

U. Warlord 1491

Chapter 1491: There's No Difference

Fang Yi broke out of the cocoon, a golden spear manifesting in his hand, combining gold-attuned genetic energy and lightning. He thrust the spear toward the void in a huge wave of genetic energy.

The spear thrust generated boundless strength, enough to pierce through the veil of the realm and leave it in tatters. It possessed both the sharpness of steel and destructiveness of lightning, and seemed to be able to destroy anything in its way.

Then, Fang Yi sat down calmly and sat cross-legged on the ground, his spear gone.

He was struck by inspiration—this pinnacle of control, of mastery, over gold-attuned energy that would allow him to defeat all foes lying before him.

Wind and storm merged into a cohesive whole, forming another cocoon around him that made him look extraordinary. Wisps of chaos surrounded him.

Fang Yi continued his metamorphosis. He had made tremendous gains, especially in the domain of lightning.

Fluid gushed down around Fang Yi, a pale-blue, crystal-clear liquid in which fishes swam. It was filled with vitality, bubbling and vivacious.

Incredibly, this wasn't actually water, but liquid lightning.

How could this be? Transforming lightning into a liquid, a form so obviously unnatural, required a perfect understanding of the element, a mastery of its core principles and in particular the ones associated with both lightning and water.

More of the blue fluid emerged, forming a stream, a river. Fang Yi sat in the middle of the river and allowed it to rush past him.

Then, within the sky appeared a waterfall. Rapids rushed out of the void and over his physical body.

The river and waterfall together formed an expanding lake. The entire sky turned into a glittering blue ocean, possessed of uncommon beauty.

As Fang Yi pointed a finger forward, all that blue fluid suddenly began to bubble, coursing where his finger directed it.

This was a frightening strength, the fourth transformation of lightning after fire, nature, and metal—fluid.

When Zhang Lie saw this scene, he too was amazed. Fang Yi had managed to reach this pinnacle of understanding all by himself, transforming lightning into four separate and distinct states. Although Zhang Lie was likewise able to transform his genetic energy into mud, superheated steam, crystal, and even corrosion, this was largely a byproduct of his understanding of his framework, [Ninecarp Transformation].

On the other hand, Fang Yi had reached this stage with nothing more than his own intuition.

Reaching such mastery of lightning was an incredible feat, one that many cultivators far above Fang Yi would never be able to achieve in their lifetimes.

Fang Yi's understanding and intuition were on the level of a genius.

Yang Ze was displaying a strange phenomenon of his own. Divine fog surrounded him.

Greenery sprung up where he lay, glowing and glittering with light. A sea surged, crystalline and swarming with fish. It was filled with vitality, bubbling and vivacious. Space tore apart a rift like a cross-section of glass.

Yang Ze was filled with vitality, but the phenomena around him were far less frightening than those around Fang Yi.

On the other hand, what was happening to Li Feng was comparable to Fang Yi.

Around Li Feng was divine fog, and by his side grew bountiful greenery in white and silver and gold, all formed of light. The greenery didn't exist in reality; it was formed of light-attuned genetic energy. He too had intuited a form of vitality.

Li Feng's transformation wasn't limited to his mind. The vitality resonated with his light-attuned framework, which governed vitality in its own right. However, Li Feng hadn't emphasized this portion of his framework in his development. Thanks to the silver-dragon lotuses, he was able to intuit light-based healing and regeneration practices.

This surprising development was unexpected to Zhang Lie, and even to Li Feng himself. That his framework could be extended in this direction was incredible.

Without these silver-dragon lotuses outlining such a path forward, Li Feng might never have been able to unlock this portion of his potential.

As far as the hunters of the Milky Way were aware, light was composed of photons.

How could photons possess any such regenerative ability? Laser skin care?

How could light-attuned genetic energy heal skin and muscles? 3D printing?

The regenerative ability of light-attuned genetic energy was based on conceptual ideas that associated light with regeneration and healing, not science.

The ability of lightning to nurture and transform matter was similar as well. Neither of these new powers boasted a scientific origin, but even so, the silver-dragon lotuses had endowed Fang Yi and Li Feng with such powers.

Zhang Lie intended to interrogate the two hunters carefully about the process they had undergone.

Perhaps this 'divine plant' was more special than he had anticipated. Not only was it able to elevate one's mind, it even had hidden abilities that Zhang Lie was unaware of.

Zhang Lie had been planning to wait for the three hunters' metamorphoses to be over, but he could sense other competitors drawing near.

The three cultivators had caused such a commotion that competitors nearby were heading toward the source of the disturbance.

Zhang Lie flashed over to where the nearest cultivators were and blocked their path. "The way forward is blocked."

"It's you?!" The cultivator glanced coldly at Zhang Lie. He wore black; a chilling aura surrounded him. A huge sickle rested on his shoulder, and a tattered cloak to his back.

Zhang Lie frowned. "Do I know you?"

His opponent's aura was very familiar. It was thick, cloying, and reeked of death—he seemed to have encountered it before.

"Just about every cultivator in the tournament knows who you are now."

Zhang Lie touched his face. "It looks like we are famous, aren't we? But I don't know who you are."

"Have you heard of the death gods of Netherworld?"

"It sounds frightening."

Zhang Lie belatedly realized why the enemy cultivator had such a familiar aura. It was because he had fought someone from Netherworld before.

The death god of Netherworld brandished his scythe. "Looks like you've gotten quite a few treasures. Your companions are undergoing some sort of critical period where they can't be disturbed, clearly. Hand over the silver-dragon lotuses and the bone talisman you obtained, and I'll pretend I haven't seen anything."

"I've killed a fair few competitors from Netherworld," Zhang Lie replied.

The death god replied proudly, "I'm aware, but I'm different from those pieces of trash."

"Not to me!"

"I've been curious about just how strong you stellar hunters are. Let's see if your arrogance is warranted."

His body began to glow with umbral light as his black armor turned crystalline. He struck with his scythe, a blow of intense strength that distorted the void as it headed for Zhang Lie.

The attack was bolstered by what felt like a whole sea of blades, shocking the gathered cultivators.

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

Chapter 1492: Oriented Skyward

However, these mythical creatures were very different from their common conception: they were nothing but skeletons, vestiges of their original selves. Deathly aura filled the air, as though they had clawed their way out of the netherworld.

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 combatants. As more and more genetic energy gathered around Zhang Lie's arms, it looked as though he were at the heart of a whirlpool.

Ripples of energy spread out from Zhang Lie, warping the space around him. The towering waves looked like enraged black dragons, flooding the area and striking the sea of blades.

As the waves burst apart, the air filled with echoes of Zhang Lie's signature genetic energy, shattering space and swallowing up all life in its vicinity.

The skies shook; the ground rumbled. The blade energy exploded as the skeletal constructs clattered to the ground. The netherworldly aura corroded the ground, turning it pitch-black.

The death god of Netherworld waved his scythe, causing dark energy to striate the sky.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!"

Zhang Lie swung downwards with a heavy blow, and a shark swam forth.

The death god cut the shark with his scythe, bisecting it.

As he swung his scythe about, a deathly aura permeated the air. Specters and malevolent ghosts seemed to climb up out of the ground, forming a veritable sea of carcasses that surged toward Zhang Lie.

"[Ninecarp Transformation]!"

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

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

As the deathly aura struck the corrosive genetic energy, it sizzled.

The death god vanished from sight, passing through the black aura and instantly appearing behind Zhang Lie. He swung his scythe, aiming to behead Zhang Lie's neck.

Zhang Lie didn't bother turning around. He punched behind him, clashing against the scythe in a metallic clank.

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

Zhang Lie clenched his fist tightly, causing pitch-black genetic energy to gather around it. A demonic serpent emerged and rushed out as Zhang Lie punched forward.

The death god blocked the serpent's attack with his scythe. The serpent clamped down on the scythe's haft, knocking the death god aside.

The death god struggled furiously, but the serpent proved a difficult foe.

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

As Zhang Lie punched forward, another black serpent shot forward.

It joined up with the previous serpent. A wave of annihilation exploded around the dragon. Pitch-black energy swallowed everything in the vicinity like a storm at sea.

The explosion was like a black hole that consumed everything in sight, rock and ground alike. The death god shrieked as he was annihilated by the rampaging energy.

As the fight finished, so too did Li Feng's metamorphosis.

The greenery around him had vanished, replaced with gold-attuned genetic energy. Before and behind Li Feng, golden blades manifested and oriented themselves toward the heavens.

Then, they began to resonate.

Zhang Lie wasn't particularly surprised. Li Feng had displayed a connection to gold in the past, and that connection had only deepened.

The golden blades formed in his hand, shining with and composed of scorching light. They were all but indistinguishable from real weaponry, but were even stronger.

Li Feng stood up, slashing at the void with his longsword. An ocean of energy poured out.

That one slash generated boundless strength, able to destroy anything in its way.

Then, Li Feng sat down calmly and sat cross-legged on the ground, his longsword gone.

Fluid gushed down around Li Feng, a silver liquid in which fishes swam. It was filled with vitality, bubbling and vivacious.

This wasn't actually water, but liquid light, much like one of Li Feng's techniques.

More of the silver fluid emerged, forming a stream, a river. Li Feng sat in the middle of the river and allowed it to rush past him.

Then, within the sky appeared a waterfall. Rapids rushed out of the void and over his physical body.

The river and waterfall together formed an expanding lake. The entire sky turned into a glittering silver ocean, possessed of uncommon beauty.

As Li Feng pointed a finger forward, all that silver fluid suddenly began to bubble, coursing where his finger directed it. This was a frightening strength.

Li Feng, Yang Ze, and Fang Yi all blinked. Their eyes were filled with excitement and exuberance. Their metamorphoses had clearly been impactful.

Voices could be heard from afar. "What happened here?"

"It looks like there was a huge fight."

"Those phenomena just now—some treasure must have spawned in this region!"

The commotion caused by Zhang Lie and the death god of Netherworld's fight, as well as Li Feng and the others' transformation, lured quite a fair number of cultivators over. Zhang Lie was just about to deal with the annoying pests when Fang Yi extended a hand to stop him. "Don't worry about them, Captain. We'll deal with them ourselves."

Zhang Lie nodded. "You want to test out how strong you've grown, don't you?"

The three hunters grinned.

When the cultivators saw the three hunters walking out, they hurriedly surrounded them.

"What did you find inside?"

"Hand over the treasures, now!"

"Hold on, I feel like I've seen these three fellows somewhere before..."

"Aren't they the stellar hunters?"

"They're the ones who made a big fuss at the divine lake, then killed the son of lightning and the heir of the Solarvines!"

When the cultivators recognized the three hunters, they blanched. They turned to leave, but it was already too late. Yang Ze was about to taunt them when Fang Yi charged forward with his spear.

"[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.

Chapter 1493: Consuming It All Alone

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 space its scales. Blue lightning extended through the sky, the lightning-to-fluid transformation that Fang Yi had just obtained.

The lightning transformed into a white tiger, spatial force forming its sharp claws and chaotic energy condensing into its eyes. That lightning was as sharp as a blade—a lightning-to-gold transformation.

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. Lightning-touched greenery began to grow explosively.

With [Heaven's Judgment: Four Sages' Roar], Fang Yi was simultaneously maintaining four lightning-related elemental transformations. The skill was so incredible that even Yang Ze and Li Feng temporarily forgot their intention to attack. Fang Yi's skill with lightning was more art than attack.

Fang Yi thrust forward with his spear. Heaven and earth alike filled with light. The lightning exploded like a boundless sea. Flames and chaotic energy burst. A storm swept over the land. When the light vanished, everything in sight was gone—Fang Yi had obliterated all the cultivators in one fell swoop.

Yang Ze and Li Feng belatedly came back to their senses.

"You didn't leave a single one of them for me?!"

Fang Yi shrugged. "Move faster next time, then."

Zhang Lie nodded approvingly. His one skill alone made it apparent how much he had grown. Yang Ze and Li Feng had likely obtained a transformation of similar magnitude.

To Fang Yi, those opponent cultivators were no longer anything more than dishes of food to be devoured.

Zhang Lie commented, "From the looks of you, these divine plants do far more than initiate a mental evolution."

Fang Yi nodded. "Our bodies were bolstered as well, and most importantly, the divine plants conferred understanding and intuition about life."

"They're that strong?" Zhang Lie wondered.

Yang Ze nodded. "It's hard to describe it properly, but you have a portion of the plants too, Captain. You'll see for yourself. I wonder how these divine plants grew? Perhaps they were deliberately cultivated by some of the strongest cultivators in the fifth realm."

Given what the three hunters said, it seemed that Fang Yi had the strongest compatibility with the intuition provided by the silver-dragon lotuses, while Yang Ze had the least. Li Feng's compatibility was little worse than Fang Yi's.

How much each cultivator gleaned from these silver-dragon lotuses would depend on their own attunement and connection to life.

Zhang Lie smiled. "I really am starting to anticipate consuming these plants. At any rate, we had better leave first."

The fight just now would surely draw the attention of more cultivators. If they remained, even more would gather.

Zhang Lie wanted to digest the bug emperor and the remaining portion of silver-dragon lotuses in peace, without the disruption of other cultivators around. The four hunters left to find a new secluded location.

After consuming the bug emperor, Zhang Lie underwent a metamorphosis. Manifestations formed around him, transforming into a black dragon, a dragonturtle, a carp, a dragonlion, and other resplendent figures.

Zhang Lie could sense an unusual path appearing before him.

Carp emerged from his flesh, endless in number, frothing like blood—a sinister transformation.

Chapter 1494: Framework Evolution

The next moment, Zhang Lie's genetic energy transformed again. Inscriptions formed along his blood, flesh, and soul, all in the shape of swords.

His aura grew sharp beyond measure. He raised a hand and a leg, his very body like a sword oriented toward the sky.

Countless tiny swords flowed along his body like blood.

[Ninecarp Transformation] activated without conscious control from Zhang Lie.

The swords intersected within his body, forming a golden tiger.

Then, they dispersed into a swarm of black demonic serpents, which congregated anew into a black dragon.

Then, that black dragon dispersed and formed a black turtle, then a dragonturtle, then a lion, a dragonlion...

Zhang Lie underwent metamorphosis after metamorphosis. Each time, he felt his mind advance by leaps and bounds, and his physical body was changing as well.

From the bug emperor, Zhang Lie sensed the peak of the evolution of the physical self, the path from larva to butterfly. It was a shocking series of evolutions, one comparable to his [Ninecarp Transformation] but without as much potential.

All that information was absorbed by his [Ninecarp Transformation], strengthening the framework tremendously.

He was able to transform into a carp, a black dragon, a golden tiger, a dragonturtle—the possibilities were endless.

He opened his eyes wide. A black dragon roared from deep within his pupils. A golden tiger shot out swords from its body, and a dragonturtle bore four tablets on its back. Universal and natural law peeked out.

The sun and moon shone; celestial phenomena appeared.

Zhang Lie blinked as he returned to reality. He exhaled. He was shocked and surprised by the experience.

"What a miraculous world. I can't believe this is just a virtual realm."

It felt just as real as cultivating in reality.

Obtaining advanced resources in this world would bolster a cultivator's mind and body, allowing for a mental evolution—but even more important were the intuition and experiences that one could gain.

No wonder Feng Xian had gotten to the point where it was difficult for Zhang Lie to suppress her any longer within a short amount of time just by collecting such resources.

A peak resource would provide an unimaginable boost in a cultivator's strength and guidance into potential evolutions. This sort of bug-specific metamorphosis framework certainly didn't exist within the Milky Way. Zhang Lie was shocked that the intuition could have been encapsulated within a bug emperor and transformed into a resource of the virtual realm.

The more he explored it, the more Zhang Lie wondered what sort of existence could have created such a mysterious realm.

The intuition and enlightenment obtained in this virtual realm could be recapitulated in reality. Even without the energy provided by the bug monarch, it would be easy to find nourishing sustenance and energy in the dimensional realm.

Furthermore, after the first virtual evolution, cultivators would be more experienced when trying the process in reality, allowing them to correct and guide the evolution more precisely.

After the initial trial experience in the virtual realm, the corresponding evolution in reality would surely be even better than before.

Even if cultivators failed here, they could easily commit suicide with no lasting repercussions.

Chapter 1495: Rather Ill-Tempered

Fluid gushed down around Zhang Lie, a pale-blue, crystal-clear liquid in which fishes swam. It was filled with vitality, bubbling and vivacious.

Water was the source of life; through his recent revelation about life, his water-attuned genetic energy was granted vivacity.

More of the blue fluid emerged, forming a stream, a river. Zhang Lie sat in the middle of the river and allowed it to rush past him.

Then, within the sky appeared a waterfall. Rapids rushed out of the void and over his physical body.

The river and waterfall together formed an expanding lake. The entire sky turned into a glittering blue ocean, possessed of uncommon beauty.

In the vision of life, Zhang Lie chose the gold attunement and his most frequently used water attunement.

Zhang Lie opened his eyes. His whole body seemed infused with vitality, and he had gone beyond his usual peak condition. His understanding of [Ninecarp Transformation] had deepened. Even though it hadn't advanced to the next level, the framework was fresher, in some sense, than before. His genetic energy bubbled.

Yang Ze and the other hunters had just finished dealing with the last of the enemy cultivators by then. They turned back to see Zhang Lie walking out.

"You're finished, Captain?"

Zhang Lie's absorption of the silver-dragon lotuses and contact with the Dao of life itself resulted in unusual phenomena that had drawn the attention of more cultivators, whom Yang Ze and the other hunters had handled.

Zhang Lie nodded. "Let's set off."

According to the queen's hive soulshard, they would be heading off in a different direction than before.

The land grew rich and lush, filled with vegetation all over. Some of the ancient trees ascended beyond even the tallest peaks of the nearby mountains, thick as could be. Glowing vines hung down from them.

Some fierce avians of tremendous size had constructed nests at the top of the trees. Those nests, woven from silversilk grass, gave off glowing light.

Pythons and giant snakes hundreds of meters long coiled along the trees, hissing at the nests from time to time. They too gave off an aura of intense strength.

On the ground, a thick layer of fallen leaves decomposed into rich and fertile soil. Purple spiders the size of one's face, silver centipedes meters long, golden scorpions half a human tall—all sorts of varied beasts could be seen.

The forest was uncommonly dangerous; stepping into these beasts' territory could result in life-threatening danger.

The four hunters passed through the forest, treading on a thick layer of leaves, with particular caution.

As they passed by a weathered cave, they startled a beast within, a toad no larger than the size of a round dining table, but nevertheless particularly dangerous.

They were strong enough and fast enough to flee immediately.

It wasn't that the four hunters feared a toad, but that any commotion within the forest would surely attract the attention of more beasts in the vicinity. The fight might have devolved into a free-for-all, and it would have become much more difficult for the members of Team Zenith to reunite. Even so, it was too late.

The toad's croaks were like thunder, visibly causing the hunters of Team Zenith to shake.

Howling winds began to blow. The toad opened its mouth wide, forming a hurricane of incredible magnitude. All the ancient trees in the vicinity bent and cracked. Many were uprooted wholesale.

A few of the hundred-meter-long giant snakes and avians were startled by the commotion. Displeased, they took to the air.

A blood-red whip struck them and whisked them away into the golden toad's mouth: its tongue.

"They were eaten just like that?" Yang Ze exclaimed. He sucked in a deep breath, then shrouded the hunters in layers of space, isolating them from the outside world.

Yang Ze knew how difficult of an opponent the toad would be, and he wanted to avoid it as much as possible.

Even Zhang Lie wasn't superior to Yang Ze when it came to techniques related to hiding and running away.

The four hunters strode deeper into the forest, finding mountains turned to rubble and lakes that were completely dried up. They searched for remnant weapons and treasures that might have been left behind.

Deep within the lake, crimson, blood-red rays of light pierced through the air. It was as though sunlight had struck a glittering pool of blood.

The unusual phenomenon was a sure sign of treasure.

Many cultivators rushed over, igniting a commotion.

By the time the four hunters made it there, some cultivators had already ventured deep inside. There was an island in the middle of the lake, wreathed in fog and glowing blood-red. A door of light was visible on the island, resplendent as could be.

Yang Ze turned to the others. "Should we go have a look?"

Zhang Lie was about to say something when the door of light rippled. A figure emerged, and the four hunters' eyes widened.

Zhou Ying's long hair fluttered in the wind, the color of crystalline jade. It gave off motes of vitality. She was so beautiful no one could take their eyes away, and golden leaves whirled around her. The tips of her hair produced gray fog.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yang Ze laughed. "What a surprise."

"Looks like Zhou Ying went on her own adventure, too." Zhang Lie smiled.

The four hunters were about to step forward when a figure appeared behind Zhou Ying.

The cultivator had white hair and a single horn protruding from his forehead. A pair of silvery-white wings sprouted to his back. He was a Holywing, and a particularly strong cultivator at that.

However, he wasn't in good shape at all right then and there. Bloodstains marred his body.

"Hand the treasure over. You don't have the qualifications to wield it!" he shouted at Zhou Ying.

"Rather bad-tempered, aren't you? You failed to trick me, and now you're trying to throw a temper. All you can do is use despicable tactics on your opponent. Do you really think me easy to bully?" Zhou Ying replied placidly.

Yang Ze frowned. "He seems somewhat familiar."

"You think so too?" Li Feng asked.

Zhang Lie said, "From his aura, it seems like he's related to the Holywing cultivator Zhou Ying faced during the qualifiers."

However, he was quite a few magnitudes stronger.

Chapter 1496: If You Want to Die

Zhou Ying scoffed. "Holywing, you say? Do you really think two chicken wings makes you an angel?"

"You dare!" the Holywing cultivator shouted. Two beams of silvery-white light shot out of his pupils. His wings unfurled, sending out a cascade of light. A frightening aura manifested around him.

"What, angered just by a few casual remarks?" Zhou Ying asked coolly.

The Holywing cultivator glared at her, saying not a word. Killing intent seeped out of his eyes; his smile was ice-cold.

"Do you really think you're impressive for having killed one of my clan during the qualifiers? He was middling at best."

"I pay off my debts and grudges alike. If you remain this recalcitrant, then I might as well send you on your way," Zhou Ying replied.

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

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

"If you want to die that badly, I'll grant you your wish!" the Holywing cultivator shouted. He unrolled a scroll depicting a frightening apocalypse.

Within moments, the contents of that scroll transcribed themselves in reality. Stars fell from the heavens and the sun itself exploded, swamping Zhou Ying in destruction.

Layers of wood dragons provided enhanced protection against the calamity. As the stars fell, the wood dragons splintered and shattered in a shower of shards, but Zhou Ying's boundless vitality and natural energy allowed them to regrow quickly. Solar fire immolated everything in sight as mist and fog formed around the island—no, that was superheated steam.

However, the solar flames were unable to harm the golden wood dragons. Zhou Ying had absorbed a golden mulberry tree in the past, endowing her creations with impressive resistance against fire, even solar fire.

Zhou Ying continued to protect herself with the wood dragons.

Fang Yi was about to charge forward when Zhang Lie stopped him. "Zhou Ying should be able to handle this opponent on her own."

The more pressing matter was the cultivators that were gathering around the site of the phenomenon. They were all aware that Zhou Ying possessed some incredible treasure, and were poised to strike at any moment.

Zhang Lie said, "The more urgent thing at present is to focus on the other cultivators in order to prevent any accidents from occurring."

The scroll glowed with light. A dragon's visage appeared in view, tearing apart a swathe of the wood dragons.

"[Storm of Leaves: Void Cut]!"

Zhou Ying made her move, clutching her dagger in one hand. She slashed at the void with her black dagger, beheading the dragon.

The scroll quivered. The falling stars and the blazing sun that had exploded vanished from sight. The scroll rolled itself up. A golden spear appeared in his hand, surrounded by arcing bolts of lightning. This was an attack that combined the elemental forces of gold and lightning.

"This will send you on your way!" the white-haired Holywing cultivator shouted, transforming into a blur as the golden light to his back took on the form of wings. He closed in on Zhou Ying within moments.

The Holywings were blessed with wings from birth, and they were able to reach incredible speed with them. The white-haired Holywing cultivator was so fast that it went against common sense.

"[Storm of Leaves: Fourfold Void Cut]!"

Zhou Ying was completely suppressed in terms of speed, and she was barely able to defend herself in time. Zhou Ying gripped a dagger with each hand, and the tendrils growing out of her lower body wrapped around two more. The daggers slashed through the void, and all four converged on the same spot. Like a whirling dervish, she spun in a tight corkscrew.

The two cultivators shouted simultaneously as they used all the tools at their disposal to strike at each other. Lightning flashed; the void trembled.

"Reverberate!" The Holywing cultivator's wings exploded with killing intent, illuminating the sky. The silvery-white wings transformed into a pair of crossed swords that slashed forward.

"How strong!" Zhou Ying gasped. "[Avatar of the Fae: Worldbound Enclosure]!"

Zhou Ying summoned tens of thousands of wood dragons from the ground, enough to fill up the entire battlefield. They were thrice as thick as before, and their barkskin shone with metallic luster.

The silvery-white swords cut through the wood dragons like a hot knife through butter.

Zhou Ying's vitality and the wood dragons' rapid regeneration weren't particularly effective against the Holywing cultivator.

The Holywing cultivator was fast and possessed a pair of swords with a keen edge. He was chopping apart large swathes of wood dragons within moments, then flew past before they could regenerate.

Zhou Ying unleashed her ultimate abilities. "[Storm of Leaves: Sixfold Void Cut]!"

Each of her tendrils held a void dagger. The six daggers struck as one, forming a sixfold cut in the air.

"Die!" the Holywing cultivator shouted. Blood dripped down from the single horn that protruded out of his forehead and landed on his blades, imbuing them with potent energy.

The blades grew even more monstrous.

"Hm?" Zhou Ying felt a breeze blowing by her face. A lock of black hair had been sliced away from her head, and her temples had barely avoided a critical injury. Drops of blood dripped down her face.

She had sustained a minor injury; the sword energy had cut her skin.

Green motes of light shone across her body, dotting the air like fireflies, as she recovered in the blink of an eye.

"[Avatar of the Fae: Galaxybound Enclosure]!"

A titanic burst of vitality and natural energy erupted from her, turning Zhou Ying into a facsimile of a goddess of nature, the princess of the forests. Huge wood dragons emerged from underground, each the size of a skyscraper. The island was filled with wood dragons and instantly transformed into a thick forest.

The Holywing cultivator reared back in surprise. The dense foliage constrained his speed, and the wood dragons attacked him en masse. For the moment, he was trapped.

"Die!" the Holywing cultivator yelled out.

Lightning obliterated what lay before him.

A tremendous flood of energy transformed into a lake of lightning, drenching the wood dragons before exploding. The wood dragons cried out as their bark splintered and cracked.

They soared through the air and pierced through the lake of lightning, surrounding it and encapsulating it with their bodies.

The blue lightning, however, refused to be corralled. It whizzed back and forth. Snakes of blue lightning wriggled out from the cracks in the wood dragons' defenses and through the clouds.

The lightning charred the wood dragons black, but Zhou Ying continuously infused her vitality and natural energy into them. The wood dragons quickly shed off their charred bark as they came back to life.

The Holywing cultivator was far stronger than Yi Shenghan had been; they were completely incomparable. Heaven and earth cracked, and the lakewater evaporated wholesale. The entire island seemed as though it were about to be destroyed.

Chapter 1497: Heaven's Blaze

The Holywing cultivator's golden lance surged with killing intent. His hair floated in the air, charged with static, as he flew toward her with a shield of lightning around him. The golden lance pierced through the wood dragons and the forest that they had formed.

Zhou Ying swooped forward, void rifts surrounding her body like wind.

The two combatants struck each other in a clash of metal.

Golden light flared as the lance pierced through Zhou Ying's forehead. Her features turned stiff as blood shot through the air.

The golden lance transformed back into a bolt of lightning and exploded.

Zhou Ying's body split apart into pieces, each charred black.

Someone sighed. "What a pity for a beauty like her..."

The Holywing cultivator preened proudly. "You should be proud of the fact that it took me over a hundred rounds of sparring to pierce you through the head—but unfortunately for you, I'm an existence you can never hope to best."

His spear thrust was a very clean attack.

Throughout the entire fight, Zhou Ying had pressured him to a significant extent, and it was difficult for someone of her stature to do as much. His final thrust that ended her, however, was a stroke of beauty that he could be proud of for a very long time.

Just as the Holywing cultivator was growing complacent in his pride, Zhou Ying's charred body transformed into a flurry of golden leaves.

"This—!"

The Holywing cultivator was startled.

"Do you think you can kill me within my domain? Who do you think I am?" Zhou Ying's voice came from all around the battlefield.

Within a horde of wood dragons, Zhou Ying had a near-absolute advantage. It was trivial for her to create a clone of herself.

The Holywing cultivator gaped. The wings to his back glowed and transformed into two divine swords, sweeping around him in a graceful arc and clearing the wood dragons in the vicinity.

"The other Holywing cultivator I faced in the qualifiers was tricked by this technique, too. You don't have a great memory, do you?"

Golden leaves fluttered through the air as dozens, hundreds of Zhou Yings appeared from within the forest.

The Holywing cultivator shouted and waved his divine wings in an even stronger sword slash.

The sword energy flowed like a river, transforming into a hurricane of blades. All the wood dragons around the island were obliterated.

"Don't just look at your opponent—but in front of you, above you, and even below you."

The earth crumbled as a black figure emerged from within—none other than Zhou Ying.

"[Storm of Leaves: Eightfold Void Cut]!" A tendril appeared to Zhou Ying's back, and another dagger manifested. Zhou Ying whirled like a dervish, corkscrewing into the air.

"[Heaven's Blaze]!"

The Holywing cultivator responded decisively, with blazing flames rising up from his body.

Blue lightning burst forth.

The black corkscrew pierced through the lightning. Eight void cuts landed on the Holywing cultivator and caused him to dissipate in a shower of light. Mental particles gathered on the back of Zhou Ying's palm.

Zhang Lie frowned. "Get ready!"

Before Zhou Ying could smile in victory, waves of energy pierced through the sky. A frightening attack swept across the heavens, targeting Zhou Ying from afar.

Zhou Ying, still buoyed by victory, was caught off guard by the attack. She blanched as the attack approached her in an unprepared state.

Zhang Lie and the others made their moves immediately.

Ripples of energy spread out from Zhang Lie, warping the space around him. The towering waves looked like enraged black dragons, flooding the area and striking the long-ranged attack.

As the waves burst apart, the air filled with echoes of Zhang Lie's signature genetic energy, shattering space and swallowing up all life in its vicinity.

A raging tide approached as four figures appeared by Zhou Ying's side, surrounding her from each of the cardinal directions.

Zhou Ying smiled in pleasant surprise. "Captain!"

Seeing the four figures around Zhou Ying, the cultivators that were raring to make a move had no choice but to hold back.

"Damn it, they're the stellar hunter's companions!"

"Apparently, they're very fearsome in a fight."

"They even managed to take down the Solarvine. They're all supposed to be very strong."

Zhou Ying smiled happily. "Captain, you've finally made it here!"

Zhang Lie said, "It looks like you managed to obtain some rare treasure within that portal."

"Have a look, Captain!" Zhou Ying retrieved a bone talisman that looked as though it were made of jade. It sparkled with mysterious energy.

Upon seeing that token, all the cultivators' eyes shone with greed.

"I do have to thank that Holywing. I unintentionally arrived by the island to find that Holywing present. He forced me to enter the portal with him and explore what lay within to trigger any traps that might be present."

Zhou Ying had had the ability to resist from the very beginning, but she too wanted to see what lay within. As such, she allowed the Holywing cultivator to order her around without much resistance. When she then found the bone talisman, the Holywing cultivator tried to attack her, only to find that she was no easy opponent to take down.

"Hehe, I was prepared to be backstabbed. The Holywing cultivator never expected that I would be so strong. You'd all have found his expression amusing, I'd expect."

Upon seeing Zhang Lie and the others, Zhou Ying visibly relaxed.

"We'll talk about the details later. Let's deal with the trouble before us first."

"Hand over that bone talisman!" The first cultivator that attacked was tall and slender, lithe and muscular, surrounded by fulgent light that hid their appearance. All that was revealed was a pair of electric eyes, the pupils of which were two glowing runes.

His posture alone differentiated him from a common cultivator. Runes flashed into existence around him.

His black hair was scattered, and he wielded a halberd of void. He looked down at the gathered spectators with pride and dominance, evoking fear in those whom his gaze met.

Zhang Lie and the others thought that the cultivator before them looked familiar, but they didn't recall where they had seen him before. The cultivators all around them shouted, "Isn't that the Immortal King's replacement?"

"To think that he would appear here himself..."

"No matter how strong the stellar hunters are, they might not be a match for the Immortal King's replacement."

Li Feng's eyes were clear and limpid, his skin and muscles radiant. He began to glow. "Captain, leave this opponent to me. I'd like to test out my newfound strength."

"Be careful." Zhang Lie and the other members of Team Zenith retreated.

The two cultivators locked gazes. Even before the fight started, the clash between their auras was sufficient to cause the ground to quake and the lake water to ripple. The beasts all around were startled; it felt as though a devastating fight was right on the horizon.

Li Feng narrowed his eyes and called out disdainfully, "The Immortal King's substitute? Ha!"

"I recognize you."

Chapter 1498: Chest Caved In

The halberd penetrated Li Feng's afterimage.

"I saw you fight against the ninth Immortal King. The same technique won't work on me."

Li Feng's illusions didn't seem to be effective; the Immortal King's substitute found Li Feng's true body near-immediately.

The halberd seemed to strike at Li Feng's neck with a spray of blood, shocking the spectators.

Was that blood? The head fell to the ground!

Everyone held their breath. If it were them in Li Feng's shoes, would they have survived that blow?

The spray of light spread out and diffused like a mist of blood.

The Immortal King's substitute had finished his opponent in just two consecutive strikes!

This was a true paragon of battle, whose prowess was so fearsome that the spectators shuddered in fear. Who could stand against him? He was invincible!

Wasn't that Li Feng's blood?

The spectators' hearts pumped.

"That was too fast. The Immortal King's substitute is truly invincible!"

Who could contend with him?

"It looks like the Immortal King's substitute might long since have surpassed the ninth Immortal King," a cultivator said. They might be witnessing a transformative moment in history, the end of an era.

"Someone who defeated the ninth Immortal King, only to have been defeated by his substitute... the Hall of Immortals must be shocked."

"No, you're all mistaken."

The blood was real, but Li Feng's head hadn't fallen off his body.

Li Feng had once fought the ninth Immortal King, and the Immortal King's substitute was from the same school of thought. Their techniques were particularly similar, and Li Feng was prepared to deal with them. He dodged to the side, the halberd whizzing barely an inch away from his neck. Li Feng caught it with his hand.

Any other cultivator would surely have been killed on the spot. This was what was frightening about the Immortal King's substitute, who was able to launch such blows in a flash.

Against such an opponent, the tricks of light and shadow that he had once used against the ninth Immortal King wouldn't have any effect.

Li Feng had predicted this possibility and hadn't banked on using his illusions to trick the Immortal King's substitute. He only had one path left: blocking his attacks directly.

Thanks to his experience fighting the ninth Immortal King, Li Feng was able to find the best opportunity to defend himself.

However, things still didn't go quite as planned. Even though he had successfully blocked the attack and protected his head, the explosive strength of the halberd had still hurt his arm. The fresh blood that the audience saw did come from Li Feng's body.

The Immortal King's substitute was incredibly strong. If the halberd had gone an inch deeper, Li Feng wasn't certain that he would have been able to protect his head.

The Immortal King's substitute himself was surprised to see Li Feng defending against his attack barehanded. "As expected of someone who managed to beat that fellow. You're more than qualified to be my opponent."

The halberd shone in blazing light. A phoenix unfurled its wings from around the halberd in a burst of bright flame, red as blood.

The phoenix soared up and looked down from high above.

The Immortal King's substitute attacked with tremendous strength. The blow was accompanied by a phoenix's shrill cry, a spiritual attack whose might could be felt even by the spectators. They sucked in a deep breath.

However, Li Feng was even faster.

"[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. The beam of light, shot through with metal-attuned genetic energy, struck the Immortal King's substitute.

The Immortal King's substitute was sent flying, fresh blood gushing out of his mouth, his chest caved in.

Chapter 1499: An Intense Clash

All the spectating cultivators were shocked to see that the Immortal King's substitute was the first to get injured in the short clash.

The Immortal King's substitute was already injured.

Light flashed from Li Feng's injured palm. The bleeding was staunched immediately, and the wound healed at a rate visible to the naked eye.

Thanks to the understanding of life-related natural law afforded by the silver-dragon lotuses, Li Feng's genetic energy now possessed some degree of healing capability.

Zhou Ying noted this point. Her eyes widened as she exclaimed, "Li Feng's able to use his light-attuned genetic energy to stimulate his vitality and accelerate his regeneration!"

"You'll pay a price for making me bleed."

The Immortal King's substitute snapped his fingers. The blood that had dripped from his body formed humanoid lifeforms held together by divine light, whose bones and tendons were reinforced by the arcane substance. Each was exceptionally strong, with at least half of the Immortal King's substitute's own combat ability.

The Immortal King's substitute swung his halberd around, forcing Li Feng to retreat as the silverblood entities struck at him.

"[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.

Although the silverblood entities possessed a considerable portion of the Immortal King's substitute's own strength, they fought solely on intuition or on their maker's commands. They didn't know any of the techniques that their maker did. An arclight dragon burst forth and swept away all the silverblood entities.

The Immortal King's substitute struck again, fast as lightning. The halberd shone in blazing light. A phoenix unfurled its wings from around the halberd in a burst of bright, blood-red flame.

The phoenix soared up and looked down from high above.

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

Concentrated light-attuned genetic energy surrounded Li Feng as it manifested certain properties of gold, condensing into a weapon.

The dragon's tooth and halberd clashed time and again in the sky. The two combatants fought vigorously as they illuminated everything in sight.

Li Feng attacked at full force.

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

The arclight imprint rapidly gathered, and a white dragon appeared behind him. As Li Feng punched forward, the dragon shot toward the hydra like a bullet from a sniper rifle. It left behind a starry trail, breathtakingly beautiful.

Bolstered by divine radiance, the Immortal King's substitute swung his halberd in a tight arc, raising it like a shield. It gave off silver and red light in a brilliant flare, like a phoenix's rebirth.

The blow was accompanied by a phoenix's shrill cry, a spiritual attack whose might could be felt even by the spectators. They sucked in a deep breath.

Starlight burst. The phoenix cried. The skies were dyed red, and stardust fell from the skies.

Lightning struck and thunder rumbled as bursts of fire peppered the sky like resplendent fireworks—the sparks and noise from two weapons clashing against each other.

"[Light's Bulwark: Earthbreak]!"

Li Feng's fists, glowing with light, were packed with huge quantities of light-attuned genetic energy.

They smashed into the ground in a massive explosion. All that energy headed in a certain direction. The ground cracked, and white light zigzagged forward.

Chapter 1500: Illuminating the Stars

Unbelievable! Everyone was shocked that Li Feng was able to suppress the Immortal King's substitute.

Each of the Immortal King's substitute's strikes were particularly accurate. With each slash of his halberd, he would take down one of the arclight dragons—and whenever a dragon died, it would release a radiant explosion.

The Immortal King's substitute forged onward against the tide of dragons coming at him in the opposite direction, braving the radiant explosions in his way.

Li Feng drew his blade and met his opponent with a clash of white light.

The sound of metal against metal echoed through the air as the ground quaked and split open. The lake water surged as lightning flashed through the air. Space distorted; even the light seemed to twist.

The spectators' ears buzzed as space distorted and lightning seemed to flash from the heavens. Radiance exploded in the air as the two cultivators clashed: the sparks from their weapons as they ground against each other, and the light that they produced.

"[Birth of the Holy Dragon]!"

Li Feng leapt high into the air and landed on the dragon's head, his sword gleaming brightly as though it had been dipped in liquid light. As he raised the sword to the skies, it glowed and expanded, morphing into a huge blade of light.

The blade parted the clouds and lit up the entire patch of void. At that very moment, Li Feng looked like a god descending from the heavens.

He sent his light-imbued sword arcing through the air.

The Immortal King's substitute swung his halberd, accompanied by the cry of a phoenix. He was encapsulated by the outline of a phoenix as divine light flared from him. He shot forward.

The spectators watched on with bated breath.

From the very beginning, they had met each other weapon for weapon. There was no need for words. The blistering pace enraptured the spectators.

The continuous clash was almost impossible to bear; the spectators felt as though their eardrums were close to bursting. Radiant light emanated, accompanied by frightening mist that seemed like chaotic energy.

The clash was like a heavenly tribulation.

After the violent confrontation, the arclight dragon exploded, and a scar was left on the Immortal King's substitute's body.

Li Feng's arms were sore and numb, but he believed that his opponent was suffering just as much as he was. His opponent's eyes flashed in deep surprise.

"You're strong,"

the Immortal King's substitute murmured. His black hair draped around his shoulders, and his whole body was shielded with divine light. He looked like an immortal descending from the heavens, invincible and without compare.

He defended against Li Feng's strongest attacks with ease, even despite the shock in his eyes. He was calm and collected, as though everything was within his control.

"But you are not stronger than me," the Immortal King's substitute asserted, then struck again.

With another ear-splitting clash, Li Feng's arms went numb, and the flap of skin between thumb and forefinger began to bleed. Li Feng sucked in a deep breath. This was a difficult opponent indeed.

He stared at the opponent's palms, wanting to see if he too were bleeding. However, the Immortal King's substitute's flesh was shrouded in golden light, and he couldn't see a thing.

Regardless, Li Feng believed that it was indeed the case.

The clash of metal continued to ring out as the fight continued intensely.

"[Birth of the Holy Dragon]!"

Li Feng yelled out. He pulled out a blade from which light began to gather. As he struck, dozens of dragons fell from the skies like meteors.

Starlight shaded the sky, resplendent and dazzling.

The Immortal King's substitute's halberd turned blood-red as a phoenix took to the air, its feathers a lurid red. It gave off a blazing ruby light that clashed against the sword technique in the air. Golden light shone bright, and silver light scattered. Li Feng's arclight dragons keened.

Brave and fierce, Li Feng continued fighting, longsword in hand.

The clash of metal shook the very heavens. By now, the combatants had exchanged over sixty blows.

With a whir, the void resonated as the halberd vanished, tearing apart a layer of space and suddenly appearing by the joint of Li Feng's arm, as if about to cripple him.

Li Feng drew his sword back as white light shot into the heavens, dazzling and flecked with gold, resplendent and beautiful. It blocked the blow and resolved the danger.

Li Feng counterattacked.

"[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. The beam of light, shot through with metal-attuned genetic energy, struck the Immortal King's substitute.

The phoenix soared into the air, red as blood, shining with golden light in a scene of surprising beauty. It blocked the blow and resolved the danger.

The divine light emerged once more as the resplendent halberd swung in a loop, forming an eternal sun.

Li Feng's gaze was severe as infinite radiance blossomed.

"[Birth of the Holy Dragon: Arclight Slash]!"

Li Feng lifted his sword high above his head. A silvery-white dragon emerged from behind him, merged with the sword, and sent a beam of light piercing the skies. Li Feng struck, and the sword slash morphed into a dragon.

The sudden, intense battle that took place over the course of just a few seconds left the spectators bewildered. Their eyes couldn't process the information fast enough, let alone their brains. Many of

the cultivators present were certain they wouldn't be able to last even a few seconds if they were part of the fight.

The Immortal King's substitute hadn't seemed to be suppressed by Li Feng. His gaze turned ardent. Strands of hair flew in the wind. He looked like a god coming down from heaven, invincible and deific.

As he breathed out, he launched into motion, spurring forth his void halberd.

"[Void Slash]!"

The spectators were yelling in shock at the amazing sight.

Zhang Lie and the others recognized the technique instantly.

"This skill, too? As expected of a successor of the Hall of Immortals..."

Chen Feng, whom they had faced earlier, could hardly compare.

The void halberd gleamed like crystal as it gave off immense energy. As the Immortal King's substitute slashed at the arclight dragons, the void split apart and ignited a large explosion.

All the spectators stepped back instinctively, worried that the virtual realm might crash again. The arclight dragons burst apart and the void collapsed. Spatial rifts formed all over the island.

Someone sucked in a deep breath. "It's weaker than the ninth Immortal King's technique, but it's more than a worthy Void Slash."

Compared to the ninth Immortal King, whom Li Feng had once fought, the Immortal King's substitute's technique was slightly weaker. Regardless, its strength was still immense.

The Immortal King's substitute made seals with his hands and spurred forth lightning. A huge bolt of lightning shot into the air like a dancing dragon, a phoenix of purple flame.

A few figures in the distance were too slow to react. Struck by the lightning, they were instantly charred black and fell to the ground.

"[Birth of the Holy Dragon]!"

Dozens of sword slashes emanated from Li Feng, each with a starry splendor reminiscent of the Milky Way. The stars in the night sky shone brightly as a galaxy seemed to unfold around Li Feng.

The starlight was so splendid that it would make any onlookers dizzy. It tore apart the lightning, the dancing dragon, the phoenix of purple flame. Dozens of resplendent beams shot toward his opponent.

"Break!" The Immortal King's substitute sounded like a deity that had descended to the mortal world. His void halberd trembled violently as it tore the void apart. A cross-shaped scar appeared in the air.