

## U. Warlord 381

### Chapter 381: Defeat and Vengeance

Reclaiming the energy that the sura king had spent on a massive explosion was like spitting out a gob of saliva and trying to suck it back in: somewhat disgusting and all but impossible.

Xiao Zhengyang frowned. "I'm not sure if others would be able to do it, but the sura king surely can—no, he's already done it."

"How?" Xia Na asked.

"The red spider lilies originally bloomed over his domain, so the force of the explosion was his strength, not the lilies'. The domain of the sura is an extension of their body, so he's simply converting that energy into a different form."

At that moment in time, Zhang Lie couldn't help but pity the sura king's concubines. Not only did most of them die a grisly, terrifying death, they even fertilized the sura king's strength. The flowers that bloomed from their bodies were used as fuel for a gigantic conflagration, and the remaining petals would be reused as fuel once more...

The hunters in Qi watched on with bated breath as the sura king used his final trump card.

Was Zhang Lie really able to take him down? Would mankind defeat the sura? Everyone was silent. The sura had never lost a confrontation against the humans. If Zhang Lie succeeded, he would establish a precedent, but his success seemed very implausible. After all, his opponent was the sura king himself, and everyone had learned of his strength.

That said, the sura king had to deal with the aftereffects of launching such a large-scale explosion. His arteries and veins were throbbing, and his body seemed to have grown slightly swollen, as though he might explode at any moment.

"We have to cheer Zhang Lie on—he's the only one who can save us from the sura king's assault!" a hunter cried out.

The other hunters, sharing the same sentiment, began to cheer.

"Mankind will not fall! Zhang Lie is undefeatable!"

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The sura king hummed. "You really are adored by these humans, aren't you?"

Zhang Lie ignored him. "I won't let you rear humans like livestock for your own pleasure, never!"

"In that case, I hope you're strong enough to defend them against me." The sura king rushed forward, red spider lilies blooming at his feet.

The sura king punched forward, his fist wreathed in red petals. No aura accompanied the blow, nor any earth-shattering commotion, but that simple punch was enough to startle the will of the world into trying to set up a third cordon.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" Zhang Lie countered with Venombane.

A terrifying explosion rang out, barely contained by the will of the world.

Zhang Lie raised both his arms into the sky, and the image of a dragon turtle appeared behind him. The first two gravity-controlling tablets smashed into the ground, but the sura king leapt out of the way in time.

As the outline of a dragon turtle appeared before Zhang Lie, the remaining two tablets fell toward the sura king, who had to contort his body to avoid them before retaliating with a punch of his own.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" Zhang Lie's blood dragons clashed with the sura king's petals once and again, neither party able to secure a decisive victory.

The sura king thrust forward. Black genetic energy snaked out from his body and clashed against Zhang Lie's blood dragon, sending yet another explosion into the air. Surrounded by the petals, the sura king was unhurt, as was Zhang Lie, safely ensconced within his runic tablets.

The sura king laughed coldly. "I don't think you'll be able to protect Qi with just that amount of strength. Kneel and surrender, and I'll accept you as a concubine."

Zhang Lie retorted, "And what of you? The petals surrounding your body seem to be diminishing with each and every attack. You don't have limitless stamina either."

"As long as I can kill you before then, it doesn't matter." The sura king thrust forward once more with his palms, sending a torrent of genetic energy against Zhang Lie. Red spider lilies bloomed on the ground, and the outline of malignant spirits seemed visible from the depths of that energy.

Zhang Lie blocked the attack with his two tablets of stasis, reducing its speed and intensity.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" He retaliated with a blood dragon that soared through the skies and swooped down toward the sura king, who defended himself with a giant shield of petals.

With impeccable timing, Zhang Lie summoned the dragon turtle once more, sending the two gravity tablets crashing down in front of and behind the sura king, disrupting his balance and his attack. His shield of petals fell apart, allowing Zhang Lie's blood dragon to charge directly at him.

Sensing imminent danger, the sura king forcefully ignited all the petals around him. There were far fewer red spider lilies by this point, but the explosive attack still couldn't be taken lightly.

Wounded, the sura king turned to flee, propelled by the force of the explosion. He had just sighed in relief when a purple shortsword shot through the center of the explosion and stuck itself up his ass.

Zhang Lie chased after him, dashing through the explosion and sending him crashing to the ground with a sudden kick. The sura king's eyes widened; he had hardly expected Zhang Lie to react so swiftly and decisively.

How could he have predicted the existence of a hunter like Zhang Lie? Zhang Lie wasn't the governor, and yet he was far stronger. The sura king had quashed the governor in a single blow, but Zhang Lie was as resilient as a cockroach.

"Is the king of the sura running away? Why don't you stay forevermore in the paradise of your dreams instead?" Zhang Lie stomped on the sura king's buttocks, pinning him to the ground.

"What do you want, human?!"

"What do I want? What do you do after catching a human?"

"Have sex with him, of course!" the sura king replied instinctively. As if realizing that his answer was flawed, however, he suddenly coughed and said, "I mean, I'll treat him in a friendly manner."

"Is that what you call rape over in your lands?"

The sura king's face turned pale. "Don't you dare try anything—I'm the sura king! If you kill me, you'll be making yourself an enemy of the sura, who have claimed thousands, tens of thousands of kingdoms—you'll be marked as an enemy, one to be eradicated at all cost! Do you really think a small human city like Qi would be able to survive under that onslaught?"

Zhang Lie laughed coldly. "Aren't you thinking too highly of yourself? If there are so many sura, then the death of one lone king would hardly be significant."

The sura king's eyes widened; Zhang Lie had a better understanding of the sura than he had thought.

Cruelly, Zhang Lie whispered in his ear, "Don't you like ravaging humans? Perhaps it's your turn to be the victim."

The sura king's eyes bulged. "No, please wait, I won't do it again!"

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" Venomblade shivered, and a bloody dragon shot out of the blade and up the sura king's Twin streaks of blood burst from the sura king's ass and mouth.

As expected of the king of the sura, his body was sturdy enough that he didn't perish from Zhang Lie's attack. He spasmed a little, but he was far from dying.

"Are you having fun, sura king?" As he watched the human race's mortal enemy struggle on the ground, spasming as blood poured out of his body, Zhang Lie couldn't help feel satisfied.

"Let justice be served for those you've harmed and killed. Again: [The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!"

Another dragon, thicker than the last, dove into the sura king's body.

Chapter 382: Hero of Mankind

"Are you in such ecstasy that you can't speak? I knew you'd love this sensation—[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" Zhang Lie sent another dragon into the sura king's prone body. "Again! [The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]! Look at how much you're enjoying it—your whole body is spasming! In that case, let's keep going—[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!"

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

The sura king lay in a pool of his own blood, one which grew larger by the second. He was suffering from heavy internal bleeding as a result of Zhang Lie's skills, but Zhang Lie had made sure to leave him alive for what was to follow.

The sura warriors had decimated the human forces. Despite the fact that they had all perished, the humans still bore the sura ill will, a blood feud that couldn't be easily annulled. The hunters of Qi would need to vent their anger, and the defeated sura king was the best target.

When the hunters of Qi saw Zhang Lie dragging the sura king's battered body back to Qi, they looked on in disbelief. They had hoped that a miracle would occur, that Zhang Lie would be able to kill the sura king, but it was still a shock to see that he had really done so.

A cheer broke the pregnant silence, one which spread until the whole city was in an uproar.

Zhang Lie had done it—he had defeated a sura king, all by himself! Not only had he saved Qi, he had started a new chapter in mankind's history. Humans weren't weaker than the sura—Zhang Lie was mankind's new hope!

"Hero!"

"Hero!"

"Hero!"

Cries of adulation and joy burst from the spectators' mouths. Struck by the mood, Zhang Lie raised the body of the sura king up above his head, and their shouts reached a new crescendo.

Many of the hunters began to cry, relieved that they had won, that they had survived, that the majority of Qi was safe, that Zhang Lie had proven that the sura could be defeated. He had wrought an accomplishment that even Martial Sage Hong Tianqi had not while he was in the second realm.

Their wounds and their friends' and comrades' deaths had, at the least, brought them something valuable. How many times had the spectators believed that Zhang Lie would lose? And yet Zhang Lie had overcome one trial after another, and he had succeeded in what they once would have deemed impossible.

"Master!" The members of Team Zenith rushed over.

"How are the other three fronts faring?"

Sun Mengmeng replied, "The moment the sura king launched his first explosion, the invaders began to flee. They likely sensed just how concentrated the genetic energy was in that region and realized that there was still someone in Qi whom they had no chance of beating. Wary that there might be other such hunters waiting for them, they retreated of their own accord."

Fang Yi scoffed. "Dishonorable foes, preying on the weak. I'll take them all down if I ever see them again!"

Zhou Ying shook her head. "I'd rather they not return at all."

Li Feng shrugged. "What's there to fear with our captain around?"

With Xia Na's assistance, the grievously wounded Xiao Zhengyang made his way up to Zhang Lie, where he patted Zhang Lie's shoulder. "Good job."

Zhang Lie smiled. "Are you alright, Governor?"

Xiao Zhengyang coughed violently. "I'm not dead yet, but I've been seriously injured. Why don't you take over the governorship of Qi for the moment—no, why don't you just become the governor of Qi? I don't think anyone here would object."

Xia Na and the other members of the special forces looked ardently at Zhang Lie, hope and expectation in their eyes.

Zhang Lie shook his head. "I have more important affairs to attend to. Please find another successor."

Xiao Zhengyang sighed. "What a shame."

Xia Na crossed her arms. "What could be more important than Qi?"

Zhang Lie smiled mysteriously. Still dragging the sura king with him, he leapt up to a balcony. "Citizens of Qi, please listen to me! Are you willing to be defeated, time after time, by the sura?"

"Do you need to ask?!" someone shouted from below. "Of course we aren't!"

"In that case, follow me. We'll strike back against the sura, right here, right now!"

Silence followed Zhang Lie's proclamation. There had been other similar attempts to fend off the sura in the past, but all had ended in failure. Zhang Lie was clearly enervated from his recent success, but would he be able to stage an effective resistance just like that?

"If you're unhappy with your present circumstances, then rise up! Fight with me! What's there to hesitate about? The sura have just attacked one of our cities—it's only reasonable that we attack them back! Perhaps we might not have been successful in the past, but now that their strongest fighters lay slain, I'm certain of our success!"

Zhang Lie shouted, raising the sura king's body with one arm. "Let's give the sura a taste of their own medicine!"

When the crowds saw the defeated sura king, they seemed to make up their minds.

"We'll attack the sura!"

"Yes, let's get revenge for what they've done to us!"

"We've suffered enough because of the sura all this time—it's time to get payback!"

If Zhang Lie were able to kill even the sura king, what else was there to be afraid of?

"Zhang Lie has made history! With the sura king and all his elites defeated, what's there to be afraid of?"

"By joining Zhang Lie, we'll be able to enter the annals of history as well! There's nothing to fear with him around."

The hunters all raised their weapons.

"Indeed, the sura aren't as fearsome a foe as we made them out to be. As you all saw, I managed to defeat a whole horde of the sura king's elites with just one special item."

"A special item?" The hunters all perked up their ears at what Zhang Lie would mention next.

"This potion concocted by the Yeluo clan is harmless to humans but anathema to the sura. Any drop of liquid that touches a sura fighter will cause their body to destroy itself from the inside out."

"Really?" a hunter shouted.

Someone who had seen the initial sortie replied, "Of course! I saw it with my own eyes—Zhang Lie rained down drops of some mysterious liquid on the sura fighters, and then they started melting!"

Some of the hunters who had been hesitating made up their mind.

"My brother lost his life on this battlefield. I saw a few sura fighters tear apart and devour his corpse—they'll all die for what they've done!"

"A few years ago, a few sura fighters killed and devoured my girlfriend in front of me. Since then, my main motivation for growing stronger has been to avenge her."

"The sura have apparently been rearing humans in their lands like livestock, and it's our obligation to rescue them."

Zhang Lie's words set the entire city of Qi aflame. The sura's actions toward the humans had fomented bitter hatred, but they had felt powerless to act on that hatred—until now. Zhang Lie's victory had enervated them all.

As Zhang Lie leapt down from the balcony, Xiao Zhengyang advised, "Isn't it too early for something like this? I know how strong you are, but the sura aren't weak either, especially with the home field advantage."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "If we humans want to make a name for ourselves in the second realm, we have to show the sura that we can fight back. We have to defend ourselves, and our first target has to be the dominant race of the second realm—the sura!"

The reason that other alien races had attacked Qi when the sura invaded was because they thought that humans were weak, and Qi would be a good target. By retaliating against the sura, Zhang Lie intended to inform the races of the second realm that that was no longer true.

He handed the sura king, which he continued to drag behind him, to Xiao Zhengyang. "Have someone hang him on the castle walls, and let whoever wants to give him a knife to his back."

Xiao Zhengyang's eyes widened. "Isn't this the sura king?"

"Indeed. We'll make an example out of him and show the other races why we aren't to be trifled with. Remember to feed him some potions now and then so he doesn't die."

Xia Na rubbed her hands. "Can anyone attack him?"

Zhang Lie nodded. "Don't worry. I've already stripped him of his genetic core, so he won't be able to retaliate against anyone, but make sure not to kill him outright."

The gathered hunters glanced deeply at the sura king, malice in their eyes.

Xiao Zhengyang was flabbergasted, but in the end, he agreed with Zhang Lie's suggestions. Glancing at the sura king, he couldn't help but feel embarrassed that he had lost in just one blow, whereas Zhang Lie had defeated and even subdued him without killing him.

"Team Zenith, assemble! Prepare to attack the sura lands."

"Yes, Captain!"

Xiao Zhengyang asked, "Are you going to head out immediately? Don't you need some rest after that fight?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "We can't give the sura any time to react and to summon reinforcements."

Xiao Zhengyang nodded, but he glanced gravely at the battle-weary fighters.

"Don't worry, I won't bring everyone with me. I'll pick out the healthy hunters with decent strength and form a team of elites to massacre the sura."

"Very well. I'll leave my men in your hands."

The members of Team Zenith began to examine the volunteers for the mission. Almost every hunter wanted to participate, but most were unable to do so. Those who weren't exceptionally strong and those who were injured would only be liabilities in this blitzkrieg attack; Zhang Lie wanted the best of the best.

In no more than an hour, a troop of hunters three thousand strong stood in front of him.

Chapter 383: Striking the Sura Capital

"Depart!" Zhang Lie commanded.

They followed the tracks of the sura king and his retinue backwards. Thanks to the sura king, who had culled the genetic lifeforms nearby on his way to Qi, Zhang Lie and his party were able to make rapid headway.

Once they reached the lands of the sura, Zhang Lie shouted, "Kill!"

The sura began to panic. It felt like no time had passed at all between the sura king's departure with his elite troops and Zhang Lie and his party invading their lands.

Within the capital of the sura lands, on one of the watchtowers overlooking the city walls, one of the sura fighters lay on the floor as he stared out the window. "Why do you think the king's been gone for so long?"

Beneath the watchtower, a fighter responded, "They're probably all having a feast with the humans they've caught! That's what they used to do in the past, after all. It'll probably be a few days before their return."

The sentries didn't take their jobs too seriously; after all, it had been many years since someone dared to attack a capital of the sura lands.

Beneath the watchtower, another fighter added, "There's even a chance the king and his party won't return for half a month or so. Regardless, given his strength, there's no way he would fail. Let's wait to hear their good news."

"Ah, I'm envious—they'll have a chance to taste fresh human meat! Ever since I ate the one my family was rearing, I've been salivating to get the taste of another. I should have gone with them!"

From the watchtower, one sura fighter glanced at the path the king and his retinue had taken out of the sura lands and found a party of hunters heading in the opposite direction. "Look! Could the king be back already?"

The guard by his side frowned. "Would they have returned so quickly? That seems unlikely."

The scout continued to murmur to himself, "Wait, they don't look like sura—aren't these... humans?!"

The other fighters all began to laugh.

"Ha! I can't believe I fell for that. You're pulling a prank on us, aren't you?"

"And here I thought we really were facing an invasion from another race!"

The first fighter replied seriously, "But there really is a party of humans heading in this direction!"

"You must be blind—where would humans find the courage to attack us sura? They've never won a single altercation against us."

However, upon the first fighter's urging, they too began to look outside the watchtower.

"They... really do seem to be a band of humans."

The first fighter rolled his eyes. "That's what I told you!"

"What are they doing here? Surely they don't plan on invading us."

"Maybe they couldn't beat our king, so they're trying to attack us in an attempt to get him to retreat?" one fighter suggested.

"What, you think these humans can do anything against us?"

His comrades scoffed at him. Every member of the sura was a fighter in their own right. Although some hadn't received military training, the constitution of the sura alone meant that they were no weaker than ordinary hunters.

It was precisely because of their physical strength that they were so arrogant; after all, on the basis of that strength, they had conquered the entirety of the second realm.

"Didn't you say that you wanted to consume human flesh?" one sura fighter asked. "You must be happy to see all this human meat making its way over, then!"

One of the fighters frowned. "But isn't it strange?"

"What?"

"How did these humans make their way over here?"

Aren't there quite a few cities and settlements the humans have to get through before arriving at the capital? Could they have avoided them all?"

"Imagine that—could the humans know how our lands are structured, as well as where our forts are? But if they didn't..."

Some of the sura fighters shook their heads. "What's there to worry about? They're just humans! Would we sura be afraid of them? We've all reared a few humans, haven't we? They're perfectly harmless, and we even break them all the time by accident! I've fought with humans myself, and I've taken part in some of these large-scale fights. It generally takes around four humans to bring down a seasoned sura fighter. We'll be able to handle that human party easily."

The sura fighter glancing at the human procession continued to frown. "I still feel like something's wrong."

As the sura fighters continued to chat, Zhang Lie and a group of the fastest human hunters flew toward the city, sending drops of the Yeluo potion splattering all over. Quite a few sura fighters were caught in the spray before they could even react, and their bodies began to decompose on the spot.

[Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring]! A gigantic flock of black dragons soared throughout the city, dive-bombing the walls and crushing the sura fighters caught within.

"Rush forward with me!" Zhang Lie and his three thousand troops rushed into the capital of the sura lands.

Their invasion was so rapid, and the scouts on the watchtowers so ignorant of the humans' true strength, that no advance warning was sent to the citizens ensconced within the capital. As a result, the fighting began and ended extremely quickly.

Every hunter held a weapon that had been dipped in the Yeluo poison, and they easily slaughtered whatever resistance they found. Having lost their king and a large fraction of their forces, the sura were unable to resist the humans' invasion, and they ultimately found themselves fleeing from their capital.

The human fighters were all exhausted after defending Qi and then rushing over to the sura lands, but bright smiles shone across all their faces. They stuck the flag of Qi above the top of the sura king's palace, waving it as they yelled out, "For the honor of glory of Qi! For Zhang Lie!"

#### Chapter 384: The Price of Assistance

While Zhang Lie, the members of Team Zenith, and the hunters of Qi were conquering the sura capital, the world federation was still in the middle of discussions about providing aid.

Everyone in the world federation was worried to hear that Qi had been attacked. There were only four human cities remaining in the second realm, and losing Qi was tantamount to losing a quarter of mankind's holdings.

Even more importantly were the million hunters stationed around Qi, who would lose everything they had if Qi really were to be seized by the sura. In the end, Hong Tianqi expedited the world federation's deliberation process and brought this matter in front of the highest authorities himself.

"We humans don't have much land in the second realm, and losing another city would be a major setback. No matter what, we have to send reinforcements to Qi— don't forget, mankind's loss will be the entire world federation's loss!" Hong Tianqi slammed a palm down on the table in agitation.

Amurong shook his head. "Hong, please calm down. It's unrealistic for us to be sending troops and resources over. If they were to be injured or killed in the process, who would bear responsibility?"

Furthermore, if there were alien races who took this opportunity to strike, we would lose more than just Qi.

"Finally, by the time these reinforcements arrive, Qi would likely have been leveled to the ground already. As you know, the sura are undefeated in the second realm, and our reports state that a sura king and his band of elite fighters are present."

"Is that so?" Hong Tianqi barked. "You'll sit by and do nothing as Qi falls to rubble?"

Amurong smiled knowingly at Hong Tianqi. "If I'm not wrong, Zhang Lie's in Qi, isn't he?"

Hong Tianqi frowned.

Amurong continued, "Losing Qi would dramatically reduce Zhang Lie's rate of growth, so you'd like to keep Qi at all costs."

Hong Tianqi snorted. "This isn't just a matter of Zhang Lie, but rather of the world federation at large. Don't forget that the existence of Qi benefits all of us, not just Zhang Lie!"

Amurong spread his arms. "How will saving Qi benefit the rest of us here?"

Hong Tianqi frowned even more harshly. "Why would providing aid require anything in return?"

Amurong smirked. "You want us, the highest authorities of the world federation, to send reinforcements to Qi, don't you? That will incur a cost on the other members—the rest of us. After all, sending aid means that we might be risking our own hunters."

"Aren't you all part of the world federation? What's the point of this alliance, then? We humans have sent help and assistance to other races here whenever they needed it!"

Amurong laced his fingers and supported his lower jaw with it. "As I've mentioned already, your situation is different. Moving our forces to Qi will require a large expenditure of time and energy. Furthermore, your enemy is the sura, the hegemon of the second realm! If it's a matter of such urgency to you, surely you should provide some compensation to the rest of us. Otherwise, even if I permit this operation, I find it unlikely that anyone would volunteer to send aid.

"As you know, every mobilization order sent out by the highest authorities will require a certain amount of resources as the price. Since this order was initiated by the humans, the humans should be the ones to pay that price."

Amurong noticed that Hong Tianqi was getting rather agitated, but he didn't care—the power he held in his hands would be able to decide Zhang Lie's future, and even Zhang Lie's life. Given how flustered Hong Tianqi was, Amurong even suspected that Zhang Lie might be in Qi at this very moment.

Hong Tianqi retorted, "Hunters from all races in the world federation are present in Qi!"

Amurong spread his arms again. "We can recover from such a loss, but can you afford to lose Zhang Lie?"

"Isn't Zhang Lie also a member of the world federation?"

Amurong chuckled coldly. "Why don't I help you make a decision? If you promise a vial of Potion #1 for each hunter that takes part in this operation, the entire world federation will send forces in aid of Qi."

An operation of this magnitude would require hundreds of thousands of reinforcements at the very least, and Zhang Lie hardly had the wherewithal to produce the potion in such quantities.

Amurong continued, "Think quickly, won't you? You're running out of time. Shall we leave the decision to a vote?"

A representative by Amurong's side suggested, "Tianqi, why don't you give in? With Zhang Lie around, you'll surely be able to produce endless vials of Potion #1, and even Potions #2, #3, and #4!"

The representatives allied with Amurong smiled maliciously at Hong Tianqi, greed flashing in their eyes.

At the very least, the representatives of those races that had allied themselves with the humans seemed abhorrent of what Amurong was trying to pull off, and from their glances at Hong Tianqi, it seemed as though they would be willing to provide reinforcements regardless of whether the motion was passed.

Hong Tianqi suddenly sucked in a deep breath and wiped the anxiety from his face.

"Very well. In that case, I choose not to submit this motion for consideration. Let Qi live or die by its own hand."

Amurong's eyes widened. "Hong, are you certain? You—"

Amurong was about to continue trying to persuade Hong Tianqi when the doors to the meeting room were suddenly pushed open, and a scout rushed in.

"Urgent news— Qi has won a great victory against the sura, and Zhang Lie's captured the invading sura king alive!"

"What?! The humans won?!"

"They caught the sura king alive... I can't be dreaming, can I?"

Amurong and the other representatives gaped in shock while Hong Tianqi roared in laughter. "Ha, haha, hahaha! I can't believe Zhang Lie actually managed to capture a sura king alive. I couldn't do the same in the second realm; he's going to usher in an era of prosperity for us humans, I'm sure."

Amurong's face was pinched as he asked the scout, "Is this information credible?"

"Yes, sir! I heard the news straight from the wounded governor of Qi himself!"

When he heard that Xiao Zhengyang had been injured, Hong Tianqi frowned. "And what of Zhang Lie? Is he badly injured?"

"No, Zhang Lie wasn't injured at all!"

The representatives glanced at the scout in shock. How could Zhang Lie have subdued the sura king without taking injuries? That was ridiculous! They had to ascertain just what had happened for themselves, but one thing was clear: they could hardly become enemies of mankind now.

With a grin, Hong Tianqi continued, "Where's Zhang Lie now?"

"Well, he's..."

"Stop mumbling and speak up!" Amurong called out impatiently.

He had almost succeeded in forcing Hong Tianqi's hand, so the sudden reversal in the humans' fortune had been a nasty surprise.

"Zhang Lie, along with three thousand hunters from Qi, has... counter-invaded the sura lands!"

Amurong: ? ? ?

The gathered representatives: ! ! !

Even Hong Tianqi was agog now.

By then, the sura capital was completely under Zhang Lie's control. He and the members of Team Zenith walked through the gigantic palace of the sura king. When he pushed open a door from which a nauseating smell was emanating, his face turned dark.

The room was akin to a dungeon in which thirty or so human males and females were kept. Their bodies were nude, and quite a few of the females were pregnant. Rather than humans, they seemed more like livestock. Their eyes were glazed over, and they seemed more like walking corpses than anything else.

They had already given up hope, and they barely stirred upon seeing the doors open.

Hong Xi felt a pang of pain in her chest, unable to bear such cruel torture.

"Don't worry, we're here to save you!" she cried out. "The sura have been defeated, and you're all free."

However, her words had almost no effect on the prisoners. Most of them began to bleat and cry out like pigs, with only a single middle-aged man revealing a hint of an unusual expression. Unfortunately, he was simply so frightened that, despite opening his mouth, he ultimately closed it and instead squealed and bleated like the other prisoners.

Only when Hong Xi repeated herself did the man ask hoarsely, "I-I'm free?"

"Yes, you're free!"

"Have the, the sura b-been destroyed?"

"We've killed the ones that fought and let the rest flee. It's over!" Hong Xi confirmed.

The man's eyes slowly grew wide as he processed her words. "Truly?"

Hong Xi pointed at Zhang Lie. "This is my master, Zhang Lie from the Zenith Dojo. He, along with three thousand brave hunters from Qi, freed these lands from the oppression of the sura!"

The man asked, "What of the sura king?"

When he mentioned the sura king, everyone in the dungeon shuddered, as though their fear of him had been emblazoned in their very soul. Zhang Lie could hardly imagine just what they had suffered.

Despite seeing Zhang Lie in the flesh, the men and women in the dungeon still couldn't believe their new reality. It seemed far more likely that they were still dreaming.

Zhang Lie turned around. "Walk outside and you'll understand."

Hong Xi broke apart their chains as they stepped toward the entrance to the dungeon, but they hesitated before the boundary. They were afraid that, the moment they stepped out, they would find that they had been in a dream all along.

Hong Xi and the others had to plead and cajole them before they reluctantly drummed up their courage and took their first tentative step outside.

Blinding rays of sunlight impinged on their faces. Because they had been kept away from the sunlight for so long, their eyes were unable to adapt, and they threw up their hands and averted their gaze.

The next moment, however, despite the overwhelming pain, they forced themselves to glance out of the palace and toward the capital. The buildings all around had been destroyed, and the only people on the streets were human scouts. Flags of Qi fluttered wherever they looked; one hung right above the top of the palace, visible all throughout the capital. Those humans who lived in darkness and despair cried on seeing it as they dropped to the ground and sobbed.

How long they had suffered in interminable pain! How long they had lay desolate in the icy-cold dungeon, how long they had hoped to be rescued as they watched their companions die!

They had hoped, but never truly expected, that they would see sunlight once again.

#### Chapter 385: Kobe Beef

Unfortunately, some of the prisoners didn't seem as though they would be able to enjoy their newfound freedom for long. Given how long they had been imprisoned, even the strongest, sturdiest hunters would have received irreversible damage to their body.

An old man who walked out of the dungeon was so agitated by the light that he passed away almost as he stepped into the sun. Zhang Lie and the others watched on as his body was cremated.

His life had been unlucky, but his last moments had been marked by a stroke of luck. He had died feeling the warmth of sunlight on his face, understanding that there were people who had ventured out into the lands of the sura to rescue him. How many prisoners had died in vain, buried without even the hope of rescue?

What was most frightening was that such dungeons were commonplace throughout the capital, not just the palace. The sura had reared humans like livestock, and there was even a large human farm within the capital.

There were over five hundred humans within, as well as human bones numbering in the tens of thousands. The search parties ended up rescuing over a thousand imprisoned humans, most of which were female.

This was only one of the sura's many kingdoms. How many humans were held in captivity all throughout the lands of the sura?

Some of these humans had been captured by the sura while on one expedition or another, while others came from cities or settlements that the sura had destroyed. The human fighters shuddered; if not for Zhang Lie, they could well have ended up in similar straits.

Hong Xi asked, "Why is it that so many of these human women are pregnant, but we haven't seen any babies?"

Zhang Lie glanced at her warily. "You don't want to know the answer to that."

Victory was exhilarating, but the aftermath of the victory left much to be desired. No human could be excited at seeing their own kind as livestock.

Zhang Lie suddenly asked, "Sun Mengmeng, didn't you ask how we were going to deal with the sura captives we ended up with?"

Sun Mengmeng was silent.

"We'll send them all to Qi, then rear them like livestock ourselves."

Li Feng clenched his fists tightly. "No—just kill them and end this feud once and for all."

Zhang Lie replied coldly, "Barbarians might eat each other, but civilized folk wouldn't. Nevertheless, their revenge might well be something far worse than anything barbarians could come up with. We'll set up a laboratory for investigating the sura in Qi. I'm sure the scientists of the world federation will be very interested in their preternatural strength."

The sura would be lab rats, stepping stones for the advancement of humanity. This series of research might not bear fruit for a century or two, but these sura surely wouldn't fare any better as lab rats than as livestock.

After all, biological research often ended up mutilating its test subjects.

The special forces troops that Xia Na led, responsible for searching the sura palace, came back dragging three human women. These women all had their mouths secured by gags, but unlike the other captives that Zhang Lie and the others had found, they were clean, ornamented, and dressed beautifully.

Although these women were tied up, they struggled furiously at their captivity.

Hong Xi asked, "Who are these women?"

Sun Xiaowu frowned. "The sura king has regular human concubines too?"

Li Feng commented, "If I recall correctly, the sura king was only interested in human men. Why would he keep these women?"

Xia Na motioned for her men to remove their gags. "Let's hear what they have to say, shall we?"

As they did so, they could hear one of the women shouting furiously, "What are all of you doing?! How could you assault our lands just like that? You're all demons and devils—unhand the sura you've kept prisoner and scram! You'll receive retribution for what you've done, this I swear!"

Zhang Lie and his retinue were shocked by the woman's surprising reaction.

She continued, "Both the humans and the sura are capable of negotiating with each other, and any violence like what you've displayed should be met with harsh censure. Given how magnificent the sura are, it's only natural that they would rule over the humans. What right do you have to attack them senselessly, to beat and kill them? Who gave you that authority?!"

Instead of listening to her harangue, Zhang Lie sent a punch in her direction, causing her head to burst open like a ripe watermelon.

Blood sprayed the nearby hunters as they jerked, not expecting that Zhang Lie would kill a fellow human so easily.

"They've all been brainwashed, and it's far too late for them. End their misery," Zhang Lie commanded.

Hong Xi rubbed her temples. "Are we really going to kill our own kind?"

Xia Na folded her arms. "These women are a blight to us all."

Li Feng asked, "Why would these women behave in this manner? Surely they can't stand the atrocities done to their fellow captives?"

Instead of replying, Xia Na asked, "Are you familiar with kobe beef?"

Li Feng nodded. "Allegedly, their pastures are the greenest, their grass is the freshest, they drink spring water from deep in the mountains, and they listen to music and get specialized massages as part of their daily routine.

"There are specialists that plan out every aspect of their life, and they're apparently even more expensive to rear than a human. They're killed when their meat is the tastiest, and beef from these cows sell for an astronomical price."

Xia Na nodded. "In principle, you could easily do the same to humans—have them drink water infused with spiritual energy, the flesh of superior- or higher-grade lifeforms prepared by the best chefs, and let them enjoy all measure of pleasant activities. Give them whatever they want, and when they grow into their prime, kill them in their sleep. Their flesh will be tastier than that of any other human."

Simultaneously wanting and not wanting to confirm her suspicions, Hong Xi asked, "In that case, these women are..."

"Nothing more than livestock reared by the sura king, yes. In order to enhance the taste of their flesh even further, they're free to roam within the lands of the sura and able to eat whatever they want. As long as their demands aren't too extreme, the sura will do all they can to satisfy them.

"They're treated as VIP guests wherever they go, allowed to buy whatever they want, and protected by the emperor's own guards. In the end, however, their fate is one and the same: to be consumed like kobe beef.

"In some sense, they're no better than the sura. They've been brainwashed their entire life, and it's only natural that they would despise us like the sura themselves."

Li Feng nodded his head, convinced. "In that case, it really doesn't make sense to let them live."

Chapter 386: Hero of Qi

Li Feng asked curiously, "How did you know about this?"

Xia Na retrieved a manual. "I found it in the palace's library. It's a manual about preparing the highest-quality human meat, and it starts by describing this sort of rearing process."

Li Feng's eyes widened. "You can read sura logograms?"

Xia Na nodded. "All members of the special forces learn a few unique skills."

Hong Xi asked, "Xia Na, have you considered re-educating them?"

"Do you think that would be useful? You heard the woman's words, didn't you? She still thinks that she's living in that sham of a dream—she's perfectly happy and willing to live as a pig!"

Zhang Lie then asked, "Do they know how the other human captives are treated?"

"Of course she does. They've seen quite a few of the other captives, but they feel as though they deserve their special treatment, and that the others had to have done something wrong. They're just like the nobility of the past—they know about others' suffering, but they don't care enough to do anything about it!"

Zhang Lie sighed. "You shouldn't have brought them over and polluted our sight."

"Captain, they're still humans, aren't they? I didn't want to make a move without discussing it with you and everyone first."

"No, they can hardly be considered human anymore. Kill them: if they want to live in a dream, then let them dream forevermore."

By then, just about everyone in the world federation was paying attention to the news about Qi.

"What's going on with Qi? Is it about to fall?"

"It surely will—there's never been a human city that's been able to defeat sura invaders!"

"Not only that, three other alien races began attacking Qi the moment they noticed the sura invasion."

"Apparently, a sura king himself appeared on the battlefield. Qi's going to fall for sure!"

"What?! I have family in Qi!"

Everyone was sighing over mankind's weakness relative to the sura and their imminent reduction in land in the second realm when an urgent announcement was added—[Qi's total victory! Zhang Lie captured the sura king alive!]

"What?! Qi defeated the sura?!"

"Zhang Lie, Zhang Lie managed to capture the sura king alive!"

"This has to be fake! How can it be? No human has ever been able to defeat a sura king. Even the strongest hunter we know of, the Martial Sage Hong Tianqi, only managed to fend off a sura king in the second realm. How could Zhang Lie fare better than him? This has to be fake news!"

Someone else replied, "No, it's not fake. I just came from Qi myself, and we all saw Zhang Lie capture the sura king with our own eyes. His body's hanging by our sole remaining city wall right now, and everyone can do what they want with it!"

"It's true, it's all true. Zhang Lie's charting a new course through history for all of mankind!"

"Right, this isn't a rumor—I witnessed it too! I observed this turning point in mankind's history!"

There were quite a number of wounded hunters in Qi who were unable to do anything because of the severity of their injuries, and these hunters had taken it on themselves to share the news of Zhang Lie's astounding victory, leading to the burgeoning number of comments under the article proclaiming Qi's victory.

One hunter asked, "Just how did Zhang Lie manage to save Qi?"

"Oh, it's a long story. Qi found itself surrounded on all four fronts: the main force was the sura, and three other alien races each separately attacked one front upon learning about the sura invasion. No hunter in Qi was willing to retreat; we all chose to fight with our lives on the line.

"Unfortunately, there was such a great disparity in our numbers and strength that we were soundly beaten on all four fronts. Our morale had reached rock bottom when our governor, Xiao Zhengyang, strode forward like a blazing sun, defeating the sura elder in an instant.

"However, the sura king was far too strong on the battlefield. Governor Xiao lost against the sura king in just one blow, and as we despaired, the hero of Qi, Zhang Lie, arrived on the scene with a horde of over a hundred dragons, instantly sending the alien invaders fleeing for their lives.

"With a wave of his hand, the sura perished in the hundreds and thousands. The sura king fought him to a standstill. Then, Zhang Lie gradually took the upper hand, and the sura king was forced to use his ultimate technique."

"Hold on, hold on! That's ridiculous! You're saying Zhang Lie held back all four fronts alone? That he killed thousands of sura with a casual attack? That's impossible!"

Another person replied, "He did exaggerate a little, but as a hunter defending Qi, I can promise you that his recounting was otherwise accurate."

"Where's Zhang Lie now, then?"

A sudden article answered this question for everyone. [Humanity's counter-invasion! Three thousand hunters entering the sura lands!]

"The invasion of Qi was a crime against mankind. On the command of the hero who saved Qi, three thousand hunters of Qi launched a counteroffensive into the territory of the sura."

The hunters glancing at the article were even more shocked than before.

"What? Are we so strong that we can strike back at the sura now?"

"Just three thousand troops? Is that enough?"

"This is ridiculous—even a drama wouldn't go to such an extent!"

"It's a true story, I witnessed it myself!"

The champion of the Void Cup, Zhang Lie, said those exact words: 'No one shall tread on mankind's dignity.'

"No one shall tread on mankind's dignity!"

"No one shall tread on mankind's dignity!"

The news of mankind's retaliation drew more and more attention, and some of the readers even began to wish that they too had been in Qi.

#### Chapter 387: A Mystical Beast

"As a hunter of Qi, I can promise you that all of this is true. If not for the injuries I incurred during the battle, there would have been 3001 soldiers entering sura territory."

"If I weren't injured, there would have been 3002!"

"If I were in Qi, there would have been 3003!"

"Ridiculous—there would only have been three thousand regardless! That was a number set by Zhang Lie himself!"

"Hmph! If I weren't injured, I would surely have been selected!"

"Zhang Lie's a true hero—of course humanity should fight back after repelling a sura invasion!"

Of course, there were those who doubted these proceedings.

"What happened in the end?"

"What else? They've surely all perished! We've sent quite a few forces against the sura, but we've never won a single altercation against them. Trying to counter-invade was a grievous mistake—I can't believe anyone would have allowed that!"

"But Zhang Lie caught the sura king alive, didn't he? That shows that he has enough strength to be able to combat the sura, surely?"

"Even so, how do you think these troops are faring? They have to be exhausted after defending their city, and now they're going to traipse all the way to the territory of the sura and launch a counterattack on the fly? Do you think they're strong enough for that? Not even Zhang Lie would be able to do anything under such circumstances.

"I believe in the hero of Qi!"

Another article took the world by storm.

[Zhang Lie seizes the sura capital, rescuing ten thousand human captives!]

"Under the command of the hero of Qi, we fighters launched a surprise invasion of the sura lands. Because of our blitzkrieg attack, the sura were unable to respond in time. We successfully captured the capital of the sura, only to find humans being reared like livestock in hundreds of locations throughout the capital. We immediately launched a search-and-rescue operation, and you can see our results."

It seemed as though one bombshell was landing after another: Zhang Lie asved Qi, then invaded the territory of the sura, succeeded, and even saved ten thousand humans!

"Zhang Lie's a true hero, and we never could have done any of this without him! He managed to take over the capital of this particular sura kingdom with just three thousand men—Zhang Lie's not just creating history, he's helping mankind reach new heights!"

"I've made up my mind: I'll report to the Zenith Dojo tomorrow, even if the only position available for me there is that of a janitor!"

"Zhang Lie's a true hero, a true paragon!"

Zhang Lie's renown rose like a rocket given his recent accomplishments. All of China—no, the whole world, the entirety of the Solar System, the breadth of the Milky Way—was paying attention to him and spreading the tales of his heroism.

Once the search parties had conducted a thorough search of the capital, everyone gathered at the palace, where Zhang Lie broke through the doors to the treasure with a technique.

The sura king's treasury was filled with all sorts of precious jewels and herbs.

The sura were a wealthy race, and that wealth pervaded the treasury. Treasures stacked up on piles the size of small mountains, and even the members of Team Zenith, who had seen their fair share of treasure, were eyeing everything greedily.

Zhang Lie's attention zeroed in on a specific herb with blood-colored fruit whose surface seemed to be burning up with flames. It had been preserved very well, and almost no spiritual energy leaked out of it.

This too was a key ingredient for Potion #4, and Zhang Lie was shocked that he had found it within the sura's treasury.

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Captain, what should we do with these treasures?"

"Each of you can pick and choose a few that you want to keep. We'll leave a portion for those human captives that have recently been released so that they can make a new life for themselves. Of the remaining treasure, give half to the hunters that have participated in this expedition, and we'll keep the rest for the Zenith Dojo."

It was only natural that Zhang Lie would reward the troops who had come all this way with him; after all, he would still need their manpower in the fights to come.

Xia Na rushed over in a hurry. "Captain, have a look at this!"

"What's the matter?"

Xia Na handed him a scroll on which a strange human-headed bird was drawn.

"What's this?"

"According to the scroll, this kingdom is protected by a mystical beast, one whose flames can melt iron and steel, whose gigantic wings can blot out the sky, whose mouth can swallow the sun, whose claws can split the sea, and whose blood-red feathers can purge all that live."

"In that case, why hasn't it appeared yet?" Zhang Lie asked in shock.

"Apparently, it can only appear after the appropriate summoning ritual has been performed, and we took over the city far too fast for the sura to perform this ritual."

Li Feng shrugged. "If it isn't going to appear, there's nothing to fear."

Zhang Lie mulled it over for a moment. "How strong is it?"

Xia Na continued, "According to the scroll, it's likely stronger than the sura king himself. It's a peak-grade lifeform, at the very least!"

At least a peak-grade lifeform... could it be a disaster-grade lifeform? Zhang Lie thought. If so, capturing the sura's capital really had been a worthwhile endeavor. Not only had Zhang Lie obtained another ingredient for Potion #4, he had even found the traces of another peak-grade, or even disaster-grade, lifeform!

"What sort of ritual does the summoning process require?"

"A hundred thousand bodies of the sura, along with a specialized altar."

"Good, very good. We haven't gotten rid of all the sura corpses, have we? Tell me where the altar is."

Sun Mengmeng interrupted, "Captain, are you intending to summon this mystical beast?"

"The only reason it hadn't been summoned was because we were lucky. I don't intend to keep a sword of Damocles hanging over my neck."

Indeed, if there were sura who had survived the purge and somehow knew of the ritual, it was possible that they could summon this mystical beast at an inopportune moment for the humans and land them all in trouble.

"We might as well defuse the bomb while we're able to do so. Sun Mengmeng, divide the spoils of war, and let the hunters who are able to fight continue to conquer the rest of the sura lands. I'll handle this mystical beast," Zhang Lie continued.

While Zhang Lie was talking, he spotted a vital treasure, something that caught even his eye. He glanced at it cautiously from afar, mumbling to himself, "A thousand-poison bloodsoul fruit! As expected, there really is a huge amount of treasure here. With this, I can brew..."

#### Chapter 388: The Anxious Amurong

After claiming his spoils, Zhang Lie personally headed to the altar, which wasn't too far from the capital of the sura. It was a tower that stretched so high it seemed to pierce the skies. There was a large platform at the very top, with an image of the human-faced mystical beast engraved upon it.

Following the ritual, Zhang Lie started by placing ten thousand sura corpses in an array that connected to an extradimensional pocket space. He would do this ten times in succession. On the tenth try, once the mystical beast had eaten its fill, it would be ready to defeat the sura's enemies.

The scent of the bloody sura corpses was thick in the air. In just a few moments, he could hear a strange birdcall far into the distance. A scarlet shadow zipped through the clouds, moving so quickly that Zhang Lie was only able to catch its appearance when it had stopped right in front of him.

Its beak was green, its face frozen into a rictus. Incisors poked out of its mouth on either side of its face, and a crown showed on its head. Its body was golden, its feathers red, its wings each half as long again as its body.

This was the sura's mystical beast.

As it approached, a gust of hot wind blew toward Zhang Lie. It had constrained its domain, but Zhang Lie still felt scorching heat all around him, as though he were standing in the middle of a blaze.

Unfortunately, Zhang Lie was certain that this wasn't truly a disaster-grade lifeform; it was possible that it was only a peak-grade lifeform about to transition to disaster-grade.

As the human-faced bird consumed the sura's corpses, Zhang Lie poured more out of his extradimensional storage, clutching Venombane tightly.

While humans all over the galaxy were cheering because of Zhang Lie, there was one man who was extremely upset: one of the highest authorities of the world federation, Amurong.

Deep within a secret chamber in the highest authorities' palace, Amurong asked, his face dark, "Is this all true?"

The shadow standing opposite him replied affirmatively, "Yes, sir, it's all been confirmed. Zhang Lie roused three thousand troops to invade the territory of the sura and managed to claim one of their capitals for himself. After that, he rescued ten thousand humans from captivity within the capital."

Amurong's face turned even more downcast. "How are his actions being received by the galaxy?"

"He's established a precedent for the humans—they're all calling him a true hero!"

"Very well. I understand. Continue keeping an eye on him and on all his activities."

"Yes, sir!"

Right after his subordinate left, Amurong flung the cup in his hand onto the floor, smashing it to pieces.

Zhang Lie's name and fame was rising at an even higher rate than when he had become the champion of the Void Cup.

After issuing a bounty on the Musi clan, quite a few of the stronger hunters had been concerned about his actions, but now, after he single-handedly rescued Qi and invaded the territory of the sura, his reputation was soaring once again.

Furthermore, a rumor had even begun to spread that Musi Yu, head of the Musi clan, was a beloved concubine of the sura king, and the reason that the sura king had attacked Qi was to seek revenge for him. Apparently, Musi Yu was also the mastermind behind the Eclipse Sage's death, and the Musi clan had long since betrayed mankind. That was why Zhang Lie had issued a bounty on him.

Thus, Zhang Lie's selfish actions were reframed as a noble cause, one which garnished his reputation even further.

Given his sterling reputation, it would be dangerous for Amurong or anyone else to try to topple him now; a careless move could mark them as a public enemy of the world federation. And with Hong Tianqi backing Zhang Lie up, they would be hard-pressed to strike, even if they were daring enough to do so.

Hunters from all over the galaxy were still continuing to cheer for Zhang Lie.

"I really am grateful for the hero of Qi. My father spent thirteen years in the second realm without returning to Earth. We had thought that he had perished in a fight, but it turned out that he had been captured by the sura instead! Thanks to Zhang Lie and the other hunters of the expedition, my father, who has been missing for thirteen years, has finally returned!"

"My family had been taken by the sura as well. I hadn't expected to ever see them again, not until today! Zhang Lie is truly the savior of mankind!"

As the ten thousand hunters were teleported from Qi to their respective homes, those humans who found loved ones, once presumed dead, returning to them couldn't help but thank Zhang Lie from the bottom of their hearts.

The human-faced bird was enjoying its meal without identifying the killing intent emanating from the human right by its side. Just as it was at its most relaxed, Zhang Lie suddenly struck.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" A blood dragon flew out of Venombane and wrapped around the beast's neck as Zhang Lie thrust the blade into its head.

The human-faced bird flapped its wings and shook its head furiously as it tried to dislodge Zhang Lie, but Zhang Lie had such a firm grip that the mystical beast, try as it might, couldn't do anything about him. Instead, it activated its domain of hellfire, sending blood-red flames flaring all around its body and incinerating the sura corpses it had yet to consume to cinders.

At the same time, a wheel of black sun appeared behind Zhang Lie's back, and blood-red moonlight by his feet. The two domains clashed against each other with such a burst of heat that Zhang Lie felt as though his body was burning up.

As the mystical beast flapped its wings, the flames morphed into a gigantic, fiery tornado, one that seemed poised to swallow Zhang Lie whole. Suddenly, however, it screeched in pain, and the tornado dissipated in mid-air. The mystical beast spasmed as though it were in agony.

"How does the thousand-poison bloodsoul fruit taste? I found it in the sura king's treasury."

The blood-red fruit had an unusually strong corrosive aura, and it was evident from one glance that it would be uncommonly toxic. This was a fruit that was nourished by blood and only cultivated by bloodshed, and only a race as vicious and cruel as the sura would be able to grow it to maturity.

Even so, the fact that even the sura had only managed to grow one such fruit was a clear sign of its rarity.

As its name suggested, the fruit had a frighteningly concentrated poison that even a peak-grade lifeform's constitution wouldn't be able to handle it.

The human-faced bird cried out in pain as it coughed out a puddle of blood, but despite its severely weakened state, the poison couldn't kill it. Flames burned all over the bird's body, cleansing it of poison, and Zhang Lie knew that his window of opportunity was limited.

In order to kill this lifeform, he activated his strongest skills all at once.

"[Rune: Resonate]!"

The outline of a dragonturtle appeared before him as four runic tablets smashed down from the heavens, trapping the mystical beast. Zhang Lie's domain whirled as he set [Syzygy] to maximum output.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring]!" With Zhang Lie's punch, hundreds of gigantic black dragons appeared, each roaring as they swooped down toward the poisoned mystical beast.

Chapter 389: Zhang Lie's Arrival

Trapped by Zhang Lie's runic tablets, the mystical beast was defenseless as the dragons bombarded it. Wounded, it began to fall.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring]!" Zhang Lie punched forward with both fists, sending dragon after dragon, a whole barrage, flying toward the mystical beast as though it were a leaf caught in a storm.

As it fell, Zhang Lie continued pummeling it, until it finally landed on the tall tower's platform like a meteor. Such was its momentum that the tower cracked halfway down its height, but Zhang Lie's punches never stopped.

[You successfully killed a peak-grade garuda and obtained its soulshard. By consuming the flesh of the peak-grade garuda, you may receive one to ten peak gene fragments.]

The garuda fell limp to the ground. Only when Zhang Lie heard the will of the world's announcement did he finally stop attacking its body.

The fight was simpler than he had anticipated. Not only was Zhang Lie extremely strong to begin with, the thousand-poison bloodsoul fruit had played an important role in debilitating the garuda. Otherwise, the fight would have taken far longer, especially because the garuda would force an aerial battle.

The most exciting part of the kill was that he had obtained a fire-attuned peak-grade soulshard, and he expected it would be particularly beneficial to Sun Mengmeng.

He headed back to the capital to find the hunters massed and preparing to return to Qi.

"What's going on?"

Sun Mengmeng reported, "The alien races around Qi are preparing for another assault on Qi!"

"What?! Don't they know that I'll defend Qi?" Zhang Lie clenched his fists tightly as a pair of black wings sprouted from his back. "Return to Qi as quickly as possible. I'll head there now!"

Zhang Lie wasn't the only one angry at the alien races' repeated invasion.

"What's going on with them? If they're going to invade, they might as well commit to it—why would they retreat and then try to invade again? Do they really think we're helpless?!"

"I bet they're doing it because they've realized that Zhang Lie's not in Qi anymore—I bet they found out that he and most of the remaining forces in Qi have gone to attack the sura's capital. That's why they dared to strike!"

"In that case, will Qi be safe?"

"Everything is Zhang Lie's fault! If he hadn't left Qi undefended and taken three thousand hunters with him, nothing bad would have happened!"

Back in Qi, an ancient, withered tree commanded its forces, "Level Qi and swallow all the humans within!"

Xiao Zhengyang, governor of Qi, stood at the tallest point of the city as he glanced at the forces invading outside. He sighed, his wounds barely having recovered in the meantime. "Is Qi doomed to fall?"

Qi was, at this point, much like the capital of the sura that Zhang Lie had just taken down: after Zhang Lie left for the sura lands with the battle-ready hunters of Qi, there were only a few weak and wounded hunters remaining.

The walls of Qi had barely been repaired in the short time since their destruction, and they were hardly able to provide any defense at all. The remaining hunters of Qi had no choice but to block the alien races' invasion with their own bodies.

Given that the alternative was for Qi to fall entirely, no one hesitated to charge forward, and no one fell back. Every hunter rushed forward like a flood.

An old hunter pulled a youthful one back. "You're younger than I am, and there's still a long future ahead of you. Let me go first!"

The young hunter shook his head. "If Qi falls, all of us will die."

"Even so, there's no reason for you young hunters to die before us veterans! Stand back!" The old man rushed forward, brandishing a sword in his hands, and met a noble death against a group of treemen.

As Xiao Zhengyang watched his own kind die to the other races of the second realm, he pounded his fists on the floor until they began to bleed. He hated his weakness, his inability to protect his city or even become one of the hunters guarding its perimeter.

The invaders began to laugh. "Haha, this is how weak you humans are! Do you think defeating the sura changes anything? What awaits you is only a worse fate. You weak humans will be nothing more than livestock for other races; you have no better destiny!"

"Your resistance is futile. If you want something to blame, blame your own weakness, blame the man who defeated the sura king and discarded all of you! With him gone, there's no reason for you to keep struggling. Surrender now!"

One human retorted, "We don't even fear the sura! Why would we fear you?"

"Ha! If not for that man, Qi would have perished long ago. Or did you think you actually contributed to saving Qi? Now that he's gone with all of Qi's manpower, we'll easily claim Qi for ourselves. You humans will always be at the very bottom of the food chain. The more you struggle, the more you'll suffer for it."

As the voices of the invaders gathered outside the city, the hunters of Qi fell into despair once more. Suddenly, a dark streak flashed through the air like a shooting star.

"Look! What's that?" Some of the humans pointed at it as it passed them by.

"It doesn't matter—no one will be able to save you now!"

As the black streak grew closer, a whirlwind of black flame suddenly spawned over the ground and sucked huge numbers of the alien invaders within, burning them to a crisp. In shock, the invaders cried out and began to retreat, but they had no time to do so.

The black streak cut apart a wide swathe of the invading forces, but just before it was about to hit Qi, it suddenly soared up into the air.

The hunters of Qi sighed in relief as black ripples of genetic energy spread through the sky and swept through the invading forces, causing them to yell out in pain.

"Look at that!" The hunters of Qi stared at the man standing in mid-air, their eyes widening in recognition. His face was a mask of determination, his black wings outstretched, and his body radiated with tremendous genetic energy.

"Zhang Lie!"

"Zhang Lie's here to save us, I knew he wouldn't abandon Qi!"

"Now that Zhang Lie's here, these invaders are dead!"

Zhang Lie glanced at the hostile forces with killing intent. "What did you say about humanity?"

Chapter 390: The Invaders' Defeat

As they sensed Zhang Lie's cold gaze, the invading forces couldn't help but take a step or two back. "Isn't this fellow supposed to be at a sura kingdom's capital? What's he doing here?"

"Damn it, there's been some mistake with our intelligence! The human who killed the sura king has returned to Qi!"

However, it would be far too embarrassing, and far too wasteful, to leave Qi again now that they almost had it entirely in their grasp.

"Don't think you're invincible just because you've defeated the sura. We're going to destroy Qi today, whether or not you're here! You must surely be tired after rushing into the territory of the sura, defeating the guards stationed there, and then rushing back to Qi. How much strength could you possibly have left? Hand over half the humans in the city and we'll promise never to come back."

Zhang Lie snorted. "Not a chance. In fact, since you're all here already, why don't you stay right here? [Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring]!"

A horde of over a hundred black dragons launched out of Zhang Lie's left arm as he expended half his genetic energy in one supercharged attack. The dragons' cries sounded like peals of thunder as they swooped down on the invading troops, sending the battlefield into a frenzy.

Countless invaders turned into ash under the bombardment of the black dragons, but a storm of leaves quickly formed around the treemen and defended against Zhang Lie's attack.

A gigantic tree suddenly appeared from the midst of the invaders' forces. As it grew larger and larger, it turned into a titanic black treeman the size of a skyscraper, with a demonic face bulging out of the tree bark.

"Human who defeated the sura king, I am the demonic tree general, the commander of the treemen forces and of the allied invading forces! Send half of the humans from this city as captives, and I'll immediately leave with my troops!"

The invaders yelled out in excitement, "The demonic tree general's making his move! He's supposed to be as strong as a sura king himself!"

"I heard that he fought against one of the sura kings in the past, and neither of them were able to defeat the other. In the end, the sura king gave up on attacking him!"

"If he's that strong, then we should be able to attack Qi while the general holds Zhang Lie back."

"[Ninesoul Dragonblade—First Form: Parting the River]!" Zhang Lie didn't deign to negotiate. He raised Venombane high over his head as he launched a sword technique that split land and sky.

The battlefield parted in twain, and the demonic tree general was bisected in half.

The humans cheered. "We've won! We've won! Is that all the strength you invaders amount to?"

Meanwhile, the invaders recoiled in shock. "Isn't the demonic tree general supposed to be as strong as a sura king? Could Zhang Lie have grown this strong out of nowhere?"

Amidst the cheering, a long vine suddenly grew out of one half of the tree trunk, tethering the two halves of the demonic tree general together. The general shouted, "It's useless! Your technique won't be effective against me."

"If I can't cut you down with one blow, I'll do it with two, three, a thousand, ten thousand! I don't believe you'll be able to regenerate from ten thousand cuts at once. [The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!"

As a blood dragon shot out of Venombane, it let out a corrosive breath that sent wooden chips splintering out of the demonic tree general's bark and the nearby invaders fleeing for their lives.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" Zhang Lie launched the same technique once again, spawning a blood dragon that aimed straight at the crack in the gigantic treeman's body.

As he repeated the technique twice more, the treeman's body fell to the ground in pieces.

Even so, the roots of the tree suddenly sprouted up from the ground, twisting together in a macabre rendition of the demonic tree general's face. "It's useless! No matter how many times you cut me, you won't be able to kill me."

The reason the demonic tree general had been able to force the sura king to retreat wasn't because it was all that strong, but rather because it had such potent regenerative abilities that even the sura king couldn't do anything to him.

"Then how about this? [Ninesoul Dragonblade—Second Form: Piercing the Soul]!"

A frightening aura enveloped the blade, one imbued with such potent power that the demonic tree general suddenly felt that his life was in danger. "Hold it!" he shouted. "We should have a peaceable discussion, not a fight to the death!"

"It's too late!" As the technique imbued with spiritual energy struck the demonic tree general, its massive body broke apart into a shower of splinters, which dissipated with the wind.

The demonic tree general possessed so potent a power of regeneration that it was virtually able to revive indefinitely, but Zhang Lie had a technique that was able to counter it: one that directly struck the soul.

The demonic tree general was equipped with incredible vitality, but his soul was far weaker.

The invaders couldn't help but shiver in fear. How had the demonic tree general perished so quickly? Zhang Lie had killed him with a single attack! Was he truly a human, a member of that weak race that everyone else had been able to bully?

At that very moment, Zhang Lie was disabusing the other races of their stereotypical notions about humanity. Even the sura wouldn't be able to take Zhang Lie lightly; he was propping up humanity's status in the second realm alone. No human before him had managed to kill a sura king, nor the demonic tree general, who had survived unscathed from a sura king's attacks.

He was far too different from the humans that these invaders knew about—was Zhang Lie actually a sura king disguised as a human, or an artificial lifeform that the humans had constructed?

"When did humans become so strong?"

"No! This is impossible—how could we lose against these humans?!"

"Zhang Lie's simply too frightening. We need to escape!"

Some of the invaders began to run away, but Zhang Lie called out,

"I told you, none of you will be able to leave Qi alive! Hunters of Qi, what are you waiting for? It's time to strike back!"

The hunters of Qi, still shocked that he had defeated the demonic tree general so easily, finally came to their senses upon hearing Zhang Lie's shout. As one, they charged forward and slaughtered the invaders that were fleeing the scene.

Only wounded hunters were left in Qi, but they charged at the invaders as though they had temporarily forgotten about their injuries. They had hardly been able to do anything during the initial part of the invasion; how could they stand still now that Zhang Lie had turned the tides?

Of course, the main attacker among the forces of Qi was none other than Zhang Lie. "[Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring]!"