

U. Warlord 391

Chapter 391: Cleaning the Environs

Another flock of dragons shot out of Zhang Lie's left arm, swallowing the skies and portending disaster for the invading forces, large swathes of which were caught by the dragons' bombardment.

This time, there was no demonic tree general to block the attack, and half the fleeing invaders were destroyed with this one blow.

"Fight! Get these invaders—don't let even one escape!"

"For our brothers who have perished in battle!"

"It's time for the humans to strike back! Avenge the dead!"

Perhaps the hunters of Qi might not be able to defeat the invaders head-on, but they could certainly pile on them now with Zhang Lie's support. With the assistance of Team Zenith, who had likewise rushed back following Zhang Lie, the hunters of Qi slaughtered the invaders to the last.

As they stepped over the invaders' bodies, they cried out, "Zhang Lie's invincible! Qi will never fall!"

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Hovering above the battlefield, Zhang Lie activated his peak-grade moonlight wrym soulshard. Whitey appeared with a faint gleam and flew over the battlefield, consuming the souls of the dead that floated into the air. As it did so, its body solidified, and it seemed far less ghostly than before.

Xiao Zhengyang sighed in relief as he hobbled toward Zhang Lie. "It's only because you rushed back in time that Qi was saved. I'm a useless governor, aren't I? All I could do was stand there and watch as invaders tore my city apart."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "It would have been easy for you to repel the invaders if you were uninjured."

Xiao Zhengyang couldn't help but feel a throbbing pain in his chest as he glanced at the dead. After the two invasions, at least forty percent of the hunters of Qi had suffered some injury or another.

When the hunters of Qi saw Zhang Lie walking toward them, they thanked him profusely. Without his reappearance, Qi would have fallen, and they would likely all have been taken captive.

"How's the situation in the sura's capital?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "Everything proceeded very smoothly."

"Good, good."

"I intend on installing a teleportation array in the sura capital."

Xiao Zhengyang frowned. "Do you intend on making that sura kingdom human territory?"

"Isn't that a good idea?"

"It's far too dangerous."

"Unless we demonstrate that mankind is strong enough to fend off these invaders, what happened today will happen over and over again."

One alien race alone might not have been able to invade Qi, but multiple had allied together against the humans. Zhang Lie's eyes turned sharp. "The alien races all think that we can be bullied, so we have to show them with our actions that times have changed."

As the three thousand hunters returned from the sura king's capital, Zhang Lie commanded, "Hunters of Qi, defend the perimeter! Team Zenith, follow me!"

"What's going on with Qi now?"

"Surely they've fallen—Zhang Lie left with all the battle-ready hunters! With just the wounded and elderly left in Qi, how could they repel the alien invaders?"

"I'm not asking about Zhang Lie, but rather the state of Qi!"

"How could Zhang Lie act so recklessly? He left with so many hunters despite the fact that the walls of Qi were destroyed after the first invasion! Why wouldn't he remain in Qi to defend it?!"

It seemed that those who had praised Zhang Lie for his decisive counter-invasion of the territory of the sura were nowhere to be seen, replaced instead by those who denounced his rash actions.

Just one mistake was enough to sway public opinion; in the eyes of many, given what had occurred, Zhang Lie was the main culprit behind the downfall of Qi, but they hadn't considered that Qi would have fallen long before that had Zhang Lie not shown up in the first place.

"Everything would have been just fine if he had defended Qi, but he just had to invade the sura! It's true that he succeeded, but now Qi is gone!"

"And how many people were killed in the aftermath? Yes, he might have saved ten thousand humans, but how many hunters in Qi were lost because of the invasion? Furthermore, with the teleportation apparatus in Qi destroyed, all the possessions of the hunters in Qi will be irretrievable! Zhang Lie was far too rash. He didn't consider the consequences properly before acting, and now all of humanity will suffer as a result!"

Suddenly, someone replied, "Delete all your posts now, and I'll pretend I haven't seen anything."

"What do you mean? Can't I criticize an idiot for his actions?"

"Have you considered that the person who might be revealed as an idiot because of these posts is you? Go look at the most recent updates on the situation in Qi."

"Wasn't Qi destroyed?"

"No, Qi's perfectly fine!"

[The hero of Qi returns to save the day, repelling the alien invaders and rescuing Qi from certain doom!]

"Really?! How did Zhang Lie make it back in time?"

"Wasn't Zhang Lie in the sura's capital?"

"Just how could he have traversed such great distances so rapidly?"

Many refused to believe what they read. Zhang Lie was certainly strong enough to repel the alien invaders on his own, but the capital of the sura was far from Qi. How had Zhang Lie made it back in time?

"As a lucky survivor who witnessed Zhang Lie's fight, let me explain things. Just as the invaders were about to take Qi once and for all, the hero of Qi entered the fray like a god of death, sending hundreds of black dragons flocking into the sky and killing swathes of invaders.

A gigantic treeman rose up from the ground, the general of the invading forces, but he died within three blows from Zhang Lie. As the invaders fled, we chased after them and slaughtered them to the last."

"Zhang Lie's invincible! Qi will never fall!"

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"Zhang Lie's invincible! Qi will never fall!"

The descriptions that the Qi survivors were posting of that battle made many a hunter regret that they hadn't witnessed Zhang Lie's fight for themselves.

Someone asked, "Right, what's the hero of Qi doing now?"

"He's slaughtering the alien races!"

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring]!" Zhang Lie punched forward with his left arm, sending a torrent of dragons flooding outward.

The dragons' cries sounded like peals of thunder as they swooped down on the battlefield, destroying the walls of the enemy city.

"Charge forward!" Zhang Lie yelled. The members of Team Zenith and the special forces troops rushed into the enemy city and began yet another counter-invasion against those races that had dared to target the humans.

Chapter 392: Champion of Mankind, Zhang Lie

Zhang Lie wasn't about to take the attack on Qi lying down. Since these races had tried to invade Qi, it was only reasonable that they be prepared to be invaded, too. He tracked down, attacked, and destroyed the territories of the races that had taken part in the invasion.

Most of his original group of three thousand hunters remained in Qi to prevent a similar situation from occurring again; Zhang Lie, with solely the members of Team Zenith, Hong Xi, and the Qi special forces at his disposal, was able to crush just about whatever resistance he encountered.

In the next few days, he terrorized the nearby territories with his team of elites, none of which contained a fighter strong enough to stop him. With his small band of hunters, he was able to strike deftly at their weakened defenses.

After Zhang Lie destroyed the coalition's main strike force at Qi, it was hard for them to muster sufficiently many fighters to defend against Zhang Lie, so they had no choice but to turtle up in their respective territories and hope that Zhang Lie didn't come for them.

Upon seeing the havoc Zhang Lie was wreaking, they very much regretted having attacked Qi.

Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith responded flexibly and creatively to whatever strategies the alien races employed, and Zhang Lie was far too strong for them to beat with brute strength.

Could a mere human really be this strong? In the past, they had successfully attacked human cities quite a few times before, and the humans had never dared to retaliate. None of them had ever done anything akin to what Zhang Lie was doing now, roaming around their territories and ambushing their own kind!

While he was in the middle of attacking yet another territory, Zhang Lie met a rather interesting king, perhaps a representative chosen by the allied territories, who tried to conduct negotiations with Zhang Lie.

"Don't think we'll allow you to keep this up, human! We're the ones who were defeated during the invasion—how dare you continue culling our forces?!"

If they allowed Zhang Lie to rampage further, their reputation would be ruined—to think they had been defeated so soundly by a mere human!

Zhang Lie folded his arms. "In that case, how do you plan to resolve this problem? Shall we pretend that you didn't invade Qi, or that we humans didn't perish as a result?"

"This is what we've always done!"

"The past is the past, and the present is different. We humans won't allow you to invade our lands any further. Anyone who strikes mankind had better be prepared to suffer our wrath."

Having said his fill, Zhang Lie struck. "[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!"

A blood dragon rushed out of Venombane, piercing the king's chest and causing blood to bloom from his body like a flower.

"Times have changed, and it's time for humanity to rise up," Zhang Lie announced.

The death of their king caused the fighters of the alien race to cry out in surprise, shock, and then indignation. They charged toward Zhang Lie.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring]!" Zhang Lie sent a horde of dragons at the invaders, decimating them in the blink of an eye. As the ground turned red with blood, Zhang Lie wiped the dust off his hands. "Come, it's time for our next target!"

There was some benefit to be had from culling these invaders: some of them were considered genetic lifeforms, though none were particularly high-ranking. Once the members of Team Zenith had all maxed out their superior gene fragments from consuming the flesh of these aliens, he had the rest of the corpses sent back to Qi.

After Zhang Lie's demonstration, the invading races had no choice but to pack up and establish new borders farther from Qi. If they couldn't beat Zhang Lie, they could at least run further away, even if that meant they would have to give up some of their land.

Zhang Lie claimed that land for Qi with relish while the alien races once again regretted their decision to invade Qi. Not only had they failed in their invasion, they even had to cede some of their land!

Mankind had grown so much stronger so quickly that the alien races could hardly keep up; it shocked them to realize that they were no longer a pushover. And if even the invasion force composed of all the races' top fighters combined couldn't handle Zhang Lie, what could any of the nearby kingdoms individually do?

The only logical choice was therefore to retreat. The land controlled by Qi expanded by almost ten times that day as the kingdoms were forced to cede their land to Zhang Lie, and the governor of Qi, Xiao Zhengyang, almost cried when Zhang Lie presented him with his new territory.

This was the crowning glory of his tenure as a governor, he was sure of it.

Besides the land, Zhang Lie had obtained quite a number of treasures from his excursion into enemy territory. After some experimentation, he decided that he needed only two more ingredients for Potion #4.

"Times have changed, and it's time for humanity to rise up," Zhang Lie announced.

Someone had captured footage of this particular scene, and the hunters of Qi all cheered upon seeing it. For what Zhang Lie had done, they crowned him with a new accolade: champion of mankind.

When he learned of what had happened, Amurong smashed a vase in his study to smithereens. "Champion of mankind, is he?!"

He was very upset that Zhang Lie, who had seemed like a talented hunter but nothing extraordinary, was quickly becoming a rising star.

If Zhang Lie continued on that trajectory, sooner or later, he would take down Amurong himself. His reputation in the world federation was growing at a burgeoning pace, and everyone knew what he was up to.

He had saved Qi in a time of crisis, then counter-invaded the sura kingdom that had attacked Qi. After taking down its capital, he rushed back to Qi to fend off another invasion, then claimed the enemy kingdoms' lands for Qi!

"Your highness, the humans of Qi must be punished. They have no sense of propriety; not only did they forcibly expel us from our own lands, they're even hanging a sura king from the city wall, subject to public humiliation! It's clear that these humans don't respect the authority of the sura!"

A representative from one of the enemy races that had invaded Qi relayed a sordid tale to the sura king who had granted him an audience, one who controlled another nearby sura territory.

The representative and the king were in a lavishly decorated audience chamber; if Zhang Lie were present, he would have noticed that it was decorated in much the same style as the sura king's palace which he had been in just a few days ago.

The sura king chuckled coldly. "Don't you think we can tell when you're trying to manipulate us?"

A sura elder tutted by his side. "You want to make use of our forces to slaughter Qi and to reclaim your own lands, don't you?"

Chapter 393: Reappearance of the Sura

The envoy didn't deny the sura king's words. "Indeed, your majesty! We bring this suit to you with an agenda in mind, but we have been nothing but truthful in our recounting of the events that have transpired."

The sura king clutched his armrest. "From your description, it looks like the humans of Qi really do have an inflated opinion of themselves."

"Exactly right, your highness! The most arrogant among them slaughtered us and took over our territory without paying any heed to the sura. Furthermore, he apparently caught a sura king alive and is hanging him from the city walls. According to the humans we've interrogated, his name is Zhang Lie, and the humans are calling him the champion of mankind!"

The gathered sura elders all began to laugh. "Champion of mankind? You must be joking—no sura king could be defeated by a pitiful human."

"It's well-known that mankind is the weakest of all the races in the second realm. How could they defeat a king of the sura? What a ridiculous claim!"

"You must be shocked silly—that simply can't be true."

The representative from the alien race cleared his throat politely. "There's something very strange about Zhang Lie. He doesn't seem like a weak human at all; rather, he might be a member of another race who's currently taking on the guise of a human."

"Oh?" The sura king seemed quite interested. "This Zhang Lie seems like an interesting fellow indeed."

Upon hearing this, the envoy continued inciting the sura into action. "Your highness, this Zhang Lie fellow has also insulted the sura more than once. He claimed that even a sura king wouldn't be able to face him for more than a few blows; even all the sura kings together wouldn't be his match! What's more, he even claimed that the times were changing, and that mankind was about to take over the second realm!"

Upon hearing these words, the sura in attendance at the palace quickly became enraged.

"How could mankind be so insolent? Your majesty, I humbly ask that you call for this arrogant human's head to be fetched back to you at once!"

"To think a human would dare besmirch the honor of the sura! Your majesty, I'm willing to kill this human and all his relatives myself!"

"Have the sura deteriorated to such an extent that they would permit humans to criticize them? My liege, we'll teach them a lesson!"

Despite his officials' reactions, the sura king himself seemed rather composed. "Although I'm not sure about the veracity of this representative's story, it is true that there was recently a sura kingdom destroyed by a human. It's very possible that the culprit behind this was Zhang Lie!"

An elder asked in surprise, "Your majesty, do you think that this Zhang Lie can really defeat a sura king?"

The king stood up. "We'll find out once we find him, won't we?"

"Y-Your majesty, will you be seeking him out yourself?"

"I've been wanting to take a stroll, at any rate. Don't you wonder just what kind of human would be able to take so much land from these other races?"

Zhang Lie didn't know that he had once again become a target, though he wouldn't have cared if he had known—unless he had finally caught the attention of the asura emperor himself, the strongest fighter of the sura clan, who had hardly been seen in the last millennium in the second realm.

He was rushing to the Yeluo Valley with Hong Xi.

As they ran, Hong Xi asked, "Master, why the hurry?"

"We've already used up most of the sura poison, and I feel like there'll be a large battle soon."

"Master, haven't we chased the enemy races far from our reach? What else could possibly threaten Qi?"

"Let's hope I'm just being overcautious."

After all, hanging the sura king's body on the walls of Qi would surely lead to retribution from the sura, and Zhang Lie wanted to be prepared for any attacks that might result.

The best scenario would be if the sura didn't make a move, but if they did, Zhang Lie wouldn't have to worry as long as he had a stock of the sura poison on hand.

Because the sura poison was difficult to concoct and not particularly useful, Zhang Lie hadn't managed to secure a large supply of it, but now that the Yeluo clan were properly motivated by the soulshards that Zhang Lie had promised them, their productivity had increased greatly. Zhang Lie found himself with five or six times the quantity of poison that he had collected last time.

If he used it appropriately, it would be more than sufficient to destroy one or two more sura kingdoms. After all, the reason the sura were so strong was because of the strength of their leaders and the bloodlust of their fighters. The sura poison from the Yeluo clan would easily decimate the ordinary fighters, whereas Zhang Lie himself could easily take care of the sura kings and generals.

Zhang Lie traded the useless soulshards he had amassed over this period to the Yeluo for the poison, then left hurrying in the opposite direction with Hong Xi.

Meanwhile, Qi was welcoming its third wave of enemies. The city walls had just been repaired when a new wave of enemies was spotted over the horizon.

"Something's wrong! The sura are here, the sura are here again!"

Qi entered a state of total defense as Xiao Zhengyang and a number of hunters observed the approaching forces from the city walls.

Xiao Zhengyang's face turned ugly. Despite the fact that there were no longer any enemy races around, much of Qi's fighting force was still recuperating, and they didn't have the numbers to defend against the sura.

"Where's Zhang Lie?" Xiao Zhengyang asked fretfully.

Zhou Ming replied, "He left with his team, apparently for some important purpose or another."

"What? Why is it that he's never around when these things happen? Has he been waiting for the situation to turn dire before stepping in?" someone wondered.

The sura approached, stopping right before they were in range of the humans' arrows. When they saw the king of the sura hanging from the city wall, with all sorts of weapons sticking out of his rear, the sura began to frown. Was this meant to frighten them?

An elder stepped forward, flanked with two guards. He infused his voice with genetic energy and said calmly, "Call the human you call Zhang Lie out. Our king would like to meet with him."

Xiao Zhengyang stepped forward. "I'm the governor of Qi, Xiao Zhengyang. May I ask on what grounds you're requesting Zhang Lie's presence?"

The elder replied, "Are you Zhang Lie?"

"No, I'm the governor of Qi—"

"If you're not Zhang Lie, scram! Tell him to come out and face us."

Xiao Zhengyang's face turned glum. Was his position as governor meaningless? In the past, the governor had been the strongest hunter in a human city, and the first thing any invader would do was try to get rid of him. Now, however, compared to Zhang Lie, he felt like a farce.

Governor Xiao decided to stall. "For what purpose are you summoning Zhang Lie? Unless you state your intentions clearly, I won't call him out!"

The elder snorted. "Who gave you humans the courage to talk back? Send him out, or I'll level Qi!"

One of the sura began to laugh loudly. "Looks like this Zhang Lie fellow isn't anything special—he's just a coward!"

Upon hearing this, however, the hunters of Qi all began to frown. "What? Repeat what you said!"

To the hunters of Qi, Zhang Lie was their savior and an amazing hero, and they wouldn't allow anyone to besmirch his name.

More of the sura began to laugh. "Oh, are all of you angry now? I don't think I've ever seen a human dare to talk back to me!"

"Oh my, should I be scared of you puny humans? What would you do, bite us? You'd sooner break your own teeth!"

"I'll repeat it as many times as you want: if Zhang Lie doesn't dare come out of the city, he's nothing but a yellow-bellied coward!"

Some hunters of Qi were about to charge out to confront the sura when Xiao Zhengyang hurriedly stopped them. He shouted back, "Zhang Lie isn't in the city. Would you be willing to wait? He should be returning shortly."

Chapter 394: Another Elder Slain

The sura elder thundered, "Those other races were right, you humans truly need to be taught a lesson. How dare you make us wait! If you aren't willing to hand Zhang Lie over, we'll head into the city ourselves and drag him out!"

The sura began to laugh.

"I really don't know what gave you weaklings the courage to try to stand up to us."

"We would be able to destroy your city with a flick of our fingers!"

Glancing at the sura king still hanging on the city wall, the sura fighters could hardly wait to charge forward and slaughter their fill of the humans within.

"Your majesty, please, command us to level this city!" an elder exhorted.

"No, I don't think I will. Wouldn't it be boring to level it? I like the look of this city, so I think I'll keep it as a vacation spot."

The elder gaped at the sura king. "But—"

Just then, a black streak of light flashed across the sky. "Who's looking for me?"

The sura glanced up at the man in the sky as the elder frowned and asked, "Who are you?"

"You wanted to find me despite not knowing what I look like?"

"You're Zhang Lie?"

"Indeed, I am!"

"Come down here. Our king has summoned you to an audience!"

"Have him come up here and meet me, then!"

"You—insolence! How dare you disrespect our king!"

"We humans are hardly subjects of the sura."

The elder narrowed his eyes. "I've heard about you from the other races. It looks like you're truly as arrogant as they claim!"

"So what if I am?"

"Then I'll knock you down your pedestal!" the elder cried out. A scepter materialized in his hand as a bloody mist began to fill the air.

The sura fighters began to laugh.

"Haha, the elder's going to destroy this foolish man! Doesn't he know of the disparity between human and sura? He won't get away with saying those kinds of things to us!"

"There are a few sura like him, aren't there? They're arrogant despite being weaklings themselves, so it's not surprising that we'll find their like among the humans."

"Does he really think he can take us on because he managed to take down these other races? He thinks far too highly of himself!"

Just then, Zhang Lie struck. He limited himself to two quick actions: drawing his sword, then sheathing it again. A flash of sword energy speared through the mist and bisected the scepter in the elder's hand, along with the elder's body itself.

The sura fell silent.

In a gigantic caravan following the fighters' procession, a voice boomed, "I've seen the technique you used before—it's nothing interesting!"

The speaker of the voice recognized another sura elder which had been bisected in a similar manner. A sura outfitted in black armor, his features stern and cold, with the aura of a peerless fighter, stepped out of the caravan.

One look was sufficient for Zhang Lie to be certain that this was yet another sura king, one that very well could be stronger than the sura king Zhang Lie had defeated.

Zhang Lie frowned. "For what reason have you come, sura king?"

Zhang Lie didn't think a sura king would deign to make an appearance just to crush a human city. The incident with the previous sura king had been a fluke, and Zhang Lie certainly didn't want a repeat of what had happened.

"I'm here to claim you for myself, of course," the sura king replied.

Zhang Lie: ? ? ?

"You were the one who caught the sura king hanging on the wall, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was. Why? Do you want to try it for yourself?" Zhang Lie retorted.

Zhang Lie knew that trussing up the sura king would bring reprisal from the sura, but that was part of his plan.

"And you were the one who claimed all the enemy races' neighboring territories for Qi, weren't you?"

"Yes, of course," Zhang Lie replied. "So what?"

"In that case, I want you."

Zhang Lie: ! ! !

Zhang Lie folded his arms. "You want to claim me as a concubine?"

The sura surrounding the king howled in outrage, "What?! How dare you! Who do you think you are to deserve to be one of the sura king's concubines? Even if he were to choose a concubine, it would be a sura female—never a human male!"

Zhang Lie sighed in relief, but the sura king's gaze swept up and down Zhang Lie's body. "Actually, I wouldn't mind."

Zhang Lie: ! ! !

"I would," Zhang Lie clarified.

The sura king spread his arms. "Fortunately, my main purpose was to recruit you as my subordinate."

Zhang Lie grimaced. "Why would I ever accept?"

A sura guard yelled out, "Are you looking down on our liege? He's personally come out here in an attempt to recruit you—you should consider yourself lucky!"

"Right, aren't you thankful? If not for the king refusing to command us to attack the city, we would have leveled it long ago!"

"Can you even imagine how much your status will rise going from a lowly human to the subordinate of our highness himself? You must be addled in the head to not take advantage of this opportunity!"

The sura king continued, "If you're willing to become my subordinate, I will place Qi under my protection, and none shall be able to invade. If you refuse, on the other hand..."

"No one has the qualifications to make me their subordinate," Zhang Lie refused flatly.

The sura king raised his head to the skies and began to laugh. "Haha, it's been quite a few years since anyone dared to speak to me in that manner. You're a very interesting fellow, but unfortunately, as a member of the sura, I can't countenance the fact that you've hung a sura king on your city wall. I'll give you one last chance: become my subordinate."

Zhang Lie refused once again. "Scram!"

The sura king's eyes gleamed coldly as he waved an arm. "Very well. Men, get ready to strike. Level this city to the ground!"

The sura fighters began to laugh. "Haha, you ignorant fool! Let the ruins of this city be your grave!"

Chapter 395: Another Sura King

On their king's command, the sura fighters rushed out toward Qi, their eyes blood-red as they swore to turn Qi into rubble.

However, the hunters situated on the walls of Qi didn't seem prepared to defend at all. Some of them even found stools on which to sit while they scrambled for snacks and made themselves comfortable.

After all, there was no need for them to worry: Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith had already returned from their expedition, and they certainly wouldn't need to fight.

Zhang Lie himself could get rid of all the sura, and they would only be liabilities if they charged forward recklessly.

The sura king noticed how strangely the humans were acting, but that didn't make him wary—and his fighters seemed to take the humans' behavior into stride as well.

"Haha, these foolish humans! They're too scared to fight back against us!"

"I think they're quite intelligent, don't you? They know that they can't defend against our attack, so they might as well not even try. This is what livestock should look like—we need to teach that Zhang Lie a lesson!"

Zhang Lie flicked his wrist, crushing a vial of potion he had just obtained from the Yeluo clan and sprinkling the drops of liquid over the charging sura fighters.

The sura didn't notice the liquid at first, not until they found that something was wrong with their bodies. As they ran, their bodies slowly decomposed. They fell to the ground, their mouths frozen in shock, as they slowly decomposed away.

The humans on the city walls began to cheer.

"It's starting!"

"I won't get tired of this scene no matter how much I watch it, I'm sure!"

"Who wants some buns? Some hot steamed buns!"

Compared to the hunters of Qi, who had seen this trick quite a few times by now, the sura were far more agitated.

"Humans, what have you done?!"

"Traacherous humans, remove this curse!"

"Do you have to resort to such petty tricks against us? We'd steamroll you head on!"

As if he had just thought of something, the sura king waved an arm and summoned a huge burst of bloody mist toward the decomposing sura fighters.

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Don't waste your strength. It's already too late; it can't be stopped now."

"What did you do to my soldiers?! No, just what was that liquid you sprinkled on them?!"

"It's a poison of sorts," Zhang Lie replied.

The sura king extended an open palm to Zhang Lie. "Hand me the antidote."

"I don't have one, and even if I did, I wouldn't hand it over."

"In that case, you can accompany them to the underworld!" A long spear appeared in the sura king's hand. As he waved it around, thunder began to rumble from the skies, and rays of bloody light gathered around the spear and sketched out the outline of a gigantic beast.

Zhang Lie likewise got ready for battle, a blood moon beneath his feet and a black sun behind his back.

The decomposing sura fighters shouted, for their final time, "Our king is indomitable! Long live the king of the sura!"

"Ridiculous, a human who thinks he can go against our king!"

"He must have a death wish!"

"Does he think that he can take down every sura king just because he managed to take down one?"

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" A blood dragon emerged from Venombane and clashed against the sura king's gigantic beast, tearing it apart instantly. The sura king himself charged forward with his spear, thrusting it straight at Zhang Lie.

"[Ninesoul Dragonblade—First Form: Parting the River]!" A line of sword energy split the world in two.

As sword and spear clashed against each other, rippling waves of energy spread out about the two combatants. The closest spectators shied back, hastily shielding themselves and finding that even their best defenses weren't sufficient to handle the aftermath of Zhang Lie and the sura king's clash.

"For a human, you're quite strong—but you're far from being able to best me!"

the sura king cried out. He activated his blood sea domain, which roared beneath him and moved according to his will. His domain was clearly more vast and far more developed than the previous sura king Zhang Lie had faced.

As he thrust forward with his spear, a huge wave reared up from his domain, like a tsunami that had formed out of nowhere.

Zhang Lie wouldn't be able to take the attack head on, and neither would the hunters of Qi behind him.

"[The Boundless Blade: the River Lethe]!" Zhang Lie raised Venombane high above his head as an underworld river formed behind him. As the two attacks clashed against each other, the ground beneath them cracked and splintered. Zhang Lie held his ground, defending both himself and Qi.

"You really are an interesting human. What about this blow?" The sura king swirled his spear, and the blood sea formed a cone of water around its tip.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" Zhang Lie defended again with another blood dragon, but this time, it was his attack that was obliterated by his opponent's. He followed up with a second blow. "[Ninesoul Dragonblade—First Form: Parting the River]!"

The sura king's face turned serious as he charged forward with his spear, defending against Zhang Lie's attack.

Zhang Lie raised both his arms into the sky, and the image of a dragonturtle appeared behind him. The two gravity-controlling tablets smashed into the ground right where the sura king was located. The sudden change in the local gravity disrupted his balance and made his defense falter for a moment, leaving him exposed to Zhang Lie's blow.

The sword energy from Zhang Lie's attack rushed toward the sura king's head.

The sura king barely swerved in time; the sword energy brushed by his shoulder and sent his blood spraying all over. Zhang Lie closed the gap between them in a matter of moments, but the sura king blocked his charge with his spear.

The remaining two tablets from the dragonturtle crashed down exactly where Zhang Lie had corralled the sura king, again stunning him momentarily and creating the ideal condition for Zhang Lie's finisher.

Chapter 396: Another Sura King Defeated

The blood dragon that swooped out of Venombane dove into the sura king's chest and gouged a big hole in it, causing the sura king to spit out blood as he hastily retreated.

At the same time, however, he reached out and grabbed Venombane. "Die!"

His blood sea exploded as lances of blood flew out from his domain, heading straight for Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie didn't dare to take such a close-ranged explosion lightly. He manifested his crystalline genetic armor, and added his white-grub armor as an additional layer above it.

An explosion of a magnitude that dwarfed any other this fight spread out from the epicenter of the clash between the sura king and Zhang Lie. As he hunkered down, Zhang Lie began charging up power in his right fist.

The walls of Qi, unable to withstand the impact, crashed to the ground once more. A number of spectators who had gotten too close to the fight found themselves pierced by the spears themselves, paying the ultimate price for their ignorance.

As the explosions came to an end and the dust settled, the sura king let out a smile, one which froze on his face.

Zhang Lie hadn't even been injured—he was standing right there in front of him, covered in a protective layer of some strange substance. The outer layer was riddled with holes, but the inner, crystalline layer had hardly a scratch on it.

Even the sura king was agape.

Zhang Lie said calmly, "Now that your attack's over, it's time for my own. [Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!"

This sura king seemed stronger overall than the previous one Zhang Lie had faced, but the previous king had had two trump cards up his sleeve, and he was a considerably more annoying foe to deal with.

"You monster!" the sura king shouted, before trying to defend ineffectively against Zhang Lie's next attack.

Unfortunately for him, Zhang Lie had amassed quite a lot of energy in that one blow during the course of the explosion, and his inexorable punch burst apart the sura king's head without his being able to do anything about it.

The rare few sura fighters who hadn't been struck by the poison were all staring open-mouthed at the scene. "Could this really be a human?!"

They had initially thought that it would be trivial for their king to kill a human, let alone take down the entirety of Qi by himself, but Zhang Lie had somehow, against all odds, overcome the sura king and even killed him instead.

Only now did they understand why the nearby enemy races had feared the humans so much that they were willing to cede so much land to Qi—they weren't a match for Zhang Lie at all!

The sura were very suspicious of Zhang Lie's true heritage: how could he be a human? Weren't humans supposed to be weak? How could one best their liege himself in a fight?

As Zhang Lie's gaze turned to them, they all shuddered in unison, but they were hardly able to muster any sort of resistance before he and the members of Team Zenith slaughtered them all.

Amurong had just entered his office when an urgent knocking could be heard from outside.

"Enter."

His secretary quickly stepped inside. "We've just gotten more word from Qi."

Amurong frowned. "Zhang Lie again?"

Zhang Lie, Zhang Lie, Zhang Lie... he had heard so much about Zhang Lie over the last few days that he was sick of the name. Unfortunately for him, he had to remain up to date with the world federation's affairs.

The secretary reported, "Another horde of sura attacked Qi and demanded that Zhang Lie be handed over to them."

"Zhang Lie, Zhang Lie again... hold on, you said, 'hand Zhang Lie over'?" Amurong asked.

The secretary nodded and clarified, "Yes, the sura wanted to recruit him."

Amurong's eyebrows shot up. "Recruit him?! Are you sure this information is reliable?"

"Of course!"

"What happened next? Did he refuse to submit, causing Qi to perish at the sura's hands? Or did he get captured by the sura?"

The secretary shook his head. "Neither. Zhang Lie prevented the sura's invasion once again and slew the sura king who wanted to recruit him!"

Amurong's face turned dark. "He caught one alive, and now he's killed another. Just what is he trying to do?"

"I'm afraid I don't know, sir."

To Amurong, this wasn't a piece of good news, because it meant that Zhang Lie's reputation was only going to keep rising. He leaned back into his chair and fell into deep thought.

"What's the situation like in Qi right now?"

"In the aftermath of the battle, the newly built walls of Qi crumbled to the ground again, and quite a number of spectators who remained on the city walls even after the battle became heated were seriously injured or even killed."

Amurong clapped loudly. "Oh? Good, very good, Zhang Lie! Destroying the walls of Qi and killing his own kind by not reining in his own strength... very good!"

Amurong's secretary seemed a little confused. "Sir, aren't you one of the highest authorities of the world federation? The humans are part of the world federation too; should you be treating them like enemies?"

"Until they hand over their limit fragment research, they might as well be considered an enemy to all of us. Furthermore, I had nothing to do with the event: Zhang Lie triggered everything himself. Help me contact the wounded of Qi!"

Amurong had decided on a strategy to deal with Zhang Lie. Since Zhang Lie's reputation had soared to such an extent that he wouldn't be able to interfere directly, he would start by ruining Zhang Lie's reputation. The sura king's invasion had been very timely indeed.

He would let the citizens of Qi besmirch Zhang Lie's name themselves.

When he returned to the city, Zhang Lie received far less welcoming a response to his arrival. There were only a few that loudly cheered for him, but those standing behind them stared stonily at Zhang Lie, a hint of enmity in their eyes.

Zhang Lie didn't pay them any attention; he stared glumly at the ruined castle walls.

The governor of Qi, Xiao Zhengyang, stepped forward. "Welcome back."

Zhang Lie scratched his head in embarrassment. "I apologize for destroying the walls of Qi once again—it looks like you'll have to rebuild."

Xiao Zhengyang shook his head. "It's alright. By now, we're used to it."

Suddenly, a voice shouted from the crowd, "Governor, what do you mean it's alright?! We're the ones who have to suffer! Zhang Lie, don't you know just how difficult the rebuilding process is?!"

Someone else immediately retorted, "Shut up! If not for Zhang Lie's presence, we would all have been captured or killed by the sura!"

Chapter 397: The Nature of Man

"You fool! Weren't the sura all lured to Qi because of this fellow? If Zhang Lie weren't around, would the sura attack Qi multiple times?" the naysayer argued. "Is Zhang Lie truly a champion of mankind? No, he's more like a scourge!"

"Don't you remember who saved us and the entirety of Qi two times in a row?"

"Wasn't Zhang Lie the reason the sura came to Qi in the first place? The sura king came to seek revenge on Musi Yu, and Zhang Lie was the one who killed him! And if the sura hadn't invaded us, neither would the enemy races nearby—and if Zhang Lie hadn't gone and seized a sura kingdom's capital as well, the enemy races wouldn't have invaded a second time.

"Use your brain, folks! What if Zhang Lie had planned all this? How do you know he's not taking advantage of all of you to build his reputation?"

Li Feng rolled up his sleeves. "Repeat that one more time, I dare you."

Upon noticing the unkind gazes from the members of Team Zenith sent his way, the man shut up and scurried off.

Xiao Zhengyang shook his head. "I think we had better return to the governor's manor and talk there instead."

As they walked toward the governor's manor, Zhang Lie said, "It looks like there are quite a few people who don't welcome me around."

"Well, that's how things are. You stand out, and that immediately makes you polarizing. The stronger you grow, the higher your reputation, the more jealousy you'll cause. Don't worry too much about what they say."

Zhang Lie nodded. "I don't mind—I don't think I have anything to be ashamed about. Right, did you manage to get what I wanted?"

Xiao Zhengyang nodded. "I've made a request to the world federation, but it seems to have been stalled."

Zhang Lie frowned. He wanted to get a teleportation array between the dimensional world and the real world, and this technology was heavily regulated by the world federation.

Seeing his frown, however, Xiao Zhengyang only grinned even more widely. "There's no need to worry. China's government was willing to provide one for you, and it's been installed in the warehouse."

"Thank you!"

Xiao Zhengyang shook his head. "Given your contributions to Qi, this is nothing. Do you really intend on leaving Qi?"

"I'm not certain yet, but I do intend to build a new human city in what used to be the capital of the sura king I captured."

There were quite a lot of rules and regulations restricting him in Qi, so Zhang Lie wanted a city of his own.

"Very well, it looks like you've already made up your mind. When do you intend to leave?"

"I'll return to Earth and deal with some matters there first. When I heard about the invasion of Qi, I had to rush over, so I had better check on how matters have been developing without my presence."

Ever since the attack on Qi, neither Zhang Lie nor the members of Team Zenith had had a good night's sleep. They had rushed over to one of the sura kingdoms' capital, destroyed it, then ran around Qi repelling the alien races, before finally having another battle against the sura. It was well past time for them to take a break.

Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith returned to Earth, unaware of a scheme unfolding all around him. In a dark alley in Qi, a black-robed man completed a transaction with several hunters.

If Zhang Lie were present, he would have noticed that one of the men taking part in the transaction was the one who had been vilifying him in front of the public.

The man grinned with malice. "Don't worry, boss, leave this to me! I've never liked Zhang Lie, so you can be assured I'll do my best. Champion of mankind? Feh!"

The others agreed fervently. "Right, he might be a capable hunter, but nothing more! I hardly understand what everyone finds so wonderful about him!"

In front of the largest plaza in Qi, which was being restored after the damage from two successive invasions, a man stood by the cusp of the fountain in the center of the plaza. He yelled out, "Friends, comrades, hunters of Qi, gather around! I'm here today to reveal the truth behind a man whom we've all thought of as a hero."

A few hunters walking by stared at the man before averting their gazes.

The man pulled out a sheaf of papers from his robes with Zhang Lie's face on them.

"I'm talking about the scourge of mankind, Zhang Lie!"

"Isn't that the champion of mankind, Zhang Lie?"

The man glared at the onlooker who had spoken. "Champion of mankind? He doesn't deserve such a title—he's a duplicitous, two-faced scumbag! Perhaps you might not know this, but he was the one who caused the two invasions that almost destroyed Qi. He's the true culprit!"

Zhang Lie's believers rushed to defend him. "What are you talking about? If not for Zhang Lie, Qi would long have fallen."

"But have you considered what would have happened if Zhang Lie weren't around?"

Why did the sura king attack Qi? It was because he was seeking revenge for Musi Yu, whom Zhang Lie killed! And why did the enemy races attack Qi? It was because Zhang Lie left Qi defenseless when he dragged everyone in fighting condition off with him to invade the sura!"

Someone else yelled, "You're absolutely right! If not for Zhang Lie's actions, Qi would have been perfectly safe!"

Think about how much we've all suffered since he came to Qi! We've never had any sura attacks, but the moment this fellow arrived, Qi was struck by calamity after calamity!"

"You're exactly right. Look all around you, everyone—how many of your friends or acquaintances perished to those attacks? Wake up: Zhang Lie isn't our savior, he's our downfall! If we remain silent any longer, Qi will fall because of him!"

The hunters that the black-robed man had paid off yesterday were having a noticeable effect on the audience.

"Everyone thinks highly of him, but I suspect he's making use of his strength and ability to lure enemies over before killing them in a grand display of strength right by the city walls. By repeating these feats, he'll easily raise his reputation and renown—but at the cost of your lives!"

"But he did save Qi, didn't he?" someone called out.

"Nonsense! You've already been brainwashed by Zhang Lie's antics!"

Chapter 398: Tyrannical Logic

"If not for Zhang Lie, would there be so many problems in Qi?"

"He's clearly in it all for the reputation, not to protect us hunters! If not for the fact that he had begun fighting with the sura king right outside the city walls, we wouldn't have to rebuild again!"

"One of my good friends died because of the shockwaves from the fight between Zhang Lie and the sura king! Zhang Lie has to bear responsibility for his death!"

The man who stood by the fountain raised his hands to the sky. "Expel Zhang Lie from Qi!"

"Expel Zhang Lie? No, surely not. After all, he did save Qi from the sura."

"Zhang Lie has to take responsibility for luring the sura over in the first place!"

"Zhang Lie is a hero of Qi, isn't he? In that case, shouldn't he donate some of his limit-breaking potions to support the hunters of Qi and to make sure we can fend off another sura invasion? After all, he has so many limit-breaking potions that he can afford to issue a bounty on the Musi clan with them!"

"Right! Surely it isn't unreasonable for us to ask for a small portion of what he has, considering the damage that was caused to Qi!"

Give a man an inch and he'll take a mile. After Zhang Lie saved the hunters of Qi twice over, they now wanted him to take responsibility for the damage incurred by the city as part of the fighting as well.

Most of the hunters didn't want to expel Qi, but their greed triumphed over logic. Some had been injured in the aftermath of the invasions, and many were responsible for helping rebuild. They certainly didn't want to blame themselves for anything, so the obvious target was Zhang Lie. They had worked hard to help save the city; surely that deserved a limit-breaking potion or two? The hunters all threw their weight behind the man who had spurred them all to action.

The man smiled: everything was going according to plan.

As a result, when Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith returned to Qi, they found the passersby staring at them strangely.

As Zhang Lie wondered about what had happened, a group of hunters walked forward and extended an open palm to him. "Zhang Lie, hand over your limit-breaking potions!"

Zhang Lie: ???

If they were trying to rob him, why would they do it in public? Furthermore, after witnessing how he had defeated two sura kings, did they really think they could defeat him?

What Zhang Lie didn't realize was that the only reason they had dared to make such a demand of him was precisely because they were in the public eye. In private, they would quail against Zhang Lie's might instantly.

Zhang Lie frowned. "On what grounds?"

"I told you he wouldn't do it!" said the leader of the group, turning to the rest of the party. He faced Zhang Lie once more. "I've seen through your ploys!"

"You were the one who lured the sura king over. He only came to Qi because you killed Musi Yu, and the alien races only invaded Qi because you took our main fighting force with you when you went to invade the sura!"

"Now that Qi's fallen to such dire straits, you're refusing to hand over your limit-breaking potions in compensation. It's clear that you had an ulterior motive behind all your actions! You didn't defend Qi just to help us—you just wanted to shore up your reputation! Am I right?"

"You duplicitous man!"

Hong Xi rolled her eyes. "My master has better things to do with his time."

Zhang Lie added, "Don't you think I'm famous enough as the champion of the Void Cup and dragonlord of China? Why would I waste my time with such a pointless gesture?"

In anger, the man thundered, "You're keeping your pretenses up, I see! Well, I don't care—you have to take responsibility for causing so many deaths in Qi!"

"Yes, you do! Before you came, everything was fine with Qi, but we've had disaster after disaster because of you. The walls of Qi were twice destroyed, and thousands of casualties ensued as a result! Perhaps you shouldn't be held responsible for those deaths, but you directly caused Qi's walls to fall once more because you fought so close to the city. Don't you think some compensation is necessary in that case?"

Quite a few wounded hunters strode forward, blocking Zhang Lie's path.

Hong Xi retorted in rage, "You're all ungrateful fools! If not for my master being here, Qi would long since have fallen. He could easily have waited on Earth, but he chose to enter Qi to save all of you because you were all fellow humans! How could you criticize him in this fashion? Scram, or I'll make you scram!"

Sun Mengmeng added, "Right, we've all seen how Zhang Lie stepped up to defend Qi in times of crisis. How can you have the conscience to blame all this on him? If not for him, would you be able to unite with your long-lost relatives who were suffering in the lands of the sura? Would you have the land that Zhang Lie reclaimed from the enemy races nearby? If you want to die, I'll send you on your way!"

Li Feng laughed coldly. "Do you think what Zhang Lie did for Qi can be compared to a mere wall?"

"Even the governor hasn't complained—what right do you all have to do so?"

"So what? Isn't it your fault that the walls collapsed?"

"It's because of Zhang Lie that my good friend's been heavily wounded!"

"There aren't many hunters left in Qi, and most of the forces have been injured because of the fighting. Isn't it reasonable that you would provide some compensation in the form of these limit-breaking potions?"

"You're the hero of Qi, aren't you? You should be more considerate of us hunters, then! You have a large stockpile of these potions, enough to issue a bounty with them, so why not give us a few?"

"I'm not your parent—why should I provide for you? Scram!" Zhang Lie snorted as he made to walk away, but the man in charge blocked his path with a group of people.

"Hold it! We won't let you leave so easily."

"You've saved Qi a few times already, haven't you? What's one more time? Why don't you hand over these limit-breaking potions so we can all get stronger and defend Qi more easily?"

"If you don't hand over the potions, your reputation as a hero will quickly fall apart. Do you understand your circumstances?"

Zhang Lie couldn't help but laugh. "Are you all crazy? As I've said, I don't care about my reputation."

Zhang Lie didn't care about being a hero, and he didn't care about how others addressed him. What was important was following his heart, his own code of ethics. He had never considered himself a champion of mankind, nor a hero in any sense of the word.

"No, we won't let you leave unless you hand over your limit-breaking potions!"

Chapter 399: Founding a City

Zhang Lie narrowed his eyes. "What can you do to me if I insist on leaving?"

"We can't do anything to you, of course, but neither can you do anything to us." The man stood right in front of Zhang Lie and blocked his way.

Zhang Lie extended three fingers at him. "I'll count to three. If you don't make way, don't blame me about what happens next."

The man looked all around him and smiled. "We're in the middle of Qi. Are you really going to strike me?"

"Three!"

The man patted himself on the cheeks. "Strike me if you dare, Zhang Lie, champion of mankind! Everyone will see this blow."

"Two!"

The man laughed. "As a champion of mankind, are you really going to bully a common hunter like me?"

His companions added, "Right, we're all weak hunters, and none of us are comparable to you. Aren't you afraid of the blow to your reputation if you strike us in broad daylight?"

"One!"

"I might only be a weak hunter, but I never backed down when facing the sura. I fought with my life on the line—do you really dare hit me?!"

"I too played a huge role in the defense of Qi, and I should be protected by its laws!"

A gust of hot wind rose as the man was flung away into the distance, tracing out a parabola in the sky as he flew out of the city grounds.

"Respect you? What's there to respect about you? As for the laws of Qi, well, I have witnesses around for your reprehensible behavior. I said, scam!"

Zhang Lie had no qualms about attacking these immoral fellows.

As Zhang Lie glanced at the other hunters of Qi who had milled around the scene and even taken part in blocking his way, he couldn't hide the flash of disappointment in his eyes. What right did these hunters have to demand his limit-breaking potions? Just because they were weak and poor, while he was strong and rich?

It had taken him plenty of time to scale up his potion crafting to his current extent, and collecting, refining, and concocting the potion had required immense effort and time on his part. Why should he help them all for nothing?

Hong Xi shielded her eyes as she glanced toward where the man had fallen. "Now that he's flown out of the city, we shouldn't need to beat him up, should we?"

"Make way! Don't force us to strike you!" Sun Mengmeng cried out, "If not for the fact that you all participated valiantly in defending Qi, I would have struck you all down already!"

"Let's go." Zhang Lie strode forward.

The companions of the hunter who had been punted out of the city hurriedly stepped forward. "No, you can't leave!"

"We won't let you go unless you hand over those limit-breaking potions!"

"Everyone saw you hit that fellow—either you hand over those potions, or we expel you from Qi!"

"And what right do you have to expel me?"

Zhang Lie sent a pulse of genetic energy rippling in a wave before him, sending those hunters blocking his way flying. He walked out of the city gates with the members of Team Zenith, none of the bystanders remaining daring to stop him.

Only when he was gone did the hunters of Qi seem to come to a realization.

"Wait, you can't leave!"

"Champion of mankind, Zhang Lie, you can't leave!"

"What's going to happen to Qi if you do?"

It was only when they saw Zhang Lie walk away from Qi that they began to regret what they had done.

Zhang Lie was a hunter on par with the sura king, and if Zhang Lie were to remain in Qi, Qi would have nothing to fear. Even the nearby enemy races had retreated because of his pressure; if he were to leave and the enemy races found out, wouldn't they take back the land they had been forced to give up?

It really seemed like Zhang Lie was planning to leave Qi completely, but all their calculations had been predicated on the fact that Zhang Lie wouldn't leave, no matter what.

Reflecting on those calculations, however, they found that they had been very, very wrong.

Zhang Lie hadn't asked for anything as thanks for saving Qi numerous times; he had even attacked the neighboring enemy races and acquired more land for Qi.

This selfless behavior led the hunters to believe that Zhang Lie had become attached to Qi, but that was wrong. Now that they had disgusted him with their shameless begging, he didn't want to remain in Qi any longer.

When they heralded him as a champion of mankind, they had expected him to provide selflessly for humanity, particularly for the hunters of Qi, but Zhang Lie had never agreed to this. He wasn't a champion of mankind, and he had no intentions to become one.

Zhang Lie was free to roam the second realm as he pleased; he had rescued Qi out of a sense of responsibility as a fellow human, not because of the hunters of Qi.

Furthermore, Zhang Lie already had his own plans in mind.

As the hunters in Qi watched him leave, they couldn't help but curse themselves for what they had done, succumbing to their greed and spurning Zhang Lie from Qi. Only when he had left did they realize the serious error they had committed.

Someone chased after him and asked, "Where are you going? You won't be able to do anything if you leave Qi! How are you going to get back to the real world?"

"That's none of your business." Zhang Lie snorted as he left a horde of screaming hunters behind.

"Come back!"

"Get back here!"

"Champion of mankind, come back! Qi needs you!" the hunters shouted.

"Don't desert us, champion!"

"Champion, Zhang Lie, we were wrong, we shouldn't have spurned you!"

No matter how they yelled, Zhang Lie didn't turn back.

As he headed out of Qi, however, he found Xiao Zhengyang standing in his way, a smile on his face. "You've forgotten something."

Zhang Lie frowned. "Do you want to prevent me from leaving, too?"

"No, I'm simply here to hand you something you left behind." Xiao Zhengyang motioned for Zhou Ming to carry a large parcel over.

Zhang Lie's eyes brightened. "The teleportation apparatus?"

"How else would you build your own city or return to Earth?"

"You aren't going to stop me?"

"Why should I?" Xiao Zhengyang pointed behind him. "It was those fools who chased you away. I know I can't make you stay, so why bother trying?"

Chapter 400: Critics and Condemnation

"It looks like you approve of my building a city," Zhang Lie replied to Xiao Zhengyang.

"I was never in opposition—I just hadn't made up my mind."

"And those hunters caused you to make up your mind?"

Xiao Zhengyang sighed. "As you know, the world federation has had a hand in founding and governing Qi, and my status as the governor doesn't give me complete authority over what goes on.

"This situation with the hunters seems rather unusual, and I can't neglect the possibility that someone from the world federation is trying to make a move against you. Now that the location of Qi is known to quite a few enemy races nearby, it's in great danger. I can't afford to punish any hunters; we need all the manpower we can get. I apologize for the indignity you've had to suffer."

"No, no, none of that at all! I'm simply disgusted by their behavior. But if Qi's in so much danger, how could you stand my leaving now?"

Xiao Zhengyang sighed. "Would you stay just because I asked you to? Furthermore, it's important to have a place of last resort in case Qi ever falls; I hope you'll be able to take in any refugees from Qi then."

"I'll do my best." With Xiao Zhengyang's promises and well wishes, Zhang Lie left with the rest of Team Zenith and the teleportation apparatus. Not long after their departure, however, Zhang Lie heard footsteps from behind. He frowned. "Go into stealth, everyone."

The members of Team Zenith slowly faded from sight.

Zhang Lie turned to face those who were chasing after him: Su Hong, along with the three thousand soldiers that Zhang Lie had brought with him to invade the territory of the sura.

Zhang Lie materialized out of thin air, shocking the gathered hunters. He frowned. "What are all of you doing here? Do you think you'll be able to force me to return to Qi?"

Su Hong smiled. "We know we wouldn't be able to beat you, champion."

The hunters beside him added, "Right, even if we had ten times the number, we might not be able to bring you back."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "I'm not your champion, and I never was."

"Well, we're no longer hunters of Qi anymore."

Zhang Lie's eyes widened.

Su Hong explained, "We want to leave with you, Zhang Lie."

Zhang Lie frowned. "Do you all know where I'm headed? I'll be roaming aimlessly in the second realm. Return to Qi—it's surely safer for all of you."

"No matter where you're headed, we're willing to follow you."

"Through hell and high water, sir!"

The hunters laughed. "We're sure you'll take care of us, champion! We're willing to work for you."

Zhang Lie chuckled bitterly. "There's only going to be suffering ahead where I'm headed."

Su Hong smiled again. "Don't worry. We've all made up our minds to follow you, and we're mentally prepared for what to face. I've heard the governor mention that you're going to be constructing a new settlement, and we're ready to be part of that."

How few settlements do we humans have in the second realm? Our names might even appear in the history books one day, and we won't let go of such an opportunity."

Zhang Lie turned to face the massed hunters behind Su Hong. "And what of you? Why are you here to follow me?"

The hunters shook their heads. "We don't have such grand aspirations—we just know that you're a good leader."

They had tasted the fruits of their labor when they followed Zhang Lie gallivanting across the sura lands. Although it had been a tiring expedition, the rewards were commensurate with the effort they had put in.

Su Hong steepled his fingers. "Don't chase us back to Qi, champion! Let me tell you something: before we left, we caught the group of hunters that tried to extort you and gave them the beating they deserved. We did it within the city, breaking martial law, so none of us can return now!"

Zhang Lie sighed. "If you really want to follow me, don't call me a champion. I'm sick of being addressed as a champion or a hero."

"Yes, Zhang Lie!" the gathered hunters shouted, beaming.

Zhang Lie's party suddenly grew far larger.

At the same time, news of Zhang Lie's sudden departure from Qi had begun to spread.

"What?! Zhang Lie left Qi, never to return?!"

"What did I miss? Why's he doing that?"

"Are those hunters from Qi crazy? They should go see a doctor!"

The hunters' forums began bursting with activity.

"Did something big happen in Qi?"

"The sura attacked Qi again—do you think that's big?"

"What? That's old news! Didn't you know that Zhang Lie was forced out of Qi?"

"What? Zhang Lie's gone?"

"A bunch of fools tried to force Zhang Lie to hand them some limit-breaking potions, and their actions disgusted Zhang Lie so much that he chose to leave!"

"Fools! If Zhang Lie hadn't saved Qi, it would be destroyed by now!"

"What's worse, they were calling him champion of mankind just yesterday, but a day later, they're kicking him out of Qi?"

"There are idiots everywhere—don't they see that they might even have perished if not for Qi?"

"A pile of ungrateful bastards! If I were Zhang Lie, I'd choose to leave, too."

"People really are greedy, aren't they?"

"Well, regardless of where Zhang Lie's headed, the city of Feng would be very happy to host him!"

"No, no, he's closer to Ming! He should go to Ming!"

"We'll do anything to bring him to Wang!"

Who wouldn't want Zhang Lie around? He was a force comparable to a sura king. With him around, no city would have to fear being attacked. It was little wonder the three other human settlements were doing all they could to recruit him.

The hunters of Qi, seeing how fervently the hunters from the other three cities of the second realm were trying to recruit Zhang Lie, regretted their decision even more.

"If I see those hunters from Qi again, I'll give them a beating!"

Only a small fraction of hunters had spoken up and taken action against Zhang Lie, though there were naturally those who knew of what they were doing and had chosen to let things slide, in hopes that they too would be able to obtain these limit-breaking potions without dirtying their own hands.

Unfortunately for them, what those hunters had done had hurt all the citizens of Qi. What was Qi to do now that Zhang Lie was gone? They could hardly defend against the enemy races alone.

Naturally, they would blame the instigators who had tried to expel Zhang Lie in the first place.