun's head emerged from a golden lake. He looked far more humbled than he had been upon entering the Cup, and the golden light he gave off was dim and muted. It was evident that he had suffered a serious mental blow.

A resplendent golden sun appeared, descending with a will so mighty it seemed as though the universe itself had been given physical form.

Seated within the sun was a man who seemed like a god, his eyes shut, the source of all the illumination. He shone brighter than Resplendent Sun himself. The figure within the light slowly began, "You've awoken."

"Father!" Resplendent Sun knelt on one knee.

The radiant figure was none other than Radiant Sun, who had defeated Bu Wentian during a previous iteration of the Cup.

Radiant Sun asked, "How is your recovery?"

When his son emerged from the apparatus, everyone had been shocked.

Resplendent Sun had all but wilted. His eyes were rolled back, and his mind had suffered deep trauma. His soul had almost been vanquished; Radiant Sun could sense that his son had been struck by a blow beyond what the virtual realm could handle, a blow from a dimension of strength that even the truly strong might not glimpse in their lifetime.

Without immediate attention and intense treatment, his son would be all but crippled.

"Thanks to the ambrosia of eternal sun, Father, I've recovered about two-thirds of my peak strength."

Resplendent Sun had been submerged in a pool of such ambrosia, refined from stars across the galaxy, each representing a drop of life that grew out of a backdrop of eternal destruction and annihilation. One drop alone would be a precious treasure; Radiant Sun was bathing in the ambrosia. In the known universe, only the Solarvine race, whose growth began deep within stellar cores, had access to such quantities of the ambrosia of eternal sun.

Chapter 1398: I Think I've Won

"I apologize, Father," Radiant Sun continued, "but I don't expect I will be able to continue my participation in the Cup."

The racial characteristics of the Solarvine race, along with the intense vivacity of the ambrosia of eternal sun, should easily have repaired Resplendent Sun's mental damage. However, Zhang Lie's [Third Form: Separating Earth and Sky] had been too strong a technique. It had deeply wounded Resplendent Sun's soul and left a scar on it.

Although his mental injuries had healed, his spiritual injury hadn't. His soul and mind was continuously attempting to transform into roiling chaos, fearsome in its intensity.

"Just rest."

Radiant Sun vanished from sight once again.

Supported by a pool of such ambrosia, Resplendent Sun would be able to recover from any injury bar death. Radiant Sun did not have to worry about his son's safety.

Beside him was a humanoid lifeform whose golden, metallic surface was blazing with flame. The liquid metal simultaneously bore properties of a liquid and a solid. The man knelt on the ground and began respectfully, "Young Master, do not be disappointed. I have learned that your opponent was using hacks during your fight. Young Master, you remain invincible!

To have used such despicable tactics—don't you worry, Young Master, we'll ferret him out and allow you to take your revenge!"

Resplendent Sun waved a hand. A beam of golden light struck the surface of the liquid metal in a spate of ripples.

A crisp slap resounded.

The man of liquid metal clutched his face in shock. "Young Master?"

Resplendent Sun snorted. "You need not worry yourself about my affairs."

The man of liquid metal bowed his head, not daring to look at his master.

Resplendent Sun thought back to Zhang Lie's final blow. The fear in his eyes warred with excitement. He sighed, "The universe is truly boundless. Such a strong competitor, and one whom I knew nothing about."

Given your strength, we'll surely meet again.

Resplendent Sun didn't notice that the humanoid's furnace-like eyes were dark and sunken. He murmured to himself, "The clan head instructed us to help out the young master, who might yet be rather ignorant of the universe..."

Meanwhile, in the fourth real, Bu Wentian yelled out, "The results are out!"

Zhang Lie cocked an eyebrow. "What results?"

"Of your fight against Resplendent Sun, of course!"

Zhang Lie was perplexed. "You can access it?"

Bu Wentian grinned cockily. "I have my ways."

Zhang Lie asked, "Has the virtual realm been restored?"

Bu Wentian asked, "You aren't curious about the outcome?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "Regardless, it doesn't matter."

"What if you lose?"

"Then I'll simply have to win the next fight."

"You really are confident."

Zhang Lie didn't mind, but someone else did. Sun Mengmeng asked, "What was the outcome?"

Zhang Lie turned on his device and saw the display on the screen. "It looks like I've won."

Zhang Lie had made it through the qualifiers and into the Cup proper.

Bu Wentian congratulated him. "Well done. The will of the realm has affirmed your victory."

Sun Mengmeng hugged Zhang Lie. "Captain, you've done it! You've made it through the qualifiers!"

Sun Xiaowu laughed. "Sis, isn't it a given that our captain would make it through? You seem even happier than he is about it!"

Sun Mengmeng scowled. "I'm happy for our captain."

Zhang Lie asked, "Is the Cup going to continue?"

"Of course!" Bu Wentian nodded. "The virtual realm has been restored, and you may all return to your matches."

Sun Mengmeng asked, "What if we were mid-way through our fights?"

Bu Wentian replied, "Those don't count. You'll be matched against another opponent."

Sun Mengmeng headed into her apparatus. "Then I want to start quickly and become the next qualifier."

Sun Xiaowu got into his own coffin. "No, I'm going to be next!"

Upon realizing that Fang Yi and Yang Ze remained where they were, Zhang Lie asked, "Aren't you going to head in too?"

Fang Yi shrugged. "My opponent from the last round was relatively decent, and I expended some of my strength. I intend on heading back in once I'm in peak condition. After all, the qualifiers won't be over for a while."

Yang Ze replied, "According to our discussions just now, the faster you return, the more likely you are to encounter a strong foe. I'd rather wait for all you stronger competitors to pass through the qualifiers first."

Bu Wentian shook his head. "That's not what I said. It's merely a matter of probability—you're just less likely to encounter a strong opponent if you head in later."

Yang Ze shrugged. "That's all I need."

"In that case, I'll be heading in too to watch the others' fights."

Zhang Lie and the others entered their apparatuses.

Zhang Lie was just in time to spectate Sun Mengmeng's fight. Her opponent had a head of golden hair and a golden lotus stitched on the sleeve of their robes. A lotus mark was present on their forehead.

From their handsome and beautiful appearance, Zhang Lie couldn't tell whether they were male or female.

"It's Qingyue Ge!" one spectator cried out in excitement and anticipation.

Zhang Lie turned to the spectator. "Is this competitor famous?"

The spectator rolled her eyes at him. "What are you doing here if you don't know a thing? That's the child of Divinity Qinglian!"

"Are they male or female?"

"That... I don't know."

The spectator beside her rolled his eyes and mocked, "What are you doing here if you don't know a thing? You're a fan of this person whose gender you don't know?"

That second spectator's voice was intimately familiar; it belonged to none other than Yang Ze.

The woman instantly grew furious. "Fight me if you dare! I've won two consecutive matches."

Yang Ze continued taunting her. "That so? Do you really consider that such a major accomplishment? Surely not, surely not!"

"And how many matches have you won? I have to imagine you're scared of just stepping into the arena!"

Yang Ze replied, "Coincidentally, I've won two stages as well—but I'm nothing compared to my companion here, who's already made it past the qualifiers!"

"What? That's impossible!" the spectator cried out.

Zhang Lie glared at both of them. "Shut up. Let's watch the fight."

Only then did the two of them notice the unfriendly glares from all around. They shot each other a nasty look before turning quiet again.

While Yang Ze and the other spectator argued, the match had begun. Sun Mengmeng raised her garuda bow. Three arrows, brimming with purple flame, flew toward the enemy like tracking missiles.

"[Lunarflame Shot]!"

The three flaming arrows exploded in mid-air in a brilliant burst of fireworks.

A golden path of light rapidly pierced through the flame. Qingyue Ge stood at the start of the path before flashing into action, closing the gap between them.

Sun Mengmeng immediately drew her daggers, meeting her opponent in a melee.

"[Baptism of Hellfire: Phoenix Rising]!"

Sun Mengmeng whirled her daggers all around her like a phoenix spreading its wings. A tail of fire glowed with radiant light, causing the stars themselves to quake.

Chapter 1399: Fragrance and Flagrance

Qingyue Ge shot forward, their golden hair shining. Their pupils had also turned faintly golden, and an aura of strength burst forth from them.

The two combatants clashed in mid-air, amidst a space of howling void. Flames rose up from them both, curling up into the air. Golden lotuses sprouted and rooted themselves, as though dying and rebirthing within the omnipresent flames.

The golden lotuses grew thirty meters tall, overwhelmingly huge, golden from stem to root to leaf to flower. They seemed to be endowed with divinity, with command over nature and the environment.

As the golden lotuses shook, they emitted golden runes, sending the flames roaring higher and higher.

"[Baptism of Hellfire: Full Moon]!"

Sun Mengmeng whirled her daggers all around her as a black moon rose into the air, blocking the attack. The ground exploded. Flames burst into the sky. Cracks of lava spread across the ground.

Sun Mengmeng stabbed forward with a dagger, the black moon behind her exploding as she shot forth. Purple flames transformed into her raiment. A long tail of flames whizzed by behind her, radiating a phantasmagorical glow. Like a meteor, she shot toward Zhang Lie.

Her beautiful features took on a tinge of the fantastical when lit by the purple firelight, causing the onlookers to stare at her agape.

With the barest hissing of wind, she unsheathed a long dark-red dagger. The dark red blade was gestated in fire and flame. It tore apart countless golden lotuses, which exploded in a blaze of golden flames and transformed the arena into a sea of fire. Sun Mengmeng tore apart the flames and mastered them. She had gained a tremendous attunement to fire, and even a sea of fire couldn't stop her advance.

As the lotuses exploded, their roots bombarded her like pellets, themselves exploding in flashes of thunder.

"[Baptism of Hellfire: Phoenix Rising]!"

Sun Mengmeng's body lit up with roaring purple flames. The phoenix that formed around Sun Mengmeng transformed into a blazing tempest.

As Sun Mengmeng revolved, so too did the flaming tempest. A phoenix's flame took over the golden flames and transformed them into storms of hellfire. Phoenixes emerged from those storms, descending on the arena.

Qingyu Ge stood amidst the tempest, unaffected by the fire. No—he was even absorbing the flames to strengthen himself. He was the largest and most beautiful golden lotus of them all.

Qingyue Ge clapped softly. "Beautiful. Amazingly beautiful. I almost want to bring you home with me."

A gigantic black phoenix soared into the void. As it cried out, countless stars trembled. It struck at Qingyue Ge as Sun Mengmeng shot forward with her daggers. Qingyue Ge's relaxed expression transformed into something intense as golden lotuses appeared around him.

Sun Mengmeng clashed against him dozens of times in quick succession as sparks of fire flared all around her. Golden flame and purple fire fought for dominance. Sun Mengmeng stumbled back, but Qingyue Ge wasn't unscathed, either. Golden fluid with a surprising fragrance dripped from his palms like ichor.

Qingyue Ge's eyes lit up in excitement. "Beautiful flowers all bear thorns."

As the golden ichor dripped onto the arena, lotuses bloomed in the flame, transforming their surroundings into a sea of golden lotuses. They combined into a majestic golden lotus that trapped Sun Mengmeng within. Frightening energy spread out from the lotus.

"Distill her essence!" Qingyue Ge shouted. Flames bloomed around the golden lotus, refining and purifying everything around, even the arena itself.

"[Lunarflame Shot]!"

Sun Mengmeng ignited the fire all over the arena, capturing it all in the form of golden flame, which she merged with her purple fire to form purplegold arrows.

Sun Mengmeng's right hand blurred as countless arrows of purple flame shot out of her bow like a meteor shower that tinted the air purple and gave the arena a phantasmagorical appearance. The air turned dry and arid, as though a cataclysm was nigh.

Under the brilliant purple sky, everything began to burn, drowned in a sea of purple flame. When her arrows exploded, they formed pillars of flame over ten meters high.

Sun Mengmeng's body burned with purplish-black flame so intense that it dyed the heavens the same color. She cast [Black Sun], forming a corona of purplish-black flame around her. Then, she activated her most impactful soulshards for battle, transforming from a young woman to a fierce warrior with a chitinous carapace, wreathed in black flame.

Her flames were so intense that the armor-type soulshard actually began to crack and split. Black flames seeped out from the cracks, burning so intensely that the ground began to melt and turn red.

By then, Sun Mengmeng had transformed into a fearsome warrior of hell. Black flames flared from her garuda bow, manifesting in the form of an undead phoenix.

"[Netherworld's Gaze]!"

Hundreds of arrows, like beams of moonlight, shot toward Zhang Lie. Their flames felt as though they could destroy everything they touched.

The golden lotus exploded, tattered petals falling from the air. Qingyue Ge stood on a golden lotus seat, radiating divine light that absorbed the flames around it and transformed them into pure strength to nourish herself.

They clapped earnestly, but their expression quickly turned disappointed. "Beautiful to the extreme. It is a pity we did not meet in the universe, or I would surely have taken you back with me."

"Unfortunately, I already have someone I like."

Sun Mengmeng loosed arrows into the air, causing nine flaming moons to appear in the sky.

"[The Nine Moons of the Underworld]!"

The moons shone even more brightly than the sun itself.

Chapter 1400: Rain of Dark Flame

As the nine flaming moons landed, black and golden flame exploded in wave after wave of fire.

The golden lotus seat rooted itself in the flaming inferno. It shook amidst the black waves of fire as it absorbed the flame and transformed it into Qingyue Ge's strength.

Zhang Lie frowned tightly. "Sun Mengmeng was unlucky enough to have encountered an opponent that counters her directly."

Yang Ze nodded. "That's right."

Qingyue Ge's ability proved to be a direct counter to Sun Mengmeng's. His cultivation technique revolved around golden lotuses blooming in intense flame, which took advantage of Sun Mengmeng's abilities.

"Furthermore, that special relic he has just augments his advantage further."

The spectators laughed at Sun Mengmeng. "That woman had better give up quickly. Against the child of Divinity Qinglian—the outcome of this match is certain."

Yang Ze shook her head. "Sun Mengmeng doesn't look as though she's planning to give up."

"It's a waste of effort."

The spectators around Yang Ze and Zhang Lie bore no hope for her.

Zhang Lie shook her head. "The outcome of the match remains undecided."

"Isn't it obvious? This woman's skilled with fire, but Qingyue Ge can manipulate flame and transform it into his own strength. She's being entirely suppressed. Is there a need to resist further?"

"If it were me, I'd have surrendered long ago."

"Keep watching," Zhang Lie replied. "You'll see."

"[Lunar Apostasy]!"

Sun Mengmeng's entire bow was blazing. She launched her arrows straight into the air, which exploded among the clouds and formed a black moon,

The moon exploded and shot down rays of moonlight, causing the lotus seat to shake as the arena transformed into a sea of black flame.

Qingyue Ge waved his hand, causing golden lotuses to bloom once more out of the flames, like holy flowers emerging from hell.

The lotus mark on Qingyue Ge's brow glowed with light. As they stood on the golden lotus seat, they looked like an immortal descending from the heavens. Many females, watching from the audience, screamed shrilly as they watched Qingyue Ge avidly.

The flames surrounding Sun Mengmeng erupted like a volcano, distorting space in a huge area around her and strengthening the flames around.

Sun Mengmeng howled into the air. Fire-attuned genetic energy erupted from her body, and her pitch-black eyes burned red. The flames formed a black hurricane with her at its eye. It sucked in all the flames around the arena and grew even stronger, dyeing the heavens black.

Lava began to form on the ground as the flames transformed into Sun Mengmeng's strength.

"[Netherworld's Torrential Flame]!"

A frightening fan of flames poured out from Sun Mengmeng's bow, an attack far stronger than the moonlight she had summoned. The intensity of her technique shocked everyone.

The flames arced in the air and fell toward the battlefield in a waterfall.

The golden lotuses exploded and their seeds shot out like bullets. Golden flames bloomed in the air like flowers. The golden lotus seat's petals extended protectively around Qingyue Ge, protecting them.

The petals rippled with light. Qingyue Ge, who had seemed relaxed all this time, began to frown tightly. Even so, they smiled. "Not only is she pretty, she's amazingly strong and skilled with fire. What a treasure to behold."

"[Lunarflame Shot: Ninefold Phantasmagoria]."

Sun Mengmeng's surroundings began to burn with dark red flames as she launched yet another attack.

Nine purplish-black phoenixes rose around her and shot toward Qingyue Ge. All the flames on the arena turned dark gold as they surrounded the golden lotus seat in a giant hurricane.

The golden seat continuously absorbed the strength of the flames in its vicinity, lighting up lotus after lotus. Qingyue Ge plucked out a lotus seed and flicked it at Sun Mengmeng.

Before it could strike Sun Mengmeng, a surprising phenomenon occurred.

The golden lotuses rooted themselves in the void, a divine and holy deity of fire appearing over each one, chanting scripture in some unknown language. Even more frightening were the bones, skeletons, and malevolent specters underneath the lotuses, filled with grudges and curses, the contrast more dissonant than even the ninth layer of the underworld.

Underneath the holiest of golden lotuses were the most malevolent curses and killing intent.

"[Lunarflame Shot: Might of the Garuda]!"

Sun Mengmeng reacted quickly. Purplish-black flames gathered on Sun Mengmeng's bow once again, forming an arrow of pure black.

The image of a golden garuda, limned in black, appeared behind her. As she loosed her arrow, it seemed to transform into a beam of light, moving so quickly that it bypassed the constraints of time and space, as though it could penetrate anything.

The arrow caused no earth-shattering explosion. It was plain and ordinary, and no sound marked its advance. It struck the golden sea of lotuses, piercing through countless skeletons and ghouls, as it made its way toward Qingyue Ge's golden lotus seat.

The black arrow struck the seat. Illusory petals let out a shrill scream as gold and black flames exploded around it. The arrow caused a cavity to appear in the lotus seat as Qingyue Ge summoned its strength. The lotus seat glowed with radiant light, and eighty-one lotuses bloomed and unfurled around it in a spray of holy light. The black arrow was obliterated.

Black flame struck the golden lotus seat with a clash of metal against metal, sending sparks flying.

"[Lunarflame Shot: Extirpation of the Garuda]!"

Black flames, stuck together, flowed like lava along the ground. Wrapped in flame, Sun Mengmeng strode forth. Her pupils had been replaced by black flame, and she looked like a demon from the abyss.

As Sun Mengmeng infused her genetic energy into the bow, the image of a garuda appeared behind her. She released her arrow, which morphed into a human-faced, golden-winged bird in mid-air, radiating red light as it arced through the skies. It began to pulse with red flame, brimming with such energy that it seemed as though it would set the world aflame.

The destructive energy dyed everything in sight a patch of black.

The entire arena seemed to transform into a furnace. The ground melted and turned into boiling-hot lava.

Sun Mengmeng released her arrow, which morphed into a human-faced, golden-winged bird in mid-air, radiating red light as it arced through the skies.

The garuda landed in a hurricane of pitch-black flames as it arched its wings wide.

It began to pulse with red fire, brimming with such energy that it seemed as though it would set the world aflame.

Sun Mengmeng's attack scorched the heavens and the earth in a tremendous surge of destructive energy. The golden lotuses, deities of fire, skeletons and ghouls—all were swept away by cleansing, all-encompassing flame. The golden lotus seat shook violently. A rain of petals formed.