

## U. Warlord 481

### Chapter 481: A Human Cannon

"[Lunarflame Shot]!" Fire-attuned genetic energy burst from Sun Mengmeng's body as her body erupted in flames. She pulled her greatbow taut. Only a series of afterimages were visible of her hand as she shot countless arrows of purple flame of her bow, producing what seemed like a meteor shower that tinted the air purple and gave the valley a phantasmagorical appearance. The air turned dry and arid, as though a cataclysm was nigh.

Under the brilliant purple sky, the zombies began to burn, drowned in a sea of purple flame. The bridge that the zombies had hoped to erect with their bodies disintegrated; they trampled on each other in a mad rush to reach the Renhuang hunters.

The leader of the rock spirits and his retinue held the line, punching forward with their fists as they sent the zombies flying in all directions. As they continued to kill the zombies, a grey mist rose around them, boosting their defenses.

"[Netherworld's Gaze]!" Sun Mengmeng sent pillars of purplish-black flame flaring toward the skies. The pillars exploded in mid-air and transformed into a violet moon.

The rays of moonlight that the moon gave off were like purple arrows, piercing whatever they encountered.

The zombies began to gather together, assembling into a monstrous zombie hundreds of meters tall. The monster was formed from countless bodies and body parts, linked by genetic energy. The valley was only as deep as the monster's waist. It opened its mouth and roared, expelling a wave of sound and deep-red genetic energy.

The leader of the rock spirits stood firm against the attack like a bulwark, splitting the force of the energy in two. Such was the momentum of the attack that even his body was forced back, his feet creating two furrows in the ground, but he remained standing firm. His body turned a deep red, as though he were a piece of molten metal. Steam radiated from his body; he expended the spiritual matter he had gathered over the course of the battle.

"[The Nine Moons of the Underworld]!" Nine more flaming moons appeared in the sky, dyeing the world in shades of purple and black.

The nine flaming moons fell as they struck the gigantic zombie from nine different directions, igniting purple flame all over his body. The zombie began to disintegrate once again.

At least half the necromantic forces had been consumed by fire, but the extent of the army still seemed boundless. They came like the tides, as though they were the only survivors of a zombie apocalypse.

Glancing at the land polluted by bones and burning corpses, as well as the hordes of zombies about to overwhelm them, Sun Mengmeng frowned. "It really does look like an apocalypse."

"What's that?"

From a distance, they could hear what sounded like peals of thunder. A ball composed of zombies was rolling its way over to the Renhuang forces, adding more and more zombies to its mass as it rolled over them, growing larger and larger like a snowball.

"Take this—[Netherworld's Torrential Flame]!" Sun Mengmeng's right hand, with which she drew back her bow, blurred. A frightening fan of flames poured out from Sun Mengmeng's bow, an attack far stronger than the purple moon she had summoned.

The flames raced across the air and struck the ball of zombies, which rolled left to evade the attack. Nevertheless, the torrent of flame continued chasing after the ball, Sun Mengmeng's hands moving as fast as ever as she poured more and more genetic energy into the attack.

While she still had stamina, this frightening attack wouldn't come to an end.

As her attack landed a direct hit, the ball of zombies began to lose momentum.

Nevertheless, it had grown to such a large size that it was able to bear the brunt of the attack as it continued to roll toward the forces of Renhuang. When she saw the ball drawing close, Sun Mengmeng was forced to change her tactics.

"[Lunarflame Shot: Ninefold Phantasmagoria]." Her surroundings began to burn with dark red flames. Nine purplish-black phoenixes rose around her and honed in on the ball of zombies, causing it to explode as they struck it directly. Zombies were sent flying like raindrops all throughout the valley—perhaps intentionally, in order to launch at least a few zombies up the valley and toward the Renhuang forces.

The hunters behind Sun Mengmeng immediately charged forward to clear some space for her. Sun Mengmeng gulped down a vial of stamina potion the Yeluo had specially prepared.

"[Lunarflame Shot]!" Purplish-black flames gathered on Sun Mengmeng's bow once again, forming an arrow of pure black.

Unlike Moyan's black flames, which devoured all light, Sun Mengmeng's flames radiated darkness instead. The image of a golden garuda, limned in black, appeared behind her.

As she loosed her arrow, it seemed to transform into a beam of light, moving so quickly that it bypassed the constraints of time and space. The ball of zombies never stood a chance; the attack pierced through it and two more balls gathering on the horizon. All three burst into flame and disintegrated into ashes.

More and more zombie balls began to form, and the rock spirits and remaining hunters found themselves starting to get overwhelmed. The entire valley shook as the balls exploded, raining zombies all over.

Sun Mengmeng's eyes turned sharp, and her bow once again burst into flames.

She pulled it taut, and the two wings on either side of the bow extended to three times its usual size. A bird's haunted call pierced the air as Sun Mengmeng's spirit resonated with her peak-grade soulshard weapon.

"[Lunarflame Shot: Extirpation of the Garuda]!"

As Sun Mengmeng infused her genetic energy into the bow, the image of a garuda appeared behind her. She released her arrow, which morphed into a human-faced, golden-winged bird in mid-air, radiating red light as it arced through the skies. It began to pulse with red fire, brimming with such energy that it seemed as though it would set the world aflame.

Three zombies suddenly emerged from deep within the valley. Unlike the other zombies, these moved agilely and rapidly, appearing in front of the garuda almost in the blink of an eye and pummeling it with their fists.

Fire rained down from the skies, but with far less intensity than before. Six zombies gathered, with a black figure at their center.

Sun Mengmeng glanced at the newcomer calmly. "You've arrived."

The black-robed sura Shicang slowly descended from the heavens. "Impressive, to be able to predict my arrival."

Sun Mengmeng laughed. "Of course you had to come—if you didn't, all your zombies would have perished."

#### Chapter 482: An Arrow to the Head

Indeed, almost two-thirds of Shicang's army had now been destroyed, and she would be able to exterminate the remaining third easily if Shicang didn't stop her. Shicang had had no choice but to make his move.

"You humans are quite a bit stronger than I had expected. I'm very curious—just how did you humans become so strong? Or were you simply hiding your strength and biding your time?"

Six zombies surrounded Shicang, protecting him from danger. The three zombies that had gone against the garuda likewise returned to his side, battered and broken—all three had lost half their arms to the garuda's explosion.

The leader of the rock spirits likewise rushed back and stood in front of Sun Mengmeng. He whispered to her, "Each of those corpses is on the level of a sura king."

Most of those corpses were of sura, whereas the others were of other alien races.

A pair of eyes sparkled within black robes. Shicang's eyes scanned Sun Mengmeng up and down. "Beautiful! My treasury's lacking a collector's piece like you, no, you're superior to any of my prized corpses! Yes, just like a goddess of war... I implore you, become the most prized jewel of my collection!"

Sun Mengmeng frowned. "I intend to serve no one but my captain, the governor of Renhuang!"

It was evident that Shicang only collected the dead.

Shicang sighed. "What a shame! I don't want to destroy a work of art—it'll take me considerable effort to put you back together if you injure yourself. Furthermore, once I have to repair you, you won't be as good as new. Losing an arm or a leg will diminish your value greatly, do you understand?"

"I have no interest in a necrophile's whims or desires. [Lunarflame Shot]!"

Three arrows, brimming with purple flame, flew toward her opponent.

Three of Shicang's corpses stepped forward, fending off the arrows with their fists.

"Please, don't call me a necrophile. I'm just a collector." Without any visible signal, Shicang sent the six corpses charging toward Sun Mengmeng.

"[Lunarflame Shot]!" Fire-attuned genetic energy burst from Sun Mengmeng's body as her body erupted in flames. She pulled her greatbow taut, and her right hand seemed to blur. Countless arrows of purple flame shot out of her bow like a meteor shower, that tinted the air purple and gave the valley a phantasmagorical appearance. The air turned dry and arid, as though a cataclysm was nigh.

Under the brilliant purple sky, the zombies began to burn, drowned in a sea of purple flame.

Nevertheless, it wasn't enough to stop the corpses that were on the level of sura kings, who agilely darted through the sea of flames like fish.

Sun Mengmeng sent more and more meteor-like arrows flying toward Shicang, but they were shot down by his three remaining bodyguards.

The leader of the rock spirits sent two of the zombies flying with his fists as the other four surrounded him. They punched forward with their fists, attacking one by one and forcing the leader of the rock spirits to grit its teeth as it was pushed back by their combined force.

Although the leader of the rock spirits was stronger than any individual sura king, there was only one of it and six of the zombies.

More zombie balls came rolling in from the distance, but Sun Mengmeng couldn't spare them any attention given that she had to deal with Shicang and his elite zombies. She left them for the other rock spirits and hunters to deal with.

The elite zombies charged toward Sun Mengmeng.

"[Baptism of Hellfire: Full Moon]!" Sun Mengmeng whirled her daggers all around her as a black moon rose into the air.

The zombies were sent flying by her attacks. In mid-air, Sun Mengmeng followed up with a second blow. As her peak-grade bow began to burn, she fired an arrow into the skies, creating a glowing purple-black moon which burst apart into a shower of arrows.

The remaining corpses in the vicinity massed together into a gigantic ball of zombies which struck the valley and exploded, propelling a huge wave of them toward the forces of Renhuang.

The elite zombies continued charging toward Sun Mengmeng, uncaring of their comrades' deaths.

"[Netherworld's Gaze]!" Sun Mengmeng retreated with [Flameburst Step], her hands burning with flame. She sent pillars of purplish-black flame flaring toward the skies. The pillars exploded in mid-air and transformed into a violet moon, which shot down rays of light that pierced her enemies.

The elite zombies defended themselves against the barrage, but quite a few more holes appeared through their bodies.

The leader of the rock spirits sent more of the elite zombies flying with his fists.

"[The Nine Moons of the Underworld]!" Nine more flaming moons appeared in the sky, so bright they eclipsed the sun and dyed the entire land in shades of purple and black.

Each moon shone upon one of Shicang's nine elites. Four were by his side, and the other five were still charging toward Sun Mengmeng. Shicang had to act now or risk losing all his elites completely. He moved through the air like a shade, helping to defend against the moonbeams.

Just then, an arrow pierced the sky, soundless and colorless, so quickly even Shicang couldn't react. It pierced through his head.

Everyone paused as Shicang's head burst open.

Nevertheless, Shicang didn't fall. He remained standing, black mist billowing forth from his neck and seemingly regenerating another head. Shicang's body was composed of black mist, and his features were obscured and unclear.

"As expected." Sun Mengmeng wasn't surprised to see such a sight, as though she had long since unraveled his mystery...

#### Chapter 483: An Endless Horde

"As expected." Sun Mengmeng seemed to have guessed it all.

Shicang panicked a little at the sudden revelation of his secret. Even when his most elite zombies were killed, Shicang didn't panic; now that his true appearance was revealed, however, he hurriedly tried to cover his head with his robes, even hooding himself in shame.

"As our captain hypothesized, you aren't a member of the sura."

In fact, he wasn't even a lifeform—only an experiment produced by the monarch of stars.

Shicang's body was made of spiritual matter that had been polluted by a concentrated source of negative emotion. The reason he liked collecting corpses was because he didn't have a body of his own, and he coveted what he didn't have.

The reason he collected these bodies wasn't to turn them into a necromantic army, but rather because he wanted one of his very own.

Sun Mengmeng clearly seemed to have touched a nerve. Shicang roared, "The sura—I'm stronger than any of them! I'm even able to kill a sura king. Except for the lack of a body, I'd be stronger than any sura around!"

Considering that his kingdom bordered sura territory, Shicang had been very careful to hide his secret in order to avoid being discovered as an outsider. The fact that he wasn't a sura made him self-conscious and caused him to harbor a grudge, and his personality gradually grew more and more twisted as a result.

He shouted, "I'm better than any of the other sura kings that the monarch of stars had claimed as godsons—why won't he recognize me?!"

Sun Mengmeng raised her bow. "I don't know what your backstory is, but at this point, we're enemies on the battlefield.

Black mist roiled around his body. "Everyone who knows this secret has to perish—everyone in the empire of stars, all of you, everyone except the monarch of stars!"

This was the reason that Shicang had transformed his entire kingdom into one of corpses, the reason that he had subsumed his brother's army. Only corpses would view him without any disdain, and only they could keep his secret.

The corpses all began to howl as Shicang's rage and anger spread to them. Their eyes turned blood-red as they rushed toward Renhuang's forces.

"[Lunarflame Shot]!" Three arrows, brimming with purple flame, flew toward her opponent.

The elite zombies stood in front of Shicang, blocking the attack and firmly protecting him. Two more elite zombies quickly rushed over.

"[Baptism of Hellfire: Full Moon]!" Sun Mengmeng whirled her daggers all around her as a black moon rose into the air. The zombies were sent flying by her attacks.

As Shicang howled, the black fog surrounding his body began to dissipate through the air, snaking toward the corpses on the battlefield. Each corpse touched by the effect gave up on the enemy before them and began rushing over to Shicang.

Sun Mengmeng's surroundings began to burn with dark red flames as she loosed arrows toward Shicang.

On Shicang's command, two of the elite zombies surrounding him began to charge toward Sun Mengmeng.

"[Lunarflame Shot: Ninefold Phantasmagoria]."

Nine purplish-black phoenixes rose around her and shot toward the zombies. Two struck the approaching zombies, incinerating them instantly. One phoenix shot toward an elite zombie and exploded by his chest, sending him flying. Three more chased after him. The zombie took down one, but two more charged him in a pincer attack and cremated him.

The final three shot toward Shicang, who summoned three elite zombies to fend off the blow.

While they delayed Sun Mengmeng for him, Shicang continued massing a zombie horde. Black mist filled the air like fog as the corpses massed together into a gigantic two-headed sura.

Shicang commanded this monstrosity from where the heart of the sura would be, secure and safe in the very middle. The remaining elite zombies formed the hands and feet of the gigantic two-headed sura.

As Shicang released more and more black fog, the two-headed sura seemed to come to life with an astoundingly strong aura.

Sun Mengmeng's peak-grade bow began to burn. She fired an arrow into the sky, creating a glowing purple-black moon which burst apart into a shower of arrows. However, the sura dispersed the attack with nothing more than a simple punch from his fist.

Sun Mengmeng's expression turned serious.

"[Lunarflame Shot]!" Fire-attuned genetic energy burst from Sun Mengmeng's body as her body erupted in flames. She pulled her greatbow taut.

The two-headed sura roared as he charged toward Sun Mengmeng, leaving deep imprints on the ground as he ran, shooting forward like a cannon. The leader of the rock spirits stood firm against his charge, but the two-headed sura knocked him aside as easily as a child would knock over a tower of blocks.

Nevertheless, the leader of the rock spirits had created an almost infinitesimal window of opportunity for Sun Mengmeng.

Sun Mengmeng's right hand blurred as countless arrows of purple flame shot out of her bow like a meteor shower that tinted the air purple and gave the valley a phantasmagorical appearance. The air turned dry and arid, as though a cataclysm was nigh.

Under the brilliant purple sky, the zombies began to burn, drowned in a sea of purple flame. Even the gigantic two-headed sura seemed to be taken aback.

"[Baptism of Hellfire: Full Moon]!" Sun Mengmeng whirled her daggers all around her as a black moon rose into the air.

The two-headed sura's fists fended off the daggers. As the black moon exploded, Sun Mengmeng was sent flying out of the melee. She landed on the ground as purplish-black flames raged all around her.

With [Flameburst Step], she halted her backward movement and made use of that momentum to pull her bow taut.

"[Netherworld's Gaze]!" A pillar of purplish-black flame flared toward the sky, exploding in mid-air and transforming into a violet moon, which shot down rays of light that pierced the two-headed sura.

"[Lunarflame Shot]!" Three arrows, brimming with purple flame, flew toward her opponent, straight at where Shicang was located by what would be the two-headed sura's heart.

The arrows burst on impact with the two-headed sura's chest, revealing Shicang's original form. His black fog was intermingled with the corpses. Layer after layer of genetic energy shielded him from attack.

As her peak-grade bow began to burn, Sun Mengmeng fired an arrow into the skies, creating a glowing purple-black moon which burst apart into a shower of arrows. The two-headed sura deflected the arrows with his fists, and Shicang covered up the wound on the two-headed sura's exposed chest with a new group of zombies.

#### Chapter 484: The Death of Shicang

"[Lunarflame Shot]!" Fire-attuned genetic energy burst from Sun Mengmeng's body as her body erupted in flames. She pulled her greatbow taut, and only a series of afterimages were visible of her hand as she shot countless arrows of purple flame of her bow. A meteor shower tinted the air purple and gave the valley a phantasmagorical appearance.

The two-headed sura charged forward underneath this field of purple meteors, which burst into flame as they landed on the ground. The valley began to burn; the forces of Renhuang retreated, wary of being caught in the aftermath of the attack.

"[Baptism of Hellfire: Full Moon]!" Sun Mengmeng whirled her daggers all around her as a black moon rose into the air. The two-headed sura's fists fended off the daggers and knocked Sun Mengmeng flying. She landed on the ground as purplish-black flames raged all around her.

With [Flameburst Step], she halted her backward movement and made use of that momentum to pull her bow taut.

"[Netherworld's Gaze]!" A pillar of purplish-black flame flared toward the sky, exploding in mid-air and transforming into a violet moon, which shot down rays of light toward the two-headed sura.

As the sura dodged, it suddenly stomped on the ground, sending a boulder flying like a cannonball. Fortunately, the leader of the rock spirits caught it in time.

"[The Nine Moons of the Underworld]!" Nine more flaming moons appeared in the sky, so bright they eclipsed the sun and dyed the entire land in shades of purple and black. They descended toward the ground. Three locked onto the two-headed sura's trajectory. Two fell in quick succession.

The sura burst one apart with his fists, causing it to explode and covering his body with purplish-black flame. The second moon drew near. The sura attacked again with his other fist, but his body suddenly seemed to shiver.

As the third moon burst apart and enveloped him in a third layer of flame, the sura's body started to char.

As more and more moons descended, the sura tried to fend them off with his hands, but the combination of three moons was so staggering that he was forced to stumble back. When yet another moon struck him, all four burst apart at once, swallowing him up in flame.

"Take this—[Netherworld's Torrential Flame]!" A frightening fan of flames poured out from Sun Mengmeng's bow, an attack far stronger than the purple moon she had summoned.

The flames arced across the air and struck the two-headed sura. As he roared out, a thick layer of charred, zombified skin sloughed off his body. As he waved his arms, he threw a number of zombies as projectiles toward Sun Mengmeng.

The leader of the rock spirits shielded Sun Mengmeng from the sudden and unusual projectiles, but he didn't notice that among them were two elite zombies. One knocked him flying.

"[Lunarflame Shot: Ninefold Phantasmagoria]." Nine purplish-black phoenixes rose around her and shot toward the zombies. They incinerated all the zombies that the two-headed sura threw toward them, forming a sea of flames over the ground. They morphed into a cataclysm of fire as they bombarded the two-headed sura and prevented it from making a move.

"[Lunarflame Shot: Might of the Garuda]!" Purplish-black flames gathered on Sun Mengmeng's bow once again, forming an arrow of pure black. Unlike Moyan's black flames, which devoured all light, Sun Mengmeng's flames radiated darkness instead.

The image of a golden garuda, limned in black, appeared behind her. As she loosed her arrow, it seemed to transform into a beam of light, moving so quickly that it bypassed the constraints of time and space, piercing the sura in the blink of an eye.

The sura simply had no time to react. Even if it did, it wouldn't have been able to dodge amidst a whirlpool of purplish-black flame.

The arrow pierced through the two-headed sura's heart, causing it to burst into flame. Like a gigantic bonfire, the blaze rose into the sky, roaring and crackling, sending a wave of heat all around. The two-headed sura began to scream.

Shicang, who was the core of the two-headed sura, was unable to remain still. He transformed back into a black fog as the zombies melted all around him, their decomposition and degradation inevitable.

Purplish-black flames gathered on Sun Mengmeng's bow once again, forming an arrow forged of fire itself.

"It's over!" Sun Mengmeng shot the arrow straight toward Shicang, piercing the fog with a beam of black light.

Shicang hissed and screamed. In the end, he wasn't a true sura king—without any corpses to command, he would only be a target.

Sun Mengmeng loosed one arrow after another, piercing Shicang's body and sending sparks of fire into the air.

The mist, ignited by the flames, burned to nothing in mid-air. In his black-fog form, Shicang began to scream, his voice turning more and more muted until it vanished entirely.

After his death, the dark clouds that blocked the sun began to dissipate, and a ray of sunlight shone down on Sun Mengmeng and the other forces of Renhuang.

She raised her head and basked in the sudden light. "The battle is over."

The hunters and rock spirits all began to cheer. It had been a long and tiring battle, but in the end, they had succeeded against all odds.

When he received word of Sun Mengmeng's victory, Zhang Lie began to smile. He walked toward an open window and gazed out at the sun.

Meanwhile, under the name of Martial Sage Hong Tianqi, the human reinforcements were getting ready to support Renhuang.

Large groups of hunters from all over set off toward Renhuang. They knew Renhuang's opponents and the overwhelming odds they faced. Never had seven sura kingdoms cooperated to attack a single force, especially not a human-based one!

One sura king alone was sufficient to destroy a human city, let alone seven of them.

And yet, despite their opponents' strength, reinforcements continued to arrive. They believed that, whether or not they could defeat the seven-kingdom coalition, they would at least be able to save Zhang Lie's life...

Chapter 485: The Reinforcements Arrive

Zhou Liao murmured worriedly, "I wonder whether Zhang Lie's holding out fine? I hope he's not trying to make some sort of heroic last stand..."

From humanity's perspective, Zhang Lie's current behavior was much like that of a fool. Dividing his already limited forces into six groups and attacking the seven sura kingdoms directly? Was he tired of living?

Quite a few hunters in Qi had fought with Zhang Lie before, and they were worried that Renhuang would be a pile of steaming ruins by the time they arrived. From their perspective, it was impossible that Renhuang, let alone the members of Team Zenith, would be able to hold the sura back.

The hunters of Qi had seen Team Zenith in action before, and they had to admit that the members of Team Zenith were stronger than ordinary hunters, but could they really compare to a sura king?

Among the humans, only the governors of each city had enough strength to contend against the sura kings, and they simply didn't understand what Zhang Lie was thinking.

Provoking the sura kings unnecessarily—they could chalk that off as pure arrogance, but how about sending the members of Team Zenith to face off against the seven kings? That was utter stupidity! How could the members of Team Zenith hope to kill the sura kings by themselves?

Zhou Liao and a large group of hunters rushed swiftly to Renhuang. When they arrived at the city and found it standing tall and proud, they sighed in relief.

"Thank goodness we're not too late." They had been so scared that, by the time they arrived, Renhuang would be nothing but a pile of ruins.

As they approached the city gates, they found a banner draped over it: [Congratulations to our heroes' success in killing the seven sura kings!]

The human hunters: ???

The trees that had rooted themselves around the city gates began to glow, and a member of an alien race that was pale green all over floated out from among a copse of trees. "Who are you?"

The human hunters had learned from those in Renhuang that there were a number of alien races present within. Undoubtedly, this was one such.

Zhou Liao stepped forward. "We're reinforcements sent to support the troops of Renhuang."

The wood spirit was taken aback. "Support? Reinforcements? For what?"

A hunter called out, "Don't you know? Seven sura kingdoms are making their way toward Renhuang!"

Zhou Liao explained, "The troops from seven sura kingdoms are on their way to attack Renhuang as we speak. No one can survive this ordeal on their own—we're here to help hold the city!"

Wasn't it strange that this inhabitant of Renhuang didn't seem to know about the news at all? The information had been sent directly to them; could Zhang Lie be preventing word from spreading? If that were true, had he just inadvertently ruined Zhang Lie's plans by revealing that piece of news?

The wood spirit blinked a few times and replied, "Those sura have all been killed. Look, we're preparing to welcome our heroes back now!"

The human hunters: ???

"Come in!"

Zhang Lie called out from the top of the city walls.

The wood spirit gave way gracefully. "Welcome to our city, humans."

The reinforcements walked toward the city gates. Zhang Lie saw a familiar face among them—the troop leader of the special forces of Qi, Zhou Liao.

Zhang Lie leapt down from the city walls and landed right by Zhou Liao's side, patting him on the shoulder as he laughed. "You're here too! I'm surprised Qi was willing to let its special forces go."

Zhou Liao replied seriously, "The human cities took Martial Sage Hong Tianqi's call for aid seriously, especially the governor of Qi. In order to repay the martial sage's assistance in defending Qi in the past, he sent all his elites over. We can surely help you out!"

Someone among the forces called out, "The martial sage knew that you certainly wouldn't retreat, so he staked his own reputation on a call for aid. There were even more reinforcements who had signed up, but after hearing about your battle tactics, they all backed out at the last minute."

"Thank you for coming." Regardless of whether or not their help was necessary, Zhang Lie was grateful for their kind intentions.

Zhou Ming frowned. "There's something I'm quite curious about—what's with the banner above the city gates? If there's anything that you can't tell us, that's fine, but I'd like to understand Renhuang's current situation."

Zhang Lie replied, "Yes, I was just about to mention it. Unfortunately, you've all arrived too late."

The human hunters: ???

Zhou Liao frowned. "Zhang Lie, what do you mean?"

He surveyed Renhuang with a critical eye. It didn't seem at all damaged; there were only Yeluo fighters remaining in the city, without any humans in sight.

Could Zhang Lie have surrendered to the sura? Or perhaps he had recruited aid from some alien races?

Zhang Lie pointed at the banner above the city gates. "The battle against the seven sura kingdoms is over. You're just in time for the celebratory banquet—I think our victorious forces will return soon, so you won't have to wait for too long, either."

Zhou Liao placed a firm hand on Zhang Lie's shoulder, pity in his eyes. "Zhang Lie, I know this has to be a crushing blow for you, considering how you've never suffered defeat ever since entering this realm. That said, escapism won't solve your problems, and you have to face reality."

It was Zhang Lie's turn to be startled. Hadn't he been clear and direct? How had Zhou Liao ended up with such a misunderstanding?

Zhou Liao continued seriously, "I know your opponents are very strong, so strong you won't be able to defeat them alone, so strong you're starting to despair and go crazy—but that's why we're here!"

"There's a chance that we'll be able to turn the tides. We need to seize that opportunity with our own hands—with these reinforcements, and with your strength, comparable to that of a sura king, we can still push back the sura."

Zhang Lie raised a hand, interrupting Zhou Liao. "Zhou Liao, you seem to be misunderstanding something. I've never despaired, and I certainly haven't gone crazy. What I've told you is the truth."

Zhou Liao placed both hands on Zhang Lie's head. "There's no need to continue this charade. Lying to yourself and lying to others won't help—what will come will come! Why not give it your all instead? If it's you, Zhang Lie, I'm sure you'll be able to create a miracle."

Zhang Lie blinked. What he relayed was so astonishing that the reinforcements simply couldn't believe him.

Could the six members of Team Zenith really deal with a sura king each? Had the members of Team Zenith taken down the seven-kingdom coalition all by themselves? No one would believe such a ludicrous claim—humans and sura kings were two separate levels of existence entirely!

No one would deny that Zhang Lie had the strength to kill a sura king, considering he had done so not once but twice, but did the members of Team Zenith really share his strength?

Zhou Liao replied once more, "Zhang Lie, no matter how cruel reality is, you can't run away from it forever. I know what you're feeling now—I felt much the same way when Qi was about to fall! But these problems won't go away just because you ignore them. No, they'll only grow more and more severe. With our help, I'm sure you can take them on!"

Zhang Lie rubbed his temples. "If you refuse to believe me, I'm not sure what I can do. At any rate, please, enter the city. You'll find out that I've been right soon enough."

#### Chapter 486: A Triumphant Return

"Enough, Zhang Lie! I've had enough of you! Did you know that I used to respect you for killing two sura kings as a human and treading new ground in the second realm? You are very strong, I'll admit that, and perhaps no one will be able to surpass you in the future. But look at what you've done! You sent out the members of Team Zenith and all your forces to die on your behalf!"

If nothing else, Zhou Liao was on friendly terms with Zhang Lie, and he wouldn't attack Zhang Lie with such vitriol. However, the other reinforcements were different. Seeing Zhang Lie's ridiculous behavior, they couldn't help but heckle him.

"When we heard the rumors that you had sent your most loyal subordinates to die, we didn't believe them—but now that we're finally here, it seems like we have no choice but to! What happened to the hero who saved Qi?"

Someone added, "We came to Renhuang with the expectation that we might die in order to support a promising human city—only to find you, the governor, lost in your own daydreams! When are you going to wake up?!"

"Wake up, wake up! If you keep this up, Renhuang really will be destroyed!"

"All you've done is hung up a banner! Do you really think the members of Team Zenith can destroy the seven sura kings by themselves? If you don't start preparing to defend the city now, we'll all be doomed!"

Zhang Lie really didn't know what to say. These reinforcements clearly didn't believe that the members of Team Zenith were strong enough to handle the sura kings by themselves, whereas he thought it obvious enough that he didn't know how to convince them off-hand.

While he was deep in thought, however, a Yeluo scout rushed over. "Governor, they're back, they're back!"

Zhang Lie beamed even as Zhou Liao frowned, asking, "Who's back?"

"Our troops, of course! I'm going to give the troops a warm welcome."

Zhang Lie flashed over to the city walls. The human reinforcements didn't know what was going on, but their curiosity was whetted enough by Zhang Lie's sudden change in behavior that they followed him over.

Far over the horizon, a group of hunters could be seen heading back to Renhuang. Their armor and skin bore the scars of violent combat. They were smiling with relief, their steps light with victory. Leading them was Fang Yi.

"Welcome home!" Zhang Lie shouted.

The Yeluo began beating on drums and blowing into ivory horns in celebration.

When Fang Yi saw Zhang Lie waiting for him at the city gates, he rushed forward, his spear pointing straight up in the air as he knelt down on one knee. "Captain, we slew ten thousand sura, among them the sura king Moyan!"

Zhang Lie clasped his hands behind his back. "Very good, General Fang."

Fang Yi raised his head and looked at Zhang Lie, and the two of them burst into laughter at once.

Zhang Lie pulled him up with one arm. "What's with the kneeling?"

Fang Yi smiled. "I watched a few historical dramas in my free time, and I've always wanted to re-enact one of those scenes. You improvised very well, Captain!"

"Haha, I simply followed your lead."

The reinforcements all stilled. The hunter in front of them was clearly Fang Yi from Team Zenith.

Hadn't Fang Yi perished? He had gone off to battle against a sura king. Could he have escaped? If he had really killed a sura king like he reported...

"I apologize that I was unable to recover Moyan's head, Captain. His body disintegrated during the fight."

They could have recovered the heads of his sura troops, whose corpses were strewn all across the land, but that would have been meaningless.

The human reinforcements stared at Fang Yi in amazement.

Had he really killed a sura king?

Surely that couldn't be true!

Zhang Lie seemed unperturbed. "What would I do with a sura king's head? I can get them myself."

Zhou Liao finally seemed to return to his senses. "Are you Fang Yi? Haven't you... died?"

"Zhou Liao?" Fang Yi picked up his spear. "Are you cursing me to die right after a long battle? Do you want to fight me? Don't think that you'll be able to best me just because I'm tired—I could deal with someone like you with one hand!"

Zhou Liao stepped back, waving his hands. "No, that's not what I meant! Didn't you set off to fight against a sura king?"

"Of course."

"What was the outcome?"

Fang Yi cocked his head. "My troops and I have all returned. What other outcome could there possibly be? We slaughtered the sura king Moyan and his forces."

Despite seeing Fang Yi and his troops safe and sound, Zhou Liao couldn't help but be amazed when Fang Yi confirmed his victory. Was Fang Yi really so strong that he could take down a sura king?

Did Zhang Lie really send out the members of Team Zenith because they were skilled enough to take down the six sura kings themselves?! How could that be? Were the members of Team Zenith really that talented that they too could stand against sura kings themselves?

There were still a few naysayers among the human reinforcements.

"Impossible! How could everyone in Team Zenith have the strength to take on a sura king?!"

"But if that really were the case..."

"Zhang Lie, was there some sort of trick or specific strategy you implemented?"

The hunters understood that, rationally, Zhang Lie and Fang Yi had no reason to lie to them, but their claims seemed so ludicrous that they defied all belief. Were they the ones who were living in their own daydreams?

Fang Yi turned to the reinforcements. "Who are all these hunters?"

Zhang Lie explained, "They're all reinforcements sent by the various human cities on behalf of Martial Sage Hong Tianqi. Unfortunately, they were too late."

Surely this was a fluke? Fang Yi was one of two deputy leaders of Team Zenith, after all, and if anyone else in Team Zenith were able to stand up against a sura king, it had to be him. The other members of Team Zenith certainly couldn't do the same...

After all, their opponents were sura kings, the peak existences of the second realm!

Yes, that had to be it, Fang Yi was the only survivor of Team Zenith!

Very quickly, however, the reinforcements found themselves proven wrong once more. The second set of troops made their way back.

"It's Zhou Ying!" one of the residents of Renhuang called out.

The first thing she did upon her return was to hug Zhang Lie tightly, a hug that Zhang Lie returned with fervor and pride.

When the reinforcements saw Zhou Ying and her troops appear on the horizon, their jaws dropped.

#### Chapter 487: The Undefeated Team Zenith

Before the human reinforcements could recover from their shock at seeing a second member of Team Zenith return safe and sound, Sun Xiaowu's team had returned. By then, the reinforcements were petrified.

Sun Xiaowu smiled as he rushed back to Renhuang. "Mission accomplished!"

"Well done," Zhang Lie praised.

Sun Xiaowu smiled wryly. "That said, Captain, my opponent really was quite something..."

Li Feng shrugged. "The seven sura kings are all perverts, and uncommonly strong ones at that."

Sun Xiaowu countered, "Did your sura king transform into two giant testicles that spread syphilis everywhere?"

Fang Yi:...

The sura king he had had to deal with certainly wasn't on the same level of perversion as what Sun Xiaowu had experienced. He could hardly imagine how Sun Xiaowu had survived his ordeal.

The human reinforcements grew more and more shocked with every set of forces that returned—not because of how Sun Xiaowu had described the sura king, but because he had returned safe and sound with much of his forces in tow.

Perhaps they could chalk the first group's return to luck, the second to chance, but the third to nothing less than strength. By the time the fourth group returned, the human reinforcements felt as though they needed a strong drink.

Not only had they all returned safe and sound, they even brought back the severed head of a sura king.

Li Feng strode forward. "Captain, this is for you!"

The two genetic hunters behind him lifted up a gigantic skull that belonged to Moyan.

Some of the reinforcements had wondered if the members of Team Zenith truly did eradicate the sura forces as they had claimed. Now that they saw a sura king's skull for themselves, those last embers of doubt were quashed.

Actions spoke louder than words, after all.

The fifth set of troops brought an even larger surprise with them. Yang Ze and Hong Xi had returned with a cage in which a baby was kept.

The humans were all shocked to see him. "Is this a baby sura?"

Li Feng asked curiously, "Why bring this baby back with you, Yang Ze? Surely you aren't going to raise him?"

Yang Ze replied, "This is the sura king Suiyue."

Everyone was astounded.

Zhou Liao's eyes opened wide as he glanced at the baby. "How did the sura king turn into a baby?"

Zhang Lie asked, "You forced him to reverse time so much that he ended up becoming a baby?"

Zhang Lie was able to guess what had happened knowing the critical drawback to Suiyue's primary technique.

"More or less," Yang Ze replied. "How should I deal with him?"

"Hand him over to the Yeluo chieftain." It would certainly be impossible to raise him—who knew what a sura baby who was once a sura king would do amidst a city of humans and other alien races? And yet it felt vile to kill a baby, even a sura baby. The best solution was to hand him over to the Yeluo chieftain to be studied and investigated.

The last to return was Sun Mengmeng.

Upon her return, Zhang Lie couldn't help but smile. "How did it go?"

The hardest foe to deal with was none other than Shicang, whose massive army presented such a quandary that even Zhang Lie wasn't certain he could deal with it all. He had dispatched Sun Mengmeng both because her techniques were compatible against the enemy and because he believed in her strength. Seeing her triumphant return now, he knew that that belief was justified.

Sun Mengmeng nodded. She suddenly stumbled, as though she had over-exerted herself, and Zhang Lie stepped forward to help support her. "Are you alright?"

Sun Mengmeng stuck out her tongue. "I'm just a little tired, and I'll be fine after a short break.

The human reinforcements simply couldn't get over their shock.

For what reason had they come? They had gathered all these forces intending to support Zhang Lie's last stand, only to find that he had already won the battle on his own!

What an idiot they had thought Zhang Lie for dividing his troops into six separate forces and sending each out against a sura king—but Zhang Lie had proved to them that they were the idiots instead!

Each member of Team Zenith had the ability to kill a sura king. Few would have believed this seemingly ludicrous claim in the past, but now, they had no choice but to do so.

Renhuang's combat strength was simply off the charts—how could even the members of Team Zenith be able to deal with sura kings like Zhang Lie? And if the members of Team Zenith were able to kill sura kings themselves, how strong had Zhang Lie become?

Zhang Lie smiled as he turned to face his team and all the forces that stood behind him. "We've prepared a banquet for all of you."

The hunters' forums were buzzing with activity.

"I heard that Renhuang's reinforcements are slated to arrive today."

"Reinforcements? What reinforcements? Mark my words, Renhuang can't be saved! A seven-kingdom coalition, led by seven sura kings—except for a sura empire, nothing and no one would be able to withstand such a force!"

"You know how hard it's been for the humans to stake a claim to the second realm— they're having a hard time surviving, let alone dealing with a serious invasion! It's true that Zhang Lie can probably take down one or two sura kings, but certainly not seven at once. Unless the world federation ends up fully backing Zhang Lie, there's no way Renhuang will survive. What a pity for all those reinforcements to be sent toward a death trap!"

"There's simply no reason to fight such a lopsided battle. The highest authority of the world federation, Amurong, was completely right—there's no need for us to sacrifice the entirety of the world federation's forces in the second realm just to save Zhang Lie!"

"I'll be waiting to hear about the news of Renhuang's destruction."

"No forces will be able to survive the invasion of seven sura kingdoms, let alone a city led by as idiotic a governor as Zhang Lie. I can't believe he chose to split up his forces! Does he really think his team is that strong?"

Suddenly, someone posted a new thread. "Breaking news! Zhang Lie defeated the seven-kingdom coalition, and the members of Team Zenith each killed a sura king!"

"What? You must be joking—there's no way!"

When did the humans get so strong that they could manage such a feat?"

"That's right. I won't deny that Zhang Lie has the ability to go up against a sura king, but surely not the members of his team!"

"I know you must be suffering as a human, but make up some more believable boasts instead!"

"Dream on—Renhuang's going to fall, and there's nothing you can do to stop it!"

The hunter who had posted the thread replied, "I was part of the reinforcements sent to Renhuang. By the time we arrived, the hunters of Team Zenith had returned, and there was the skull of a sura king hung up on the city gates!"

"A skull? Ha!"

"How was it? Has Renhuang been destroyed already?"

Chapter 488: The Monarch's Anger

"No, Renhuang's doing just fine! They're hosting a celebratory banquet at the moment.

"In addition to the humans, there are also four different alien races present in the city, and everyone gets along surprisingly well. According to one of the residents of the city, the standard of living is surprisingly high—did you know that the hunters don't even have to go out hunting on their own? They can just hire a few mercenaries to help them out!"

"We're talking about the seven-kingdom joint attack, not Renhuang!"

The original poster replied, "Didn't I mention it already? The forces from the seven sura kingdoms were all defeated!"

"I'm another hunter stationed at Renhuang, and I saw the members of Team Zenith return myself! Honestly, it was rather upsetting. We'd gathered all these people, expecting to die as we marched toward Renhuang— and then, by the time we arrived, they were already making preparations for a banquet! Don't you know how terrible we felt to have come all that way for nothing?"

More and more hunters flooded into the forums; what the replies above had described clearly was an impossible occurrence.

Someone suddenly added, "The seven sura kingdoms' forces truly were annihilated. They never appeared along their projected trajectories."

"Hold on, what do you mean?"

"The seven kingdoms' forces all vanished."

"Indeed! Don't you remember what a hubbub everyone was making while the sura forces gathered and marched to their destination? In the last two days, however, we haven't heard a single word."

"Now that you mention it..."

"Surely this can't be true!"

When Amurong received the news that Renhuang had survived against all odds, he cursed. His face turned dark. If this were true, not only had Zhang Lie survived a death sentence, the reputation that he had lost would be regained threefold, fivefold, even tenfold!

Amurong slammed a palm on his table as he shouted to his subordinates, "Verify this information, as quickly as possible! I must understand what's going on!"

The investigation was straightforward: the seven kingdoms' forces had wreaked a path of destruction toward their destination until one day, they had suddenly vanished all at once.

Some members of the world federation had even headed to the battlefields themselves and borne witness to the havoc and corpses that lay strewn all over.

There was only one possible conclusion: the seven sura kingdoms really had lost to Zhang Lie!

"I was a scout who was dispatched to confirm the defeat of the sura. Following their projected route toward Renhuang, I chanced upon an entire field filled with sura corpses. Renhuang was right—the seven kingdoms' forces really have been killed by Team Zenith!"

"I can't believe it. How could this be? Every member of Team Zenith has the ability to take down a sura king by themselves?!"

"The valley at which Shicang's army fought was truly a sight to behold! Throughout the entire valley, there was no patch of ground left uncovered by ash and blood. I can barely imagine what happened there."

Everyone was shocked. To the last, no one had believed that the members of Team Zenith would be able to deal with the seven sura kings, and Zhang Lie was widely heralded as an idiot for his decision.

It was only now that they understood Zhang Lie's absolute confidence in his team.

Just what was going on with Renhuang? How could his subordinates have the ability to deal with sura kings by themselves?! Where were all these skilled hunters coming from? They had heard of the members of Team Zenith during the Void Cup, but they didn't know Team Zenith was that strong!

It hadn't even been a year since the Void Cup ended, and the members of Team Zenith already possessed such strength!

"Thinking back, given Team Zenith's performance during the Void Cup, perhaps it was inevitable that they would grow strong enough to defeat sura kings themselves..."

Most people suddenly did an about-turn with regards to Zhang Lie and Team Zenith.

No one else dared to criticize him for being a fool and an idiot, nor did they claim that Renhuang would eventually be destroyed.

Those hunters who had been his largest detractors vanished as though they had never existed, and all the world seemed to be praising Zhang Lie for his foresight and acumen.

"Zhang Lie's amazing! His team alone was able to deal with the seven sura kingdoms!"

"Zhang Lie's my idol, the man whose actions will surely spawn a new chapter in mankind's history! No other force has ever prompted or survived an attack from seven sura kingdoms simultaneously."

"Zhang Lie's a true legend, I say!"

"The seven sura kings, defeated by a motley group of humans—I can't believe it!"

Countless hunters began to boast of Zhang Lie's accomplishments, ignoring that they had just been criticizing him moments before.

"I'd been hoping to take part in the defense against the sura, but by the time I arrived, the sura kings had all been defeated!"

The hunters of the Milky Way were astounded to hear the news. The fact that the seven sura kingdoms were working together was shocking enough, but not just that—all that it had taken to destroy them was Team Zenith! As the governor, Zhang Lie hadn't needed to take a step outside Renhuang at all.

The hunters couldn't help but wonder just how strong he had grown.

Some hunters wondered, "After Zhang Lie killed two sura kings, he drew the attention of seven that attacked him together. Now that he's killed them all, what's going to happen?"

No one dared to answer. It was clear that the sura wouldn't take this lying down, so would Renhuang face an even more critical threat in the future?

Within the palace of the monarch of stars, a pillar of bloody light burst into the heavens, destroying everything it touched.

The light burned like flames. With each yell, the flames grew larger and larger. It was evident how angry the owner of the flames was.

When the monarch of stars heard the news of the death of his godsons, he couldn't quash his anger and rage. Genetic energy burst from his body, and the images of a thousand beasts seemed to appear in his shadow.

His officials trembled as they knelt on the ground, waves of energy rippling and spreading out all around them. A stout pillar in the palace began to crack as the ground shook and rumbled.

The citizens of the empire of stars all turned to the palace and glanced at the bloody pillar of light that shone out of it. As the monarch of stars' roars echoed throughout the land, the citizens all began to kneel, lying prostrate on the ground in deep supplication.

#### Chapter 489: New and Old

Team Zenith hadn't been able to kill all the sura, and there were a few that evaded notice and managed to make it all the way back to the empire of stars.

When the monarch of stars heard about the news, he naturally exploded in rage. Seven godsons—all seven of his remaining godchildren had died, the seven potential successors to the empire of stars! Not only that, the culprit had also killed Xueju and Xuechi—he had stripped the monarch of stars of all his heirs!

Unable to curb his emotions, the monarch of stars erupted in rage. Heaven and earth trembled at his anger. Space itself began to crack, and several of his weakest officials, unable to bear the ripples of force that emanated from him, were sent flying out of the palace.

As the ground trembled more and more violently, it began to crack. The crack propagated all the way to the middle of the capital, and a third of the palace fell into the ground. The citizens of the empire of stars lay prostrate as they pleaded for the monarch of stars to calm down.

Eventually, the monarch of stars reined in his aura, but anger was apparent in every line of his face. As he slapped his throne, it shattered into pieces. The monarch of stars stood. "We march to war!"

He strode forward. "Only the blood of humans can pacify me now!"

"Please calm down, your majesty! Otherwise, the other sura empires might contemplate launching another attack against us!" the sura officials pleaded.

The monarch of stars glanced at the official, his blood-red eyes gleaming with light. The official burst apart in a shower of gore.

Renhuang had taken all nine of his godsons away from him. If the monarch of stars didn't make a move, for what purpose had he amassed all his strength? Despite the risk of the other sura empires attacking him, he would invade Renhuang at any cost.

"With my anger, I'll burn Renhuang to a crisp, scorching the earth and land forevermore! All mankind shall regret making me their enemy. Each and every sura will learn that those who dare go against me will pay the heaviest of prices. This is a war for the authority that the empire of stars represents!"

The sura officials, as one, knelt on the cracked floor. "We obey his majesty's orders!"

"What a beautiful city."

The day after the celebratory banquet, Zhou Liao and Zhang Lie toured Renhuang.

Zhang Lie explained, "This city exists only because of the combined effort of everyone around, human and alien alike. To me, there isn't a better city around in the entirety of the second realm."

They walked through the streets toward the bazaar, where members of every race had set up stalls. Zhou Liao's eyes lit up. "Is this what an interracial city looks like?"

There were quite a few hunters touring the bazaar. The human reinforcements hadn't participated in the war; rather, they were spending all their resources in the bazaar, providing a significant infusion of trade into the city.

"Every race brings out their specialties and sells them here at this bazaar we've set up. We humans provide soulshards, the wood spirits sell the herbs and plants they've been cultivating, the Yeluo sell their potions and concoctions, the rock spirits sell the genetic lifeforms they've hunted, and the crag eagles do the same, along with various trinkets and oddities they've collected. By cooperating with each other, we grow stronger as a whole," Zhang Lie explained proudly.

Zhou Liao's gaze landed on a stall that had been set up by a rock spirit, with genetic lifeforms locked behind cage after cage, much like a wet market in the real world.

All the genetic lifeforms that the rock spirit had captured were chained and sedated with a Yeluo concoction to prevent their escape.

Zhou Liao glanced at the stall in surprise. "So the hunters of Renhuang don't even have to hunt down genetic lifeforms on their own?"

Were they really able to obtain gene fragments within the safety of the city? That was incredible!

"Indeed, but there are generally only regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms available in the bazaar. Superior-grade lifeforms still have to be hunted down outside the city limits. There are some superior-grade lifeforms that appear in the bazaar from time to time, of course, but they get snatched up in no time."

Zhou Liao placed both his palms on Zhang Lie's shoulders. "Zhang Lie, don't you know what this means?"

"What?"

"Oh, you—" Zhou Liao sighed. "Of course you wouldn't know. You were strong enough to go out hunting on your first day, but that's not something regular hunters can do. In Qi, we once conducted an investigation of how to prevent hunters' deaths in the second realm. Do you know what we found?"

"What?"

Zhou Liao continued with a huff, "Ordinary hunters have significant trouble hunting down even mutated-grade lifeforms. This is what causes new hunters the most trouble, and the most lethal stage of their growth—a significant fraction of hunters even perish while trying to cap their basic gene fragments."

Zhang Lie frowned. "Surely you're joking—there's no way they can die to mutated-grade lifeforms!"

"No, I'm not! You don't realize just how weak incoming hunters are without basic or mutated gene fragments, and they struggle immensely to acquire such resources. Of course, the ones who survive this ordeal and end up challenging superior-grade lifeforms result in much fewer deaths, because they had to be strong and experienced to get to that stage in the first place."

In most cities, live, restrained regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms were a precious commodity and in high demand.

"This problem is exacerbated by the fact that regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms tend to roam in packs, and any additional degree of uncertainty can be debilitating to incoming hunters at their current level of strength."

For instance, it was far easier to make a hundred thousand dollars starting with ten thousand than with nothing.

Renhuang's bazaar obviated this struggle for new hunters, who would be able to acquire gene fragments without having to leave the safety of their city.

Zhou Liao continued, "Now that there's an easier way for new hunters to amass their strength, they'll be able to practice on regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms before setting their sights on superior-grade lifeforms with far less danger than before."

In time, as Renhuang's forces grew stronger and stronger, the number of superior-grade hunters would only increase, and they might even be able to take on peak-grade lifeforms together.

Zhou Liao sighed. "To be honest, I hadn't expected that an interracial city would confer such amazing benefits."

After all, alien races had no great need for genetic lifeforms. Instead of keeping the lifeforms for themselves, they could sell it to incoming hunters for a significant profit.

Zhou Liao admired Zhang Lie from the bottom of his heart.

In the past, while the humans were weak, no alien races had shown any interest in them. The humans had grown stronger since, but even in Qi, they wouldn't have been able to secure the cooperation of the alien races nearby.

With brute strength alone, it might have been possible to forcibly incorporate an alien race into Qi, but all sorts of societal issues might result instead. If the humans and aliens remained insular, there would be no point to their inclusion in the city at all.

On the other hand, with a large number of alien races present, there wouldn't be such a significant barrier because each race would be on equal footing; the different races would counteract one another.

Chapter 490: Laissez-faire

Renhuang was uniquely successful because of Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith. Their might was sufficient to suppress any hunters who might be racist or violent against the aliens, but the same couldn't be said for the larger human enclaves, which both had more hunters and fewer contingencies.

Zhou Liao continued, "What sort of currency is used here? Not coins from the world federation, surely?"

"We use our own currency, one specific to Renhuang," Zhang Lie explained. "The alien races aren't members of the world federation, after all, and they wouldn't value that currency at all. If you want to buy something, you can also barter for it with soulshards."

The reinforcements who had been preparing for a battle were extremely excited to see all the commodities that were being sold in the bazaar—the herbs, plants, special potions, and even the live genetic lifeforms—that they all flocked towards the bazaar and began to buy whatever they could get their hands on.

As the number of hunters increased, however, the value of soulshards began to drop precipitously.

Zhou Liao suddenly frowned. "Hold on—you said that soulshards could be used as a form of currency here?"

"That's right."

"And soulshards come from genetic lifeforms, don't they?"

"Isn't that common knowledge?"

Zhou Liao clutched his head. "In other words, a hunter could theoretically trade a soulshard for a genetic lifeform, kill that lifeform and acquire a soulshard, then trade it for another genetic lifeform..."

He squinted at Zhang Lie. "Isn't this rather unfair to those aliens?"

Zhang Lie countered, "On the contrary, it's a fair deal to everyone. They're agreeing to trade lifeforms that they've captured for soulshards, after all."

Zhou Liao:...

Was this why there weren't many hunters making a fuss among the human reinforcements that had arrived at Renhuang?

Even those humans who viewed the alien races as their enemies had, after learning of the benefits of the bazaar, changed their minds near-instantaneously. The humans were the only race that could obtain soulshards from killing genetic lifeforms, and this was a significant advantage for such trades.

After all, the alien races couldn't obtain soulshards by any other means.

Of course, soulshards condensed only rarely from genetic lifeforms, so only a few lucky hunters would manage to acquire live lifeforms for "free".

Humans could produce soulshards, the Yeluo could make specialized potions, the wood spirits could cultivate rare and precious herbs and plants, the rock spirits had sturdy bodies and almost infinite regenerative abilities—each race had its own specialty, and this was the humans'.

Compared to the other alien races, humans couldn't be considered anywhere near the best at combat. On the other hand, their millennia of culture made them particularly adept at trading and commerce.

Zhou Liao went to exchange some of his soulshards for Renhuang's currency.

"The appearance of these new hunters really is causing the value of soulshards to drop by quite a bit..."

Before the reinforcements' arrival, a regular-grade soulshard could have been exchanged for a hundred silver coins, but now, it was worth only twenty. As more and more hunters arrived at Renhuang, this exchange rate would only continue to drop.

However, Zhang Lie didn't have any intention of manipulating the exchange rate by buying up regular-grade soulshards from the bazaar—he felt that a laissez-faire policy would be more appropriate.

As long as the market didn't crash, he was perfectly willing to cede control of it to the consumers themselves.

Zhou Liao asked, "What else do the alien races need beside soulshards?"

Although he had quite a few soulshards in his possession, he didn't want to sell them all.

Nevertheless, there were a few gems in Renhuang's bazaar, rare herbs and potions with surprising effects that Zhou Liao was sure he wouldn't be able to find in Qi. If he were to buy some potions now, then sell them when he was back in Qi, he would surely make a tidy profit—about five or six mutated-grade soulshards' worth, say.

Zhang Lie imparted a few important pieces of information to him. "The Yeluo like soulshards. The wood spirits don't really care for them, but they like toys and trinkets—carved puppets, ancient toys, and so on. Actually, they're almost saturated with toys already. They enjoy human culture too, so books, manga, cartoons would also work in trade."

"Really?"

"After all, the wood spirits don't have access to the internet, and they aren't yet able to write their own novels and cartoons. In fact, before we initiated contact with them, they didn't even know about this form of entertainment. Right, don't bother trying to trade them the webnovel [Ultragene Warlord]. Most of the wood spirits have already read it, and it's quite popular in Renhuang."

Zhou Liao blinked a few times. "I can't imagine seeing alien races read our webnovels... Ah, what's that building right ahead? I see a bunch of hunters and alien races entering—it looks quite popular!"

The building they were heading toward was the largest building in Renhuang save the palace itself, whose construction Yun Bing had argued for.

"That's our hunter's guild."

"A hunter's guild?" Zhou Liao seemed a little surprised.

Zhang Lie explained, "Anyone can post quests in the guild, which others can take on for promised rewards."

Zhou Liao continued, "No, no, I understand what a guild is, but I've only ever seen it in games! What's it doing in Renhuang?"

"It's where hunters go to employ the services of alien mercenaries."

"Alien mercenaries?"

"Humans need to get gene fragments to boost their strength," Zhang Lie explained. "Yun Bing's idea was to facilitate this by having a building specifically geared to expeditions outside the city limits."

Such employment had previously taken place in the bazaar itself, but Yun Bing rightly anticipated possible issues that might result from a lack of official oversight.

For instance, the mercenaries might very well turn on their employer.

There hadn't been such problems yet—the mercenaries were largely rock spirits and the Yeluo, who were races known for their frankness and honesty. The rock spirits were particularly trustworthy. No incident had yet occurred, but if there was no oversight over such behavior, problems would arise sooner or later, especially as the population of Renhuang grew.

In order to facilitate such employment while simultaneously keeping an eye on such practices, Yun Bing had suggested constructing a guild.