

U. Warlord 271

Chapter 271: Unfathomable Greed

Unfortunately, Zhang Lie's plan didn't have any effect in the short term, and there were outsiders who viewed all of this as a joke. For example, when Zhou Ying arrived at the Galewind settlement and relayed what Zhang Lie had told her, she was met with considerable disbelief; indeed, there were even a few people who suspected that Zhang Lie was planning something big here and was hoping to get them out of the way before it happened.

These people dug their heels in and refused to leave. They announced that, as fans of Zhang Lie, they wanted to see what was going on, that they would surely only play the role of a bystander.

Of course, most of these people were hoping that they could claim some misplaced loot in the bargain, but they had hardly thought to consider the disparity in strength between them and Zhang Lie.

Zhou Ying tried to persuade them as hard as she could, but they only became more and more stubborn. Sighing, Zhou Ying gave up and teleported back to the real world.

Following Zhang Lie's instructions, she contacted the Blackwind Fort. Su Feng was currently in the midst of training his soldiers. When he received the call from Zhou Ying, he was rather surprised—Zhang Lie had always contacted him directly, rather than letting his subordinates do so.

"What's the matter, Zhou Ying?"

"Commander Su Feng, our captain has indicated that there will be an imminent disaster in the first realm of the dimensional world. He asked me to inform you to have all the soldiers in the first realm retreat, then to sound a red alert and have all civilian hunters, at least from China, do the same!"

Zhou Ying spoke so quickly that it took Su Feng a few additional seconds to process her words.

"The red alert—Zhou Ying, can you tell me precisely what's going on?" Su Feng asked. Despite knowing Zhang Lie and the rest of Team Zenith well, what Zhang Lie was asking for was too important for Su Feng to proceed without any further information.

"I'm sorry, Commander Su Feng, but I don't know what's going on either. Based on what my captain told me, there's about to be an impending disaster in the dimensional world, so please, act as quickly as you can!"

Zhou Ying hung up decisively; even if Su Feng pressed her for more information, she had none to give.

Next, she informed the remaining hunters of Team Zenith to head back to the real world. When they returned and saw her waiting for them, they immediately peppered her with questions.

"Zhou Ying, what's going on? Where's the captain?"

"There turned out to be an irregularity in the region I was patrolling, and he's checking on it himself. He told me to inform you that, from now on, without his express order, no one from the Zenith Dojo is to enter the first realm of the dimensional world."

"Even us? What's going on? Just what happened in your region?" Fang Yi asked.

"There wasn't anything much. In the evening, one of the rivers in the region I was responsible for began to froth all of a sudden, with far more bubbles than there used to be. After that, our captain told me to return and warn everyone of an impending disaster. He even wants Commander Su Feng to announce a red alert!"

"What?" Sun Mengmeng exclaimed. What sort of disaster would necessitate such a response? If not for the fact that Zhang Lie had commanded them not to enter, they would surely try to help him out. "We have to do something, don't we? Otherwise..."

Her words were met with fierce agreement from the crowd.

"Right, there has to be something we can do! If our captain doesn't want us to interfere in what's going on within the dimensional world, we can at least help out on the outside. Can't we work together with Commanders Su Feng and Yan Long to warn everyone?"

Everyone from the Zenith Dojo quickly left the first realm, urged by Zhang Lie and the rest of Team Zenith. In the outside world, however, except for the hunters affiliated with the military, who had received direct orders from their commanding officers, the hunters by and large refused to believe Zhang Lie's words.

"Disasters" in the first realm were commonplace, and every few months, there would be a stampede of lifeforms that each settlement had to face. However, the military had never before announced a red alert for such an event.

From these errant hunters' perspective, the military was about to launch a big incursion against something or another, and if they obediently followed the military's instructions, they would lose out on whatever benefits they could otherwise have obtained.

As a result, they began to hide from the military and refused to leave the dimensional world. Of course, these hunters were just a vocal minority. Given the combined warnings by the military and the hunters of Team Zenith, most civilian hunters chose to believe their words and to leave the first realm.

In the Galewind settlement, for instance, around 70% of hunters ultimately listened to Zhou Ying's advice and departed, and other settlements behaved similarly.

The remaining 30% of hunters within the Galewind settlement, at the eye of the impending storm, knew that Zhou Ying was broadly responsible for surveilling the region around the Galewind Lake. If they wanted to obtain any goodies, they had to be present at the scene, so all of them quickly set off for the Galewind Lake.

Given Zhang Lie's strength, none of them dared to disrespect him, but Zhang Lie wouldn't be able to chase them all away, either. After trying to persuade them to leave to no avail, Zhang Lie gave up. In the end, he established three directives: first, not to make a loud disturbance; second, not to randomly activate a technique or summon up genetic energy; third, not to summon any objects, or to get within a hundred meters of the lake.

Anyone who disobeyed would die.

After that, the spectators' hubbub quickly died down. From Zhang Lie's perspective, if these hunters wanted to die, then so be it. He had no intention of using his genetic energy to save them once the disaster-grade lifeform broke into this world.

The spectators all eyed the lake while cursing Zhang Lie's domineering behavior deep within their hearts. It was clear that he had done something to the lake, and while no hunter would be stupid enough to break Zhang Lie's three directives now, once something big began to happen, they would take advantage of the chaos to strike.

They were greedily imagining their spoils from this battle, but they didn't realize just how insignificant their strength would be relative to their target.

Would a disaster-grade lifeform, even heavily wounded, be so easy to kill? If so, Zhang Lie wouldn't have chased out even the members of Team Zenith. After all, the more people were present, the more people would obtain disaster gene fragments as a result.

If it were feasible, Zhang Lie would gladly have called everyone from Team Zenith over, but their ultimate probability of survival would be so low that Zhang Lie didn't dare take such a gamble. Team Zenith was an elite team that he had spent so much energy and time building, and it would be a waste of his efforts if they were all to perish here.

Night fell. Beyond a hundred meters of the lake, the spectating hunters lit fires and lamps, providing a stark contrast to the pitch darkness that lay above the lake. Some hunters began to roast meat, to party, to consume alcohol.

Over 60% of hunters in the first realm of the dimensional world had evacuated because of this emergency, but where the danger was most imminent, a number of greedy, idiotic hunters wined and feasted.

Zhang Lie couldn't help but feel as though he were in a dream, until his gaze turned back to the frothing surface of the lake. He hoped that the disaster-grade lifeform would make an appearance quickly so as to teach the greedy spectators a lesson, but alas, it was not to be. The bubbles continued frothing, but no other change seemed forthcoming.

Chapter 272: The Disaster-Grade Lifeform

The wait lasted three whole days. Some spectators, impatient, turned to leave; others returned to the dimensional world and stayed, sensing no danger. Some even braved his directives and died as a lesson to the others.

Suddenly, the Galewind Lake began to froth even more violently than before, and a frightening aura could be sensed through these bubbles.

"Leave!" Zhang Lie shouted. "You've had the excitement you wanted, haven't you? I won't protect you if you stay!"

He shielded his own body, hovering above the lake. However, those spectators who had camped out at the lake for three whole days surely weren't going to turn back now. The tragedy that he had predicted was, indeed, about to take place.

A crystalline lifeform suddenly burst out of the surface of the lake. It took the form of an inverted anchor, with a gigantic eye where the bottom of the anchor would be. It looked rather shocking, but

not particularly dangerous. Zhang Lie estimated that its body was about dozens of meters wide, though much of it lay obscured beneath the lake.

The moment it appeared, Zhang Lie felt the genetic energy that sustained his body begin to tremble, as though, sensing some unknown directive, the energy was trying to escape from his body.

Fortunately, his peak gene fragments and limit fragments protected his body from this assault, but those spectators by the edge of the lake weren't so lucky. He saw the spectators' bodies fall like stalks of wheat, with blood-colored lifeforce flying out of their bodies.

Almost instantly, their bodies turned into parched, desiccated corpses.

The battlefield turned silent. The blood-red genetic energy that the disaster-grade lifeform had extracted from their bodies floated to the anchor, causing its gigantic eye to blink a few times, as though in enjoyment.

The next moment, a primordial aura began to spread out all around the creature, and it released a few high-pitched cries.

Subsequently, the mountains and forests all around responded with cries of their own.

Most sounded like superior-grade lifeforms, having been summoned by the disaster-grade lifeform's cry.

Just then, however, its anchor-like body suddenly stumbled, and a strand of blood appeared on the surface of the massive anchor. The blood-colored water of the lake began to froth once more, and even more strands of blood began to appear on the anchor's body.

It was then that the disaster-grade lifeform noticed the only unusual living creature remaining nearby: Zhang Lie.

It felt a mysterious power which it grossly disliked seeping into its body through the lakewater. The mysterious power was rapidly weakening its body and decreasing the rate at which it could obtain energy from the environment.

The disaster-grade lifeform screeched; despite the fact that Zhang Lie was prepared, his eardrums were pierced almost immediately, and blood began leaking out of his ears. Even then, Zhang Lie didn't give up what he was doing. Circulating more and more genetic energy around him, he manipulated the thousands of threads of blood around the disaster-grade lifeform's anchor-like body, causing it to crack and splinter.

The anchor began to revolve more and more rapidly in an attempt to dislodge the bloody threads, and its eye began to release rays of annihilation.

A red beam of light struck the land, releasing a mushroom cloud of smoke and dust in the air. Hundreds of kilometers away, the redmaple forest abutting the Blacksteel settlement vanished into thin air.

Just one beam of light possessed such incredible energy—Zhang Lie didn't want to think about what would have happened if the anchor had targeted a human settlement instead. He was very glad he had ordered Zhou Ying to reach out to Commanders Su Feng and Yan Long.

Another beam of red light shot toward the nearest human settlement, the Galewind settlement. The settlement's core shields materialized into existence, but they lasted only a brief moment before being pierced by the beam.

Those hunters who had refused to leave the Galewind settlement had perished, just like that.

The anchor continued to rotate as it loosed beams all around itself. When it realized that neither approach was working, it even began to screech. Huge sound waves roiled toward Zhang Lie and agitated the lifeforms all around it, leading to a cacophony of cries, squeaks, roars, howls, chirps, squawks, and clicks thousands of kilometers away from the lake.

These lifeforms began to rampage, destroying all that lay around them. Human settlements and hunters, all those living creatures they despised, had become their targets.

Because of the anchor's screeching, Zhang Lie was also in deep trouble—the first wave of lifeforms summoned by the anchor had arrived at the Galewind Lake: a flaming chimpanzee, a red-and-jade-green-striped snake, three galewolves, and four other superior-grade lifeforms besides.

Under ordinary circumstances, it would be straightforward for Zhang Lie to deal with them all, but at present, his entire attention was focused on manipulating the water in the Galewind Lake to seep into the disaster-grade lifeform's anchor-like body.

The most Zhang Lie was able to do in the meantime was to avoid the anchor's rays of annihilation; he wouldn't be able to fend off the superior-grade lifeforms surrounding him as well.

The flaming chimpanzee was the first to cause a problem. It had found a huge boulder from somewhere, which it hurled from hundreds of meters away. The flaming rock fell toward Zhang Lie as though it were a bomb.

"[Eclipse]!" Zhang Lie yelled out.

As a bloody moon rose into the air, space froze around Zhang Lie, and the huge boulder that the flaming chimpanzee had tossed was quickly broken down into small pebbles. Then, Zhang Lie canceled [Eclipse]'s domain almost as quickly as it had formed. As the snake and galewolves approached him, Zhang Lie activated his domain again, destroying the snake's jaws and crippling the two galewolves.

The fight dragged on. Because of what Zhang Lie had done to the lakewater, the disaster-grade lifeform's body was slowly corroding away, but that only made it struggle all the harder. As it continued to screech, Zhang Lie found himself surrounded by no fewer than ten superior-grade lifeforms.

Although these superior-grade lifeforms were often damaged by the anchor's undifferentiated attacks, there were more and more reinforcements trickling in from the nearby mountains and forests.

As a result, Zhang Lie became more and more fatigued, and he dodged a few of its attacks only at the very last moment. If Zhang Lie didn't have a method for dealing with these superior-grade lifeforms, he wouldn't be able to fight for much longer.

Chapter 273: A Spiritual Onslaught

A red beam of light brushed past Zhang Lie's head as it turned another piece of land, hundreds of kilometers away, into a gigantic mushroom cloud. That was far too close for comfort. Even given Zhang Lie's defensive abilities, if the anchor were to land a direct hit on him, he'd be heavily injured, if not outright dead.

He had barely shifted his position and gotten a breather when three superior-grade lifeforms pounced at him as though they were mad.

Zhang Lie's eyes twitched. With a cutting motion, he released his control over the blood-red lake water. The disaster-grade lifeform, which he had been suppressing all this time, finally broke free. Of course, this also meant that Zhang Lie was finally able to make a move.

A pillar of genetic energy rose up into the skies from Zhang Lie's body, and Venombane appeared in his hand. "[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!"

A dragon's howl shook the skies. Before the superior-grade lifeforms could make a move, Zhang Lie struck. An array of blood-red dragons cleared the land all around Zhang Lie, annihilating the dozen or so superior-grade lifeforms nearby in a single brilliant moment.

Zhang Lie rushed toward the side of the disaster-grade lifeform. Comically, the disaster-grade lifeform actually tried to flee. The moment it had arrived in the first realm, it had fallen prey to Zhang Lie's machinations, and the lower half of its body was still corroding away in the lake. It was heavily wounded, and even a first-realm hunter like Zhang Lie could now pose a threat to it.

It knew that Zhang Lie had done something to the water in the lake, so it floated into the air. Sparks of light began to gather by its large, bulbous eye. Under such circumstances, Zhang Lie certainly wouldn't let himself get hit.

He moved quickly, but so too did the disaster-grade lifeform. By the time Zhang Lie skirted past the rays of death, it had already floated over a hundred meters into the air. The blood pooling around its body had vanished, and it looked almost like an abstract piece of art—though a flawed one, owing to the cracks on the central axis of the anchor and a scar marring its eye.

After arriving in a lower realm and rejuvenating itself with the life energy of the gathered hunters, the disaster-grade lifeform tried to establish itself as an apex predator. It howled at Zhang Lie in an attempt to expel him, or perhaps as a threat, announcing that the entire realm, all that was in sight, now belonged to its control.

As it howled, the superior-grade lifeforms nearby began to fall to the ground, their bodies dry and parched, just like those hunters that had been surrounding the lake.

Zhang Lie couldn't afford to let this absorption succeed; if he allowed the anchor to continuously replenish its lifeforce, the only thing that awaited him would be death.

He broke the seal on three of his potions, then surrounded his fists with the liquid within. Blood-streaked beams of water shot toward the anchor like spider silk. "Do you think I'll let you do as you please?!"

The disaster-grade lifeform immediately tried to evade these attacks, having suffered more than enough from them while within the lake. It howled. Frightening crystalline genetic energy gushed out of its body like a fountain, forming a domain of absolute control over its surroundings.

Everything seemed to freeze, including Zhang Lie's bloody beams and his ongoing technique, [The Boundless Blade]. Pain flashed from his chest, and he felt as though he were about to stumble. He opened his mouth; blood trailed down his lips. His body seemed like nothing more than a shell.

Disoriented, Zhang Lie tried to flee. The moment he did so, the region of space surrounding the disaster-grade lifeform began to swell and distend, spatial distortions that were caused by the magnitude of the energy fluctuations coming from the anchor-like lifeform.

The failed attack caused Zhang Lie to realize just how weaker he was compared to the wounded disaster-grade lifeform, and he had no intention of clashing against it head-on again. Instead, he would focus on slowly whittling the anchor down, just as he did while it still remained in the lake.

He moved rapidly and shot a few attacks at the anchor intermittently, forcing it to stop its plan of consuming the life force of the superior-grade lifeforms around. Whenever he moved, he would shoot a skein of bloody water into the air, as though he were constructing a gigantic spiderweb.

Although the disaster-grade lifeform was impermeable to these threads because of the genetic energy currently surrounding its body, exuding and materializing genetic energy out of one's body took considerable effort and placed a toll on one's reserves. The anchor was able to sustain its expenditure by drawing from the life force of those superior-grade lifeforms around, but it wouldn't be able to do so for long.

After all, its injuries were far more severe than they seemed.

Somehow, in its heavily wounded state, it had been able to arrive at the first realm of the dimensional world, which should have been a region of space over which it could wholly dominate.

This was what had happened in Zhang Lie's past life, but this time around, it found itself facing Zhang Lie, a reincarnator who understood its weaknesses shockingly well. Zhang Lie's spiderweb would definitely outlast its shielding, so unless anything were to change, it would eventually fall prey to him.

The disaster-grade lifeform had also noticed this point, so as it and Zhang Lie exchanged blow after blow, it began to float toward the region of space in which the bloody strands were least dense.

The heavily wounded disaster-grade lifeform might have overwhelming offense and defense, but its attack patterns and battle strategy were surprisingly single-minded. The ray of annihilation that it could shoot out of its eye was frightening indeed, but because of its injury, and because of the necessary charge-up period before the attack, it hadn't managed to land a direct hit on Zhang Lie even once.

The only other attack accessible to it in its heavily wounded state was its domain, but even that was slow to form after its injury. Zhang Lie suspected that it was originally a near-instantaneous attack; indeed, Zhang Lie had been caught in its effects, but the anchor was too slow to take advantage of it given its condition. The domain had briefly injured Zhang Lie, but that was a problem easily fixed with a few health potions.

The anchor shot out three beams of annihilation at the weak spot in the web of bloody skeins that Zhang Lie had intentionally left open. The next moment, it activated its domain once more and shot

toward that opening, understanding that it couldn't afford to fight against this unusually strong and irritating human in its heavily wounded state.

It needed some time to recover and a source of genetic energy to repair its wounds. At peak condition, it would easily be able to take control of this entire realm, but before then, it would have to avoid any pests.

The moment right before it was about to escape from the web, however, it saw Zhang Lie smile. It immediately realized that there might have been a trap waiting for it, but it was all too late.

In front of the anchor, a small white wyrm blinked into existence. Its thoughts seemed to slow, and the wound by its eye seemed to magnify. Struck by a mental blow, the anchor fell into temporary paralysis, unable to sense its body or its limbs.

A frightening, corrosive energy entered its brain through the wound in its eye, causing it to try to retaliate with the full force of its might. There was a snake-like creature in its mental space—no, a gigantic, frightening, white-colored wyrmlike creature, with a piercing horn on its forehead and sharp, serrated teeth. It glowed with white, spiritual flame, then tore the anchor's mental space to shreds.

All faded to black. The last thing it saw was the human injecting the bloody liquid it had so feared into its body. It felt its lifeforce gather around its heart, then fade away. The last moment before its death, it suddenly regretted entering this dimension.

How could there have been such a killer lying in wait for him in this realm?

Chapter 274: Emergency Assistance

In truth, this disaster-grade lifeform was far weaker than Zhang Lie had anticipated, and if he had known the extent of its injuries, he would surely have summoned the other members of team Zenith back.

However, by then, it was too late. The disaster-grade lifeform had perished to Zhang Lie's hand, and the rewards of the kill were his to claim. A disaster-grade lifeform's body was filled with treasure. Its heart could be consumed to obtain disaster gene fragments, and its crystalline body would be an amazing material for armor and weapons.

More importantly, upon ascending from the first realm to the second realm, hunters would have to use their genetic energy and special supplementary materials to condense a genetic armor, one that played an important role in determining their strength within the second realm. The crystalline anchor-like exterior of this disaster-grade lifeform would be an unparalleled material for this armor.

No one else would be able to kill a disaster-grade lifeform in the first realm, Zhang Lie was sure of it.

Indeed, the very existence of disaster-grade lifeforms were a closely held secret, and no one else knew that a disaster-grade lifeform had made its way to the first realm. The existence of disaster-grade lifeforms would only become public knowledge in five years' time, and Zhang Lie had no intention of speeding this process up.

After all, if he were to do so, he would be in the center of yet another event. He had just returned victorious from the Void Cup; before that, he had become known for his theory of limit fragments.

If people were to find out that he was the first to kill a disaster-grade lifeform—at least within the first three realms—how envious would they get?

Even the highest authorities might step in at that point, and he didn't want to owe anyone, even Martial Sage Hong Tianqi, another favor, especially after what he had already done for the affair involving Phoenix.

In that case, what was he going to say? Destruction had been wreaked all around the Galewind Lake, and the Galewind settlement had essentially vanished overnight. Apart from the Galewind settlement, over half the settlements in the area were being battered by a stampede of lifeforms, thanks to the commands the disaster-grade lifeform had broadcasted before its death.

Zhang Lie estimated that over 90% of the lifeforms in the first realm had been affected by the sudden arrival of the disaster-grade lifeform, so who would believe him if he tried to claim that the disaster had been a superior-grade stampede?

Perhaps he could explain it away as a peak-grade lifeform, but how was he supposed to deal with its missing carcass? After all, Zhang Lie had no intention of showing the disaster-grade lifeform's carcass to anyone. He would even scour the battlefield to ensure that no trace of the disaster-grade lifeform remained.

Zhang Lie wasn't sure how he would spin the story, but at the very least, he was the only eyewitness to the event, and he would be able to avoid scrutiny as long as his lies didn't seem too unrealistic. Others might guess that something was amiss, but they wouldn't have any proof for just what had happened.

Zhang Lie didn't consume the disaster-grade lifeform's flesh immediately; it was possible that something unusual would happen while trying to assimilate disaster gene fragments into his body, and it would take him some time to do so.

At the moment, the dimensional world was still fraught with danger, and Zhang Lie couldn't afford to waste any time here. After he packed everything up, he began investigating the extent of the disaster-grade lifeform's damage, starting from the Galewind Lake and heading all the way back to the Blacksteel settlement. The disaster that had been wrought far exceeded Zhang Lie's expectations.

The settlement itself had been damaged, but it had been spared the worst of the superior-grade lifeforms' incursion due to its barrier. Those who fared worst were the hunters who refused to listen to reason, hiding all over the realm instead of within the various settlements. In the end, they were overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of lifeforms coming for them.

By the time Zhang Lie returned to the Blacksteel settlement, the front gates had already fallen, and genetic lifeforms were prowling the streets and fighting against the trapped hunters.

Zhang Lie's return was undoubtedly a boon for the hunters within. The moment he shot into the settlement, the beast tide began to recede. Compared to humans, these lifeforms had far more acute senses, and the moment they sensed Zhang Lie's arrival, they began to flee.

Zhang Lie was an existence with which they could not contend.

The disaster at the Blacksteel settlement averted, Zhang Lie hurried back to the real world and summoned the members of Team Zenith, along with whichever experts the dojo had hired which were still in the first realm.

"Everyone, last night, over 90% of the lifeforms in the first realm of the dimensional world began to stampede. All the settlements within are in danger, and the lifeforms have managed to enter over 80% of them! It's time for us to step in. Everyone, enter the dimensional world— head to all nearby settlements that have been invaded, then expel the beasts from them! Zhou Ying, I'll leave you in charge of informing the military that it's time for them to launch their counter-offensive as well."

When the civilian hunters were informed of the situation and returned to the dimensional world to see the havoc that had been caused, they became more trusting of Zhang Lie—his advance warning could well have saved their lives, especially when they found the bodies of their dead comrades within and without the settlement.

The alarm that Zhang Lie had sounded caused China to become the country that had suffered the fewest casualties in this onslaught. No matter how stubborn some hunters were, the majority of the Chinese hunters had chosen to believe Zhang Lie and left the dimensional world. These hunters remained safe and sound, but the remaining hunters in the dimensional world suffered all the more for it.

No matter where they hid, or even if they tried to defend their respective settlements, they found themselves at a loss for manpower, so despite the fact that China had the fewest casualties, they had the most wounded.

If they had been willing to follow Zhang Lie's warning, they would have survived with their lives intact, but what was done was done. All that the remaining hunters could do was to try to fish out any survivors from amidst the rubble.

Within the Blackwind Fort, Zhou Ying had secured an audience with Su Feng.

"Commander Su Feng, according to my captain, the disaster is over—it's time to strike back!"

"To strike back? Zhou Ying, just what's going on?"

"Commander Su Feng, last night, there was a major stampede involving over 90% of the lifeforms in the dimensional world, one that led to the invasion of more than 80% of the settlements within. At this point, the stampede is nearing its end, and it's our best time to strike back at them!"

Then, just like before, faced with a stupefied Su Feng, she hung up. In fact, she didn't know what was going on within the dimensional world, either. All that she knew, she had heard from Zhang Lie. As a result, after finishing this task that Zhang Lie had assigned her, she too rushed into the dimensional world.

Chapter 275: The Source of the Disaster

When Zhou Ying stepped into the dimensional world, she was stunned by the sight she saw. Carcasses and corpses littered the ground in such quantity that she could barely process the sight. She began moving immediately: the faster she moved, the more lives she would be able to save.

The Blacksteel settlement was quickly restored thanks to the help of the hunters in the region, and the injured were being taken care of. However, repairing the infrastructure within the settlement

would take at least a few months, given that the beast stampede had destroyed more than half of the buildings within.

After the affairs at the Blacksteel settlement were in order, Team Zenith, under Zhang Lie's direction, began to provide assistance to nearby settlements as well.

At the same time, Su Feng's forces finally arrived in the Fengxing settlement. Just like Zhou Ying, Su Feng was stunned at the macabre sight, but as soldiers of China, he and his forces quickly recovered and immediately split up into search parties that wandered the city and helped out those in need.

By then, the Fengxing settlement was nothing more than a pile of smoking ruins. There were still a considerable number of lifeforms in the area, along with wounded hunters.

Su Feng was very glad that, despite the surprising lack of information, he had chosen to believe Zhou Ying and Zhang Lie's words. Before entering the dimensional world, he had passed on the information to Yan Long, allowing the Chinese search-and-rescue operation to begin over fifteen minutes before the other countries', an advantage that could be counted in the number of lives saved.

However, no matter how fast they were able to provide aid, a disaster had still occurred, and they could hardly revert time and prevent it entirely. Most of the settlements would be able to reconstruct after the disaster, but some had been completely destroyed by the beast stampede, and there would be no point in reclaiming those.

The search-and-rescue operation lasted over a week before the dimensional world returned to normalcy, the lifeforms having returned to their natural habitats and the hunters having secured their settlements.

Only then did the authorities begin to investigate the source of this calamity. The most suspicious country was naturally China. After all, before the start of the disaster, China had given advance warning, and they were the first to prepare a search-and-rescue operation.

All this implied that China knew much more about the disaster than any other country, but in truth, the officers and commanders of the Chinese military didn't know much at all. They turned to the person who had been the source of all their information: Zhang Lie.

In the Zenith Dojo, Zhang Lie sat facing Yan Long and Su Feng.

"Zhang Lie, you brat, you know what we're doing here, don't you?"

Zhang Lie beamed. "Of course! You must be here to thank me for my efforts, Commander Yan. As a hot-blooded youth of China, of course I'd participate in such an operation. Furthermore, as a dragonlord warrior of China, I naturally have to stand out in times of crisis. There's no need to come personally—we know each other so well by this point, after all!"

Zhang Lie had decided to hide all traces of what had actually happened in the first realm of the dimensional world, so he began spouting all sorts of nonsense.

"The Zenith Dojo has indeed made invaluable contributions to this operation, and on behalf of all the hunters of the first realm, Su Feng and I thank you for all your efforts. However, we're here today for some other reason," Yan Long replied.

Zhang Lie blinked innocently. "What other matter could there be?"

Su Feng rolled his eyes. "Enough! Zhang Lie, you're really a magnet for trouble, aren't you? What happened this time?"

"What do you mean, what happened? Commander Su, what could you be asking about?"

"Just what happened in the dimensional world? How did you know there was an impending disaster, and just what happened during this disaster?" Su Feng clarified.

"Ah, well, you've all seen the aftermath, haven't you? I'm not privy to any other information beyond that," Zhang Lie replied.

"Oh? In that case, how were you able to give us advance warning of the event, as well as the best time to counter-attack?" Zhang Lie's duplicity was starting to anger Yan Long.

"I began having a bad premonition a few days before the calamity, so I sent Zhou Ying to speak with the two of you just in case. Unexpectedly, my premonition actually came true!"

Yan Long and Su Feng gaped at how Zhang Lie had managed to say all this with a straight face.

"In that case, what about the Galewind Lake?" Su Feng pressed. "What happened there a week ago? We haven't been able to recover the corpses of any of the hunters that purportedly made their way there."

Chapter 276: Entering the Dimensional World

"What could I have to do with the Galewind Lake?" Zhang Lie wondered.

"Enough! The Galewind settlement's been entirely annihilated, and I'm sure that's something you're aware of. I've dispatched some soldiers to ask around, and I learned that the hunters of Team Zenith were active in that area just a few days ago. If I'm not mistaken, the one responsible for the region around the Galewind settlement must have been Zhou Ying, who was the first to inform us of the impending calamity." Yan Long and Su Feng, having known Zhang Lie for some time, naturally ignored his lies.

"So what? What can that prove? It was just a mere coincidence that the members of Team Zenith were present in that region, and she had left quite a few days before the disaster happened!"

"You... Fine—what will it take to get you to tell the truth?" Yan Long visibly reined in his anger. Against anyone else, he would already have been shouting in rage, but his superior had been very clear about instructing him to conduct the investigation cordially.

Yan Long hadn't expected this to be difficult considering how well he and Su Feng knew Zhang Lie, but for some reason, Zhang Lie clearly wasn't willing to tell them anything this time around.

Given the lavish rewards Zhang Lie had received during the Void Cup, however, Yan Long's offer was hardly attractive to Zhang Lie. Almost immediately, he replied, "I'm sorry, Commander Yan Long, but I don't have anything to say regarding this matter. From my perspective, we should focus on rebuilding after the disaster, rather than investigating how it had occurred."

Either he truly didn't know, which Yan Long and Su Feng doubted, or he wouldn't reveal a thing.

"If you won't tell us anything, what do you expect us to say to the public, to the other countries on Earth, and even to the Solar System at large?" Su Feng asked, but even this approach was fruitless.

"Just tell them that I had a prophetic dream, or that I sensed impending danger a few days ago," Zhang Lie replied, causing the two commanders' faces to darken.

They turned to leave. Even though it seemed that Zhang Lie hadn't said anything, they did learn more about the event than before—at the very least, from Zhang Lie's attitude, he was certainly aware of what had caused the disaster, but for some reason, he was trying to hide it all.

Zhang Lie had anticipated this sort of interrogation, but he hadn't expected that Yan Long and Su Feng would be the ones summoned to talk to him, nor that their attitude would be so polite. For that, he was sure he had nothing to thank but his status as the champion of the Void Cup.

After sending the two commanders away, it was almost time to consume the disaster-grade lifeform's flesh, but before then, he had to arrange for his sister's introduction into the first realm of the dimensional world.

She had been asking to enter right after the disaster struck, but it was far too dangerous then for her. Now that things were being restored to normal, Zhang Lie no longer had an excuse to refuse his sister.

Once the two commanders left, Zhang Lie sent for his two apprentices and Zhang Hanxiang.

"Let me introduce you to my sister, Zhang Hanxiang." Zhang Lie patted his sister's shoulder as he looked at his apprentices. "Hanxiang, these are my first two apprentices, Ye Xianchen and Jun Jiuxiao."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss!" The two children bowed respectfully.

"Ah, none of that. My brother said that we're all friends and family here, didn't he? Why don't you call me sister too?"

Zhang Hanxiang really couldn't bear being addressed as "Miss". Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen were slightly younger than she was. They turned to Zhang Lie, who nodded, then smiled at Zhang Hanxiang. "Sister Hanxiang!"

The three of them easily became acquainted with each other.

After watching them interact for a while, Zhang Lie cleared his throat to get their attention.

"The reason I've summoned all of you here today is because I have an announcement to make."

"An announcement? Could it be that..."

"Yes—we're going to be making plans for all three of you to enter the dimensional world."

Zhang Hanxiang, Jun Jiuxiao, and Ye Xianchen all gaped in surprise.

"Really, Brother? Are you finally willing to let me enter the dimensional world?"

"Do you mean that, Master? Can we enter the dimensional world again, too?"

All of them exuded anticipation.

"Of course! When have I lied to you, Hanxiang? As for the two of you, I'm worried that you're too small to be going places on your own, so I'd like for all three of you to work together. Meet up at the settlement closest to each other once you enter, then start hunting together."

The three of them all whooped.

"I'm finally going to enter the dimensional world!"

"Right, won't it be fun to hunt together?"

"Brother, when can we enter? Immediately?"

"Immediately? No, of course not. There are a lot of areas you need to be aware of before entering the dimensional world, so we'll do it tomorrow. Tonight, Sun Mengmeng and Fang Yi will give you an important lesson regarding surviving in the dimensional world. After this lesson and a good night's sleep, they'll escort you into the dimensional world themselves."

Their faces fell.

Zhang Hanxiang asked coyly, "Brother, do we really have to wait until tomorrow? Why can't we enter tonight?"

"Hanxiang, your safety is of paramount importance. I won't allow any negotiation on this front!"

Chapter 277: Fiasco at the Inn

Seeing how serious Zhang Lie was, Zhang Hanxiang acquiesced immediately, though she grumbled at having to do so. For her, this might well be the longest night she had ever lived through. However, Zhang Hanxiang couldn't bring herself to disobey her brother. She knew that, no matter what, her brother would always side with her, that he truly cared for her.

The same was true for Zhang Lie's two apprentices; to them, Zhang Lie had all but given them a new life. Without Zhang Lie, they wouldn't be where they were now, and their future would have been a miserable one. They would do whatever he told them to.

Zhang Hanxiang's entrance into the dimensional world handled, Zhang Lie finally freed up some time for himself.

He intended to consume the disaster-grade lifeform's flesh that very night. After informing Team Zenith and Zhang Hong that he would be returning to the dimensional world, he stepped through the teleportation array and appeared within the Blacksteel settlement.

Over half of the buildings in the settlement had been destroyed, but it had fared better than some other settlements in the aftermath of the beast invasion. Its signature black steel gates, however, had vanished entirely, leaving a gaping hole where the entrance was and making it feel much more desolate.

Fortunately, the Blacksteel Inn, which stood at the center of the settlement, was relatively intact. As he walked through the debris-strewn streets and stood underneath the inn's nameboard, which drooped as though it were about to fall, he felt a sudden dissonance.

Memories of his past life flooded back. After the disaster that had occurred, like a dead dog, he curled by one corner of the inn, which had turned into nothing more than a pile of smoking rubble. In this life, however, because of his existence and early defeat of the disaster-grade lifeform, the inn had been almost perfectly preserved.

Zhang Lie blinked a few times, then walked into the inn and requested a VIP suite.

"I apologize, sir, but no VIP suites are available at this point," the robot receptionist informed Zhang Lie.

"They aren't available?"

"They're all occupied, sir!"

Zhang Lie sighed. As he was about to turn and leave, a shocked cry rang out from behind him.

"Ah, aren't you the champion of the Void Cup, Zhang Lie? I heard you were from the Blacksteel settlement, but I never expected to see you here! May I have an autograph, sir?!"

The speaker was a youth seemingly at the cusp of adulthood. Perhaps because of his shock, his voice quavered. He scrambled to get a pen from the front desk, then proffered it to Zhang Lie.

Realizing that he would have to find a room elsewhere, Zhang Lie was feeling somewhat annoyed, but given how excited the youth seemed to be, Zhang Lie didn't want to refuse him.

He signed the hunter's armor, but the next moment, he regretted his decision. Almost immediately, the inn's lobby seemed to fill up with hunters.

"Zhang Lie!"

"Champion of the Void Cup!"

"Please sign my clothes!"

"Hug me, my hero!"

"Won't you give me a few pointers?"

Although he had tried to mask his appearance somewhat, Zhang Lie had severely underestimated his fame and popularity. More and more hunters came out of their rooms upon hearing the commotion.

Zhang Lie! This was a name that would attract any hunter in the settlement, because it was simply so well-known. Zhang Lie was a dragonlord of China, the strongest among the younger generation of hunters, and the champion of the Void Cup.

Each of these titles represented a massive accomplishment, let alone when they were combined.

"Ah, stop pushing me, look at the doorframe!" a hunter cried out, and the hunters within the inn all felt a quake that reverberated throughout the building.

Zhang Lie, standing by the front desk, saw a sight he felt he would never forget.

The inn might still be standing, but the stampede had given its foundations quite a shock. As more and more hunters began pouring in, the doorframe creaked as it was forced wider and wider. Finally, amidst Zhang Lie's horrified gaze, it and a portion of the wall crumbled, burying the lobby in a cloud of dust and rubble.

"Stop, stop!" In the end, Zhang Lie had no choice but to step forward to try to control the crowd. Otherwise, he didn't know how much further the situation would devolve. With how agitated the crowd was, however, even his shout didn't have much of an effect.

In exasperation, he activated [Eclipse], forcing everyone into silence with a crushing pressure.

"I'm happy to provide my autograph, but please be more orderly! Who do you think will be held responsible for this mess?" Zhang Lie gestured at the mess that the hunters had created in the lobby. "If any of you can get me a VIP suite here, I'll provide autographs for everyone around for the next two hours—but make sure to form an orderly line!"

The domain of [Eclipse] forced everyone to remain still as they listened to Zhang Lie's words. The moment he deactivated [Eclipse], the crowd did start to form a line, and one of the guests immediately stepped forward and handed Zhang Lie a key to his room.

Within mere moments, Zhang Lie had entered the room and was preparing to sign autographs for the next two hours, but as he glanced at the long line that snaked all the way out of the inn, he wasn't sure that he had made a wise decision.

Chapter 278: Absorption Procedure

A long line of hunters snaked out of the inn, extending so far into the distance that he couldn't see an end to it. In the next two hours, Zhang Lie felt as though he was in a living nightmare, experiencing all sorts of unusual requests.

One hunter even came prepared with a tattoo needle, and she requested that Zhang Lie sign her stomach. Another wanted Zhang Lie's name engraved on his broadsword. Even more absurd were the ones who wanted Zhang Lie to give them a signature over their genitals.

This nightmare lasted two whole hours for Zhang Lie. After the two hours were up, Zhang Lie swore that he would never host an autograph session so casually again.

Those hunters who had been at the scene had called all their friends over, so even after the two hours were up, there was still a long, ever-growing line of hunters.

That said, Zhang Lie had only promised two hours of this time, nothing more. The moment that time was up, he shut the door and had the security staff escort any lingering hunters out. He had no choice; if he had to sign one more autograph, he felt as though he might vomit.

Zhang Lie, who had happily entered the dimensional world expecting to be able to ingest his newly obtained disaster gene fragments, had wilted after two harrowing hours.

He fell asleep in his suite and slept all the way until midnight. Waking up with his stomach growling, he had a sumptuous feast before he regained the vitality to do anything more. This late at night, he was unlikely to be disturbed, and it would be a good time to act.

A black, crystalline orb appeared in Zhang Lie's hand, one filled with thorny spikes. It looked just like a spiky chestnut, but a darker, sturdier, and more mysterious one. This was the genetic core of a disaster-grade lifeform, the source of all their energy—their heart.

To be honest, it didn't even look like an edible object. Just from holding it in his hands, Zhang Lie could feel an oppressive energy radiating out from it. The spikes were far sharper than they seemed, and they were pricking his palm.

Fortunately, given Zhang Lie's experience in his past life, he knew precisely how to deal with such a core. Back then, as just another ordinary hunter within the crowd, he never had the opportunity to get a disaster-grade lifeform's core for himself, but he had learnt how to deal with one. Otherwise, he wouldn't have dared to ambush the disaster-grade lifeform.

The first step was to drip a drop of blood on it, allowing it to absorb the hunter's blood and familiarize itself with the hunter's genetic content until the entire core turned red. Subsequently, the hunter would have to infuse it with the purest genetic energy they possessed, causing a reaction between the core and the hunter's genetic code which would cause the core to soften.

After this two-step procedure, the disaster-grade lifeform's core would turn into what was essentially a very large gummy. Apparently, it even tasted quite good.

Zhang Lie sliced his left palm with Venombane, causing deep red blood to well out of the wound. The moment it touched the dark, spiky core, the blood was quickly absorbed into its interior. It sucked up more and more of Zhang Lie's blood, and Zhang Lie had to reopen the wound five times before it finally transformed wholly into a red, crystalline ball.

Then, he closed his eyes and began pouring concentrated, black genetic energy from his body into the core. It took him an entire hour before he felt the core start to soften. After ten more minutes or so, the entire core had softened completely. As Zhang Lie clutched the crystalline orb, he felt some unusual sense of kinship with it, as though it was already part of his body.

Zhang Lie swallowed it whole without even daring to chew it. As the core slid down his throat, Zhang Lie felt a fiery, numbing sensation spread throughout his body.

The moment the core reached his stomach, it seemed to explode. Zhang Lie let out a huge burp, and his face turned red, quickly followed by his neck, and then his whole body. Almost immediately, Zhang Lie took on the color of a boiled prawn.

As the fearsome energy from the genetic core rampaged through his body, he felt his blood begin to steam. The pain was unimaginable. Despite how tough Zhang Lie was, he had curled up into a ball on the ground. His head spun as he forced himself upright one stumbling step at a time.

The agonizing process he was going through was essentially a full-body blood transfusion between him and the disaster-grade lifeform's core, an evolution of the genetic code in his very cells.

Zhang Lie's [Ninecarp Transformation] activated on its own. Because of the genetic energy surging through his body, Zhang Lie was able to complete one cycle of cultivation in just a minute, an unimaginable speed. Even Zhang Lie himself could barely believe it, considering that this had previously been an hour-long process that required his full concentration.

Even more shockingly, this speed was increasing moment by moment.

As he continued to cycle the genetic energy through his body, he suddenly felt himself starting to swell, as though his body couldn't take it any longer.

Indeed, were Zhang Lie to open his eyes, he would find his body inflating like a balloon; at some point, he would surely pop, and he was drawing very close to that boundary.

Chapter 279: Pain Worse Than Death

As a reincarnator, Zhang Lie's plans had naturally been superb, but there were still some assumptions that he had taken for granted.

A disaster-grade lifeform was an existence that could only be supported on the third and higher realms of the dimensional world, and their strength was so frightening that it would take a third-realm hunter with maxed genes to be able to absorb it—but Zhang Lie was just a first-realm hunter!

Although he had an astounding collection of gene fragments, and although he would be able to easily deal with a mutated-grade third-realm existence, he was ultimately just a first-realm hunter, and his body and fundamental genetic code hadn't yet been tempered by the process of advancing from realm to realm.

Given his combat strength, he hadn't imagined how dangerous absorbing these disaster gene fragments would be for him. His body was close to succumbing to the rampant energy that the disaster-grade core was giving off.

As his body continued to balloon, Zhang Lie spat out a mouthful of blood. Following that, blood began to well out of all of his orifices. The moment he spat out that mouthful of blood, it evaporated instantly, revealing just how hot his body had become.

After all, his framework was water-attuned, and the fact that his body temperature had somehow ended up so high meant that his body had gone entirely out of control. The overwhelming strength of the disaster-grade core had caused him to enter a mental state in which he felt dissociated from his physical body.

If not for his overwhelming willpower, Zhang Lie would have gone unconscious, but even with this shred of clarity, there was little he could do. His body had reached its limits, and he was about to explode.

His skin was already starting to crack and tear, and black genetic energy was seeping out from within. Black rays of genetic energy, much like the rays of annihilation that the disaster-grade lifeform had given off, shot out indiscriminately from Zhang Lie's body, destroying all that they touched.

The Blacksteel Inn was quickly shot through with all manner of holes, and quite a few unlucky guests in the inn became injured, or even lost their lives, as a result. The inn, which had withstood the beast stampede not a week ago, finally collapsed as a result of Zhang Lie's unintentional attack. The moment the inn fell and the beams of genetic energy were exposed to the first realm at large, urgent messages filtered through the depths of Zhang Lie's mind.

[An unknown high-dimensional energy source has been detected. Activating extraction procedure!]

[An unknown high-dimensional energy source has been detected. Activating extraction procedure!]

[An unknown...]

Forcing himself to retain consciousness, Zhang Lie noticed that his environment seemed to be changing.

He was teleported away from the ruins of the inn into an extradimensional space, a white room illuminated by a seven-colored light.

[Energy has exceeded the maximum threshold. Activating second-realm transferral routine.]

[Energy has exceeded the maximum threshold. Activating second-realm transferral routine.]

[Energy has...]

The next moment, before Zhang Lie could react, the seven-colored light suddenly flared, forcing the disaster-grade energy that was rampaging his body back within it.

Because of the will of the world's expulsion and forceful teleportation into this unknown space, Zhang Lie was barely saved from death, but the pain that wracked his body, that scoured his insides and colored his vision in shades of red—that didn't stop.

The will of the world had forcibly activated the transferral procedure that would send him to the second realm, and it would endow him with a refined body as part of this process. The energy that was supposed to fuel this refinement was now contesting the energy from the disaster-grade lifeform.

Zhang Lie's body was at the center of this unstable equilibrium; it was a miracle that he had somehow managed to cheat death once and again. The two frightening sources of energy continued warring over his body, a process that brought him unimaginable pain, one that caused even the strong-willed Zhang Lie to wish for death—the sensation of his body tearing itself apart from the inside wasn't something he would ever willingly bear.

Caught in the grasp of two forces beyond his ken, beyond his control, driven half-mad with pain, Zhang Lie sought the only solace he could: his framework. He cycled genetic energy through his body following the patterns inscribed by his framework, focusing on this singular objective over which he still had some control.

The disaster-grade genetic energy which was running rampant around his body was far stronger than what his framework could generate and control. Whenever he cycled his framework, he would be able to process a skein of that disaster-grade genetic energy, nothing more. That energy was holding the refinement energy at bay, preventing it from entering Zhang Lie's body.

This process would only end once Zhang Lie was able to incorporate the will of the world's energy into his own body, but in order to do so, he would have to strip the barrier of disaster-grade genetic energy surrounding his body first—and with nothing more than his own framework to do so.

Forcing himself to ignore the pain that felt poised to send his body into shock, Zhang Lie gritted his teeth and began the arduous task of cycling genetic energy throughout his battered body.

Chapter 280: A Startling Enhancement

The longer it took Zhang Lie to absorb the disaster-grade genetic energy, the longer he would suffer the pain carving away at his body, but his desire for life ultimately triumphed over that pain.

After the initial onslaught, Zhang Lie found, to his surprise, that he was slowly acclimating to the sensation. After an interminable period of time—perhaps a moment, perhaps several days, or even a few months—Zhang Lie finally regained sensation over his body.

His arms, which had swollen to the size of pig's trotters, finally went back to normal. Disaster-grade genetic energy still ran rampant throughout his body, but its might had been considerably reduced.

The seven-colored energy from the refinement process was also finally able to enter Zhang Lie's body. Where it went, Zhang Lie felt a palliative coolness that reached all the way to his soul.

As he regained full consciousness, Zhang Lie recalled that he was undergoing the refinement process for ascending to the second realm. He immediately began to direct control over that process. It was something every hunter had to experience while ascending to the second realm, and represented a summary of sorts of a hunter's accomplishments in the first realm.

The refinement energy would allow the gene fragments that a hunter had amassed within the first realm to permeate throughout the hunter's body, elevating a hunter's status on a fundamental, genetic level.

Every ascension would be accompanied by a refinement process, and this boon was what motivated hunters to ascend. Zhang Lie was undergoing such a process, but his had clearly exceeded the limits of what would be considered ordinary.

Zhang Lie hadn't undergone this process intentionally; instead, he had been forced to do so because of the strength of the gene fragments in his body. Indeed, his strength was even starting to distort the laws of the first realm.

Of course, this wasn't something that Zhang Lie knew at present; he had no clue just how outsized an impact his presence in the first realm was causing to the will of the dimensional world.

The refinement process continued. From Zhang Lie's perspective, the most important thing here was to refine a high-quality set of genetic armor.

He immediately retrieved the disaster-grade lifeform's outer shell from his soul-space.

Under ordinary circumstances, those who passed through the refinement process would have their status of life elevated in accordance with the highest-grade gene fragments they had accumulated.

A hunter who had maxed out his superior gene fragments would be the equivalent of a superior-grade lifeform. The benefits afforded to such a hunter would clearly be greater than that to a hunter who had only maxed out his mutated gene fragments.

The difference between such hunters was massive, not only in terms of their status of life, but also in terms of the quality of genetic armor they were able to produce. This was why Yun Bing and Chu Feng had refused to ascend even after maxing out their mutated gene fragments.

No one wanted to lose out from the very beginning. The first realm possessed the lowest difficulty of all the realms, and it would be foolish to give up an opportunity to acquire gene fragments easily.

Zhang Lie didn't know just what status of life he would be granted.

After all, no hunter had ever been his equal in terms of the gene fragments collected in the first realm, and it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that he had exceeded the limit of what was humanly possible.

When Zhang Lie extended his will into his soul space, he was dumbfounded by what he had found. His soul space, originally the size of a small duck pond, had evolved into a massive lake. Within that lake, Zhang Lie saw the soul shards he had amassed, along with a white-colored worm.

A soul space was where hunters kept their soul shards; a first-realm existence would only have a soul space the size of a small pond, which would be able to hold at most ten or so soul shards.

That Zhang Lie's soul space had expanded tenfold meant that he would be able to make use of ten times the soul shards that an ordinary hunter could. He could barely imagine what collecting and simultaneously using the effects of a hundred soul shards would be like.

Just what had caused this sudden expansion? Was it the disaster-grade genetic energy, or the refinement energy from his ascension? Even in his past life, Zhang Lie had never heard of such a phenomenon.

Given the pressing importance of constructing his genetic armor, however, Zhang Lie couldn't afford to spend more time thinking about this.

He would be able to investigate this phenomenon after the refinement process; what he needed to do at present was to condense a suit of genetic armor. He began to purify the crystalline armor of the disaster-grade lifeform, which would require infusing the refinement energy and his own genetic energy into the material.

Zhang Lie's attention turned to his genetic core, but his eyes bulged upon seeing it anew.

There were two more transformations visible within the core of [Ninecarp Transformation], one a giant turtle whose shell bore five tablets with mysterious runic inscriptions on them, and the other a qilin-like lifeform covered with dragon scales.

Had... his framework evolved twice over?

Caught within the recesses of pain, Zhang Lie had focused singularly on his framework. He had expected significant advancement as a result, but certainly not two whole evolutions. The third transformation's winged tiger had become the fourth's dragonturtle, and subsequently the fifth's qilin.

Zhang Lie couldn't help marveling at the potency of the disaster-grade genetic energy. Just from the advancement to his framework alone, he felt that the mind-shattering pain he had experienced was worth it.