

U. Warlord 1511

Chapter 1511: Come at Me Together

Chi Chi howled, "Aren't you just relying on the strength of your weapon? That's not your strength at all, but your weapon's strength instead! I dare you not to use that sword!"

"Very well."

Zhang Lie sheathed Guicang. The stellar dragon that was pursuing Chi Chi vanished. To be frank, he wouldn't have to use Guicang to deal with Chi Chi. Chi Chi was simply too weak; he talked as though he was far stronger than he really was.

Chi Chi grinned. Internally, he thought to himself, "What a fool!"

He had sheathed his sword just because his opponent told him not to use it.

That sword was the reason for his strength, after all. Without that sword around, he would hardly be able to do anything.

"Learn to be smarter in your next life!"

Chi Chi blazed with flames. His malevolent features were illuminated by crimson flames as sura emerged from hell. Like incandescent meteors, they shot through the sky and headed straight for 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.

The black genetic energy surged all around him. The darkness of the night instantly claimed the firelight over Chi Chi's body, and the pitch-black genetic energy and stellar energy quickly corroded his body. They seeped into his blood and flesh and began to dissolve it all. Chi Chi was in such pain that he writhed on the ground, his face screwed up. Zhang Lie punched forward and knocked him flying.

Zhang Lie sneered. "Say what you said again."

Chi Chi clutched his face. The corrosion of Zhang Lie's genetic energy had left half his face melted off, making him look even more sinister than he had been. He shouted, "Yao Long, Jinyang Hua, how long are you going to keep watching? Are you really going to watch me die?!"

To be frank, Yao Long and Jinyang Hua were perfectly willing and even happy for Zhang Lie to kill Chi Chi, but they were currently enemies of Zhang Lie at present.

If he were to kill Chi Chi, they would surely be next.

Yao Long widened her mouth and transformed into a beam of purple light that shot around Zhang Lie.

Jinyang Hua's foot touched the ground as golden radiance spread throughout the sky. All around Zhang lie, golden lotuses bloomed like a golden ocean that illuminated the heavens and trapped Zhang Lie.

Chi Chi lifted his scarlet ruler up high and soared into the sky.

The three cultivators struck simultaneously, acting in sync with barely any interruption in their flow.

Zhang Lie reached out for purple light with his palms. Stars seemed to spin over his palm, tearing apart the purple light by force. The starlight dissipated and formed a stellar river. Black, pitch-black energy spread into the land all around and began to devour the golden lotuses.

"Kill!"

As the fighting commenced in earnest, the three of them ganging up on Zhang Lie, Zhang Lie showed no signs of retreating. He forged forward bravely and fought on equal terms with the three cultivators. His attacks were simple, domineering, and effective. As his aura swelled to titanic proportions, he unleashed a tremendous frontal assault.

He punched forward with a fist, striking the blood-colored ruler directly and knocking it flying in a bolt of blood lightning.

Zhang Lie's palm seemed to be filled with infinite starlight, forming a galaxy, a stellar river. His black hair danced in the wind, and lightning flashed in his eyes. His blood roiled with energy. He was only a single cultivator, but his aura seemed to have expanded to fill the heavens.

The blood ruler was sent flying against as it hummed in protest.

Zhang Lie looked up and punched forward once more. The void shattered.

Chi Chi was unable to protect himself even with the blood ruler activated. It was sent flying as he vomited out blood.

Half his body had cracked apart from the force of Zhang Lie's blow. The radiant cultivator shot forward with another punch.

Heaven and earth alike resonated as Chi Chi burst into mental fragments.

The blood ruler shattered under the force of Zhang Lie's assault. Its fragments shone with intense, bloody light.

The sinister light coalesced into a blow of epic proportions that caused heaven and earth to quake. It was thousands of times more intense than the blow that Chi Chi had unleashed with the relic.

Someone had sealed a single, incredible attack within the ruler. Once the relic was broken, that attack would activate immediately.

Even Yao Long and Jinyang Hua were struck by the attack.

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

Zhang Lie punched forward. The black serpent behind him shot forth and erupted amidst the bloody light. The dark clouds dispersed as the night swallowed up the light. Within moments, the light was completely devoured.

Zhang Lie whirled around and eyed the women.

"Take him down together!" the purple-robed cultivator shouted. She really was starting to get afraid of Zhang Lie.

She began to panic. Fear filled her face.

Even the golden lotuses scattered through the floor were unable to block the attack. It broke through even her purple light.

The blood ruler erupted with authority. Zhang Lie might not be aware of the history of the relic, but she was. The attack that had been stored in the relic had been done by a cultivator far beyond her might, close to his prime—but even so, Zhang Lie had handled it easily.

He was too frightening a foe.

The purple-robed woman transformed into her true appearance, a giant purple dragon.

She had not the oppressive aura of an ordinary dragon, but rather some sort of demonic aura instead.

The next moment, Zhang Lie waved his arm about, using the edge of his palm as a sword, resplendent and shining. Before Yao Long could make a move, her head had flown into the air, accompanied by a huge burst of blood, as she transformed into a rain of light.

"What?!"

Zhang Lie saw a bone talisman within that rain of light.

It was warm and lustrous, as though it were made of jade. It sparkled with mysterious energy.

Zhang Lie reached out for the bone talisman as the cultivators behind him watched on with envy and jealousy.

Even with three of them working together—Yao Long, Chi Chi, and Jinyang Hua—even with Chi Chi's blood ruler, none of that had any impact on Zhang Lie.

Jinyang Hua shuddered in fear. The moment the purple-clad woman had revealed her true appearance, so too did she. She transformed into a huge sunflower.

However, Zhang Lie had struck too rapidly. Within the blink of an eye, he had finished off Yao Long without giving her any chance to retaliate.

Jinyang Hua knew that she would only end up like Yao Long if she didn't resist, killed in a single strike without realizing what was going on.

The sunflower emitted piercing light, like hundreds of lamps all shining in unison.

The entire sky was dyed golden. The golden light erupted and shot forth.

It was as though the sunflower was in the middle of a superheated sun. Within the light were countless miniature suns.

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

Zhang Lie's genetic energy condensed into a black dragon, whose scales were each a star.

The stars inlaid in its body formed a long stellar river, shining with twinkling stars, which transformed into a dragon that shot out alongside Zhang Lie's punch.

Struck by the miniature suns, the stellar dragon was battered and bruised.

Chapter 1512: Been Delayed

Jinyang Hua smiled in relief, her leaves trembling.

Zhang Lie really wasn't as strong as she had expected. With her true form, she could pose a challenge to him.

The next moment, Jinyang Hua realized that she was badly mistaken.

The moment the stellar dragon was destroyed, a wave of annihilation exploded around the dragon. Pitch-black energy swallowed everything in the vicinity like a storm at sea, covering up the sky.

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

The miniature suns fed the energy of annihilation, causing the black hole to expand rapidly.

Countless small suns appeared around Jinyang Hua, rooting themselves and growing to become sunflowers.

The golden light and sunflowers seemed to establish a domain. Jinyang Hua used that domain to seal space and prevent the energy of annihilation from growing at will and destroying everything in sight.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring]!"

A horde of dragons launched out of Zhang Lie's left arm as he expended half his genetic energy in one supercharged attack.

Howling with the force of thunder, the hundred stellar dragons soared through the air. The sunflowers' petals scattered through the air as the domain was rapidly shattered by the assault of Zhang Lie's dragons.

Jinyang Hua howled in rage. The sunflowers burned. The golden light grew even more blinding as the pretty patch of sunflowers transformed into a flaming golden sea.

The flaming golden sea burned heaven and earth. The stellar dragon shattered, and waves of annihilation exploded around the dragon like a tempest. Hundreds of such waves devoured the whole sea of golden flames.

Even Jinyang Hua's domain was unable to prevent the incursion of the tempest. The domain was gradually devoured.

Jinyang Hua knew that she was no opponent for Zhang Lie. Against such a powerful cultivator like him, even turning to run was an extravagance that she couldn't afford. Within a dense patch of sunflower seeds, Jinyang Hua spat out a single one.

The sunflower seed burst apart, pierced through by the light. Within was a bone talisman with which Zhang Lie was intimately familiar.

It was warm and lustrous, as though it were made of jade. It sparkled with mysterious energy.

It was a bone talisman that would allow passage into the heart of the tournament.

Their mysterious client had given each of the cultivators participating in the joint assault against Zhang Lie a treasure.

Chi Chi had gained a blood ruler of incredible might, with one of the client's own attacks sealed within.

It showed how devious and unscrupulous their client was.

Their client had known or expected that the cultivators wouldn't be able to deal with Zhang Lie and his group, so he encapsulated his strength within a blood ruler that he handed to them. Once they failed and the blood ruler shattered, the attack within would devour everyone. However, Zhang Lie's extreme strength went beyond even his expectations.

Chi Chi clearly intended to take advantage of the blood ruler's strength—not only to kill Zhang Lie, but also to steal what the rest of them had obtained from the client.

Jinyang Hua, like Yao Long and the majority of the cultivators, had chosen a bone talisman rather than a relic.

This wasn't it, either. If the client's undertaking was successful, they would all be richly rewarded in the future as well.

These promises were what had ultimately enticed them to act.

Upon seeing the bone talismans, the cultivators' eyes widened.

Against a cultivator as powerful as Zhang Lie, Jinyang Hua tasted a sense of helplessness she had never felt before. She tried to run with her bone talisman, but Zhang Lie was even faster than she was. He pierced through the storm of annihilation and caught the bone talisman with a hand.

With her life-saving bone talisman seized, Jinyang Hua let out a chilling screech. The sunflower seeds radiated with golden light even more splendid than the sun itself, but against Zhang Lie, all resistance was futile.

Zhang Lie punched forward with a fist, crushing the giant sunflowers and the suns they encapsulated. They exploded in the air. Even the translucent crystalline barrier began to quake. The cultivators that were in the safe zone, noticing the commotion, gathered to see what was going on.

Zhang Lie reached out and grabbed what remained of the giant sunflower and pulled it open, tearing it apart as Jinyang Hua screamed. A huge wave of energy enveloped the realm, and even the crystalline barrier began to crack.

Zhang Lie had torn Jinyang Hua apart with his bare hands.

The moment he killed Jinyang Hua, the cultivators behind him struck at once.

Zhang Lie had obtained two more bone talismans during the fight just now, and he now had five bone talismans in all. That was a quantity that was sufficient to make any cultivator go crazy.

Zhang Lie met the field of cultivators with a body glowing with light. Each punch struck flesh; each palm drew blood. The cultivators burst apart one after another, killed to the last.

His fists shone with light, his blood like a raging ocean. Zhang Lie alone stood in the center of the battlefield, corpses shattering into light all around him. Everyone had been killed.

The cultivators safely ensconced in the safe zone goggled. Their souls trembled. What sort of power and strength was this?

Dozens of cultivators had fallen to Zhang Lie in an instant; this was a one-sided slaughter.

"Captain, it's time to go."

Zhang Lie crushed the last cultivator's head, then looked over at the heavenly cordon that was right about to envelop them.

Zhang Lie and the four other members of Team Zenith flew toward the safe zone. It was right before their eyes, and they would easily be able to make it. Yang Ze took out what he had obtained from his opponent in order to flaunt it.

It was a bone talisman, warm and lustrous, as though it were made of jade. It sparkled with mysterious energy.

He had snatched a bone talisman from his opponent, too.

Now, Team Zenith possessed six bone talismans. Every member of the team would be able to head into the central region.

Zhang Lie smiled. "Once we find Sun Mengmeng, we'll be able to teleport directly into the heart of the tournament."

Yang Ze smiled. "Haha, we might not know who tried to kill us, but that person really helped us out, didn't they? Sending us three free bone talismans—why, I don't know how to thank them enough."

Zhou Ying said worriedly, "I wonder what happened to Sun Mengmeng..."

"According to the queen's hive soulshard, she's right on the other side of the safe zone," Zhang Lie replied.

"She got into the safe zone before we did? As expected of Sun Mengmeng!"

Yang Ze shrugged. "We were delayed by all manner of affairs. Under ordinary circumstances, we should have made it into the safe zone relatively easily ourselves."

The crystal barrier was right before them, no more than a hundred meters away.

To an ordinary person, that might still be a considerable distance, but for hunters like Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith, it was a distance that could be crossed by a single breath. Suddenly, however, countless attacks swarmed them from across the crystal barrier.

Zhang Lie cleaved all the attacks with his sword, establishing a path forward.

Chapter 1513: Affects the Balance

On the other side of the crystal barrier, the cultivators already gathered in the safe zone were attacking Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith.

Perhaps because of fear, or because of the exceptional performance that Zhang Lie and the four members of Team Zenith had demonstrated, the competitors wanted to get rid of their opponents.

Despite the fact that the cultivators on the other side of the crystal barrier would ordinarily be prideful individuals, they were currently all cooperating to attack Zhang Lie and the four members of Team Zenith.

All of those who could make it into the safe zone had to have at least a base level of strength. Clearly, the cultivators on the other side of the safe zone were stronger than those that Zhang Lie had just killed.

Under ordinary circumstances, Zhang Lie wouldn't be worried, but the heavenly cordon was rapidly catching up from behind.

The second wave of attacks headed toward them. Zhang Lie and the others made their moves.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!"

Zhang Lie manifested a sword will that rose into the heavens, strong beyond human understanding, vast as the ocean.

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

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

The spectators found their souls trembling.

Heaven and earth resonated with the will of the sword and the aura of the godlike being within the sun. A deep scar was left on the crystal barrier.

The cultivators on the other side of the crystal barrier were even more frightened. They shouted shrilly, "We can't let these fellows in! If they make it past the safe zone, we surely won't make it into the finals!"

"They're affecting the balance of the competition. We can't let them remain alive!"

"This is our only chance to kill them. Once they enter the safe zone, we're done for!"

"We've already made a move, so we can't turn back now. If they enter the safe zone, they'll surely target us."

The cultivators on the other side of the safety barrier all struck as one. Their attacks formed a rainbow river of resplendent energy.

"[Light Dragon's Remnants]!"

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

Countless golden leaves whirled around Zhou Ying's body and flew into the air in a tempest, clashing against the barrage of techniques heading their way.

With a low shout, Fang Yi dashed forward with his spear in hand.

Golden lightning surrounded his spear, lightning that was infused with gold-attuned genetic energy. The entire spear turned a gleaming gold, bolstered by wind. Its offensive abilities were greatly augmented, as if the spear itself had been enchanted.

Fang Yi launched his spear, crackling with wind and lightning, with incredible force.

The golden spear sent wind howling and lightning flashing through the sky.

With his spear, he invoked chaotic energy in the form of lightning and raging wind. The spear left a dozen afterimages in its wake as it clashed against the techniques.

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

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

A stellar river materialized in the air. As though the doors to hell had just been thrown open, tens of thousands of serpents rushed out in a flood.

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

As Zhang Lie's sword swung down, the stellar river struck the mortal world.

The noise shook heaven and earth. Each serpent fell like a sharp blade, a meteor that struck the barrage of techniques headed their way.

"Victory is right before us. We have to keep pushing!"

The cultivators in the safe zone struck at full force, ignoring their expenditure of stamina and energy.

Yang Ze whirled around. "We have to hurry!"

The heavenly cordon had made its way over.

The competitors in the safe zone, sensing that their gambit might be successful, that no one would be able to survive such a dense barrage of attacks. Fortunately for Team Zenith, their opponents wouldn't be able to sustain such high-intensity attacks for long. As long as Zhang Lie and the four members of Team Zenith could survive the initial barrage, they would be able to make it into the safe zone.

Unfortunately, the heavenly cordon was right behind them, and they wouldn't be able to wait until the competitors on the other side of the crystal barrier were drained of energy.

Just as they thought that Team Zenith had all perished, purple flames lit up the sky and dyed the crystal barrier purple.

Three arrows, brimming with purple flame, flew forward like tracking missiles. exploding in mid-air among the cultivators in a brilliant burst of fireworks.

The cultivators shrieked, their formation broken.

They shouted, "A traitor! A traitor!"

"Sun Mengmeng!"

Although none of them had seen Sun Mengmeng make her move, the familiar purple flames and technique made the identity of the 'traitor' clear.

Sun Mengmeng had to be the one who had struck on the other end of the crystal barrier.

She then launched a second attack.

"[Lunarflame Shot]!"

Countless arrows of purple flame shot out of her bow like a meteor shower that tinted the air purple and gave the battlefield a phantasmagorical appearance. The air turned dry and arid, as though a cataclysm was nigh.

The cultivators on the other end of the crystal barrier were ill-equipped to deal with a sneak attack. They were instantly on guard against each other as they avoided the flaming purple meteors. In the end, they were all competitors themselves, and they would never be able to remain steadfast allies.

With their attacks having weakened in scale and scope, Zhang Lie immediately took the opportunity to strike.

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

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

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

Chapter 1514: You Can Try It

One of the cultivators on the other end of the crystal barrier discovered Sun Mengmeng. She shouted, "It's that woman with the bow! We have to deal with her first!"

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

From afar, stellar dragons seemed to roar. The pitch-black dragons were like the night sky made manifest. Thunder and lightning crackled in the air.

Dragons unfurled their wings amidst a storm of lightning. The auroras stretched on for thousands of miles, so beautiful they captivated the gathered hunters.

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

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

The sea had morphed into a boundless battlefield. The sea breeze was as a horn to action, and the serpents, thousands of courageous soldiers heeding its call.

The heavens shook as all things hummed in resonance. Boulder after boulder exploded, even those tens of thousands of tons heavy. The ripples that emanated from the dragon's keening easily sparked a resonant decomposition.

With a stellar dragon paving the way, Zhang Lie rushed forward with the members of Team Zenith.

"Those fellows outside are going to rush in! We can't deal with that woman right now!"

Upon noticing that Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith were again drawing near, the cultivators on the other side of the crystal barrier again worked together to launch attacks out toward them.

A huge netherworld sea blocked all the attacks as the stellar dragon rushed forward. The heavenly cordon closed in from behind as pale blue lightning and winds interspersed. The spatial pressure left Team Zenith's movement speed greatly reduced. They felt as though a mountain were weighing them down as they continued forward, the power of the heavenly cordon draining their strength.

The cultivators on the other side of the barrier were overjoyed. Hardly anyone could survive after being caught within the heavenly cordon.

"Haha, they're dead meat!"

The heavenly cordon advanced alongside Zhang Lie and the others. They were moments from being devoured.

Yang Ze shouted, causing ripples around his body to spread to the other members of Team Zenith. The spatial suppression was greatly weakened.

Meanwhile, Sun Mengmeng was unleashing her full repertoire as well.

"[Baptism of Hellfire: Full Moon]!"

Sun Mengmeng whirled her daggers all around her as a black moon rose into the air.

The black moon blazed, fire spreading like moonlight and disrupting the competitors on the far side of the crystal barrier from launching any more follow-up attacks.

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

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

The dragon's howls shook heaven and earth. The stellar energy that filled the battlefield transformed into a massive stellar dragon that took to the skies. The members of Team Zenith rushed forward, shattering the spatial restrictions that bound them as they flew out of the heavenly cordon and smashed into and through the crystal barrier.

The huge commotion caused the entire safe zone to quake. The crystal barrier shook violently.

Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith had made it within.

The crystal barrier would keep the heavenly cordon at bay for at least the short term.

The cultivators within the safe zone shuddered in fear upon seeing Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith enter their sanctuary—not only because they were able to escape the heavenly cordon despite having been mired deep within, but also because they were aware of their strength and had attacked them.

The cultivators in the safe zone retreated warily as Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith found a wide-open space before them.

"If you hadn't attacked us out of nowhere, how would they have made it in?!"

Many of the competitors glared at Sun Mengmeng angrily.

Zhang Lie narrowed his gaze. "It sounds almost as though you were planning to trap us outside."

The cultivators shuddered.

"Well, you've already made it in, so it doesn't matter, does it...?"

Zhang Lie smiled coldly.

"Let's say I were to stab you but failed to kill you. Should we treat it as though I never stabbed you?"

The cultivators retreated.

"Don't try anything funny! You've already had several huge fights outside the safe zone. You must have expended much of your energy already. Fighting with us would be an unwise decision."

"Right, think about how many people are on our side and how much effort it took you to even make it in here. Do you really think you can win against all of us despite being exhausted?"

"Let's try it and see, then."

Zhang Lie raised his sword high overhead. Bright sword energy radiated from him like brilliant rays of sunlight, illuminating the entirety of the world.

"[First Form: Parting the River]!"

A frightening force spread out from Zhang Lie, energy rumbling and rippling around him. As Zhang Lie swung the blade in his hand, a huge slash of sword energy shot toward them. The cultivators blanched as they turned to flee.

Who would want to fight against someone like Zhang Lie?

As the sword energy swept across the heavens, many cultivators fell from the sky.

"[Shadow and Light]!" Zhang Lie whirled around. Time suddenly sped up in the vicinity of Zhang Lie. His sword flashed time and time again, sweeping across the backs of the fleeing cultivators. By the time they reacted, they were heavily injured and starting to dissolve into fragments of light.

Zhang Lie overtook the gathered cultivators and appeared before them. He shouted coldly, "Where do all of you think you're headed?"

The cultivators stopped short, their faces pale.

"We can't flee anymore. He must have expended a great deal of energy to free himself from the heavenly cordon. If we work together, we might have a chance against him, or we're dead!"

The cultivators banded together.

"Do you think numbers will work against me?"

A pitch-black sun appeared behind Zhang Lie, and a blood moon by his feet. His aura was magnified tenfold, and a halo of black sun appeared above his forehead. Natural law seemed to warp around him.

"A bunch of small fry working together is still just small fry."

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

"[Syzygy]!"

Everyone's energy was drained as Zhang Lie's was magnified.

Chapter 1515: Gathering Once Again

The cultivators cried out, "What have you done to us?!"

They could sense something strange happening to them.

Zhang Lie crossed his twin blades. The blood moon resonated with the blade in his left hand, and the black sun with the blade in his right.

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

The cultivators deeply regretted having provoked someone like Zhang Lie.

The battle ended in the blink of an eye. Four hunters of Team Zenith had expended the majority of their reserves; only Sun Mengmeng and Zhang Lie had spare energy left.

The cultivators, unable to defend against their overwhelming might, spread out and ran, but Sun Mengmeng and Zhang Lie took down the majority of them in one fell swoop.

Zhou Ying rushed up in excitement and grabbed Sun Mengmeng's hands.

"Sun Mengmeng, you're finally here! You don't know just how harrowing our experience was. We had all manner of fighting over the last few days. It's been tough."

Yang Ze rolled his eyes. "It was worse at the start, let me tell you that."

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Just what happened to all of you? You were chased by a group of cultivators, and then another group blocked your path!"

Li Feng replied, "As far as we know, those were two different groups."

"We were chased because of the bone talismans," Yang Ze added.

Li Feng shrugged. "As for the group blocking our way, we don't know how we offended them, or what we did to deserve that."

Zhang Lie headed over. "At any rate, we didn't lose out. We now have six bone talismans in our possession."

"What are these bone talismans?" Sun Mengmeng asked.

Yang Ze explained the situation briefly as Sun Mengmeng nodded in understanding. "No wonder all of you were being chased."

Li Feng turned to Zhang Lie. "Captain, what are our next steps?"

"Let's rest for a moment," Zhang Lie replied. "After a few major fights, I'm sure everyone's tired. We can hand the two remaining pupae to Zhou Ying and Sun Mengmeng, then head straight into the heart of this realm."

"We'd miss a few resources that way," Li Feng replied.

"There has to be a reason that some cultivators suddenly appeared to stall us. Although I don't have any evidence, I keep thinking back to the black-robed man who rescued the Immortal King's substitute. I feel like he's particularly sinister, and might do something untoward at the heart of this realm."

"I agree with our captain's proposal."

Everyone turned to Sun Mengmeng, who had just spoken. Sun Mengmeng pointed toward the hole in the crystal barrier left behind from Zhang Lie's attack as they sought entry through it, which was steadily expanding.

"The crystal barrier likely won't last for long," Sun Mengmeng continued.

"Let's find a place to rest and prepare to advance to the heart, then. I have a feeling we'll have a major battle up ahead," Zhang Lie said.

The safe zone wasn't particularly large, but the hunters managed to find a spot that was particularly defensible. They rested to recover their mental and genetic energy, all of them being exhausted from the multiple days of fighting. Sun Mengmeng, who had the least expenditure, guarded the other hunters as they rested.

Then, Zhang Lie handed the remaining two pupae to Zhou Ying and Sun Mengmeng.

Zhou Ying frowned. "It looks like the lifeforce within has been damaged..."

"It must have been from the shockwaves from our attacks as we fought to make it through the crystal barrier."

"I can attempt to heal them with natural energy, but whether it'll work will depend on the lifeforms within."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Natural energy condensed, combining with the pupae's innate vitality. They shone like two pieces of jade, giving off green motes of light as though they were surrounded by fireflies. The light wasn't eye-catching, but seemed to provide a gentle warmth.

Quickly, all that natural energy receded once more. Zhang Lie asked, "How is it?"

Zhou Ying shook her head. "The two lifeforms within these pupae aren't organic in origin. Someone used their own intuition—or knowledge, say—to create them within this special realm. They might as well be knowledge constructs rather than true life."

Yang Ze frowned. "So did it work or not? I don't quite understand what you said."

"Put simply, the pupae aren't living beings as we know them. Although the cultivation insights they embody are similar to mine, they're not the same. I wasn't able to heal them much."

Yang Ze rolled his eyes. "So you wasted your efforts?"

Zhou Ying shook her head. "Not quite. At the very least, they're better off than before."

Zhang Lie broke them off. "Alright. Why don't you split them among yourselves now?"

Zhou Ying held the two pupae up to Sun Mengmeng. "Which would you like, Sun Mengmeng?"

Sun Mengmeng casually chose one of the two. In a flash of purple flames, a bug appeared from the pupa, about the size of her arm. It was burning with purplish-black flame in the shape of a phoenix.

The phoenix floated in the air, mysterious but palpably strong.

Just as Zhou Ying had promised, despite still being a bug monarch, the bug that had emerged from Sun Mengmeng's pupa was evidently more powerful than the bug monarchs that Yang Ze and the others had obtained. It was at least half a step toward a bug emperor.

It attempted to run the moment it saw Sun Mengmeng, but was unable to escape from her grasp.

Zhang Lie said, "Consuming this bug monarch should have a noticeable impact."

"I have to eat this?"

Sun Mengmeng frowned, somewhat resistant to the notion of eating bugs. Yang Ze said, "You can wait until you get hurt before you consume it."

"I'd rather eat it now. I'd feel even worse if I had to eat it after being injured."

Sun Mengmeng had eaten all manner of vile lifeforms in the dimensional realm; this wasn't any worse.

She opened her lips wide and swallowed the bug monarch whole, wrinkling her nose as if she had just ingested some vile-tasting medicine.

Chapter 1516: Zhou Ying's Evolution

At the heart of the ancient palace, a beam of light shot into the sky and pierced through the heavens. The ground cracked; the central pillar was surrounded by countless chains of natural law that linked the entire realm.

The man in a dark green robe sat on a flight of steps, eyes glowing with frightening light. He looked agitated. "I'll quickly be able to obtain the most valuable treasure of this virtual world, the largest inheritance, and recover my peak strength once more."

Before him lay the Immortal King's substitute, who had fully recovered from his injuries and even grown stronger beyond that. The Holywing's silver wings were outstretched and blazing even more brightly than before. There was a youth dressed in green, floating atop a flaming golden lotus. There was a man crackling with golden lightning, his face a golden mask, his body shrouded by golden light, as if he were himself a man of gold. There was a man on whom a golden sun shone, seated cross-legged in meditation as he floated atop the void, austere and holy, a man like a god.

A cultivator in blue, with a golden lamp in his hands, appeared. All manner of cultivators were arrayed around the man in the dark green robe, each illustrious and renowned in their own right.

In addition, there was even an arcane centipede, a golden elephant, a jade mantis, a golden luan, and a sapphire-blue scorpion.

Any cultivator who saw this array of cultivators and beasts would be shocked to no end. Combined, they would easily sweep through the tournament.

After Sun Mengmeng consumed the bug monarch, her body reacted immediately. Manifestations formed around her and condensed into the form of phoenixes, their wings outstretched.

Sun Mengmeng's manifestations lasted only temporarily, unlike Zhang Lie's.

Clearly, she had only received a boost to her mental faculties; she couldn't replicate Zhang Lie's tremendous gains from consuming a bug emperor.

Then, with natural energy and vitality brimming in her hands, Zhou Ying gently opened up her cocoon and extracted the bug within.

As she did so, a manifestation formed.

A golden crow cawed. Life, nature, death, and mutation energy surged forward like the tides, blooming in jade-green, black, and purple. Green and black leaves danced through the air.

The members of Team Zenith, who had seen these cocoons opened before, were shocked by the sight. Yang Ze frowned. "This is comparable to what happened when our captain unraveled his cocoon."

Life, nature, death, and mutation surrounded the cocoon. A bug appeared from within, only about as long as an arm. Its body was mottled with green and blue, and it seemed to radiate a gentle warmth. The next moment, however, the colors had transformed into black and purple, causing those who saw it to shudder in distaste. The black and purple splotches seemed to form a ghastly face.

One moment, it radiated the energy of nature; the next, of death, as though just touching it would inflict a curse. A giant tree sprouted by the side of its body.

The sun and the moon shone on it in turn. As the celestial bodies' light shone on the tree, it transformed. In the daytime, the tree's leaves were jade-green, filled with natural energy and vitality, like a tree of life.

At nighttime, the tree's leaves turned black, like a ghost tree that would have been planted in the netherworld. Its branches were like claws, ghastly, frightening, and steeped in the aura of death. Many tendrils suddenly grew out of the tree and flew around like tentacles. A large eye opened up on the tree trunk; onlookers staring at the trunk at any angle would feel as though the eye were looking at them.

Even the hunters of Team Zenith subconsciously took a step back.

The tree was illusory in nature, floating in the void, mysterious and palpably strong, holy and yet intimate.

Yang Ze said, "This manifestation isn't weaker than Captain's..."

Li Feng and Fang Yi nodded simultaneously.

Either Zhou Ying had been lucky, or her infusion of vitality and natural energy had caused a resonance with the construct within the cocoon.

Compared to the manifestation from Zhang Lie's bug emperor, however, Zhou Ying's bug emperor seemed far more sinister.

Sun Mengmeng hesitated. "Zhou Ying, this bug seems a little sinister. Are you really going to eat it?"

"That depends on what it says," Zhou Ying replied.

Zhang Lie: ? ? ?

The other five hunters of Team Zenith: ...

Do you ask food whether it wants to be eaten before you have meals? What sort of strange response was this?

Zhou Ying asked the newly hatched bug, "Are you willing to join me?"

The bug's round eyes looked toward Zhou Ying. From her, it sensed a natural intimacy. It nudged her fingers, as though thinking of her as its mother. It leapt up into the air and burrowed into Zhou Ying's body in a beam of light.

Zhou Ying's body radiated with light as she underwent a metamorphosis. A giant tree manifested around her, shining and splendid.

The image that had been revealed when the cocoon was first unraveled appeared once again. The sun and the moon shone on the tree in turn. In the daytime, the tree's leaves were jade-green, filled with natural energy and vitality, like a tree of life.

At nighttime, the tree's leaves turned black, like a ghost tree that would have been planted in the netherworld. Its branches were like claws, ghastly, frightening, and steeped in the aura of death. Many tendrils suddenly grew out of the tree and flew around like tentacles. A large eye opened up on the tree trunk; onlookers staring at the trunk at any angle would feel as though the eye were looking at them.

Bloody roots appeared, flowing like blood, extending within her body, rooting within her flesh: a sinister transformation. The tree turned from green to black, from vitality and natural energy to death.

Her flesh squirmed, as though every bit of her body were coming to life.

As life and death transformed into each other in turn, her mind likewise evolved. After every cycle of life and death, her body seemed to be forged anew.

Something within Zhou Ying's body was glowing with light, controlling the transformation to her body.

On careful inspection, it was the bug emperor that had just darted into Zhou Ying's body.

The bug emperor provided crystallized intuition about the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly, a startling evolution that resonated with Zhou Ying's path of life and mutation.

The resonance between the two paths was immediate and intense, and another startling evolution took place.

Zhou Ying seemed to transform into a tree brimming with vitality, which then transformed into a haunted, malevolent tree, and finally back into human form.

She opened her eyes, which were lustrous and endowed with preternatural depth. Her left eye had turned blue, and a tree of life had taken root there. Vitality and natural energy shone from it. Her right eye had turned dark gray, and a ghostly tree had taken root there. Her heterochromic vision was a sign of her advancement and understanding of life and death itself.

The sun and moon shone; celestial phenomena appeared.

Zhou Ying grew far stronger than before.

She let out a breath. She was excited by the transformation and astounded by the new sensations that suffused her.

"What a miraculous world."

Sun Mengmeng sighed. "Was that how we should have absorbed these bugs?"

Asking the bug whether it wanted to be eaten, and then allowing it to enter her body...

Zhou Ying shook her head. "This method would only work for me."

Chapter 1517: Into the Heart

If the others were to try what Zhou Ying had done, they would be lucky if the bug emperors didn't bite them to death.

Zhou Ying's unique constitution allowed her to develop intimacy with the bug emperor, and she had endowed it with a great deal of vitality and natural energy before unraveling it from its cocoon. It was natural that the bug emperor would treat Zhou Ying like its mother, allowing for her unique method of absorption.

Using this method, she was able to obtain exceptional benefit from the bug emperor. The bug emperor willingly merged with Zhou Ying's body, naturally resulting in an incredible boon beyond that which Zhang Lie had obtained.

The moment Zhou Ying finished her transformation, the crystal barrier around the safe zone shook. A huge crack formed where Zhang Lie had left a scar in the barrier.

Yang Ze rubbed at his lower jaw. "At this rate, this barrier will only survive a few days at most."

The moment the barrier broke, the heavenly cordon would constrict the portion of the realm that remained accessible. There wasn't much time left for the cultivators within.

Li Feng nodded. "It's going to be wholesale slaughter while the remaining competitors fight their way to the heart of the realm."

However, it was none of their business any longer.

The two hunters' tone even seemed a little gleeful.

Originally, the crystal barrier should have been able to last at least ten days or so. The other cultivators' attacks had forced Zhang Lie to create an opening in the barrier, one which would dramatically reduce the time it took for the barrier to break.

More importantly, they could easily leave with their bone talismans, and didn't have to worry about the situation outside the heart.

"Are all of you ready?" Zhang Lie asked.

The members of Team Zenith nodded.

"Let's go, Captain! We're ready to head to the heart of the realm at any time," Yang Ze said.

Zhang Lie distributed the bone talismans among the hunters, and they activated them immediately. The hunters of Team Zenith transformed into beams of light that shot across the sky and headed straight into the heart of the realm.

As Zhang Lie and the others vanished from sight, the crystal barrier finally broke apart.

Light shrouded them as their vision blurred. Within moments, they found themselves in an unfamiliar environment.

By the time they came to their senses, they were within an ancient hall.

The hall was vast and filled with chaos. They felt as though they had reached the end of the realm.

There, they could feel the aura of time and age, as if backtracking through the river of time, ancient murals that recorded times long past, the rise and fall of tens of thousands of civilizations.

Not far away, they found a silver stele floating in the air, surrounded by a bloom of chaos. Only two characters were written on it, but they had long since been corroded away by the chaos.

At the heart of the ancient hall, a pillar of light shot into the sky and pierced through the heavens. The ground cracked; the central pillar was surrounded by countless chains of natural law that linked the entire realm.

There was clearly something unusual about this place.

Zhang Lie and the others naturally gravitated to the pillar of light, the most eye-catching part of the otherwise empty hall.

Beneath the pillar of light was a huge altar in gold, resplendent and majestic, surrounded by chaos.

It was almost as large as a mountain.

A man in a dark green robe sat on a flight of steps leading up to the altar, his hands on his knees. He wasn't surprised at all to see Zhang Lie and the others arrive. "You came, as expected. The moment I saw you, I knew that you would be my greatest enemy and the greatest obstacle to the success of my plan."

The man's eyes frosted over as he stared at Zhang Lie.

Sun Mengmeng frowned. "Who's this?"

"It's a cultivator we've met before. He's an enemy," Fang Yi said.

"You must have been the one who dispatched those cultivators to the crystal barrier outside the safe zone," Zhang Lie stated.

The man sat casually on the flight of stairs, but a fearsome aura surrounded him as though he were an envoy from hell. He felt like a demon king, full of darkness beyond the likes of what the hunters could imagine, an aura barely concealing a horrifying craze.

The man countered, "Are you satisfied with the bone talismans I sent you?"

Zhang Lie frowned. "Why would you do that?"

It sounded as though the man had expected the cultivators he sent to fail.

"I want a glorious battle to celebrate my rebirth." The man spread his arms wide, his back to the pillar of light. Under the harsh light of the pillar, the man looked fearsome, his shadow stretched, elongated, and looming over the hunters.

The man snapped his fingers. "Come one, come all!"

Spatial fluctuations rippled as something shot horizontally across the void.

A halberd gleamed with light. The Immortal King's substitute stood tall and proud, his halberd directed at Li Feng.

Li Feng reacted quickly. White light surrounded his fist, which shone with a metallic luster.

The two cultivators struck each other in a deafening clash.

Li Feng sneered. "Do the successors of the Hall of Immortals only know how to launch sneak attacks?"

The Immortal King's substitute retreated.

Somehow, he had managed to make a full recovery from all his injuries, and his strength had even advanced to the next level. Li Feng had to take him seriously.

He was wearing a winged garment that radiated with light. The void halberd in his hand made him look the very part of an imposing guardian.

Beside him was Feng Xian, her white clothes fluttering in the air. She was a peerless beauty.

She glared daggers at Zhang Lie, as though she wanted to eat him alive.

Then, even more beams of light appeared.

A Holywing cultivator emerged, silver wings outstretched and blazing even more brightly than before. Qingyue Ge, dressed in green, arrived atop a flaming golden lotus. There was a man crackling with golden lightning, his face a golden mask, his body shrouded by golden light, as if he were himself a man of gold. A golden sun shone on Resplendent Sun as he sat cross-legged in meditation atop the void, austere and holy.

A cultivator in blue, with a golden lamp in his hands, appeared. All manner of cultivators were arrayed around the man in the dark green robe, each illustrious and renowned in their own right.

In addition, there was even an arcane centipede, a golden elephant, a jade mantis, and other such creatures which had once been seen within the halls of the realm. There were also beasts responsible for guarding the hall, a golden luan and a sapphire-blue scorpion.

The sapphire-blue scorpion's body seemed to be made of crystal. A fearsome cold seeped out of its body, clearly an incredible toxin.

Somehow, the black-robed man had gained control of the beasts responsible for guarding the hall.

The Immortal King's substitute pursed his lips in distaste. "They're all trash. Puffed up and proud though they were when they sought rewards for their contribution, they achieved nothing of note at all."

The Holywing cultivator said, "I was certain that such a group of cultivators would be able to block them from entering the cordon, but it looks like you're right, Your Highness. This group of cultivators is worth considering seriously."

The man waved a hand carelessly. "I never bore high hopes for those pieces of trash. It would have been ideal if they had succeeded, but we'd get a bit of entertainment otherwise. Wouldn't it be good to have a few more sacrifices?"

Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith were beneath him; they might as well have been nothing but sacrifices.

Qingyue Ge smiled at Sun Mengmeng, besotted. "Miss, we meet again. We are truly connected by fate." Sun Mengmeng made a nauseated expression.