

U. Warlord 1431

Chapter 1431: Stone of Counteracting Fate

Countless spectators were shocked. Some widened their eyes, while others clutched their mouths.

"That's... a stone of counteracting fate!"

Everyone was gobsmacked. They glanced at Fang Yi's glowing body. What the stone of counteracting fate released wasn't radiant light, but rather formless energy—not a curse, and instead more like an extreme sense of willpower. It felt as though there were countless figures surrounding Fang Yi, roaring and screaming in defiance.

The stone of counteracting fate was tetrahedral in shape and significantly smaller than the stone of starlit fate that Xing Yu had displayed.

Many of the spectators eyed the treasure greedily.

Sun Xiaowu asked, "Just what is this stone?"

"Allegedly, it's a treasure on par with the stone of starlit fate. During the era of the Stargods' dominance, a new star was born. Some called it a wish made manifest, that this was karma for the Stargods' tyranny; others considered it fate. This stone came from that star.

"A strong cultivator happened across the stone of counteracting fate and quickly ascended to strength, slaying stronger opponents one after another until that cultivator finally fought against the Stargods' Starlit Legend, defeating the legend and ending the Stargods' long reign.

"That stone was what ultimately led to the downfall of the Stargods.

Allegedly, being in possession of that stone will be enough to recapitulate the legend of counteracting fate.

Unfortunately, just like a stone of starlit fate, a stone of counteracting fate will be forever attuned to a cultivator and would be useless even if seized."

Someone suddenly cried out, "No, that's not the complete stone of counteracting fate!

Don't you remember the conclusion of that fight? The Starlit Legend perished, as did his opponent. Even the stone of counteracting fate was shattered into pieces.

Would this shard alone allow that cultivator to overcome his opponent?"

"Xing Yu's not an invincible Starlit Legend yet. He's only managed to attune to one such stone."

Another spectator's eyes gleamed. "To think that we would see a fight between two cultivators of legend—and in the qualifiers, at that! Any amount of mental trauma would be worth being present for this fight."

Fang Yi had undergone a dramatic transformation. His wounds healed, his bones knitted back together, and his body glowed with radiant light.

Fang Yi's eyes were focused, his muscles bunched up, his flesh and blood glimmering with strength. It was as though his body was composed of a series of furnaces that provided him with neverending energy.

Fang Yi's status of being was quickly being elevated by the stone of counteracting fate. What energy he had consumed was immediately replenished, and wheels of time flared into existence to his back. Five appeared out of nowhere.

The spectators gasped. As expected of a stone of legend.

Xing Yu raised his head to the skies and laughed. "Incredible. I knew you had to be someone extraordinary. This is a fated fight, and you my fated opponent. We were destined to meet."

Fang Yi's eyes flashed like lightning. Although his transformation wasn't as extreme as Xing Yu's, the wheels of time to his back shone with blinding light. Wind, storm, and time revolved around him in a manner brighter than even the sun. With five wheels of time, he looked like a god descending from the heavens.

Xing Yu, however, seemed perfectly unruffled by Fang Yi's transformation. His eyes revealed his confidence and pride. "I will reforge the reputation of a Starlit Legend by defeating you once and for all."

It felt as though a thousand furnaces burned within his body, lighting him up with starfire. The glow emanating from him eclipsed that from Fang Yi.

The sky itself was dyed in two different shades of light.

Xing Yu formed a seal with his hands. A gigantic furnace manifested before him. He added some of his vital energy into the furnace, along with the two sharp blades. Divine fire blazed as the arena shook. The blades shone with starfire.

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

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

Wind and storm roared around him, resonating with his genetic energy and transforming into a chaotic dragon of wind and a chaotic tiger of lightning. His spear shattered Xing Yu's two blades.

The Starlit Horns! Xing Yu's Starlit Horns shone with starlight.

A bell tolled. Another wheel of time formed behind Fang Yi as he thrust his spear forward. With six wheels of time supporting him, it was as though six Fang Yis had simultaneously launched an attack. The spear struck the starlight.

As Xing Yu's Starlit Horns activated, countless blades of light shot forth like radiant stars.

"[Shadow and Light]!" Fang Yi morphed into countless clones, each of which moved independently and shattered the blades of light.

"Is this the full might of the stone of counteracting fate? It isn't much!"

Xing Yu snorted. Metallic clangs rang out from his body as starfire blazed, transforming into weapons, bells, swords, cauldrons, pagodas—all sent flying forward, hundreds, then thousands, then millions of weapons.

"[Heaven's Judgment]!"

The combination of wind and lightning generated a frightening force that seemed to be able to penetrate space. Fang Yi's spear emitted chaotic energy as the three disparate sources of energy combined with his temporal force.

Void wind and void lightning merged together and generated a frightening force that seemed to be able to penetrate space.

The spear, with Fang Yi in tow, shot into the rain of weapons that threatened to crush Fang Yi in a flood. Despite the momentum of his spear, Fang Yi felt tremendous resistance.

After all, what he possessed was only an incomplete fragment of the stone of counteracting fate, and there would be a marked difference between him and Xing Yu, who had a complete stone of starlit fate. He would only regenerate once in a fight, and only have one chance at overcoming the powers of fate.

Xing Yu smirked. "Don't struggle futilely. You might not know this, but the Starlit Legend was the victor of that legendary fight."

Fang Yi snorted. "And so what?"

Chapter 1432: Counteracting Fate

"Do you really think you'll be able to change your fate just by being lucky enough to pick up a stone of counteracting fate? That's just a joke."

Xing Yu continued to try to shake Fang Yi's confidence with a verbal assault.

"I'm your opponent, not the stone of counteracting fate! [Floating Clouds]!"

As if in response to Fang Yi's internal struggle, wind and lightning raged around him. The six wheels of time to his back blazed.

Wind and storm surged from the wheels, providing explosive strength that propelled Fang Yi forward

Starfire continued to explode in the air. Bolstered by temporal force, Fang Yi moved at a rapid clip, shooting forward with starfire.

"[Born of Lightning, Swallowed by the Wind]!"

As Fang Yi shouted, his spear traced a half-moon in the air, surrounded by an aura of time. Light and shadow flashed by its tip, just like the wind and lightning that made up the core of Fang Yi's techniques. The spear pierced space abruptly, spawning a rift that turned its surroundings gray. All movement was locked in time.

The only color in the space, the only movement, came from Fang Yi.

"It's useless!" Xing Yu was far different than before. His back glowed with silver radiance like an active volcano, shattering the space of gray stasis with his own strength.

Fang Yi thrust forward with his spear, and Xing Yu countered with his fist. Silver light exploded like a volcanic eruption.

Both combatants glowed with inner light as they fought each other fiercely, exchanging hundreds of blows in an instant.

Zhang Lie turned to the spectator beside him and asked, "What happened during the confrontation between the Starlit Legend and the underdog?"

"As Xing Yu said, the Starlit Legend won in the end—and simultaneously lost."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "What, is the Starlit Legend supposed to be like Schrodinger's cat?"

Sun Xiaowu added, "Is the Starlit Legend of the Stargods' legends supposed to be a radioactive particle?"

The spectator clarified, "The Starlit Legend did win the fight, but he was grievously injured and perished not long after."

As the battle raged on, more and more wheels of time accumulated by Fang Yi's back. The arena continued to deteriorate and break down. After hundreds of clashes, Fang Yi had stacked twenty-five wheels of time. Unlike before, however, Xing Yu was perfectly able to match Fang Yi's tempo with the support of the stone of starlit fate.

"Your techniques aren't impressive. I've been able to deal with them all," Xing Yu stated.

"Try this, then!"

The twenty-five wheels of time released blinding light to Fang Yi's back as they expanded through the air. Wind and storm surrounded them.

"[Heaven's Judgment: Four Sages' Roar]!"

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

The combination of wind and lightning generated a frightening force that seemed to be able to penetrate space. Chaotic and spatial energy joined in the mix—a miniaturized version of his signature fivefold strike, at least at the level of a fourfold strike.

A black turtle and divine bird rushed out of the mix of chaotic energy, spatial rifts, wind, and storm.

The wind resolved into a stormwind dragon. Spatial force transformed into a qilin, with the void as its claws and lightning as its whiskers.

The lightning transformed into a white tiger wreathed with howling winds, spatial force forming its sharp claws and chaotic energy condensing into its eyes.

Spatial force manifested in the form of a divine bird, space its feathers, the storm its body, lightning its beak, and chaotic energy seeping from its feathers like burning flames.

The chaotic energy transformed into a black turtle, spatial force into its shell, lightning into its legs, and the stormy wind its head.

The twenty-five wheels of time to Fang Yi's back, with twenty-five associated afterimages, duplicated the technique.

A hundred divine beasts appeared in the air, forming a pack of massive proportions. The lightning that crackled through the air was so bright that the spectators could barely open their eyes. Space distorted as chaos reigned supreme. Wind and storm roiled, tearing apart the void.

The moment Fang Yi thrust forward with his spear, his twenty-five afterimages combined into a cohesive whole. The pack of a hundred divine beasts rushed through the air, forming an unassailable force.

Xing Yu rampaged, countering the blow with a massively strengthened version of his own. His divine armor glowed with light, haloing him in what seemed like a barrier of invincibility. He clashed with Fang Yi with ringing blows.

Not only were the horns on his head shining with light, his hands were forming seals. He employed one of the strongest techniques of the Stargods—the Stargod Seal!

Runes flashed all over the void cage, an arcane script that thrummed with power.

Any other hunter would suffer greatly in a fight of such proportions, because Xing Yu was the master of the cage and lord of the domain within.

His hair was in disarray. The holy light radiating off his body grew more concentrated. His armor shone with divine radiance, holding Fang Yi back with mounting pressure. Xing Yu's divine armor was far too powerful; it was difficult, near-impossible, to penetrate.

The pack of divine beasts struck the Stargod Seal. The forces of void, wind, lightning, space, chaos, and starlight exploded in the air. A weaker hunter would be obliterated by the explosion.

Within the tempest of chaotic energy, two figures could be seen clashing with one another, as fierce as dragons.

Every clash left the ears ringing; every clash was filled with destructive might that threatened to obliterate the arena.

As they exchanged hundreds of blows, Fang Yi formed a thirty-fifth wheel of time.

Without the reinforcement afforded by the stone of counteracting fate, Fang Yi's body would have shattered.

He seemed to be standing on the other side of the river of time. With thirty-five wheels of time, each of his attacks was 3.5 seconds faster than they should have been, and he would be able to launch thirty-five spear thrusts in the span of one.

Even Xing Yu was starting to have a hard time keeping up with Fang Yi's speed.

Chapter 1433: Fall of the Legend

Xing Yu roared as his eyes glowed with light. He used his ultimate technique in order to end the fight as quickly as he could.

His avatars filled the arena.

As his Starlit Wings flapped, the void cracked and began to shatter. A pair of silver wings slashed at Fang Yi's physical body with a keen edge beyond compare.

Fang Yi was shocked. He defended against the blow with his spear, but the webs of his thumbs began to tear. Blood dripped down; Xing Yu's Starlit Wings were obscenely strong.

Even the spear of Chaos that the king of chaos had forged for him began to chip.

Any other opponent might have been bisected.

Fang Yi marveled at the weapon that the king of chaos had forged him.

Xing Yu's eyes narrowed. He too knew that any other opponent would have fallen to his Starlit Wings. How in the world had Fang Yi managed to defend against it?

These were no ordinary wings. They possessed the strength of the stone of starlit fate, and they should have been able to crush all resistance!

Fang Yi stared at Xing Yu, unruffled. "Is this all there is to the Starlit Legend?"

By then, the two cultivators had already exchanged over five hundred blows. Fifty wheels of time had formed by Fang Yi's back. The shining wheels were so thickly clumped together it was as though they had formed an impenetrable wall. Fang Yi, boosted by the fifty wheels of time, was akin to a god.

Xing Yu's gaze turned cold. His armor rattled and his wings flapped, poised to shatter the void and attack Fang Yi.

"[Floating Clouds]!"

Fang Yi morphed into lightning itself. Storms rose up all around him, and he left a flurry of afterimages behind.

Golden flames blazed up over Xing Yu's body, as if he were a god come to life. The Starlit Legend unearthed every last drop of his potential. Starlight surrounded him as he reached peak strength once more.

"The Starlit Legend shall rise anew. Your defeat is fated."

A huge pair of silver wings unfurled behind Xing Yu, beaded with starlight. Strands of karma followed their every flap.

The Starlit Wings achieved their ultimate form. It was as though they encapsulated an entire universe, with each feather representing a shining galaxy.

Xing Yu had yet to truly invoke the strength of the Starlit Legend, the undefeated legend that had swept through gods and legions.

To his back, the Starlit Wings reverberated. Runes emerged from their depths, forming a stellar river behind them.

Many of the spectators trembled as they witnessed the Starlit Legend in its entirety.

Wind and storm appeared around Fang Yi's body. Illuminated by fifty wheels of time, he looked like a god descending from the heavens. He had freed himself from mortal constraints, from spacetime, from the here and now. The wind and storm coalesced into a huge pair of wings to his back

One wing dipped into the forces of formless time, and the other into infinite space. As they flapped, chaotic energy seeped out.

Fang Yi and the spear had achieved a harmonious balance during the drawn-out fight, and he felt a sense of kinship the likes of which he had never felt before. His aura was magnified until all around the arena could sense it.

The wings of wind and storm to his back invoked a primordial will. The stone of counteracting fate lent its power to the wings, augmenting the wisps of chaos that formed around it.

Fang Yi was drawing out every last drop of the power of the stone of counteracting fate. This was something he could only do for a short period of time while bolstered by the fifty wheels of time. Fang Yi didn't think he would be able to use such a skill a second time during this fight.

The next moment, the wings slashed forward in tempestuous rage, cracking the cage that surrounded him and Xing Yu. It was about to collapse.

Xing Yu's Starlit Wings flapped as silver radiance shot through the arena like countless accreting galaxies, poised to counter Fang Yi's wings of wind and storm. His eyes blazed with ardor.

This might very well be the end of this match!

"Crack!"

Xing Yu's eyes suddenly widened. The confidence and surety on his face froze. His wings had been cut apart by Fang Yi's. The sound was jagged and discordant, and it was all that he could hear.

He roared in outrage. His disheveled hair stood on end as his body radiated with light. His divine armor clattered as he flung himself at Fang Yi.

Fang Yi stood immobile, but his wings swiped downward.

Xing Yu's armor, allegedly impenetrable, was scored and subsequently dimmed. Xing Yu was sent flying as he spat out mouthfuls of blood. With a shout, his armor transformed into fragments of blazing light, shards of a burning galaxy, that shot toward Fang Yi and were about to explode at any moment.

Fang Yi narrowed his eyes. His wings of wind and storm surrounded him. A wind dragon and storm tiger, made manifest, roared and summoned the energy of spacetime and chaos before them.

He dodged to the side as the armor fragments exploded, but they did little against the ethereal constructs of wind and storm. Instead, they fell to the void that Fang Yi summoned.

Xing Yu roared again, mustering up all his strength and setting his own body aflame. He conjured another Stargod Seal and combined it with the void to produce his strongest attack.

Fang Yi, having reached the apex of speed, sent his wings down against Xing Yu once more.

Xing Yu was sent flying in a mess of blood.

Fang Yi swooped forward and pressed the attack, his spear glinting with golden light and thrusting through Xing Yu. He fell, his blood dyeing the air as the void cage burst open and they returned to the reality of the arena.

The spectators were shocked. They had all seen Fang Yi's spear destroying half of Xing Yu's body in a spray of blood that arced over the sky.

"Even the Starlit Legend... was defeated?!" the spectators exclaimed. A legendary figure, nipped in the bud!

Xing Yu, eyes cold, ignoring his wounds, shot into the sky in blazing starfire. He ignited his life force and mental energy to transform into a stellar river that illuminated the sky. He exuded the pressure of a god. His Starlit Horns, pushed to the extreme, were surrounded by threads of karma, then combined with the Stargod Seal and his mastery over the void.

"The Starlit Legend will not fall here!"

Linked by karma, Xing Yu's Starlit Horns, Stargod Seal, and mastery over the void gave off divine pressure.

"Succumb to my fated future!"

Xing Yu unleashed the strongest blow he was capable of, with everything on the line. The stone of starlit fate, his mastery over the void, the Stargod Seal, the strength he obtained with his own body as sacrifice, his future—he could not lose here, for he bore the burden of the entire Stargod race and of the Starlit Legend!

Chapter 1434: Fate-Defying Spear

Xing Yu bore the burden of the entire Stargod race and of the Starlit Legend!

His resolute will allowed him to produce an attack stronger than anything he had managed to date before.

"This is heaven's will!"

Despite the fact that Xing Yu was exhausted and nearing the end of his reserves, the blow that he struck was stronger than anything before.

Black chains extended from the void and locked in on Fang Yi.

The chains were ethereal in nature. They were formed by karma, and they restricted his movement to an immense degree.

"If this is fate, then I shall defy it!"

Fifty-two wheels of time emerged to Fang Yi's back, shining with incredible light. Fang Yi looked like a god descending from the heavens. Lightning sparked; the storm raged on. Time itself froze under the influence of the fifty-two wheels of time, as did all spectators that should have been protected by natural law, and even Xing Yu himself, bolstered by the stone of starlit fate.

In the gray world of stasis, Fang Yi was the only spot of color within.

"[Heaven's Judgment: Fate Defied]!"

With blazing wheels of time to his back, Fang Yi was able to simultaneously manifest different techniques at the same time.

Wind and storm combined and crackled at the tip of Fang Yi's spear, imbuing it with sharpness and penetrating strength beyond measure.

Fang Yi compressed that energy again and again, until even the space around the spear started getting sucked in. The tip of the spear punched through space as though it were nothing more than paper.

The combination of elemental, temporal, and spatial energy at the tip of the spear multiplied the strength of Fang Yi's attack beyond what should have been possible.

Chaotic energy swirled over the spear.

Fang Yi combined [Born of Lightning, Swallowed by the Wind], [Tiger's Howl, Dragon's Bellow], and [Heaven's Judgment]—elements, time, space, and chaotic energy.

All these sources of energy were stacked together, like buff after buff.

A dragon of purple lightning and tiger of green wind, shielded by a barrier of time and shrouded by black spatial energy, slowly began to manifest. Storm winds were sucked into the mix.

Wind and storm combined with space and time, a whole new combination.

A spatial rift began to form where Fang Yi was standing, but the frozen world prevented it from breaking out immediately.

The energy of chaos, which had the ability to destroy anything, spun amidst the howling winds.

Formless lightning flashed over the surface of Fang Yi's spear, gathering near its tip. The dragon of winds and lightning tiger prowled about the spear.

Part of the energy from the spatial rift seeped into the lightning-attuned genetic energy, turning it into void lightning. The pitch-black lightning spiked and sizzled.

The void lightning combined with the spatial rift that was forming and tore apart the space around Fang Yi. The manifold energies merged and tangled with each other, space and time, wind and storm, beginning and end.

Fang Yi sent a stream of each type of energy swirling and corkscrewing around the tip of his spear.

As the forces continued to revolve around each other, the wheels of time behind Fang Yi began rotating more and more quickly as the space around him was strained to its utmost.

Fang Yi had combined seven different forms of energy: wind and lightning; their advanced counterparts, spatial rifts and void lightning; the fundamental forces of space and time; and chaos.

Even more frighteningly, Fang Yi's fifty-odd clones allowed him to stack the same attack fifty times over, each clone contributing a single form of energy and producing seven full sets in all. The strength of this new attack would be seven times that of his [Heaven's Judgment].

Fang Yi's body illuminated the entire virtual realm. His aura was expansive, dark, chaotic, and rampaging; it was grand and all-encompassing.

The stone of counteracting fate flew out of his body and began to shine in the gray world of stasis.

What the stone of counteracting fate released wasn't radiant light, but rather formless energy—not a curse, and instead more like an extreme sense of willpower. It felt as though there were countless

figures surrounding Fang Yi, roaring and screaming in defiance. They surrounded Fang Yi and helped him grip his spear tightly, as though conveying their emotions and feelings to him.

Fang Yi's domain of time glimmered brightly again.

Dragon-like lightning, tiger-like storm, formless time, timeless space—those four disparate energies combined into a cohesive whole, tied together by a dark gold thread. The energies revolved around each other, summoning a howling gale surrounding a spatial rift.

Part of the energy from the spatial rift seeped into the lightning-attuned genetic energy, turning it into void lightning.

The energies combined, somehow managing to stabilize the mix of energies that ran rampant around Fang Yi.

All that energy, linked by the karmic power that Fang Yi had manifested, led to an unbelievably complex combination.

It was as though Fang Yi had placed all seven sources of energy into a blender and allowed them to combine.

The clash between the energy of chaos and that of time and space caused the wheels of time on Fang Yi's back to shatter one after another. His spear vibrated ceaselessly, and huge quantities of chaotic energy gushed out.

His hands trembled as the energies combined. At the most crucial moment, Fang Yi concentrated as the energy of chaos and spacetime merged into a brand new, mysterious strength, that of primordial chaos.

The combination of energies gave off such a fearsome aura that all around Fang Yi, space and time began to splinter and crack.

Chapter 1435: Fall of the Starlit Legend

As the spatial rifts spread, the gray world of time shattered in an instant.

Everyone was shocked by the sight before them.

"What's that?"

Fang Yi's domain trapped even the spectators in stasis. They saw him activate the domain—and the next thing they knew, his technique had activated.

Zhang Lie was inwardly startled. Fang Yi's wheels of time were so strong that they had begun to affect him as well.

The skin on Fang Yi's arms cracked. Veins protruded from his forehead and his arms turned bright red.

Bolstered by the strength of the stone of counteracting fate, of the wills that it possessed that fought against destiny, the golden and black threads of karma shattered.

The strength imbued in the stone of counteracting fate exploded as the black chains broke apart, along with the golden and black threads surrounding Fang Yi. The spectators were astounded.

"Who is he? What's he doing here?"

"What's going on?"

As the power of karma shattered, so too did everyone's understanding of Fang Yi.

The karma that linked the challengers and spectators in the Galactic Rising Stars Cup—gone. Everyone forgot about Fang Yi's existence.

The stone of counteracting fate was able to break the tethers of fate, but Fang Yi wasn't able to control it perfectly. As a result, his own fate had been affected. Everyone in this virtual realm had forgotten about Fang Yi's existence.

If the destruction of karma had been more complete, no one would even be able to establish a karmic link with Fang Yi.

In other words, they would be unable to see him or sense him.

Fang Yi might live on in the universe, but none other would be able to sense or interact with him. He would be the first living specter.

He had entered a particularly unusual state, freed from the chains of karma and of the mortal world. It was as though he were standing above them all, looking down at them without their noticing him.

However, Fang Yi didn't have the time to appreciate the unusual state. With the stone of counteracting fate's energy incorporated into the mix, he was about to lose control. Blood seeped out of his mouth and lips. He forced himself to manifest a spear from the confluence of energies.

The wheels of time to his back exploded. Fang Yi was bolstered by the combined force of fifty wheels of time, and his strength was elevated beyond what he had ever imagined. He was all but unable to control the strength he wielded. His skin cracked, his blood vessels burst, and his bones creaked. Fang Yi's eyes filled with blood as he reached the limits of what he could handle. He was no longer able to maintain the energy in the form of a spear.

Having expected that this situation would arise, Fang Yi didn't dare to use the stronger form of his ultimate, the Fated Spear.

Of course, that was only one reason. Another reason was that he was unable to combine karmic power with that of the stone of starlit fate. If he were to use the Fated Spear, he would only be able to substitute the power of the stone of starlit fate with that of karma. Without karmic power to serve as glue for the eight disparate sources of energy, the energies couldn't combine, so he had no choice but to use [Heaven's Judgment] instead.

Xing Yu immediately applied the Stargod Seal he had been manifesting, but it was too late.

The energy that emanated from Fang Yi transformed into a frightening tempest that shot forth and destroyed everything in sight.

Bolstered by the fragment of the stone of starlit fate, the attack was unassailable and undefendable. The Stargod Seal melted away and dispersed in the face of the overwhelming attack, and the void itself shattered.

The combination of wind and storm, spatial force, void lightning, time and space, and chaos—all that energy erupted in the middle of the virtual realm as it cracked and fell to pieces.

Xing Yu, at the epicenter of the explosion, had his reinforced body destroyed. All that remained of him was half a chest, his head, and one arm.

Xing Yu's eyes filled with grievance. "I am the Starlit Legend, and I cannot fall!"

He bore too much; his burdens weighed him down. He was the hope of his generation, of the Starlit Legend.

If he were to lose here, the Stargods' resurgence would only ever be a joke.

Xing Yu forced out the last of his strength in a ray of starlight. Fang Yi immediately retreated, sensing the attack, then retaliated with the lightning from his spear.

All paled in comparison to that flash of lightning.

"No!" Some of the Stargods tried to leap onto the arena to prevent the attack, but there was no way they could react so quickly.

The spear pierced straight through Xing Yu's head in a fountain of blood, leaving behind nothing but a pile of scattered dust.

The spectators reeled.

"Xing Yu lost."

"The Starlit Legend... lost?"

"The Starlit Legend lost to a nameless challenger?! How could this be?"

The spectators had no time to consider the ramifications of the fight. The virtual realm collapsed quickly after as everyone was unceremoniously dumped out once again.

All the spectators and challengers were shocked and awed by the events that had transpired.

"What's going on? Why are we back out again?"

"Could the realm have collapsed again?"

"You must be joking. Wasn't it already reinforced?"

Shortly thereafter, the equipment screens lit up with a notice. "We apologize to all affected users. An uncontrollable incident in the competition has triggered emergency maintenance. Please wait patiently."

"It really did collapse again!"

"What? This wasn't planned, was it?"

"I don't believe it. Are the challengers this year that strong that the virtual realm would collapse twice in a row?"

"Once is bad enough, but twice?"

"Which match was it?"

"It looks like it really was the qualifiers..."

"What sort of match?"

"A nameless race against the Stargods."

"The Stargods? Aren't they a relic of history?"

"The Stargods were very strong during the era of a Starlit Legend, but their race has been weakening ever since. No true Starlit Legend has appeared in eons, and those who have attuned to the stone of starlit fate are incapable of drawing out its full power. The race is just a joke by now."

"Right? How many of them can still attune to those stones of starlit fate?"

"You're wrong. This challenger did so."

"At this age? I suppose there's still a spark of hope left for them, then. If that challenger's unable to draw out its full power, however, the Stargods will only remain a joke."

"No, no. Not only has the Stargod challenger attuned to the stone of starlit fate, he even managed to recreate the legend. He wielded the Starlit Horns, the Starlit Wings, and even the divine armor!"

"What? All three manifestations? How many stones of starlit fate has he attuned to?"

"One."

"Just one...? He's treading the path of the Starlit Legends of yore, then!"

"It's no wonder the virtual realm shattered in that case."

Chapter 1436: Dark Horses in Unison

"No, the Starlit Legend wasn't the one who shattered the virtual realm. It was his opponent."

"What? That nameless opponent?"

"Are you joking?"

"I'm not. That nameless opponent wielded the stone of counteracting fate!"

Everyone was astounded.

"What? A fight between the Starlit Legend and the stone of counteracting fate? Mirroring that fight of legends?"

"I should have gotten a ticket to the Cup this year..."

"Hold on, wasn't the stone of counteracting fate destroyed in that ancient battle?"

Many were naturally aware of that famous galactic legend.

"The nameless opponent only possessed a shard of that stone."

"What a lucky cultivator..."

"The Starlit Legend was incomplete too, wasn't he?"

"He had only attuned to a single stone of starlit fate."

"It looks like this nameless challenger does possess some measure of skill, at least. How else could he have defeated a Starlit Legend with Starlit Horns, Starlit Wings, and divine armor bearing just a single shard of the stone of counteracting fate?"

"What do you mean?"

"The stone of counteracting fate can neutralize the stone of starlit fate to some extent, but a shard alone could hardly stand up against a Starlit Legend with Starlit Horns, Starlit Wings, and divine armor. This unknown challenger has to make up the deficit with his own skill."

"That unknown challenger was really strong! He managed to combine a number of arcane forces in an attack of overwhelming strength. The only one I could discern among them was spacetime."

"He'll be the dark horse of this year's Cup, won't he?"

"There are a lot of dark horses this year..."

"Allegedly, this unknown challenger is one of the stellar hunters."

"That's incredible. I've been wondering just what race the stellar hunters are from. How could there be so many top-tier challengers among them?"

"One defeated the invincible Solarvine; another, the crazed successor of Heaven; a third, the child of Divinity Qinglian; now a fourth, a Starlit Legend! How could this race have been nameless for so long?"

"I can't believe they came out of nowhere."

"Have the supreme forces still not found anything about them?"

"They've uncovered a bit."

"Any race that has appeared in the galaxy must have left some traces behind. I'm sure the supreme forces know more than they're letting on."

Back in the dimensional world,

Zhang Lie and the other hunters emerged from their apparatus.

Zhang Lie gave Fang Yi a thumbs up. "Well done."

Fang Yi smiled.

Sun Xiaowu rapped Fang Yi on the chest.

"You're incredible! To think you've hidden a secret like this from us for so long."

Zhang Lie asked, "Where did you get this stone of counteracting fate? By the looks of it, it's a tremendous treasure."

Fang Yi chuckled wryly. "Would you believe me if I told you I just realized it myself?"

"What do you mean?"

"This is a reward from the trials."

Everyone turned to Bu Wentian.

"When the orb in the trial chamber asked me what sort of reward I wanted, I knew what my problem was," Fang Yi began.

Fang Yi's ultimate techniques were so powerful that they were difficult to control and consumed an incredible amount of energy, which would drain Fang Yi's reserves quickly.

"That's why I asked the orb in the trial chamber to give me something that would allow me to keep going. Elder Bu Wentian gave me a shard of a stone. I didn't know what it was, only that I would be able to keep fighting by attuning to it."

Bu Wentian shrugged. "I gave out a prize corresponding to his needs. What's weird about that?"

Zhang Lie asked, "How did you come across such a shard, Elder?"

Bu Wentian replied, "I picked it up when I was young. It's only a shard. It might be rare, but not particularly so."

"It looks like you were a powerful figure in your prime," Zhang Lie began, hoping that Bu Wentian would reveal more information.

"I was simply lucky."

The hunters knew that they wouldn't be able to pick up too much from conversing with Bu Wentian, so they didn't press the point.

Zhang Lie turned to Yang Ze. "You're the only one left. Are you confident?"

Yang Ze smiled. "Don't you have any confidence in me, Captain?"

Sun Xiaowu stepped forward and punched Yang Ze on the back in a friendly manner. "Deal with your opponent quickly and don't waste time. We'll enter the official tournament together!"

Yang Ze nodded. "Very well. Don't worry, as a member of Team Zenith, I won't lose to any of you!"

Meanwhile, countless Stargods stood around Xing Yu. His body had been placed under concentrated starlight, and it had taken a huge investment of resources from the Stargods to bring him out of his coma.

"I apologize for making everyone worry."

The Stargod elder patted Xing Yu on his head. "Silly child! You're the most promising Stargod in a millennium. This is nothing in comparison to your worth."

Another Stargod elder shook his head. "Genetic expansion would allow you to improve your strength, but it's not so impressive as to be worth putting your life on the line.

To have burned your own soul as fuel for a pittance like this Cup—if we revived you any later, your future might really have been destroyed."

Another elder cried out, "Do you know how close you came to losing everything?"

Xing Yu replied seriously, "But the fate of the Stargods rests on me. I couldn't allow myself to lose in the qualifiers! Everyone was watching me."

The elders chided him. "Ridiculous! You should hardly have to shoulder this burden. Leave it to us old men."

Another Stargod elder said, "You are indeed the most promising Stargod talent of a millennium, but you are yet too young to take on such a heavy burden. Focus simply on getting strong. We will take care of the race as a whole."

"You may be able to shoulder this burden in the future, but not yet."

"But I lost."

The Stargod elder replied, "Losing isn't necessarily a bad thing. Learn from the experience."

Another Stargod elder added, "The younger generation has been growing too cocky as of late, thinking that the Starlit Legends of the past will reappear in the modern day. They've grown even more enamored with your mythos ever since you attuned to the stone of starlit fate. We'll take advantage of this failure to teach them that there's always someone stronger."

Xing Yu's eyes glowed with starlight. "Elders, I'd like to attune to more stones of starlit fate."

The Stargod elder replied, "As I said, losing this Cup means nothing."

Another elder added, "You've just suffered serious mental and spiritual damage. don't think about cultivation or the tournament for the time being. Rest up instead."

Xing Yu replied, "I'm not part of the tournament anymore. By attuning to more stones of starlit fate, I'll be able to grow stronger. I'm not going to lose the next encounter!"

Chapter 1437: Whoever is Unluckier

The Stargod elders considered Xing Yu carefully.

"You should know very well what it means to attune to more stones of starlit fate, as well as how difficult it will be."

Xing Yu nodded seriously. "The reason that the only true Starlit Legend has been that grandmaster of the Stargods from history is the stunning difficulty in attuning to more stones of starlit fate. Each additional stone is twice as hard to incorporate, and failure implies death."

The Stargod elder asked, "Aren't you afraid?"

"I used to be, but not anymore. Rather than death, what I worry about more is being single-handedly suppressed by that opponent of mine when we meet again. I need to catch up and seize victory the next time."

The Stargod elder laughed. "Haha, very good. It looks like allowing you to participate in the Galactic Rising Stars Cup was the right decision, after all. This bearer of the stone of starlit fate has been a tremendous positive influence."

Another Stargod elder laughed. "It's the nature of fate, after all. You're destined to be opponents, which will spur both of you onward."

Xing Yu clenched his fists tightly. "Just you wait, legend of counteracting fate. The next time we meet, I'll prove that I'm the true Starlit Legend!"

The virtual arena was quickly restored as Yang Ze confidently walked up to the arena.

Yang Ze curled a finger at his opponent. "Come on. Let's not waste time."

"You?!"

His opponent was very shocked to see him.

Upon hearing his opponent's voice, Yang Ze was initially confused. He didn't understand how his opponent knew him—but when he thought about it more carefully, he made an expression of surprise. "It's you!"

His opponent cracked his fingers as he strode forward, accompanied by a gale wind and crackling lightning. Rain fell around them both, and the ground began to crack.

"I told you we'd better not meet in battle, didn't I?"

Yang Ze had never expected fate to play such tricks on him. His opponent was the man he had argued with while spectating Li Feng's match.

"You really are unlucky to have encountered me."

"It's too early to say who the unlucky one is, don't you think?"

His opponent struck, sending a fist punching forward.

Yang Ze stood where he was. He met the fist with a hand. Both smashed into each other in ripple after ripple of energy. Heaven and earth shook, and the voice began to tremble.

Their initial confrontation had been one of shocking strength. Zhang Lie frowned and asked, "Who's the opponent? He looks rather strong."

The spectator replied, "He's considered one of the promising challengers for the Cup. I think he's called Chang Sheng."

Sparks flew all over as the two cultivators' fists met once more. Like a phoenix undergoing rebirth, the explosion gave way to countless resplendent runes.

The spectators' ears hurt. Their eyes were scorched by the intense light, and their senses were all distorted. They were forced to narrow their eyes and seal their hearing, lest they be hurt from spectating the fight.

Yang Ze clenched his fist tightly. It glowed with light. His long hair was scattered around his shoulders, his gaze bright and frightening. Blue genetic energy gathered around him as space vibrated. The ripples spread out over his arm. He flicked his wrist.

Gale winds formed as mirrored light spread around him. Pale-blue genetic energy shot out from him in droves, as though he were a divine king.

Sun Xiaowu critiqued, "Yang Ze's Fists of the Silent Sea has some measure of our captain's strength, doesn't it?"

Chang Sheng's body radiated with metallic luster and gave off light in the colors of a rainbow. Even his fist was surrounded by golden light. When it smashed into Yang Ze's own fist, it gave off a burst of divine power.

In mere moments, the two cultivators had exchanged dozens of blows. A metallic ringing filled the air as the runes in the sky smashed together. Lightning crackled; the entire virtual arena seemed to be reacting to their attack on each other. Mirrored refractions filled the ground.

Chang Sheng narrowed his eyes and considered his opponent carefully. His combat strength was fearsome.

Even so, he wasn't upset. He remained perfectly confident in himself and was cool and composed.

Chang Sheng's fists shone with light. The power of reincarnation had the ability to peel and steal time away. He activated it now.

The brilliant shining runes around Chang Sheng shot toward Yang Ze as a flood, swamping him in an attempt to take him down.

Yang Ze narrowed his eyes. To an ordinary cultivator, this was the equivalent of an ultimate technique. None would be able to discover its flaws; their very lives would be sucked away in an instant.

Yang Ze confidently shrouded himself in his mirrored refractions. Chang Sheng's fist passed harmlessly through him.

In that patch of mirrored refraction, pale-blue genetic energy summoned raging sharks all around. They shot forward at Chang Sheng, who caused the raging sharks to explode with punch after punch. As the mirrored refractions churned, more pale-blue sharks appeared.

Upon realizing that all the sharks could be all but endlessly regenerated, Chang Sheng stopped wastime time taking down the sharks.

A pair of lightning wings appeared on his back. He stepped across the void, moving in an odd, oscillatory fashion.

Despite how slow and inefficient it looked, the net effect was rapid movement forward. He left countless afterimages behind, making others think that he hadn't moved at all. He escaped from the sharks by moving in a Z-shaped pattern.

He squatted, his right leg sweeping forward and triggering hundreds of electric arcs around. The lightning exploded as he struck at Yang Ze's head with a kick.

Yang Ze defended with his sword.

The kick he had executed was so strong that his arm was going numb.

"Reincarnation!" Killing intent suddenly billowed out from Chang Sheng. The ancient runes hadn't been snuffed out and were activated anew. They shot toward Yang Ze, leaving no gaps in his defense this time.

He firmly believed that he could easily win against any cultivator of his generation.

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

A sword flashed, the strike forming a long river through the skies. The genetic energy burst in a shower of droplets, forcibly slicing apart Chang Sheng's Reincarnation technique.

Chang Sheng's eyes turned silvery-white as devastating light exploded from them.

The white light pierced straight through Yang Ze's body, but to no avail.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragonwhale]!"

In the blink of an eye, Yang Ze was surrounded by a patch of ocean.

The lapping of waves echoed through the battlefield. They grew and grew, reaching a crescendo and rising into the sky like a tsunami, manifesting in the form of a huge whale.

The whale's body was long and streamlined, with long whiskers and scales patterning its body.

Pale blue genetic energy rippled about Yang Ze's arms. He flicked his wrists, causing a frightening aura to descend on the world. The sky began to darken, and a fish the size of a whale materialized in the air.

Chang Sheng was surrounded by radiant dawn. Divine flames filled his body, and he held a sword of bone in his hand. Lightning crackled in the air and shot down at Yang Ze.

The electric arcs interwove densely with each other like a spiderweb. In an ear-splitting crack, the pale-blue energy spread out like tides in a tempestuous sea.

Chang Sheng's hair was standing up in range. His eyes were like cold lightning. He shot forward with his bone sword in hand.

Chapter 1438: Learn by Watching

The bone sword struck in a flash of lightning and divine flame. It quivered as the flames fell like a waterfall from the skies.

At the same time, Yang Ze kicked Chang Sheng's face, shattering his cheek bone and loosening six or seven teeth from his gums.

Of course, that wasn't it. Yang Ze's kick was infused with tremendous strength. Even Chang Sheng's skull was cracked, a frightening wound that dripped with blood.

"[The Boundless Blade: Sea Serpent]!"

The sword slash transformed into a sea dragon whose scales were like ice crystals. It clashed against the waterfall of divine flame in a burst of steam that turned the arena into fog.

Chang Sheng formed divine flames around himself as protection as he retreated.

This was insulting and humiliating—Yang Ze had managed to kick his mouth in, sending his teeth flying! His face was burning in pain and shame.

All this happened in a flash. The two combatants separated from one another.

Chang Sheng lifted his hand as his eyes shone with ardor. A lightning talisman sparkled in his palm.

"[The Boundless Blade: Nine-Headed Hydra]!" Genetic energy exploded from Yang Ze and manifested in the form of a nine-headed hydra, which sprayed out nine breaths of sword energy.

The sword energy blocked the lightning.

Chang Sheng's bone sword combined his divine flame and lightning. The nine-headed hydra shot over in a burst of wind and storm. Water-attuned genetic energy flooded the air and shrouded the entire arena in steam.

"[The Boundless Blade: Hundred-Headed Hydra]!"

Yang Ze's genetic energy manifested in the form of an astounding hundred-headed hydra. As he drew on spatial force, the hydra sprayed out a hundred simultaneous beams of sword energy, and compressed spatial force from a high-dimensional layer of space.

Chong Sheng invoked the power of regeneration and imbued it in his sword, causing the steam to evaporate. Divine flame and lightning struck the hundred beams of sword energy that were launched toward him in a barrage. Chang Sheng was momentarily distracted as he attempted to block the dense waves of projectiles. Fang Yi's eyes widened as he watched the scene from high above.

"Isn't this Xing Yu's..."

Yang Ze appeared behind Chang Sheng in the blink of an eye. Chang Sheng whirled to attack him, but the blade passed straight through his body, as though what lay before Chang Sheng was only a reflection of reality that didn't exist. By the time Chang Sheng reacted, it was too late.

Two hundred eyes had appeared behind him in the form of a hundred-headed dragon, all the heads of which attacked simultaneously. Before Chang Sheng could react, the dragons had already killed him.

"As I said, if you were to meet me in a match, you would surely lose terribly."

Victory was decided within moments.

The audience applauded Yang Ze's strength.

"To be able to use spatial force to this extent, especially in the qualifiers, is certainly impressive."

"This lad is promising."

"I wonder how he'll fare compared to those cultivators groomed by the strongest forces...?"

Yang Ze's performance was stellar, but his opponent wasn't someone of particular strength or background. As a result, his victory didn't result in much attention or surprise overall.

Compared to the undefeated Solarvine, the child of Divinity Qinglian, the successor of Heaven, or the new Starlit Legend, Yang Ze's opponent was just an ordinary cultivator, if one bearing more potential than most.

This was part of the nature of the tournament. Those promising candidates had already qualified for the actual tournament by this point in time, like Zhang Lie and the others. Yang Ze had chosen to participate in matchmaking rather late. His opponents would still be skilled, but none of them would be anything like what the other members of Team Zenith had faced.

Of course, Yang Ze had planned this all out.

He did intend on making it through the qualifiers like the other members of Team Zenith, but had no interest in making it a difficult or drawn-out fight.

He hadn't aroused much attention, precisely as desired.

He felt that his plan had gone perfectly.

As he stepped out of the virtual realm, Yang Ze made a V sign with his fingers, indicating victory.

Zhang Lie nodded in satisfaction.

Fang Yi asked, "Yang Ze, how did you learn Xing Yu's technique?!"

Yang Ze shrugged. "By observing it, of course."

The members of Team Zenith were shocked. They knew that Yang Ze had a shockingly strong attunement to space, far stronger than the attunements that the other members of Team Zenith had to their own element, even Zhang Lie. Despite that knowledge, they hadn't realized that Yang Ze was so strong as to be able to learn a spatial-based technique just by watching it.

Yang Ze didn't seem particularly excited about the accomplishment. "There's no need to be surprised. The techniques weren't anything impressive, and you could learn them just by watching them closely."

"Did you learn all of them?" Fang Yi pressed.

"Not the Starlit Wings or Starlit Horns."

Bu Wentian huffed. "Isn't that obvious?"

Sun Xiaowu replied, "Those techniques were granted by the stone of starlit fate, and aren't intrinsic to his person. If you really could learn the Starlit Wings and Starlit Horns, the Stargods would probably go crazy."

"How about the other techniques?" Fang Yi asked.

Zhang Lie nodded. "How much of the suite of void-based techniques that Xing Yu demonstrated did you manage to grasp?"

"All the way up to [Judgment of Stars—Seize the Flesh]. I'm still researching that technique, though I already have a good idea of what it entails. I'll be able to reproduce it with some time. As for the next technique, [Judgment of Stars—Seize the Soul], that's not something I can emulate. Much of it is just a smokescreen, but I don't have a technique that can extract or split the soul."

Even so, Yang Ze's actions had shocked everyone else. Who else could learn a technique just by watching it?

Fang Yi laughed. "Let's train together sometime."

Yang Ze nodded.

Bu Wentian said, "Congratulations to all of you for passing through the qualifiers."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "Do we get a reward?"

"Let's talk after your official tournament results."

"When do they start?" Fang Yi asked.

"Three days after the qualifiers. You've already done very well by making it this far. I didn't get as far as you did when I was competing. Don't worry about what follows too much. Take some time to rest and prepare for the tournament proper."

The hunters nodded.

Bu Wentian had had food prepared for them all. Once they finished, Zhang Lie asked, "What are your views on this tournament?"

Sun Xiaowu sighed. "There are a lot of strong cultivators."

"Is there something you wanted to bring up, Captain?" Yang Ze asked insightfully.

Chapter 1439: This Cruel

Zhang Lie asked, "We know from interacting with the spectators and from watching the fights that there are many exceptionally strong cultivators in the tournament, many of whom are supported by forces of shocking strength and means. Where do you think they come from?"

Sun Mengmeng replied, "Allegedly, from the stars above—a galaxy, though I doubt it's the same physical one we're in."

"And where is that galaxy located?"

Yang Ze smiled. "Why ask, Captain? You already have a guess."

Fang Yi nodded. "I think we all have a similar guess."

"The fifth realm," everyone replied simultaneously.

Zhang Lie nodded. "As expected."

Sun Xiaowu asked, "I'm just somewhat confused. The lifeforms of the fifth realm should be far stronger than we are."

Zhang Lie smiled. "Don't forget that we're all mental projections in the virtual realm. Our bodies are only copied over."

Yang Ze steepled his fingers and propped up his jaw. "My hypothesis is that the virtual realm straddles the fourth and fifth realms. It's a particularly special existence, and the fact that our bodies are only projected over means that the strength of fourth- and fifth-realm hunters are roughly the same in that virtual realm."

Everyone nodded in agreement.

Yang Ze couldn't help but laugh. "If Elder Bu Wentian were here, he would certainly say something like, 'In a manner of speaking, but also not. Your answer is close, but not comprehensive.'"

Everyone laughed at Yang Ze's mimicry.

The members of Team Zenith had all taken some damage in their respective fights, though nothing particularly serious. Because they had been fighting with their mental projections, the damage that they suffered was spiritual in nature. It would heal quickly with sufficient rest. The hunters rested well over the next three days, preparing to enter the tournament proper at peak strength.

The three days passed in the blink of an eye, and Bu Wentian informed them all of the rules of the tournament.

"The rules have been published. Unlike the qualifiers, the actual tournament isn't going to be focused on one-on-one arenas. Rather, it's a free-for-all."

"With how many challengers? A few, or a dozen? Are the victors the ones who survive until the end?"

Bu Wentian shook his head. "It's not so straightforward, and it's not just a few or a dozen challengers. It's all the competitors."

Yang Ze gaped. "That cruel?"

Bu Wentian continued, "Of course, you're not going to be sent to an arena. Rather, everyone will be teleported to a small world for the fight. Fifty challengers will make it out of the qualifiers, and another fifty seeded challengers didn't need to participate in the qualifiers at all. That makes a total of a hundred challengers."

Zhang Lie clarified, "Do you win by surviving until the end?"

"Indeed."

Sun Xiaowu rolled his eyes. "That's easy, then!"

Bu Wentian shook a finger. "It's not so straightforward. A contracting boundary will form within the planet, slowly restricting the area over which challengers are trapped."

Sun Xiaowu frowned. "Why does this feel so familiar...?"

"The competitors you'll face will surely be stronger than in the qualifiers. Although you all performed excellently, don't let it get to your heads, and don't be overly prideful. None of these challengers will be weak, especially those groomed by the strongest forces."

"It looks like it'll be an intense fight," Zhang Lie commented.

"That said, don't be too worried, either. There are plenty of treasures on that planet that can heal your wounds, increase your mental strength, and so on. Try your best to claim them to grow stronger."

The members of Team Zenith goggled. Sun Xiaowu cried out, "This is just Fortnite!"

Yang Ze was speechless. "And here I thought there would be something deeper to the competition..."

Bu Wentian frowned. "I don't know what it is that you're talking about, but don't underestimate your opponents. Otherwise, you'll suffer. When the tournament starts, you'll automatically be sent to different parts of the planet."

Sun Xiaowu raised a hand. "Aren't we going to parachute onto it?"

Bu Wentian shook his head. "Random teleportation. Why would there be parachutes? You might even encounter an enemy right beside you; that would be the worst-case scenario."

Zhang Lie nodded. "We need to think about how we can all gather together, don't we?"

"Indeed."

Bu Wentian took out six soulshards. One was a giant golden orb like a beehive, while the five others were like small bees.

"This is a particularly special set of soulshards. The golden orb is called the queen's hive, a disaster-grade soulshard with the ability to attract these small bees—the five superior-grade tracker bee soulshards. Their function is to lead your way to the disaster-grade queen's hive soulshard."

"In other words, they're like compasses," Yang Ze concluded.

Bu Wentian continued, "The tracker bee soulshards have no combat strength whatsoever. The only reason they're superior-grade is because of their particularly strong functionality. They would lead you to the queen's hive soulshard even from hundreds of kilometers away. Allegedly, they're attuned to karma, and it's difficult to trick or disrupt them."

Zhang Lie nodded. "So we'll easily be able to gather with these soulshards in hand?"

After some discussion, it was concluded that Zhang Lie would carry the disaster-grade queen's hive soulshard, while the rest of them would each take a tracker bee soulshard.

Yang Ze said, "If someone were to steal the queen's bee soulshard, they could lead us all into an ambush. Our captain's the strongest among us, and it makes sense for him to guard it."

Bu Wentian nodded. "That's a standard choice. The disaster-grade queen's hive soulshard can even allow you to sense the five tracker bee soulshards. If any of them break, the queen's hive soulshard will immediately inform its wielder of the direction where it occurred.

"So I can rush to the scene and rescue anyone in need, right?" Zhang Lie asked.

Sun Mengmeng clenched her fist. "Don't worry. We're very strong, and you won't need to rescue us, Captain."

Bu Wentian reminded them, "Don't forget that you've made yourselves famous in the qualifiers. Everyone's talking about you, and the representatives of the strongest forces might target you to gain the attention of the spectators. All of you are members of an unknown race, and many wish to test themselves against you."

Zhang Lie frowned. "In other words, we'll be a prime target."

Bu Wentian shook his head. "Not to that extent, but you'll have a harder time surviving than other challengers."

Zhang Lie smiled. "Don't worry. We're not that weak. We'll see who's the hunter and who's the prey."

As they kept the soulshards in their soulspaces and finished their preparations, the hunters stepped into their respective apparatuses.

A screen flickered before them. [Congratulations on making it through the qualifiers of the Galactic Rising Stars Cup. The official tournament has begun. Enter the tournament grounds?]

Chapter 1440: What Are You?

Zhang Lie chose [Yes] without any hesitation.

The sight before him blurred. A beam of light scanned his body and projected it into a virtual realm.

A wide expanse of space opened up before Zhang Lie. It was hard to believe that everything was an illusion, rather than reality. There were mountains and streams all around him, and his bare feet were touching the ground. Wind blew at his face. Everything seemed real.

The massive world was layered with fog, with trees that stretched toward the heavens. Avians of unusual make took to the air, and giant beasts roared.

Zhang Lie felt a sudden pain on the back of his palm. A mark had formed, imprinted on his mental avatar.

"Is this to show that I've made it through the qualifiers?"

Zhang Lie was taking in this miraculous virtual world when a shout came from behind. Someone was launching a sneak attack.

Zhang Lie immediately whirled to dodge. He turned back to see a woman dressed in radiant gold. She was tall and svelte, her features elegant, her black hair scattered around her back. Her eyes were limpid, her face veiled.

She stood proudly. When she blinked, lightning flew out of her eyes. She seemed to be a being freed from the constraints of the mortal world, and a deific aura surrounded her.

"A monster?" the woman asked. A film of divine light formed over her eyes.

"A monster?" Zhang Lie echoed.

Perhaps by luck, or misfortune, Zhang Lie had encountered another competitor from the very beginning.

"An immortal," the woman replied.

"A human," Zhang Lie replied.

"And here I thought I found a monster to defeat. I remember now. You're one of the famous stellar hunters from the qualifiers, aren't you?" The woman's gaze sparked like lightning. Her golden clothes shimmered.

Zhang Lie cocked his head. "Is an immortal a genetic lifeform like those Solarvines?"

The woman was rather taken aback. She smirked and muttered to herself, "How fortuitous. I wanted to have a go at one of you."

Zhang Lie suddenly pinched his nose. "I know of a so-called immortal weed, otherwise known as earthwort, whose essential oils can serve as insect repellent. It's a poisonous species, with a pungent stench. Much of its poison lies within its fruit, a smaller portion in its leaves, and the smallest in its stem. You look rather appealing to human sensibilities, but to think that you would be a poisonous plant!"

Hunters who wanted to make a name for themselves in the dimensional world would have to be familiar with all manner of biological organisms. Zhang Lie had made it to the fifth realm in his past life, and was half a biologist and an expert in genetic lifeforms by that point.

"You're the poisonous one, I should think." The woman in gold laughed merrily. "I've never heard of humans. Show your true self. If you're like one of those nine-headed lions, I'll take you as a mount."

Zhang Lie ignored his opponent's words. He murmured to himself, "The immortal weed is also called stinkweed, bugweed, or fleaweed. Allegedly, it's a particularly effective insect repellent and killer."

The woman raised an eyebrow. Two bolts of lightning flew out of her eyes as her strength suddenly magnified.

Her hair floated in the wind as she shot forward. The veil over her face didn't cover her bright, luscious lips.

When Zhang Lie noticed his opponent's reaction, he gasped. "My goodness, I was just talking to myself! Could you really be this so-called immortal weed? Are you poisonous and emit a toxic stench?"

The woman's features and bearing were undoubtedly elegant. Her smile widened, and the aura around her grew so strong that the void itself was vibrating.

"You shall die!" she announced. As she shot forward, she left behind a series of afterimages. She moved unbelievably quickly.

She stood before him in a burst of spatial fluctuations, her white, slender fingertips reaching for Zhang Lie's face.

The woman was clearly an expert in spatial force, whose mastery might well be comparable to Yang Ze's. However, Yang Ze's strength was in hiding himself and conjuring illusions, whereas the woman's was in speeding herself up.

In a flash of golden light, Zhang Lie left a series of afterimages behind. Ethereal blue genetic energy defended against the woman's spatial spikes.

The woman was simply too fast. Her golden dress whirled as she spun. She kicked at Zhang Lie with her right leg in a sharp, decisive blow.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!"

Zhang Lie tilted his body and barely avoided the leg. With his finger as a sword, he summoned potent sword energy and chopped at her thigh.

The woman in gold diffused the attack with a swivel. With her back to Zhang Lie, she swung an arm in a graceful arc. Her wrist, bathed in golden light, shot toward Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie smiled and stepped back. As her attack missed, he reached forward, fingers grasping at her neck, while he made a fist with his other hand and unleashed ethereal blue light that struck at her lower back.

The woman's senses were acute. Rather than turn, she contorted her body into a swift and efficient back kick.

Light erupted between the two cultivators.

Zhang Lie's fist struck her leg in twin bursts of light. They rose into the air and circled each other.

Then, the woman dropped to the ground, her golden dress fluttering.

"As expected of a competitor who clawed his way out of the qualifiers. You're fierce indeed." The woman licked her bright red lips in mounting excitement. She seemed to have found the best of prey.

"Which means you're not one of those competitors. You're a scion of one of the strongest forces, then?"

Zhang Lie's expression remained calm, though he was inwardly shocked. Who was this woman? She had an incredibly strong body. If not for her appearance, he would have suspected her to be a pretty monarch-grade lifeform.

"A rarity indeed, to have found such a stubborn mount. I'm fortunate to be able to break you." The woman charged forward,

moving rapidly as she formed seals with her hands. Her body was a series of afterimages; she looked like a divine bird swooping with wings outstretched, a frightening gale behind her.

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

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

A howling gale swept over the arena. 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 space and striking the palm of fog. The two competitors clashed against each other.