

U. Warlord 1481

Chapter 1481: Divine Flame

Zhang Lie had clearly been recognized by one of the challengers, a Redgold cultivator who sat cradled in a sun like a god. A jeweled vase, radiant and resplendent.

Zhang Lie scoffed upon seeing the familiar technique.

"I've fought you like three times by now. Don't you have any other techniques?"

Meanwhile, not far from him, Feng Xian was herself surrounded by cultivators. She attacked the enemy cultivators intensely but with surprising grace, like a beauty who had walked out of a painted scroll, her figure lithe and curvaceous. Her clothes fluttered in elegance even in the midst of heated battle, stirring the gathered crowd.

The Redgold cultivator's jeweled vase shone with radiant light as sword energy shot out. The radiant light arced across the air and transformed into thousands of beams of sword energy.

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, sealing the sword energy.

The Redgold cultivator remained calm.

In his heart, he contemplated the movement of thousands of different types of beasts, then integrated them into the most ordinary of sword techniques. The beams of sword energy transformed, into a rising phoenix, a roaring suanni, forked lightning, a phoenix's outstretched wings—with his hands clasped together, he invoked all manner of natural and supernatural beasts.

The Redgold cultivator's attack developed fully into a beast stampede.

"[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.

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—layers of earth sank into the whirlpool, obliterated in an instant.

Some of the cultivators observing the fight were unsteady on their feet and stumbled as they were forcibly sucked in.

Within the void, the Redgold cultivator peered at Zhang Lie in surprise. His opponent's aura was worthy of his further consideration.

"Suppression," he whispered, and his jeweled vase flew forward to take on Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie slashed at the heavens themselves, his black hair fluttering in the wind.

The void rumbled as blazing light exploded from the cut. Heaven and earth shook in resonance; the light forced all the competitors to close their eyes momentarily.

The fighting was simply too intense. Light from the two cultivators struck each other like the parting of mountains and seas, the birth of immortals and demons, like primordial chaos itself.

As the dust finally ceased, the Redgold jeweled vase cracked and scattered like dust.

"That jeweled vase, a supreme relic of the Redgold race—destroyed?" The cultivators all around Zhang Lie were frozen stiff. It took them far too long to react to what had happened. They sucked in deep breaths. Zhang Lie truly was a fearsome opponent.

"I shall test your mettle!" A young cultivator with golden hair strode forward, his hair blazing and shining where sunlight struck it. Golden flames followed behind him, causing the void to warp and twist.

Zhang Lie stood still. Those who had been able to withstand Zhang Lie's attacks were surely exceptional cultivators themselves, but that also meant they were prideful enough not to attack Zhang Lie together. Even so, that didn't mean that he would entertain all challengers.

"What do you take me for, a buffet?" Zhang Lie called back, displeased.

Why should he have to fight everyone who wanted to fight him?

"Whoever dares challenge me will be met with lethal force," Zhang Lie announced, his eyes blazing. His gaze swept across the arrayed cultivators, including the golden-haired man walking forward.

The golden-haired man didn't break his stride. Was this a warning? A threat? He didn't fear it at all.

"Are you talking to me?" he asked coolly. His golden blood surged; pressure wafted from his body. His lips curled up in a mocking smirk, aloof and arrogant, as he looked down on Zhang Lie.

"You can think of it that way," Zhang Lie replied.

The golden-haired man was bathed in flame. Golden runes appeared over his muscles. His smile deepened. "How conceited. I can't imagine you'll live long—perhaps not even past this very day."

"Are you sure you're talking about me, or about yourself?" Zhang Lie retorted.

"Haha—do you think you can kill me? I'll send you on your way!" the golden-haired man retorted, divine force erupting from him. The golden runes flashed as the void itself was dyed golden. A raging ocean seemed to surge around him.

Zhang Lie was tall and lithe, with a gentlemanly appearance when he was calm. His eyes were limpid, his teeth white, his smile resplendent. He stared at the incoming cultivator and responded with his body.

He drew his blade and took the initiative to start the fight.

Within just a single moment, his calm air grew aggressive and assertive. His aura was like a coiling dragon, seeping out of his muscles. His sword cut at the very heavens, and the intersection of the blood moon and black sun made him look like a demon from the very pits of hell.

The two cultivators clashed; the stars fell and the ground cracked. Golden flames burst apart. Within moments, the golden-haired man was sent flying.

The golden-haired man was incredibly shocked;

Zhang Lie's skill and strength went far beyond what he could have expected.

Even so, knowing that the gaze of countless cultivators was upon him, he continued to assert dominance. From up high in the air, he looked downward at Zhang Lie and scoffed, "I have laid claim to many and many a star in the universe, and I strike only against the talented. I hope your death today won't sully that reputation of mine."

The implication was clear: Zhang Lie was barely deserving of his attacks.

Chapter 1482: Come If You Want to Die

"Come die if you want!" Zhang Lie shouted, holding his longsword horizontally before him and prepared for the possibility of an extended battle. He intended to demonstrate his strength to ward off any further challenges.

Just as the golden-haired man was about to strike once again, countless illusory arclight dragons streaked across the sky. The golden-haired man frowned, taking action to defend himself.

A familiar voice accompanied the starlight. "Captain, I'm here!"

"[Light Dragon's Remnants]!"

Li Feng marshaled his genetic energy into the form of a large number of white dragons.

The huge commotion had attracted Li Feng's attention. He was shocked to sense a familiar energetic fluctuation amidst the battle of titanic proportions. He headed toward the fighting to witness Fang Yi and Zhang Lie arrayed against a dizzying bevy of cultivators. Zhang Lie had been surrounded; Li Feng immediately stepped in.

"Scram!" The golden-haired man punched forward and obliterated the whole flock of arclight dragons.

Although Li Feng had come at an inopportune time, the fact that he had shown up at all had Zhang Lie nodding to him in thanks.

"[Dance of the Incandescent Wyrms]!"

Li Feng summoned dozens of serpents, flaring with blinding light. The golden-haired man stretched his arms wide and tore apart the void, the canvas on which these dragons flew.

"Captain, leave this cultivator to me!" Li Feng glowed with light, stepping forward to ward off the enemy from Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie nodded and left immediately.

"[Arclight Dragon's Imprint]!" Li Feng waved his left arm, around which a torrent of light-attuned genetic energy was gathering. It took the form of a gigantic dragon's claw, bearing down on the golden-haired man like a beam of light.

"I said, scram!"

The golden-haired man dashed downward at extreme speed, leaving a trail of golden afterimages behind. He struck at Li Feng's skull with his foot.

A burst of thunder erupted in the air alongside his stride. Golden light exploded forth across the void.

This was unbridled arrogance and clearly insulting toward Li Feng.

"You don't have the right to be my opponent!"

The golden-haired man stared disdainfully at Li Feng, intending to stomp him to death to display his martial prowess.

"Kill!" Li Feng shouted, his hair scattering in the wind. He had once stood calm; now, he strode to action like a demonic statue that had been animated, his eyes sharp and piercing, an aura of fighting intent billowing around him.

His right hand formed a seal that he raised high into the air. It exploded like a blazing sun. An infinite expanse of light shot into the heavens, toward the golden-haired man.

The fact that Li Feng's opponent was being so impolite stoked his own anger. He struck at the sole of his opponent's foot, attempting to obliterate it.

The two cultivators clashed in an explosion of light. Energy scattered. This was a confrontation between two cultivators at the peak.

Li Feng had to admit that the golden-haired man was particularly skilled. His foot alone would have sufficed to crush a mountain and turn it into dust, to cause the very ground to crack open. Against a skull, it was easy to contemplate how much damage that foot could cause. A body would instantly turn into a cloud of bloody mist.

Li Feng rose up, cleaving the light and unleashing his ultimate technique.

"Break!"

The person stood high in the air, foot glowing with light. Golden runes emanated from him and formed a map of the constellations beneath his foot, as though the stars themselves were bolstering his attack.

"I reign supreme over the universe, having conquered many and many a star. I strike only to take down geniuses. How can a nameless piece of trash like you hope to be my opponent?"

Only a cultivator of exceptional strength could be so arrogant.

"[Light's Bulwark: Draconic Fist]!"

Li Feng clenched his fist. His right arm, clad with light, was covered with scales. The scales began to move as an arclight dragon materialized, howled, and rushed forward.

The blow felt as though it could destroy anything it encountered.

Even the cultivators fighting afar could sense how terrifying this blow was. It caused the very void to quake, distorting space in its vicinity, as it exploded.

All this happened under the cover of lightning. Li Feng's fists glowed brightly, exploding with light.

He shattered the map of the constellations, tearing it up and burning it to a crisp. Lightning followed his movements in a brilliant display.

Li Feng's fist struck the sole of his opponent's foot and drew blood. Bone cracked. The foot shattered, its glow fading, crippling his opponent.

"What right do I need to kill you?" Li Feng's fists transformed into claws, grabbing at his opponent's foot and tugging downward. Bone and blood appeared.

The cultivators watching the fight unfold were shocked. Had this youth defeated his opponent already?

With a crack, Li Feng wrenched the foot free from his opponent's body in a shower of blood.

The cultivators gasped.

The air filled with fog and turned hazy.

"Hm?" Suddenly, Li Feng sensed that something was wrong. He didn't hear his opponent shout or cry out in pain, and his surroundings were getting blurry. This wasn't the sign of impending victory.

Then, he looked down and saw that the foot he had wrenched from his opponent's body had transformed into a small piece of vine. The blood became golden liquid.

"A vine?"

"Who's this? Isn't this his actual body?"

The spectators were shocked. They looked all around for the golden-haired man.

Four golden vines appeared within the fog soundlessly, grabbing onto Li Feng's four limbs. Then, they began to emit a tremendous quantity of golden light.

"Break!" the golden-haired man commanded coldly. His body couldn't be seen; only his pupils shone luminously from within the fog. He intended to tear apart Li Feng's limbs.

"Release!" Li Feng shouted. Light blazed from his body, piercing through the vines and tearing them apart. He tensed up, breaking the vines in crisp snaps.

The four golden vines fell to the ground, while the golden-haired man in the distance sniffed loudly as he suffered the backlash from his attack.

The fog vanished, revealing the golden-haired man anew. Golden flames danced around him.

"I know who this is, now—it's the divine heir of the Solarvines, the successor of the Redgold Hall, the elder brother of Resplendent Sun, Coruscant Sun!"

Everyone was shocked.

"Coruscant Sun isn't as renowned as his brother, but he's supposedly no weaker—no, he's even stronger!"

Zhang Lie had likewise been hindered by the vines. His opponent was the same Redgold cultivator as before, but Zhang Lie sliced him apart with a single slash of his blade. The cultivator reverted into a piece of vine.

Chapter 1483: A Peerless Vine

"[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 his opponent's soul.

The golden-haired man blocking his way didn't have a soul; Zhang Lie was certain that it was nothing more than a puppet.

The real enemy lay hidden, waiting for a more opportune moment to strike.

"Do you think I won't be able to do anything to you if you hide behind a puppet?"

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.

All those who witnessed the hypnotic light would stand still in a daze.

The sword energy flew through the heavens. His sword shone as brightly as the northern lights overhead, bringing him momentarily out of the physical into the intangible.

No one discovered the small threads of black hidden within the gorgeous display.

The sword energy struck the golden-haired man. The black threads pierced through the void as the aurora extended into the distance.

Within the void, the golden fog dispersed, revealing the golden-haired man anew. Golden flames danced around him. He stood with traces of blood by his mouth, clearly having been wounded by Zhang Lie's attack.

What had appeared before Zhang Lie was nothing more than an avatar, a puppet meant to play around with Zhang Lie and his ilk.

Unexpectedly, however, Zhang Lie was able to infuse karmic power into his attack, allowing him to hurt Coruscant Sun despite attacking only his avatar.

Coruscant Sun stared coldly at Zhang Lie, his hands forming seals as an explosive aura erupted from him.

"I, Coruscant Sun, have never suffered defeat since my birth. That you would have been able to hurt me with a trick—you won't be able to escape," Coruscant Sun muttered. His gaze grew brighter as he spat out radiant flames.

"The Solarvines' ultimate technique—[Solarflame of the Divine Vine]!"

Those flames had been extracted from deep within the sun and were frightening in their intensity and strength. Many spectators gasped. The void distorted where the flames burned, and the shining, infinite expanse of vines surrounding them formed a domain of slaughter.

Li Feng shouted, "Be careful, Captain!"

Several Redgold cultivators had surrounded Li Feng and blocked his way.

Perhaps they were puppets made of vine; perhaps not. The solarflame streaked across the sky and surrounded Zhang Lie, boxing him in.

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

Zhang Lie stared at his opponent, his eyes cold. 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 solarflame was extinguished and the divine vines torn.

Coruscant Sun was shocked that his attack had been foiled. He spurred more flame and vines onward.

"[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.

The steaming water-attuned genetic energy sprayed outward, quenching the solarflame. Shockingly, all the water was evaporating from the golden vines, which bore incredible resistance against fire.

Coruscant Sun shot out an unusual vine that looked like black crystal instead of the regular gold. It gave off umbral light.

"[Light's Bulwark: Dragon's Teeth]!"

Concentrated light-attuned genetic energy surrounded Li Feng as he shot out a piercing burst of light that surpassed even Sun Xiaowu's penetrating power.

The Redgold cultivators had no hope of stopping Li Feng. In the blink of an eye, he slew all the Redgolds and reduced them to motes of light.

A mark of white light was emblazoned on the back of his palm. He reached out toward the vine, intending on helping Zhang Lie. When he tugged on the vine, he felt a sharp jerk of pain. His palm was bleeding despite the fact that he had imbued it with his light-attuned genetic energy, concentrated so densely that it was tougher than an ordinary weapon.

"That's... what makes Coruscant Sun so much stronger than the rest of his generation. Allegedly, his father spent great effort in refining and tempering him, consuming a large quantity of his clan's resources. He's far stronger than the average Solarvine," one person said.

"Don't come over, Li Feng!"

In the blink of an eye, Zhang Lie erupted with strength. Genetic energy grew agitated around him as he released a cloud of scarlet steam, glowing with motes of starlight. He attempted to destroy this black vine with all his strength.

He sent a sword slash forward, blazing with fire. The fiery-red genetic energy was interspersed with radiant light.

The end of the black vine broke off as Coruscant Sun shouted in surprise. He retreated, his face dark.

The vine should have been impossible to destroy; it was able to ruin others' treasures and absorb the essence of their blood. He had never before suffered any damage to the vine, not until today.

Zhang Lie stepped forward, surrounded by scarlet steam as though he were in a blazing furnace. He quenched the solarflame of the divine vine.

"Very good. If you're this strong, then I have the more reason to fight you at full strength." Coruscant Sun calmed down. He faced Zhang Lie coolly.

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 him 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.

Golden flames surged into the air from the repeated attacks. Sword slashes filled the sky as golden leaves and tendrils fell from Coruscant Sun's golden vine.

Finally, Zhang Lie leapt up into the air and stomped on Coruscant Sun's head, emulating what Golden Sun had done to others.

Coruscant Sun cried out in shock. His skull fractured and almost shattered.

Then, Zhang Lie chopped at his neck with a palm strike as fast as lightning, sending his head flying out.

Losing his head didn't affect Coruscant Sun's ability to fight. He melded together with his divine vine, which slowly turned pitch-black. The energy it gave off was more intense than ever. A sea of golden light spawned, each ray of sword energy like a blazing sun.

The fallen leaves and tendrils blazed like flames, transforming into golden men that looked like the spitting image of Coruscant Sun.

Chapter 1484: Time to Return

The fallen leaves and tendrils blazed like flames, transforming into golden men that looked like the spitting image of Coruscant Sun.

Golden light illuminated the heavens as starlight swept across the sky.

"It's time to end this battle."

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.

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 virtual realm.

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

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

The golden men formed of vines and tendrils were immediately obliterated by this power that straddled reality and illusion. Despite Coruscant Sun using whatever techniques he could against the assault, that vast expanse of sword energy rushed into the sky. A golden sun emerged, but it was a futile defense against Zhang Lie's technique.

Golden juice spurted from the golden vine as it swiftly turned dark.

Coruscant Sun, knowing that he would be no match for Zhang Lie, used his final tactic. He exploded; golden sunlight burst along with countless sword energy.

"Self-destruction!" Zhang Lie exclaimed. He hadn't expected Coruscant Sun to use such a technique, but there was a secret to it.

Before the self-destruction, a black vine had shot out from Coruscant Sun's body and transformed into umbral light. As the energy from his self-destruction deflected the whirlpool of swords and blades that resulted from the intersection of reality and illusion, the black vine charged out unscathed from the remaining energy.

Zhang Lie immediately gave chase and grabbed at one special tendril of the vine. Umbral light shone around it; natural law gleamed.

Someone shouted, "That's Coruscant Sun's true body!"

"This was the vine that was forged from countless treasures, with no regard to expense!"

"Hmm?" Zhang Lie was shocked to see that the vine had not, in fact, been cut apart.

He was well aware of just how strong [Blades, Extinguish] was. It was a simultaneous attack on two layers of reality.

Suddenly, the umbral vine glowed with incredible light, so bright it was like the blinding sun. It grew so hot that even Zhang Lie had to drop it and step far back.

A golden runic pattern intersected itself as a solarvine emerged from afar. Coruscant Sun's body reforged itself and transformed into his appearance anew. He glared at Zhang Lie with malice in his eyes.

"I'll kill you!"

He had recovered just from a tendril of the golden vine. It was as though he would be invincible as long as this tendril persisted.

"Is that so? It's time for you to leave, I think." Zhang Lie blinked and licked his lips.

Coruscant Sun's hair danced in the wind. Golden light surged forth. He was embarrassed and angry. Before he could strike and reveal his true strength, however, Zhang Lie took the initiative. 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.

Chapter 1485: The Might of a Single Sword

The runes of the [Keys of the Elder Gods] manifested outside Zhang Lie's body and glowed with light.

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.

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 the genesis of the universe.

"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.

Space shattered; the ground cracked. All things were destroyed in a calamity. The lakes and streams vaporized, and fog filled the air.

All the land and water beneath Zhang Lie was completely cleared away. Like candlelight, Coruscant Sun was easily snuffed out by Zhang Lie's sword. He scattered over heaven and earth—and he wasn't the only one. The whole region of space around him had been eradicated.

None had been able to escape that calamitous blade.

Zhang Lie's attack shocked all the cultivators watching him from afar.

This virtual realm possessed many treasures; a silver-dragon lotus was indeed precious, but not worth one's life and qualifications as a competitor.

There was simply no need to risk it all for a divine plant.

The son of lightning's fist glowed brightly, exploding with light.

As they continued to fight, twenty wheels of time had formed by Fang Yi's back.

The wheels of time to Fang Yi's back began to resonate. Temporal energy rippled around him. Fang Yi stood motionless, immobile as a mountain, as his spear broke through the constraints of spacetime and returned to the static world of gray.

"[Spear of Fate]!"

In that world of frozen time, he was the only spot of color within.

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 chaotic energy imbued within the spear activated, gushing out around Fang Yi.

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

Golden threads surrounded wind, storm, time, and space.

Fang Yi combined [Born of Lightning, Swallowed by the Wind], [Tiger's Howl, Dragon's Bellow], [Heaven's Judgment], and the power of karma—wind, storm, time, space, chaos, karma.

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.

The power of his strike transcended both of its constituents, time and karma.

The strike touched the notion of fate, that all things were predetermined in the long, winding river of time.

The combination of wind and storm, spatial force, void lightning, time and space, karma and fate—all of it combined into a hurricane. The nine different kinds of energy stacked on top of each other and were refined into a cocoon.

As Fang Yi infused more and more of his own energy into the attack, the energies morphed into threads of nine different colors that began to separate.

The void lightning combined with the spatial rift that was forming and tore apart the space around Fang Yi.

Faced with Fang Yi's ninefold strike, the virtual realm was already starting to crack and shatter even before Fang Yi released his technique. The ground cracked, the lake water was vaporized, and the riverbed itself ran dry.

The manifold energies merged and tangled with each other, space and time, wind and storm, chaos and fate, the beginning and the end.

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

Lightning crackled like a demon swiping its claws. A storm raged, and space tore apart. Black-and-gold chains criss-crossed and tangled up under the influence of chaos and fate.

After the incorporation of karma, the energy of chaos was able to reach an unstable equilibrium with that of space and time.

Karma forcibly linked all the disparate energies together like glue.

The karma would have affected Fang Yi's fated future if not for the chaotic energy surrounding him. Most importantly, the chaotic energy came from Fang Yi's spear, not from himself, and the powers of karma and chaos wouldn't cancel out.

The spear of Chaos would continuously provide titanic amounts of chaotic energy, forcibly maintaining this unstable balance.

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, destroying even natural law with their combined might.

Chapter 1486: Hand Over the Bone Talisman

Fang Yi's attack shocked all the competitors present.

If Zhang Lie's sword slash had made them wary, then Fang Yi's spear strike pierced through any nascent fighting spirit that they drummed up, resulting only in fear.

Space and time cracked, and unusual pitch-black thorn-like protrusions spiked into the pocket space.

Twenty-five afterimages appeared, shining with light.

Black, formless chains surrounded Xing Yu as fate locked in on him.

A howling storm, void lightning, mysterious temporal charge, the wind of ages—the mishmash of elements exploded.

The twenty-five wheels of time that stabilized Fang Yi's techniques shattered.

"[Godbane Strike]!"

The nine different energies formed a huge vortex.

Fang Yi was suffering from a nosebleed. Even with his fourth-realm body and twenty-five wheels of time, it was difficult to support the sheer offensive might of this technique. Fang Yi was able to control formless energy effectively, but not the ninefold confluence of energies. Nor could he form it into the shape of a spear.

All that energy erupted in an instant in a blow that shook the world.

The son of lightning was initially shocked, but he then focused on reinforcing his own technique. He imbued manifold authorities into his lightning: a phoenix clawing, a phoenix spreading its wings, a dragon howling into the skies.

The two frightening attacks struck each other in an explosion of lightning. A howling storm, void lightning, mysterious temporal charge, the wind of ages—the mishmash of elements exploded. Against fate, the lightning had no choice but to bow down. Fang Yi's [Fated Spear] scattered the lightning and the manifold authorities it possessed.

The competitors were deeply astounded by this blow.

"I remember who they are now. They're the stellar hunters! One of them beat the invincible Solarvine, and the other, the ninth Immortal King. They're both incredible existences."

Upon witnessing Zhang Lie and Fang Yi's strength, many of the cultivators backed down.

They were here to steal their treasures, not to be killed. They backed down hastily.

"Ah, something just came up. I have to leave for the moment."

"Ouch, my stomach! I'm going to head out first."

"Is something happening over there?"

"It looks like there are people fighting over treasure. Why don't we have a look?"

"Oh, great excuse—no, there really are people fighting over something!"

"There's a massive conflict brewing over there!"

"What incredible commotion. What in the world is happening?"

Piercing light emanated from the heavens.

A figure emerged waving a halberd, surrounded by light, the very sky his backdrop. He was poised to split apart the heavens himself.

Meanwhile, opposite him, bearing a golden lamp glimmering with light, was another young man who was equally tall and heroic. The two cultivators prepared to face off.

Fog surrounded the two cultivators as a talisman rose into the air. The two cultivators struck simultaneously, fighting over it.

"This is the 'Bone Talisman' that allows you to enter the land of inheritance!"

The competitors all around gasped, giving up on Zhang Lie and Feng Xian as they rushed toward the talisman.

Clearly, that talisman was far more precious than the divine plants in Zhang Lie's possession.

The son of lightning deserved his status as one of the budding cultivators of this younger generation. He had even survived the [Fated Spear], but he wasn't in good condition. Half his body had been destroyed, and mental dust continued to scatter from his wounds. The son of lightning evoked the inverse to destruction, creation, in an attempt to heal his wounds.

An ordinary injury would easily be healed by this approach, but Fang Yi's attack was extraordinary. The ninefold attack had used elemental forces that were difficult to comprehend and harder still to transmute. The son of lightning's restorative ability didn't take effect.

"You were lucky." The son of lightning snorted, vanishing in a bolt of electricity. He flashed away so quickly that Fang Yi wouldn't be able to give chase.

"Come at me if you dare!" Fang Yi shouted, but he didn't give chase. Using the [Fated Spear] had drained much of Fang Yi's reserves, and he wouldn't be able to fight at full strength. He too needed time to recuperate.

Li Feng asked, "What's this 'Bone Talisman' that grants access into the land of inheritance? Why are there so many people chasing after it?"

Zhang Lie recalled what Sun Xiaowu had told them before his departure. This realm was far more complex than they had imagined, and it harbored tremendous secrets.

"Perhaps it leads to the place that Sun Xiaowu entered through one of the palaces back then. That's the real 'core' of the world."

The members of Team Zenith, and indeed many others, had understood the realm like nothing more than a game of Fortnite, but it seemed that things were far more complicated.

Fang Yi stepped forward. The three cultivators exchanged glances with each other as they headed into the depth of the fighting.

The fog grew stronger as the cultivators fought for the bone talisman.

As Zhang Lie stepped forward, a cultivator slammed a palm at him with radiant light. This was a free-for-all.

A bolt of lightning, thick as could be, shot toward Fang Yi's skull.

Zhang Lie looked up to see that the son of lightning had struck. The 'Bone Talisman' had ended up in their vicinity.

The son of lightning was the fastest among all the cultivators and chased after it with extreme speed.

A bolt of light shot forward and penetrated the lightning in a flash of sparks.

Fang Yi still hadn't recovered from his exertion. He hadn't been the one to launch the attack—Li Feng had.

Li Feng punched forward with a fist of dizzying light.

The void resonated; it collapsed like a tattered painting.

Several cultivators rushed over and attacked everyone present.

Zhang Lie caught the bone talisman, which shone with multicolored light.

"Hand that talisman over!"

A beam of sword energy stretched for hundreds of kilometers and came at Zhang Lie from afar.

"[Light Dragon's Remnants]!"

Li Feng marshaled his genetic energy into the form of a large number of white dragons, which clashed against that beam and exploded in the air.

"Hand it over!" the cultivator demanded again. He wore black; a chilling aura surrounded him.

Li Feng stood before the two cultivators. "Captain, Fang Yi, you've already been through an intense fight. Rest up and leave this opponent to me!"

The enemy cultivator gave off umbral light. His dark armor began to glow and crystallize. He struck with a black divine sword. "Scram!"

His sword slash distorted the very heavens and struck at the three cultivators before him. It was no mere slash; rather, it seemed more like a sea of sword energy, terrorizing all mired in its midst.

The sword energy transformed into a phoenix, a suanni, a dragon, and all sorts of mythical creatures.

Chapter 1487: Hand Over the Inheritance

"[Dance of the Incandescent Wyrms]!"

Dozens of dragons brimming with light spawned on the battlefield, clashing against the sea of sword energy.

The skies shook; the ground rumbled.

"Oh? That cultivator from the Netherworld has met a match at long last!"

"That's Gui Jianmo of the Netherworld. He's incredibly strong. Who could have stopped him?"

The Netherworld was a particularly frightening place, and this confrontation drew the attention of many spectators, all of whom were staring avidly.

Li Feng had to admit that Gui Jianmo was a strong opponent, one who would be much more difficult to face than the other opponents he had encountered prior, even the ninth Immortal King. Netherworld light shimmered around him, corroding his genetic energy.

"Someone managed to defend against Gui Jianmo?"

The two sides fought each other to a standstill, even after hundreds of rounds had elapsed. Li Feng's performance shocked the spectators.

"Gui Jianmo of the Netherworld is no ordinary cultivator, and he slew a large number of competitors in his own right, including ones similar to Coruscant Sun. How could he be unable to take down the cultivator before him?"

In the sky, an arclight dragon appeared, forcibly dissipating the black netherworld light surrounding Gui Jianmo. Li Feng punched forward.

After they had exchanged three hundred blows, Gui Jianmo coughed out blood as he was forced to retreat, badly hurt.

"[Arclight Dragon's Imprint!]"

Li Feng waved his left arm, around which a torrent of light-attuned genetic energy was gathering. It took the form of a gigantic dragon's claw, bearing down on the enemy like a beam of light.

"Hand over the inheritance!"

The son of lightning shot forward, his aura charged. A thick bolt of lightning fell from the skies.

Li Feng was about to take on this new opponent when Fang Yi shot forward in a beam of lightning, surrounded by wind and storm. "This is my opponent. Don't interfere!"

"[Wheel of Time]!"

Fang Yi's spear took on the aspects of time and age. Temporal winds buffeted the spear, and a mysterious light began to circle the spear like lightning.

A wheel of light appeared behind Fang Yi, taking on the form of a clock.

The bell tolled as the two cultivators fought in the air, their domains demarcated with lightning. Fang Yi hadn't fully recovered from the exhaustion of his technique, but the son of lightning hadn't recovered from his injuries, either. Both cultivators were unable to fight at full strength and stuck in a stalemate.

Suddenly, divine radiance seeped out from Fang Yi.

A small shard of rock sprayed out radiant light from within his body. It was blue one moment, royal purple the next, and ink black a moment later. Mysterious shades of light filled the land.

Fang Yi's soul lit up, illuminating the entire virtual realm. The aura was expansive, dark, chaotic, and rampaging; it was grand and all-encompassing. All of it stemmed from that mysterious stone.

Fang Yi's domain of time glimmered brightly again.

"Stone of counteracting fate!"

Fang Yi's glowing body revealed the stone of counteracting fate. What it gave off 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.

Fang Yi's wounds were rapidly closing up. His skin, hair, and bones shone with 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 sudden use of the stone of counteracting fate allowed him to immediately turn the fight in his favor. His spear pierced through the son of lightning's body and ended this fight.

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

A sword flashed, the strike forming a long river through the skies. The ripples pushed the cultivators in the vicinity back.

Amidst the crowd of cultivators, Yang Ze shouted, "What are you waiting for? Do you want to die?"

While the cultivators were still gobsmacked by the two incredible fights close by, Yang Ze made his move. He created a path for Zhang Lie and Fang Yi, forcing the other cultivators to step back.

He shouted, "Run! What are you waiting for?!"

Zhang Lie shouted, "Hurry!"

The other cultivators belatedly came to their senses. One of them shouted, "They have the bone talisman!"

"[Light's Bulwark: Draconic Fist]!"

Li Feng clenched his fist. His right arm, clad with light, was covered with scales. The scales began to move as an arclight dragon materialized, howled, and rushed forward.

"[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. As it flipped over, pale-blue genetic energy exploded and transformed into a howling tempest, pushing back all cultivators in the vicinity.

"[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.

Fang Yi, Li Feng, and Yang Ze stood in a triangular formation protecting Zhang Lie. No one could close in on them.

When the cultivators saw that they were no match for the hunters of Team Zenith, they shouted from afar, "You've been surrounded. You won't be able to run. Hand over the bone talisman!"

"Resistance is futile. I know you're confident in your own strength, but against this many people, there's no chance you'll be able to get away. Hand over the bone talisman. As long as you don't do anything extraneous, I'll guarantee that you can make it out."

"There's only one bone talisman, and only one person can enter the land of inheritance. There's no need for all of you to die together."

"Don't harm your companions out of your own greed!"

"None of you will be able to escape. We've surrounded you!"

"Not even a mosquito would be able to fly out."

Yang Ze asked, "Captain, do you have any trump cards? It's time to show your strength."

Zhang Lie smiled confidently. "Don't worry. When have I ever disappointed you? Just sit tight and watch."

Chapter 1488: Where Did You Go

"[Ninesoul Dragonblade—Fourth Form: Warping Space and Time]!"

Temporal force whirled around Zhang Lie. This technique drew on even more of that force than even [Shadow and Light]. Time itself was disrupted and distorted. As Zhang Lie slashed with his longsword, the river of time flowed backward. His surroundings seemed to tear apart like a curtain.

The three hunters sensed everything in their vicinity rewinding in time. By the time they came to their senses, they had returned to the lake where all this had begun. Even their energy expenditure had all been restored.

His face pale, Zhang Lie let out a long sigh, then a smile. "It looks like it worked."

Yang Ze opened his eyes wide in shock. "Captain, have you become a deity?!"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes at him. "What nonsense are you talking about?"

Yang Ze seemed incredulous. "If you aren't a deity, how could you have reversed time?"

Just now, they had been surrounded by cultivators and besieged on all fronts. Now, however, they were back where they started. Everything that had happened in the past seemed to be like a dream.

Yang Ze couldn't help but add, "If you aren't a deity, how could you play around with time?"

Li Feng nodded thoughtfully. "The only possible answer is that Captain has been hiding his strength and has secretly transformed into a deity."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "I haven't given up on being single just yet."

Yang Ze frowned. "How do you explain all this?"

Zhang Lie was still panting from exertion. The tremendous cost required for his technique left his cheeks pale.

"I didn't reverse time fully, just a small part of it."

Yang Ze shrugged. "Isn't that the same?"

"It's not. Reversing time would entail undoing everything that had happened. If I had really done so, would you still have memories of the past?"

Yang Ze frowned. "So it's not what we guessed, then. How did you do it, Captain?"

Li Feng asked, "We were surrounded by a group of cultivators. How did we suddenly appear by the lakeside, where we initially started out?"

"All I did was bring the few of us within a small range back in time. I set us as the targets." Zhang Lie pointed at him, then the three members of Team Zenith before him.

Yang Ze's eyes lit up. "I understand it now. Captain, you used temporal force to move us back in space following our temporal trajectory, but not in time!"

Zhang Lie nodded. "That's right. I reverted our spatial location with the side effect of replenishing our genetic energy and healing our wounds. The other cultivators are where they were."

Yang Ze smirked. "They must be stupefied."

Fang Yi gave Zhang Lie a thumbs up. "Amazing, Captain."

"Haha!"

When they thought about how gobsmacked those cultivators had to be, the four hunters all laughed. Indeed, they were as stupefied as Zhang Lie and the others imagined them to be.

They had just surrounded Zhang Lie a few layers of cultivators deep. Even if the cultivators on the outer edges of the encirclement weren't able to attack Zhang Lie and the others, neither would they be able to escape. However, Zhang Lie's four-man party had vanished from sight right then and there!

Where's my inheritance?

Where's my bone talisman?

Where are the cultivators I trapped?

How could they have gone missing?

Where did they go?

How could they have just vanished like that?

One moment, the four cultivators were right there; the next moment, they were gone.

The cultivators stared at each other in shock, some even considering digging up the ground in case Zhang Lie and the others had suddenly burrowed underneath it.

"The four of them couldn't have vanished just like that. Something had to have happened. Search! We have to find them!"

The majority of cultivators didn't have enough insight or understanding to sense that the disappearing act had to do with spacetime. Some did sense it, but they didn't dare believe that any cultivator of their generation had sufficient command over spacetime to perform such an act.

Back at the lakeside, Li Feng couldn't help but mutter, "Captain, if you were able to do this, why not do it sooner? We wouldn't have had to spend so much energy fighting them off. I thought we were done for!"

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes at Li Feng. "Do you think it's an easy skill to use? I might be able to replenish our supplies of genetic energy, but not my mental energy. Furthermore, we aren't that far away. They'll find us in no time."

The cultivators chasing after them weren't particularly weak; unless they were to displace themselves far enough in space, they would quickly be found.

Zhang Lie was only able to displace the hunters of Team Zenith over a short period of time. Before they arrived at the lake, the hunters hadn't been moving at a rapid clip, and it would have expended too much energy for Zhang Lie to displace them too far back in time—too much for him to keep on fighting.

Yang Ze shrugged. "At any rate, we managed to escape. I suppose we're done for the time being, then."

Fang Yi looped his arm around Yang Ze.

"What were you doing all this time? You only showed yourself at the end. Be honest, now: were you hiding in the crowds and watching us fight all this time?" Fang Yi demanded.

Yang Ze shrieked. "Save me, Captain! I'm innocent!"

Zhang Lie laughed and shook his head. "Alright, alright. Let him go. I'm sure Yang Ze had his own reasons."

Fang Yi released Yang Ze, who rubbed his neck as he said, "I did notice the commotion rather early on—or rather, only the blind and the deaf wouldn't have noticed it. Later, I snuck into the crowd of cultivators that were chasing after you, and I was indeed waiting to see you and Li Feng being pummeled by the crowd. It's a pity that never happened."

Li Feng turned to Fang Yi.

"He confessed. Now what?"

Fang Yi cracked his knuckles and smirked. "What else? Get him!"

Li Feng held Yang Ze down as Fang Yi tickled him vigorously.

"You wanted to see us pummeled? It's fun to watch the show from the sidelines, isn't it?! You were right there and didn't even intend to help! Do you still consider yourself part of the team?"

Yang Ze shrieked. "Hold it, hold it! I had a reason for not helping, a special reason!"

Fang Yi stopped short. "What's the reason? Tell us. We'll use what you say as testimony."

Li Feng continued, "What you tell us will determine whether we tickle you for the next half-hour, hour, or thirty hours!"

Yang Ze asked, "Won't it tire you out to do it for thirty hours?"

"We can easily take turns," Li Feng replied.

"Isn't that tiring, too?"

Li Feng took a deep breath. "You have ten seconds left to reveal your intentions."

Fang Yi grinned. "After ten seconds, you'll see just how tired we are. Ten, nine, eight,..."

If they really tickled me for thirty hours, I'd be dead even with my monarch gene fragments supporting me! Yang Ze immediately said, "I trusted in your abilities. Even without me, you would have been able to hold them off. I had a more important task at hand."

Chapter 1489: Save Me, Captain

Yang Ze explained, "I trusted in your strength, Captain. With the three of you here, you'd easily be able to take down the group of cultivators coming at you. I'd be irrelevant. Rather, there's something more urgent I had to collect, that we're currently lacking."

"What is it?" Fang Yi asked.

"News, of course."

"And what news did you manage to get by betraying us?" Li Feng asked.

Yang Ze cried out, "I didn't betray you!"

Fang Yi nodded solemnly. "A very good excuse. You claim this is why you hadn't participated in the fight?"

Li Feng rubbed his palms. "We'll tickle you for just fifteen hours, then."

"But I really was working hard to collect news!" Yang Ze exclaimed.

Fang Yi and Li Feng were about to strike when Zhang Lie stopped them. "Let's hear about your news first, then."

Yang Ze replied, "We're considered to be part of the top echelon of competitors. You might be the strongest among us, Captain, but we know barely anything about the other competitors who might pose a challenge. That's our weakness, and that's why I took advantage of this opportunity to try to gather information."

"And what information did you gather?" Zhang Lie asked.

"The first one is that the bone talisman you obtained, Captain, is used to access the land of inheritance."

"Is that it?" Fang Yi rubbed his palms together in anticipation.

Yang Ze hurriedly continued, "The land of inheritance has another name: the Final Circle."

Everyone was surprised by what Yang Ze revealed.

Li Feng frowned. "What does that mean?"

Yang Ze replied, "According to the information I gathered, this tournament isn't just a free-for-all a la Fortnite. In order to get into the Final Circle, we'll have to pass through two more barriers along the way."

The hunters of Team Zenith listened attentively. They knew nothing about this!

Yang Ze continued, "To pass through those barriers, there are two possible strategies. The first is to teleport in. There are several special regions in this virtual realm associated with special inheritances that permit direct teleportation into the Final Circle. That's what Sun Xiaowu did. The bone talisman in your hands is much the same, Captain."

"And what about the other strategy?" Li Feng asked.

"We can walk toward the Final Circle, but passing the first barrier requires that we eliminate a hundred competitors. The second barrier requires that we eliminate a thousand."

The marks on the backs of the competitors' palms were the key to passing through these barriers normally, but doing so would require defeating an inordinate number of other competitors.

Zhang Lie looked at the mark on the back of his palm that had extended all the way to his arm and was glowing with light.

"To think that this mark would not only influence the final rewards we obtain, but also serve an instrumental role as we approach the later stages of the tournament..."

Li Feng sucked in a deep breath. "Just how many competitors are there? Defeating a thousand of them to enter the Final Circle—this has to be a joke!"

They had seen fewer than three hundred cultivators so far.

Zhang Lie asked, "How many competitors are there in this tournament?"

"According to the news I collected," Yang Ze replied, "there are about ten thousand."

"So only ten people will be allowed into the Final Circle?"

Everyone sucked in a breath.

Wasn't this sort of elimination rate far too extreme?

"Not quite." Yang Ze shook his head. "There are a few beasts in this virtual realm, and each one counts as the equivalent of ten competitors. Of course, these beasts can kill unprepared competitors as well. Heading toward the Final Circle by brute force is usually a last resort, though, chosen only after the other methods are exhausted. Competitors tend to prefer to fight for bone talismans or to pass through by teleportation from the special regions that provide inheritances."

"How many people tend to make it into the Final Circle?" Zhang Lie asked.

"No more than fifty."

"What?!" Li Feng cried out. "Bu Wentian's estimates were way off!"

Bu Wentian had said that there were roughly a hundred cultivators, but the actual number was about ten thousand. A factor of a hundred—two orders of magnitude!—was far too large a difference.

Yang Ze continued, "The qualifiers were split up into several regions. We participated in the central region, which was full of talented cultivators."

Li Feng frowned. "Bu Wentian must have scammed us."

Fang Yi shrugged. "Why would he do that? There's no need to deliberately send some cannon fodder into the tournament."

"What about a few strong cultivators unaware of how the tournament operates, then?"

Yang Ze disagreed.

Zhang Lie shook his head as well. "There's no motive for doing so."

Li Feng replied, "But you have to admit it's strange. There's so much information that the competitors take for granted, but that Bu Wentian's completely unaware of."

The information that Bu Wentian had given them was simply too different from their actual circumstances.

Fang Yi suggested, "Could Bu Wentian just know nothing at all about the tournament?"

Li Feng countered, "Isn't Bu Wentian's actual body in the fifth realm?"

"What if Bu Wentian is in an abnormal situation?" Fang Yi refined his thoughts.

"What other hypotheses do you have?" Li Feng asked.

"Perhaps Bu Wentian might be trapped," Fang Yi said. "He can only access the world at large during limited time intervals, and he can't gather information readily."

Yang Ze made a bold hypothesis. "Or perhaps Bu Wentian isn't from the fifth realm at all. He might be a lifeform of this virtual realm that bridges the fourth and the fifth realms, as we proposed earlier, who found a way to link up to the fourth realm."

Zhang Lie cut them all off. "There's no reason to discuss such matters at the moment. What we need to do is win the tournament. As for why there's such a large discrepancy between our actual situation and the information that Bu Wentian gave us, we can find out by asking him once we've returned to the fourth realm."

The other hunters all agreed. There would be time to consider Bu Wentian's situation in more detail later.

Zhang Lie turned to Yang Ze again. "What other news have you managed to obtain, Yang Ze?"

Yang Ze shrugged. "That's about all I have."

Fang Yi and Li Feng rubbed their palms in anticipation. "Your information was somewhat useful, so we'll reduce your punishment to an hour or two or tickling."

Yang Ze cried out, "Help me, Captain!"

Zhang Lie cut them all off again. "Alright, that's enough. Yang Ze didn't make a mistake in heading out to search for more information. We'd still be in the dark if he hadn't done what he did. We'll keep him around for the time being."

Yang Ze relaxed as Fang Yi and Li Feng obediently gave up on the punishment.

Li Feng said, "To think you'd be able to obtain so much information despite how chaotic the situation was..."

Yang Ze smirked. "That's precisely what made it easy to gather more information. I just have to rescue one or two people, then fight with my injured 'teammates' to win their trust. They revealed tons of information after that. Under ordinary circumstances, everyone would be on their guard, and it would be far harder to get such information out."

While the hunters were chatting, a deafening bang suddenly resounded from behind.

Chapter 1490: Individual Absorption

The four hunters turned to the source of the commotion. Heaven and earth seemed like it was about to shatter. Ghostly blue lightning spread in a crackling web, destroying everything around it.

As the lightning storm continued to spread, beasts were sent flying.

Yang Ze gasped. "Is this divine retribution?"

"What an amazing sight!" Li Feng praised.

Fang Yi asked, "Captain, do we need to leave the area?"

Zhang Lie glanced at the lightning storm for a moment. "We should."

Yang Ze rubbed his jaw. "There's no need to worry, is there? It's moving too slowly to reach us for a few days, surely."

Zhang Lie replied, "That's true, but I'm worried the other competitors will find us."

The other three hunters immediately nodded. They vacated the area, then searched for shelter.

"Should we find the other hunters?" Yang Ze asked.

Sun Mengmeng and Zhou Ying were still out gallivanting on their own.

Zhang Lie shook his head. "There's no rush. The competitors are still searching for us. If we keep running haphazardly, we'd easily end up surrounded. We should find somewhere to hide for the time being, then absorb the bug monarchs and silver-dragon lotuses to raise our own strength."

After his momentary confrontation with Feng Xian, Zhang Lie realized that the other competitors were growing stronger with the resources they had harvested from this realm. Perhaps they might have been weaker than he had been at the start, but if Zhang Lie didn't learn how to take advantage of the resources available here, those weaker competitors would rapidly catch up to and eclipse him in strength.

Fang Yi shook his head. "Forget about the bug monarchs, I think. They won't represent a notable boost in strength for us."

The bug monarchs weren't bug emperors, after all. Fang Yi had consumed a bug monarch in order to recover from his injuries, and he was well aware of the potency of a bug monarch. It wasn't sufficient to elevate them to new heights; they had started out at the acme of the competitors in this realm, and it would be difficult for them to advance further.

"We'd better save the bug monarchs for when we suffer injuries," Yang Ze said. "As for the silver-dragon lotuses, Captain, you were the one who found them. It ought to go to you."

Li Feng nodded. "Even if we hadn't done anything, you would have been able to secure the treasure yourself, Captain."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Better that we all raise our strength evenly to handle our opponents. We're a team, and I insist." The other three hunters nodded, no longer objecting. They were well aware that they could easily hold the others back by being too weak.

The hunters found a secluded location to absorb the silver-dragon lotuses.

Zhang Lie divided the lotuses into fourths, then gave each of the other three hunters one portion.

"I'll guard you as you absorb the lotuses. Once you're done, it'll be my turn."

"Why don't you go first, Captain?" Yang Ze suggested.

Zhang Lie kicked him. "Just get started and stop dilly-dallying!"

Yang Ze and the others consumed the silver-dragon lotuses and absorbed its potency. Each of them fuzzed into a ball of silver light, surrounded by fragments of the realm's laws. A mysterious transformation was taking place; the energy that seeped out from the silver balls was shocking.

Fang Yi's silver ball was crackling with lightning. Light pierced through the heavens as his silver ball transformed into a silver sun, then turned golden-yellow. Pitch-black storm winds surrounded it, almost like an eggshell. Karmic power wrapped around it, flecked with divine aura, and even bits of chaos started to appear.

This was an astounding transformation.

Yang Ze's situation was much the same. Pale-blue genetic energy spread out from underneath his body like tendrils of water. Spatial ripples surrounded him. As time passed, the genetic energy beneath his body formed waves over which light refracted. Space seemed to fold into high-dimensional accordion-like layers.

Li Feng was surrounded with light and radiated a holy, divine aura. An arclight dragon spawned around him.

Three whole days passed quickly.

Above Fang Yi, the wind and storm that surrounded his ball of silver light had manifested in the form of a giant lotus. Chaotic energy surrounded the lotus, obscuring Fang Yi at its center. A shocking metamorphosis was taking place.

Beneath Yang Ze was a huge sea of genetic energy. A lotus of crystalline ice bloomed around him, floating at the heart of the sea.

Li Feng was encapsulated within a huge lotus brimming with white light, like an egg or even a placenta. Within, Li Feng was in a state of nirvana. A dragon's howls could be heard from time to time around him.

Fragments of natural law surrounded the three cultivators.

The stone of counteracting fate emerged, a tiny shard of stone that sprayed out radiant light. It was blue one moment, royal purple the next, and ink black a moment later. Mysterious shades of light filled the land.

Fang Yi's soul lit up, illuminating the entire virtual realm. The aura was expansive, dark, chaotic, and rampaging; it was grand and all-encompassing. All of it stemmed from that mysterious stone.

What the stone gave off 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.

A pair of wings formed behind him, composed entirely of lightning. Wind and storm surrounded him as lightning fizzled through the sky.

Then, he was swamped by wind and storm again. They surrounded him like a cocoon. He seemed to be advancing beyond mortal ken.

Wisps of white fog, like divine qi or like bursts of primordial chaos, wreathed around him, mysterious to the extreme.

Around him, all manner of grass, shrub, herb, and plant began to grow: some in gold, in purple, and in green. All radiated with luster.

This greenery wasn't real; it had manifested from lightning. Fang Yi was intuiting a facet of lightning that had previously eluded him.

Not only that, he could feel a strong and vibrant life force around him, ensconced in the silver-dragon lotus. Not only was he undergoing a mental metamorphosis, he had gained insight from the transformation as well.

Lightning wasn't just an element that harbored immense destructive potential; it could likewise birth life and vitality.

Understanding this aspect of lightning was the key toward true mastery of the element: what came after destructive lightning was budding life.

Greenery grew rampant around Fang Yi, a breathtaking display of nature. Flowers bloomed with uncommon beauty, marked with lightning.

Then, all that greenery wilted.

The cycle repeated, lush blooms transforming into withered husks, almost like a cycle of reincarnation. Fang Yi's mastery over fate thrummed as he enacted the cycle of life, death, and rebirth fundamental to lightning. He melded that cycle with power over fate. At the heart of this combination would be mastery over reincarnation itself.

Finally, the greenery all vanished. Metal appeared before and behind Fang Yi. Golden spears pointed toward the heavens.

Then, they began to resonate, gleaming and crackling with energy.

Fang Yi's understanding of lightning was deepening by the moment.