

U. Warlord 501

Chapter 501: Fighting the Monarch of Stars

Black and red genetic energy exploded from the monarch of stars as he shouted, "That wasn't a smart decision. Regardless of how you try to protect them, they'll die!"

"That's not something you can decide!" Zhang Lie struck with a fist. "[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!"

A frightening explosion engulfed the two combatants.

Zhang Lie's fist was so strong that the monarch of stars' very bones were trembling upon impact. If not for his extreme constitution, the monarch of stars' arm might have been crippled just from this one punch.

Even so, the monarch of stars could feel his bones creaking after the impact. Countless beasts seemed to materialize behind him, elevating his strength and sending Zhang Lie stumbling back.

"In my youth, I had my own goals and passion—to travel the world and have sex wherever I went! It's a little embarrassing, but in my youth, I found alien races and genetic lifeforms more attractive than sura. When I encountered them, I would often be so attracted that I would pounce on them, and I caused quite a few problems doing so."

The monarch of stars explained his background with a laugh, as though he were speaking to one of his descendants rather than facing a strong foe.

"No one wants to hear about that!" Zhang Lie's fists rippled and seemed to form countless afterimages in the air.

He met the monarch of stars fist for fist, but their combat styles were completely different. Each of the monarch of stars' fists seemed to carry the power and potential of a different genetic lifeform, and Zhang Lie felt as though he were battling a thousand beasts in quick succession.

The monarch of stars continued recounting, "I was besotted with my goal, and I met quite a few ridiculously strong lifeforms as a result. I barely escaped death several times, but I continued pouncing on them like a moth flies toward an open flame."

"Oh, it's a marvelous experience, one that you can hardly imagine without going through it on your own! In order to continue developing such experiences with more and more genetic lifeforms, I had to continue strengthening my body and soul. At some point, I reached the peak of the sura."

Despite engaging in a round of fisticuffs with Zhang Lie, the monarch of stars didn't seem nervous. He continued recounting stories from his youth, as though Zhang Lie were such an easy opponent that he didn't need to respond with full concentration.

As their fists continued to clash against each other, ripples and bloody light interlaced in the air.

So strong were the resulting explosions of genetic energy that quite a few Renhuang forces were getting knocked down. The ground shook as though there were an earthquake, and cracks began to form in the earth.

"However, as I grew stronger and stronger, I became tired of my youthful dalliances."

The monarch of stars' fists suddenly grew larger, and his skin was replaced with a dense layer of scales. As the monarch of stars' strength increased, Zhang Lie found himself being knocked back.

One of the monarch of stars' hands morphed into a bestial claw. "My intimate experiences with these genetic lifeforms allowed me to study them closely, and I've performed a few experiments on my body as well."

Fenghe had been very interested in stitching genetic lifeforms together, and it was the monarch of stars who had given him the requisite information to do so. Perhaps this was a manifestation of the monarch of stars' love of these lifeforms, or perhaps his desire to get closer to the realm of an asura, or perhaps both.

The monarch of stars waved his claw in mid-air, rending the sky with a few blades of wind.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!" Zhang Lie responded with another technique, one with such strength it made the very air warp. Ripples of energy spread out all around him, tearing the blades of wind to pieces.

The monarch of stars' muscles bunched up as he swiped at Zhang Lie's technique with his claw.

"[Rune: Control]!" Zhang Lie raised an arm into the air and sent the gravity and anti-gravity tablets crashing down by the monarch's side. Black ripples emanated from the two gravity-altering tablets, forming a localized region of distorted gravity.

Even the monarch of stars momentarily lost control of his body.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!" The punch took the form of a dark serpent that shot toward the monarch of stars, whose body seemed to be undergoing a significant transformation. His hands morphed into claws, his feet into hooves, and his eyes into slit golden pupils.

Unlike Fenghe, who had replaced essentially all parts of his body except his brain with other lifeforms, the monarch of stars had done so only with his four limbs.

Even stronger explosions filled the air. Despite being weakened by distance, it still felt like hurricanes were battering the retreating forces.

Sensing the strengthened disturbance, Xing Bai, who was still rushing far away, couldn't help but ask, "Can Zhang Lie really defeat the monarch of stars?"

Sun Mengmeng looked at him seriously. "Do you need to ask?"

Li Feng likewise chimed in, "Our captain has never before lost to anyone!"

Hong Yu shook her head. "It's too hard to say. The monarch of stars is the existence closest to that of an asura in this realm. He's so strong he can destroy heaven and earth with a single thought. Surely even Zhang Lie can't guarantee a victory against him?"

Lianna nodded. "Right, I've never heard of an alien race that has won against a sura empire before, or anyone who has managed to survive against a sura monarch."

Sun Mengmeng clenched her fists tightly. "I believe that our captain will be able to create a miracle—he's a legend!"

Lianna shook her head. "Zhang Lie is truly a strong hunter, but you have to recognize that his opponent is the strongest known sura!"

Hong Yu added seriously, "I feel like we had better make a few preparations just in case—"

As Zhang Lie's demonic serpent was knocked aside, his body began to transform. A black sun rose behind his back, and a bloody moon flared into existence at his feet. Under the combination of the two auras, Zhang Lie seemed to have transformed into a god.

The serpent's body likewise changed. Its scales turned a lurid red, and a layer of black flame rose above them. It opened its maw wide and pounced once again toward the sura monarch.

The monarch of stars blocked its attack with two arms, but he found, to his shock, that he was knocked back by the blow.

"Many years ago, I noticed the limits of my own body, and I had no choice but to head down a different path to strength. I supplanted my limbs with those of other lifeforms in order to obtain a stronger, more perfect body. If I were unable to overcome a chasm of strength with my own talent, then I would simply steal that talent from other lifeforms, other creatures. However, despite all that, I found that my strength was lacking."

The serpent's tail swiped at the monarch of stars, who leapt up into the sky to avoid the blow. "I quickly realized that stitching together more lifeforms wasn't going to improve my strength beyond a certain threshold, so I decided to change my soul, the core of my existence, instead."

Zhang Lie looked toward the monarch of stars with distaste. "Are you done talking?"

Thousands of beasts manifested behind the monarch of stars. He punched straight down, his fist slamming the serpent into the earth.

"It's useless!" The monarch of stars pummeled the serpent's body until it dissipated into thin air.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring]!" As the serpent vanished, Zhang Lie cocked his right arm and sent hundreds of dragons soaring into the air...

Chapter 502: Galaxies of Blood

"Interesting! [Ten Thousand Claws]!"

The monarch of stars' claws blurred as the beasts behind him came to life, each taking on one of Zhang Lie's dragons. Frightening explosions filled the sky, far stronger than any that had come before.

As the last black dragon burst apart, Zhang Lie suddenly rushed forward, a sword piercing the air as he struck.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!"

The sudden appearance of Zhang Lie's bladed weapon left the monarch of stars somewhat surprised, but he had encountered so many battles, so much fighting to the death, that his experience allowed him to react quickly. He reached out and grabbed the blade with his bare hands, allowing it to slice his palm.

The sword energy burst apart in his palm, instantly crippling his arm, but the monarch of stars didn't even frown. He punched forward with his other arm without any hesitation.

A white light shone on Zhang Lie's right arm, blocking the monarch of stars' claw.

One of the sura monarch's arms had been crippled by Zhang Lie's blow, and a long gash appeared on the other.

Nevertheless, the monarch of stars didn't much care. "Oh? You really aren't bad. It's a pity that you were born a human!"

"I never expected the renowned monarch of stars to be such a loudmouth!" Zhang Lie replied. Black genetic energy gathered over his sword.

The monarch of stars stretched. "It's been quite a while since I exercised my body to this extent. It's refreshing!"

"Oh? One of your arms is crippled, and the other's halfway there. You're going to call this a mere exercise?" Zhang Lie taunted the monarch.

"Very well. I'll admit your strength. You're eligible to be my lab rat."

The monarch of stars retrieved a compass. As it spun, a dark red sun rose from its surface, causing the entire realm to tremble. The scarlet sun seemed to possess some tremendous energy, as though it were a miniature universe in its own right.

The moment the sun emerged, the monarch of stars' injuries were healed immediately.

The compass was an exquisite construction, and the monarch of stars gave it its full attention. "In that case, let's conduct an experiment now.

Rejoice—you'll be this compass's first test subject!"

As the scarlet sun appeared, the entire sky seemed to take on a tinge of the same color, replacing the sun shining over the very realm itself. Although the scarlet light it gave off wasn't particularly strong or bright, it felt as though the light was devouring everything around it.

When the Renhuang forces saw the sky suddenly turn red, shock filled their eyes. Sun Mengmeng's hands trembled, and a note of worry crept into her gaze. In her heart, she earnestly prayed for Zhang Lie's safe return.

The monarch of stars cupped the compass as he introduced it slowly. "This is a peak-grade armament I created after a deep study of life and spirit, a miniature universe given life by copious amounts of blood and spiritual matter."

The scarlet sun that rose out of the compass opened one eye and cracked a mocking smile. A scarlet beam shone out of it, one which Zhang Lie immediately dodged. It landed on a large hill behind him and sent a cloud mushrooming into the air. The hill had been vaporized in its entirety, leaving nothing but smoking earth and what seemed like lava behind.

"A peak-grade armament, you say? It seems quite easy to dodge." Zhang Lie smiled lazily at him.

Frowning at how the first test of his long-planned weapon had gone, the monarch of stars retorted, "Useless fool, what do you know? You won't be able to hide for long! [Universe of Blood]!"

The dark red sun exploded with light, and a blood-red night sky seemed to spawn into existence. Each star seemed to be filled with lifeforms brimming with anger, malice, and rage. As the monarch

of stars tapped his compass, thousands of those stars fell through the air like a meteor shower, each of them heading straight for Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie darted and skirted by each star gracefully, never being caught by any of the projectiles.

The monarch of stars tapped his compass again. A thick beam of blood-red light shot toward Zhang Lie from the scarlet sun.

Zhang Lie was forced to dodge, but the change in tempo caused him to be struck by dozens of meteors as a result. They buried him in an explosion that covered the ground.

The monarch of stars turned and sighed in disappointment. "It's over!"

With just a minute fraction of the compass' true strength, he had killed Zhang Lie.

"Humans truly aren't strong, after all."

"Hoh? You must be dreaming. Don't you feel ashamed of calling these meteors? They can't even scratch my itches!" Deep within the ground, Zhang Lie stood perfectly upright, the bombardment of meteors blocked by a suit of glassy genetic armor. The meteors couldn't even touch Zhang Lie, let alone kill him.

"[Rune: Control]!" Black ripples emanated from the two gravity-altering tablets, forming a localized region of distorted gravity.

As the dust and smoke from the explosion cleared, a blood-colored dragonwolf emerged.

Zhang Lie's newly acquired peak-grade dragonwolf soulshard replaced his superior-grade forest wolfman soulshard in functionality. His lupine form had pitch-black fur and slitted eyes. A few dragons circled around him. A black sun appeared behind his back, and blood-red moonlight by his paws. He looked like an atavistic deity.

Upon seeing Zhang Lie's dragonwolf transformation, the monarch of stars eyed him with newfound desire. "What a beautiful lifeform, what beauty! Even I, who have recanted from bestiality, feel desire thrumming in my veins. You're surely the most beautiful lifeform I've seen in my entire life!"

"You said that your compass created a miniature universe, didn't you?" Zhang Lie ignored the monarch of stars' words. "It's nothing more than a toy, one created with an immense amount of spiritual matter and genetic energy! You dare call it a universe? You, a foolish sura king from the second realm, dare to claim that you've made a universe? How laughable! Let me show you the truth—I'll destroy it before your very eyes! [The Boundless Blade: the River Lethe]!"

An underworld river hurtled into existence, roaring into the skies and clashing against the scarlet manifestation of the night sky.

Strong though the monarch of stars' weapon might be, Zhang Lie was stronger. His dragonwolf transformation had boosted his strength tremendously, and the river of the underworld broke what now seemed to be an illusion.

As the monarch of stars tapped on his compass again, the scarlet sky mustered a defense, forming a concentrated beam of starlight.

"[Rune: Resonate]!" Zhang Lie raised an arm into the air and sent the gravity and anti-gravity tablets crashing down by the four sides of the monarch of stars. They began to resonate as one, sending ripples that melded with the sky and forming an absolute domain over all things within.

However, for the first time, Zhang Lie found his tablets ineffective.

The monarch of stars continued moving naturally, as though he were shielded from the domain the tablets had created. A shining brilliance emanated from his body.

He commented coolly, "You might have the ability to suppress space and time, but I have some achievement in those areas, too."

After all, the time-reversal technique that Suiyue had come from the monarch of stars' direct tutelage. Unlike Suiyue, who obtained the ability to reverse time, the monarch of stars was able to speed up time and space locally around him.

Zhang Lie's four tablets formed an absolute domain that could even slow time, but the monarch of stars could counteract his technique by accelerating time around himself instead.

However, Zhang Lie had inspected the manual for this technique closely, and he knew that it came with extreme side effects as a result. Mortal bodies weren't equipped to handle such cosmic principles, and any self-targeting techniques of this kind often came with commensurate drawbacks.

As the scarlet sun burned brighter and brighter, the monarch of stars' aura increased dramatically. The crimson starlight descended to the ground. Without any hesitation, Zhang Lie waved his sword, sending the underworld river clashing against the beam of starlight.

As the two frightening sources of energy struck each other, twin bursts of light filled the sky.

The monarch of stars laughed. "Interesting!"

"Oh? Your nine godsons said the same, but they all perished afterwards. Just you wait—I have more interesting tricks to show you. Don't die too quickly, will you? [The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!"

A dragon's roar resounded through the air like peals of thunder. A rampaging dragon of blood pounced toward the monarch of stars.

As the scarlet sun burned even more brightly, more and more stellar energy wrapped around the monarch of stars and shielded him from the dragon's advance.

The rampaging dragon tore all that energy apart. On seeing that Zhang Lie's attack was so strong, even the monarch of stars had to pay him more attention.

"It looks like I've underestimated you. I have to admit, you're a wonderful test subject!"

The monarch of stars materialized a crimson blade from the compass and waved it at the dragon, causing another earth-shattering impact. Even Renhuang's forces, now a few hundred kilometers away, could still sense the strength behind the clash.

The fight between the monarch of stars and Zhang Lie was apocalyptic; it went far beyond what the second realm could handle. The will of the world was paying close attention to the fight, but it didn't dare interfere, especially after what the monarch of stars had done to it.

The blade in the monarch of stars' hand burned like the sun. Flames of blood flared up and down the sword as the monarch of stars fought off Zhang Lie's dragon. As the flames fell to the earth, they caused explosion after explosion, causing the ground to erupt and lava to form.

Chapter 503: Starshine Blades

The monarch of stars used yet another technique. The stars of the crimson night seemed to merge together into rivers of blood, through which a dark red dragon swam. The scarlet sun shone all the more brightly as the dragon roared, giving off such heat that the air seemed to twist. Rays of scarlet light shot toward Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie met the attack head-on with his sword, sending blood-red flames splashing all over the ground and causing even more lava to erupt.

The force of the blow caused the monarch of stars' blade to crack and disintegrate, but he remained unperturbed. "This should be interesting data for the future."

Upon seeing Zhang Lie swallowed up by the lava, Sun Mengmeng tried to rush forward in an attempt to rescue him, but the other members of Team Zenith held her back.

"Next, I suppose I'll deal with Renhuang's forces."

A roar sounded from the lava as a blood-colored dragonwolf emerged. Thanks to his transformation, Zhang Lie had gained a particularly high resistance to heat. He appeared in front of the monarch of stars looking as though he was barely injured. "Sorry, but the battle isn't yet over!"

The monarch of stars shook his head. "Wouldn't it have been better to just lie there? Why rush out and condemn yourself to an early death?"

"An early death? No, I think that belongs to you!" Zhang Lie raised the sword in his hand high in the air, some fighting spirit in his eyes.

In truth, the monarch of stars' blows had been easily avoided thus far. This last strike was a rather skillful attack, but the energy had been too diffuse to achieve very much.

The monarch of stars retrieved another blade and used the same technique again, enclosing them both in blood-red flames that baked the moisture from the surroundings.

"[First Form: Parting the River]!" Zhang Lie's lips quirked up. Ripples spread out around his blade as genetic energy honed the edge to brilliant sharpness. The sword technique pierced the skies, shining radiantly against the scarlet tint that seemed to cover everything.

A patch of red and a patch of silver bisected the sky.

The monarch of stars' blood-colored blade struck Zhang Lie's sword. The former's weapon exploded again, releasing blood-red flames into the air in such a strong explosion it felt almost as though the sun had burst apart.

The air reached such a blistering temperature that all space was beginning to warp. Zhang Lie's strike split heaven and earth in two, splitting even the flames and lava that covered the ground.

The strength of the attack forced the monarch of stars back as his compass began to spin more and more rapidly, the miniature universe seeming to explode with supernova after supernova to defend against the blow.

Zhang Lie poured more genetic energy into his technique, breaking apart layer after layer of the universe. The monarch of stars' face turned worrisome.

This hunter in front of him was far too strong! He had underestimated Zhang Lie, treating him like nothing other than a lab rat with which to test the strength of his compass. At this point, however, he realized that Zhang Lie was more akin to a bomb, a dragon, a monster that could swallow him whole.

He believed that, even among the sura monarchs, none would be his match. If he didn't have his compass, even he might suffer the same fate.

As Zhang Lie's sword strike drew closer and closer to the monarch of stars, he activated his time-manipulation technique and avoided the blow by speeding up his local time.

The effect of Zhang Lie's sword technique was even more exaggerated than his own. The entire sky seemed to split in two, revealing pitch-black spatial cracks. The line of sword energy moved so rapidly, with so much momentum, that nothing could stop its advancement.

Moving ten times more rapidly than his usual speed, the monarch of stars appeared behind Zhang Lie. Unfortunately for him, Zhang Lie had predicted this move. With a yell, he sent four runic tablets crashing down around him. They began to resonate as one, sending ripples that melded with the sky and forming an absolute domain over all things within.

The monarch of stars' speed boost vanished as the flow of time was forcibly restored.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" A dragon's roar resounded through the air like peals of thunder. Zhang Lie struck forward with a thrust that morphed into a dark, rampaging dragon.

The monarch of stars activated his compass immediately, but the dragon ignored his defense as it struck. The monarch of stars had no choice but to draw his sword halfway through the attack. As fast as he reacted, it was too late—the attack tore a large hole in his body as the dragon charged forward.

The dragon twisted around, then made to attack him once more.

"[Thousand Beasts]!" Even so, the monarch of stars didn't give up. With a low shout, he materialized countless beasts behind him, each with such fine detail they almost seemed to be real.

Those images condensed and coalesced into a frightening chimera that darted into the monarch of stars' body. His muscles bulged; his eyes turned blood-red. Heavy pants of air came from his nose, steaming in the air. Like a beast, he charged forward in an attempt to block Zhang Lie's attack.

He clashed with Zhang Lie in mid-air, sending yet another frightening explosion into the air. The monarch of stars stumbled back with blood dripping from his palm, but he didn't spare it any attention.

With his compass, he could recover from any injury that wasn't life-threatening.

"Ever since teaching my godson this technique, I've rarely used [Thousand Beasts] myself."

There were very few people who were able to force the monarch of stars to such an extent.

The forces of Renhuang, situated a few hundred kilometers away, were shocked by the extent of the battle between Zhang Lie and the monarch of stars—not just because of how devastating it was, but also that Zhang Lie had the strength to contend with the legendary monarch of stars.

The four prime races, who had the best understanding of the monarch of stars' strength, were the most surprised. The monarch of stars wasn't a regular monarch—he was the strongest among them, the one said to be the closest to becoming an asura!

Even so, Zhang Lie looked almost as though he were taking the upper hand.

They had known how strong Zhang Lie was, but not that he was any stronger than a sura monarch. In fact, they thought themselves overvaluing Zhang Lie to be placing him at the same level as a sura monarch, but now it seemed that they had underestimated him once again. He was as strong as the monarch of stars—no, stronger!

Hong Yu's face turned pale. Once again, she cursed how foolish the previous prince of the winged had been.

The four prime races believed, for the first time, that Zhang Lie really stood a chance of killing the monarch of stars. He would break new ground by being the first human to have killed a sura monarch—the first alien to have done so, even.

The members of Team Zenith, on the other hand, seemed much less shocked.

They had followed Zhang Lie all this way, after all, and his strength was well known to them. They were proud of his prowess—this was Zhang Lie, Zhang Lie of China, Zhang Lie who represented mankind!

Even the monarch of stars was surprised.

He couldn't help but wonder how a human could have become so strong. If he hadn't prepared his compass in time, he would have fallen to Zhang Lie in a mere two blows. He had to capture Zhang Lie and study his body carefully...

Chapter 504: Boastful Words

"A long time ago, I was very interested in genetic lifeforms. In order to have relations with more such lifeforms, I worked hard to strengthen my body, challenging them one by one as I came across them in my travels. Over a prolonged period of time, I became stronger and stronger without realizing it, and I often accidentally killed them during the course of copulation."

The monarch of stars continued blathering away, causing Zhang Lie to suspect that he had some mental illness. Even if he were interested in bestiality, just how much strength did he need to be able to... kill... these genetic lifeforms?!

As though it were a badge of pride, the monarch of stars puffed up his chest and added, "After it happened multiple times, I realized that these genetic lifeforms would generate spiritual matter upon their deaths. At that point, I had yet to conduct a deep and deliberate study of spiritual matter—until I accidentally absorbed this spiritual matter into my body and felt it come to live within me."

Zhang Lie frowned as he activated his peak-grade dragonsoul soulshard. His eyes turned silvery-white and widened as he looked at the sura king.

"It compelled me to search far and wide for genetic lifeforms, then to kill them all while I'm at it! I must have explored half the sura realm, until all those lifeforms that came across me knew of me and knew to run. I gradually grew tired of chasing after them, so after becoming a sura monarch, I imparted some of what I knew to my godchildren."

From his dragonsoul pupils, Zhang Lie was able to discern thousands of lifeforms trapped within the monarch of stars' body.

No, those weren't complete souls—they were remnant pools of spiritual essence that were left behind when the corresponding lifeforms died while feeling great emotion. That spiritual essence, tainted by grievance and anger, was sucked into the monarch of stars' body.

These remnant souls shrieked in anger and flailed in grief, but their resistance was futile in light of the monarch of stars' dominance.

Given the number of creatures that were forcibly stuffed into the monarch of stars' body, Zhang Lie was very surprised that he hadn't gone crazy.

In some sense, a body was like a glass bottle, one which would explode upon being stuffed with far too many objects. The only reason it hadn't was because of the monarch of stars' overwhelming strength. Even so, it was shocking that he hadn't gone crazy—no, perhaps the monarch of stars was crazy, after all. Who else would roam the world in an attempt to kill genetic lifeforms by copulating with them?

And with every additional lifeform he collected, he grew crazier...

The behavior of the monarch of stars was very similar to one of the sura kings he had fought against—the sura king Xueju. It was very likely that Xueju had learned his techniques directly from the monarch of stars himself. The monarch of stars was the source of all his godsons' perversion!

After activating his dragonsoul soulshard, Zhang Lie saw the world anew. In the sky hung not scarlet stars, but rather orbs filled with spiritual essence. Each orb was composed of a few dozen grieving souls, squished and compressed together to form a sticky, disgusting substance.

There were a few thousand of these "stars" filling the sky, dyeing it scarlet. It was difficult to imagine just how many lifeforms the monarch of stars had killed in order to fill up the entire night sky. The monarch of stars was a truly depraved being, far worse than his nine godsons combined!

Hold on—what was happening? Zhang Lie raised his head and looked up at the sky again. The scarlet tint had grown more and more intense as the number of stars increased, out of nowhere, by a factor of ten.

The entire sky was filled with stars.

The monarch of stars smiled. "It looks like you've noticed it too."

This was clearly part of the sura monarch's plan. During the battle, he had continuously activated his compass and allowed Zhang Lie's attack to break his shields in order to fill the sky with stars.

Most importantly, all those stars were gathered above Zhang Lie's head, forming a dense stellar cloud that began to spin more and more rapidly. It was growing so large that Zhang Lie was unable to avoid the attack no matter how or where he moved.

As the monarch of stars made a hand gesture, the stars filling the sky rushed down toward Zhang Lie like a waterfall, so numerous and so massive that they broke the constraints of space. The air began to hiss; lava exploded from the ground. It felt as though a thousand elephants were charging toward Zhang Lie at once.

Zhang Lie's [First Form: Parting the River] would need to be charged to be able to achieve the same level of strength. Zhang Lie didn't have the time to do so, and the monarch of stars wouldn't give him the time to do so.

Upon seeing the shift in the skies, the forces of Renhuang gaped and began to worry for Zhang Lie. Here they thought that Zhang Lie had a chance at victory! Were they too naive? The monarch of stars was truly a strong foe—no one could counter this attack!

The monarch of stars crowed, "I have to admit that you're a strong hunter, and the old me might have been no match for you. Unfortunately, I now possess the ability to rule over this entire sura realm! No one in the realm will be strong enough to be my opponent. Once I kill you, I'll easily dispatch the rest of Renhuang's forces. Haha!"

The monarch of stars was growing so strong that even the will of the world couldn't remain silent any longer.

After being forced to retreat from the monarch of stars once already, the will of the world was a little afraid of him, and it refused to make an appearance no matter how large a disturbance the two fighters were causing.

With this new attack from the monarch of stars, however, the will of the world couldn't remain a mere spectator any longer. If it didn't react, a fraction of the sura realm might be destroyed. A hemisphere of light guarded the monarch of stars' attack and prevented it from leaking out.

Faced with a sword of Damocles over his head, despite how worried the Renhuang forces seemed to be for him, Zhang Lie was nevertheless a paragon of calm. The attack didn't faze him at all.

"Now that you've told me all about yourself, there's nothing to fear."

Zhang Lie waved an arm and summoned Whitey, his peak-grade moonlight wyrm. It rose into the air, spreading a silvery glow as it did so. Its scales were pearlescent, and its serpentine body gave off a radiant sheen that made it seem ethereal.

The wyrm swam toward the sea of stars, opening its maw wide and consuming all that stood in its way. The scarlet sea, boasting enough energy to destroy the sura realm, was easily counteracted by the moonlight wyrm.

The monarch of stars stared open-mouthed at what Zhang Lie had done—at how easily the wyrm was destabilizing the sura monarch's attack. The moonlight wyrm's body grew and grew as it feasted, and its scales turned red.

Upon seeing the moonlight wyrm tear apart his stellar clouds piece by piece, the monarch of stars felt as though he himself was fraying. All his preparations to construct this compass—and he was being foiled by a mere wyrm?!

"What have you done, human?!"

Zhang Lie raised his head. "As long as I can understand the fundamental principles behind your attack, I have nothing to fear."

The thousands of stars that the monarch of stars had amassed over the course of his lifetime had enough power to destroy half the second realm, but these stars were ultimately spiritual constructs—and his moonlight wyrm was the ultimate counter to such attacks.

The moonlight wyrm had managed to devour even a disaster-grade soul, and it had evolved beyond its origins as a peak-grade lifeform. It was hardly impossible for it to devour the monarch of stars' handiwork.

The monarch of stars, knowing nothing of the moonlight wyrm's specialty, again raised the compass in his hands.

Zhang Lie glanced at the compass. The miniature scarlet sun that had risen over it had, at some point, morphed into a creature of pure darkness.

It was a small, black ball, but one that was far darker than anything Zhang Lie had ever experienced. A single eye and a wide, ravenous mouth were visible; it seemed to be mocking the entire world.

Activating his dragonsoul soulshard, Zhang Lie inspected the black orb even more carefully. Suddenly, countless eyes appeared all over the orb's surface. Zhang Lie winced and reared back; bloody tears fell from his dragon's pupils.

The black orb was very similar to the peak-grade dragonsoul he had encountered.

Zhang Lie's eyes widened. "Could this be another peak-grade spiritual lifeform?"

As the monarch of stars manipulated the compass, another blood-red beam of light shot into the air. From his dragon's pupils, Zhang Lie could identify it as another spiritual construct, filled with countless tormented souls, squeezed together so tightly that they had liquefied. The high-pressure liquid exploded into the air so fiercely it felt as though it would rupture space itself.

Nevertheless, the moonlight wyrm was still able to devour the red beam.

"Damn it, just what kind of being are you?!"

The moonlight wyrm's appearance completely flummoxed the monarch of stars. Against the wyrm, the compass that he had constructed by sacrificing three sura empires seemed to be all but useless!

Chapter 505: A Bunch of Grapes

Naturally, the monarch of stars wasn't going to give up just yet. He began to spin his compass. The compass opened up, and the black orb dropped into its very middle. The monarch of stars grabbed the hilt of the sword and pulled it out. The golden blade turned a dark red, and blood-colored flames seemed to blaze over it.

This was a far stronger weapon than the monarch of stars had used to date. The scarlet tint in the sky grew even stronger.

Through the lens of his dragon's pupils, Zhang Lie could see countless wailing souls smeared over the blade. These souls were what lent the blade strength; they were fuel for the flames burning over it.

With his sword in hand, the monarch of stars chased after the moonlight wyrm.

Perhaps because he had sensed something, or perhaps out of luck, the monarch of stars had brought out a weapon that was particularly effective against it. The flames on his blade which could burn spiritual matter was particularly effective against the half-spiritual moonlight wyrm.

"I'm your opponent! [Rune: Control]!" The image of a dragonturtle appeared before him as Zhang Lie raised his hand. Ripples spread out from the two tablets, diminishing the monarch of stars' will and strength.

"[First Form: Parting the River]!" Gleaming light honed the edge of Zhang Lie's sword, and a beam of sword energy rose into the air.

After being caught unawares by Zhang Lie once before, the monarch of stars knew that staying within the domain of Zhang Lie's tablets would render his body uncontrollable. He hurried out of the range of their effects.

Despite seeing Zhang Lie's strike, the monarch of stars didn't dodge or avoid the attack. As though it were nothing exceptional, he continued chasing after the moonlight wyrm.

The silvery-white slashes of sword energy cut off the monarch of stars' shoulder and arm, as well as half his heart. It should have been a lethal blow, but his groin suddenly began to glow, and his body regenerated instantly.

He was the one who had imparted Gaoyuan with his special regenerative ability, after all.

Zhang Lie frowned.

The monarch of stars had decided to kill Whitey at any cost. He continued flying toward the moonlight wyrm, who whirled around upon sensing him. It suddenly opened its maw and spat out a pillar of bloody red light toward him.

"What?!" The monarch of stars' eyes widened, and he stilled in mid-air. The wyrm was able to attack on its own?!

"What made you think that Whitey can't protect itself?" Zhang Lie shouted as he chased after the monarch of stars, charging up for another blow against him.

The monarch of stars was struck by the unexpected blow, and he began to fall from the sky.

After consuming a large amount of spiritual essence, the moonlight wyrm had some ability to fight in its own right, shooting out compressed beams of spiritual essence. The blood-red beams would inflict damage both on a physical and spiritual level.

Upon being struck by the attack, the monarch of stars was temporarily stunned. Zhang Lie, standing below him, charged up toward the sky, his sword brimming with energy.

A silvery-white gleam split the sky, and the monarch of stars' waist, in two.

The upper half of the sura monarch's body continued waving the sword in his hands as he charged toward the moonlight wyrm. Due to how far apart they were, however, the moonlight wyrm easily dodged the attack.

The lower half of the sura monarch's body glowed with light as a new upper half grew out of it and transformed into a second sura monarch. He had regenerated his entire body from the waist up.

Zhang Lie stared at him with disgust. "Is the lower half of his body his true form?"

Just like Sun Xiaowu had mentioned, his testicles might be the crux; with his testicles unharmed, he could continuously regenerate his body. If not for his dragon's pupils, that was surely what Zhang Lie would have thought.

Upon regenerating, the monarch of stars's blood immediately began to burn as he continued attacking the moonlight wyrm. Though it shot another beam of blood-red light at the sura monarch, he was prepared and easily avoided the blow.

"[Rune: Resonate]!" The image of a dragon turtle appeared before him as Zhang Lie raised his hand. Ripples spread out from the four tablets, forcing the monarch of stars to a standstill for a moment.

This time, the monarch of stars ground to a halt. Zhang Lie didn't seem very surprised. He turned around and deflected a blow from the upper half-body of the monarch of stars, which had darted behind him.

As his lower half regrew, the monarch of stars remarked with surprise, "You could see through my clone?"

Zhang Lie didn't respond.

The reason he had identified the deception so readily was because the lower half of the sura king's body had no soul. From another person's perspective, the sura monarch would have seemed to have regrown from his lower half, but Zhang Lie's dragon's pupils revealed this as nothing more than an elaborate deception. It was simply a puppet controlled by the sura monarch.

And once Zhang Lie noticed this point, he was easily able to predict the monarch of stars' next move—to launch a sneak attack on Zhang Lie while he was distracted by the monarch's clone.

In the air, the moonlight wyrm sent another blood-red beam shooting toward the monarch of stars' clone, vaporizing it.

The monarch of stars tutted. "What a pity! I'd added sixty testicles to that clone, and it can revive at least twenty or thirty more times."

Sixty testicles?! As expected of the godfather of the perverted sura kings! Zhang Lie didn't want to imagine just what the monarch of stars' groin looked like—perhaps it was like a bunch of grapes.

"[Blade of the Heavens: the Sea Swells]!" The first form of Zhang Lie's [Ninecarp Transformation] activated, revolving quickly about his genetic core. Energy poured out of him in waves, honing the edge of his blade. The pulses of energy struck the realm like a tsunami, devouring everything within.

This was a sword art that Zhang Lie had created by combining the sword techniques from his past life and that from [Ninecarp Transformation]. There were three skills corresponding to this sword art, and this was the first time he was testing it out in practice.

The monarch of stars stumbled back, blocking the technique with his own sword. The waves of sword energy emanating from Zhang Lie snuffed out the blood flames on the monarch's sword and

drowned him completely. He barely made it out alive, cuts and bruises marring his skin, his appearance disheveled.

Immediately afterwards, however, his flesh seemed to knit back together, and the injuries were washed away as though they had never existed.

The monarch of stars preened. "It's no use. You won't be able to defeat me—this body has plenty of testicles as well. I'll be able to recover no matter what."

"[Second Form: Piercing the Soul]!" The two types of energy from the first two transformations of [Ninecarp Transformation] were infused into the technique. Dark ink and deep blue genetic energy intertwined about the face of the blade as Zhang Lie poured his genetic energy within.

The soul that he had trained and honed over his previous life carried over to this one, and the blade gleamed more and more brightly as he charged up his technique. The silvery-white glow was so radiant it outshone the sun.

The monarch of stars glanced at him placidly. "It's useless," he repeated. "My regenerative abilities are unparalleled."

Zhang Lie didn't care; his attack cut the soul, not any physical manifestation. The silver slash struck the monarch of stars' body, but there was no visible injury.

The monarch of stars peered at his body, unable to hide a bout of laughter. "What are you doing, making a fool out of yourself?"

His laugh didn't last for long.

Especially after acquiring the peak-grade dragonsoul soulshard, Zhang Lie had improved his technique by leaps and bounds. His slash had bisected a third of the monarch of stars' bestial souls. With a second slash, the monarch of stars found his strength diminished to an even more significant extent.

He was unable to retain his original confidence. "What have you done?!"

In truth, he wasn't able to regenerate indefinitely, as he had claimed.

Gaoyuan's accomplishments in the field that the monarch of stars had guided him toward surpassed even the monarch of stars'. The only other godsons of his who had managed a similar feat were Xueju and Shicang.

The monarch of stars didn't enjoy consuming testicles, and he had no intention of sealing his soul within his testicles. As a result, his regenerative abilities were significantly worse, and his methods were far cruder.

He had installed a few dozen testicles all over his body, enough to regenerate him five or six times over. Most of his regenerative ability came from the lower half of his body, on which he had installed over sixty testicles.

However, with the lower half of his body sliced off, the monarch of stars had lost most of that ability, and he was simply trying to shake Zhang Lie with bravado and bluster.

Red light flared from his body, and his skin began to crack. He was burning his own blood to increase his strength, and his regenerative abilities would replenish the lost blood. Compared to Suiyue, he could keep this state up for far longer.

Through this process, he was barely able to retain his current level of combat ability despite the souls that Zhang Lie had extinguished with his attack.

With a wave of his hand, he extinguished the remaining stars that the moonlight wyrm hadn't consumed to strengthen his next technique. He cleaved downwards with his blade burning with blood-red flame. The flames covered his entire body, flaring up the more they burned, releasing searing heat.

"[The Boundless Blade: the River Lethe]!" The first form of Zhang Lie's [Ninecarp Transformation] activated, revolving quickly about his genetic core. Energy poured out of him in waves, honing the edge of his blade. The pulses of energy struck the realm like a tsunami, devouring everything within.

Half the world was an ocean; the other was a sea of flames. As the two fronts met, white steam rose into the air. The energy of the collision shattered the will of the world's cordon in an instant.

Chapter 506: A Refined Blade

Even the will of the world, which was desperately trying to mitigate the effect of the confrontation, was unable to do anything against the two combatants. Just the aftershock of the collision was too much for it to handle.

The monarch of stars was astounded. He had almost never had to burn his blood ever since ascending to the ranks of a sura monarch. That Zhang Lie had forced him to do so was shocking enough; not only that, Zhang Lie was actually able to fight him on equal footing even afterwards.

"[Blades, Reverberate]!" A blood dragon revolved around Zhang Lie. Energy poured out of him in waves, honing the edge of his blade. The pulses of energy struck the realm like a tsunami, devouring everything within.

A dragon of blood rushed out of the tide accompanied by a series of dark, black waves. This was a combination attack involving [The Boundless Blade] and the post-peak-grade blades he had received from the golden rocs he had killed.

The rampaging dragon of blood snuffed out the sea of flames by brute force, overwhelming the monarch of stars and destroying his body once again.

Although the monarch of stars immediately crushed the testicles installed on his body, he quickly found that Zhang Lie's blows had changed from before. The rampaging dragon of blood was assaulting his body with a frightening aura of destruction, one that the monarch of stars had to combat with his regeneration.

His face turned ugly, his gaze sharp. Was his opponent truly a human?! When had humans become so strong? Weren't they as easy to breed as cattle?

He could hardly believe that he was on the losing end despite the compass he had created with such effort and sacrifice.

He didn't expect to be able to stand up to an asura, but he did expect to be the strongest below that level. And yet, the first lab rat he found, a human called Zhang Lie, had almost overwhelmed him and caused him to lose his life more than once!

The monarch of stars had initially hoped that his test subject would be strong enough to withstand a few hits from his compass, but only when the battle started in earnest did he realize how frighteningly strong Zhang Lie was.

If he had enough time, he would be able to recover from his injuries; clearly, Zhang Lie had no intention of giving him that opportunity.

"[Second Form: Piercing the Soul]!" He infused spiritual energy into his blade, and the blade gleamed more and more brightly as he charged up his technique.

The silvery-white glow was so radiant it outshone the sun.

The bestial souls trapped within the monarch of stars' body began to tremble, and he too resonated with their fear. Time flowed at an accelerated pace and the monarch of stars sharply retreated.

Recognizing that Zhang Lie was too strong a foe, the monarch of stars sought to escape. Despite his compass, he was no match for Zhang Lie; continued confrontation would bring him no benefit.

Zhang Lie had a devastating attack, one that could wipe out a whole swathe of the souls he had spent so long collecting. The monarch of stars knew that, the moment he ran out of these souls, he himself would be killed by that brilliant white light.

He intended for Zhang Lie to be his lab rat, but it appeared as though he would be Zhang Lie's lab rat instead. His opponent seemed to be the one testing attacks on him!

Upon coming to that realization, the monarch of stars couldn't help but laugh. The compass he had spent years planning for was nothing more than a joke to Zhang Lie, and the mysterious moonlight wyrm that Zhang Lie had summoned was the compass' natural enemy.

Now that he understood Zhang Lie's strength, he deeply regretted provoking Renhuang once and again, or even sending his seven godsons against Renhuang. He had been far too incautious. These past few years, his strength had increased without any setbacks whatsoever. After growing prideful, a monster like Zhang Lie had appeared to end him.

Without a peak-grade moonlight wyrm like Whitey, this might have been a long, exhausting battle for Zhang Lie—but unfortunately for the monarch of stars, Whitey existed.

"Don't try to run!"

Zhang Lie chased after the monarch of stars with a gleaming blade, but he wasn't able to make any progress. If he chose to run at full speed under the effects of local time contraction, Zhang Lie wouldn't be able to catch up to him.

The monarch of stars' time-manipulation ability had surprisingly few repercussions.

Manipulating time and space always came at a cost.

The monarch of stars' ability was to locally contract time around him, so that he moved at up to ten times the rate that everyone else did. The drawback was that his body would age at the same pace.

When he had first started learning the technique, the monarch of stars had barely been able to contract time by a factor of two. That he was now able to do so by a factor of ten demonstrated how much effort he had gone through to refine this technique.

The more powerful such time-manipulation techniques were, the larger the drawback.

Suiyue's ridiculous ability to reverse time naturally came at a commensurate cost.

Of course, part of the reason for his downfall was that he had yet to master his ability before facing the members of Team Zenith. If he had had enough time to grow, he might have been able to use his technique at the same level as the monarch of stars. At that point, he would have become an even more frightening enemy to defeat.

Zhang Lie cursed himself. At this rate, the monarch of stars was going to get away! The distance between the two combatants grew larger and larger.

The monarch of stars waved his blade. The cordon that the will of the world had set up was pitted and marred after the confrontation, despite its best efforts at repairing it. The monarch cut a hole in the cordon and flew out.

Zhang Lie followed after him. The monarch of stars was heading directly toward Renhuang's forces. Guessing his objective, Zhang Lie's eyes glinted.

The monarch of stars was clearly trying to use Renhuang's forces as a shield against Zhang Lie, or as batteries with which to recharge himself. He couldn't let the sura monarch succeed.

"[Rune: Resonate]!" The four tablets began to resonate as one, sending ripples that melded with the sky and forming an absolute domain over all things within—right in front of the monarch of stars' path.

The monarch of stars had been delayed enough by tearing apart the will of the world's cordon that Zhang Lie was able to use his signature technique. As the two combatants escaped from the dome, Renhuang's forces jumped up in shock.

Lianna's eyebrows had almost reached her hairline. "Is Zhang Lie chasing after the monarch of stars? Surely my eyes are mistaken!"

That was the monarch of stars himself! Not only was he a sura monarch, he was the strongest of all sura monarchs, and the sura closest to reaching the realm of an asura.

Sun Mengmeng's eyes likewise widened, but for a different reason. She called out behind her, "Run! The monarch of stars is going to hold us hostage against our captain!"

"[Second Form: Piercing the Soul]!" Zhang Lie infused spiritual energy into his blade, and the blade gleamed more and more brightly as he charged up his technique.

"[Blade of the Heavens: the Sea Swells]!" Energy poured out of him in waves, honing the edge of his blade. The pulses of energy struck the realm like a tsunami, devouring everything within.

"[Blades, Extinguish]!" Spiritual energy condensed into shining waves.

Like a tsunami, the waves rushed toward the monarch of stars, whose eyes widened at the sight. The half-spiritual attack would be a strong counter against him, and he would surely lose half his life if he were to take the attack head-on.

Despite stepping into Zhang Lie's runic domain, the monarch of stars was able to preserve a relatively normal speed. Just as he was about to escape from the domain—

"[Heaven's Judgment]! [Tiger's Howl, Dragon's Bellow]!"

"[The Boundless Blade: Shark Horde]!"

"[Golden Divide]!"

"[Dance of the Incandescent Wyrms]!"

"[Avatar of the Fae: Earthbound Prison]!"

"[Netherworld's Torrential Flame]!"

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Sun and Moon]!"

A howling tiger and keening dragon materialized from wind and thunder. Hundreds of blue sharks charged forward.

Golden blades filled the air, accompanied by serpents of bright, white light.

The earth tremored as countless roots speared out of the ground and crept toward the sky. Hundreds of arrows formed a waterfall of fire. A white moon and black sun appeared over the ground in a yin-yang configuration.

Rather than retreat like the rest of the forces, the members of Team Zenith and Hong Xi, almost as one, chose to make a final stand.

They might be weak compared to the monarch of stars, weak as fireflies compared to the radiant moon, but their defense caused the sura monarch to stall for one crucial moment.

That moment decided his fate.

Damned humans! The monarch of stars cursed the hunters in his mind. Under ordinary circumstances, he would knock them all dead, but he knew very well that he wouldn't be able to tarry.

How could these ants have been the ones to decide his fate?!

Perhaps this was karmic retribution.

The members of Team Zenith had slowed him down for barely half a second, but that was enough for the silvery-white waves to overwhelm him.

At that very moment, the monarch of stars received a crippling injury to his body and soul alike.

The waves swept over him, leaving him bruised and battered, his myriad bestial souls swept clean from his body. He lay like a rag flung carelessly on the ground, his soul so weak it could be snuffed out at any moment.

To be frank, Zhang Lie was quite shocked that the monarch of stars had survived despite the incredible shock he must have received upon having the souls wiped from his body all at once...

Chapter 507: A Sea of Souls

If not for the massive damage dealt to his soul, the monarch of stars would likely have been able to face off against Zhang Lie for no less than an entire day.

Zhang Lie was no human—he was a demon!

The monarch of stars had never expected to lose to a human, let alone lose so completely that he couldn't even run away.

Zhang Lie walked closer and closer to him. The monarch of stars attempted to scramble up a few times, but he ultimately failed to do so. He lay in a heap on the ground.

The forces of Renhuang and the world federation stared at the sight in shock. This was the monarch of stars, the strongest of the sura—and Zhang Lie had pushed him so hard that he couldn't even stand up!

Didn't that mean that Zhang Lie's strength was approaching that of an asura? If they hadn't witnessed this scene for themselves, they wouldn't have believed it. The hunters, who knew little of the sura hierarchy, weren't particularly shocked, but the members of the four prime races were agog.

Lianna muttered, "I'm not blind, am I? I seem to be seeing... Zhang Lie beating up the monarch of stars!"

Xing Bai nodded. "I'm seeing the same thing. Could this be a mass hallucination?"

Hong Yu replied, "What a coincidence! I saw the monarch of stars caught up in sparkling white waves, before he was forced to the ground like a limp rag!"

Pu Kui frowned. "And now he's lying there, moments from death!"

The representatives of the four prime races looked at each other in shock. This was no illusion—Zhang Lie really had bested the monarch of stars.

"How could this be?!"

No one could deny what lay ahead of them. Zhang Lie had created a miracle; he had written himself into the annals of history once again. No human nor alien had managed to defeat a sura monarch to date—and this wasn't even the weakest of the sura monarchs, but rather the strongest, the one closest to the level of an asura!

Before Zhang Lie appeared out of nowhere, humanity had no hunters to boast of save the Martial Sage Hong Tianqi. Moreover, the martial sage wasn't even a pure-blooded human.

It would have been high praise to call humans a nameless race. Compared to the innumerable races scattered all throughout the Milky Way, the human race was little more than an afterthought—all until the appearance of Zhang Lie.

The representatives of the four prime races had to revise their estimation of Zhang Lie once more.

Lianna jerked upright. "The limit-breaking potions! Yes, it has to be those frightening potions that gave Zhang Lie such strength!"

Surely it would have been impossible for Zhang Lie to rise out of a race known for nothing but mediocrity if not for these potions? Surely it would have been impossible for the entirety of the second realm to know his name if not for them?

If Zhang Lie were the only overwhelmingly strong hunter they knew, they would at least be able to console themselves with the thought that Zhang Lie was exceptionally special. However, they knew

a crucial piece of information—every member of Team Zenith had the ability to take on a sura king on their own. This could never have happened before Zhang Lie's time.

In that case, what was the answer—the only possible answer!—to this conundrum? It had to be the limit-breaking potions that Zhang Lie had developed. These potions, that every human hunter could consume, would change the trajectory of the human race.

The four prime representatives coveted these limit-breaking potions more than ever.

If the humans had managed to get so strong after consuming these potions, strong enough to be in contention with the four prime races themselves, how much stronger would they get when they came up with such potions too? If they allowed Zhang Lie to continue his experiments unchecked, the four prime races would soon have to bow out to the dominant race of the Milky Way—the humans.

They had to speed up research into these potions, they had to!

After Zhang Lie, Sun Mengmeng, and the other members of Team Zenith obtained their limit fragments, they were able to defeat sura kings by themselves despite their initial weakness. In that case, once they obtained limit fragments, wouldn't they be able to stand against sura kings, or even sura monarchs like Zhang Lie, themselves?

Zhang Lie walked up to the monarch of stars' side, his blade gleaming with light. The monarch of stars, panicking and flustered, called out, "Hold on! We have no grievances between us, and you haven't lost anything. Why don't you let me go? I'll have my forces retreat immediately!"

"Oh? What good does that do me?" Zhang Lie laughed.

The monarch of stars' eyes widened.

Zhang Lie's smile shook him to the core. "Without any sura from the empire of stars to defeat, how will Renhuang be able to make a name for itself? I do have to thank you for renouncing your claim to as large a piece of land as the empire of stars."

"This—This was all your plan?!"

"Not quite. Let's call it a coincidence."

The monarch of stars begged for mercy. "I'll cede over all the land under the jurisdiction of my empire, as well as everything in my treasury. Won't you let me go this once?"

"If I kill you, I'll be able to claim those prizes for myself, too."

The monarch of stars frowned. "Governor of Renhuang, don't be too full of yourself. Don't think that I'm helpless!"

"Are those your last words?" Zhang Lie replied coolly. "Unfortunately, I have no intention of erecting a headstone for you. You'll die without a trace!"

The monarch of stars could see the frost in Zhang Lie's eyes. At that moment, he understood that, no matter how he begged or pleaded, Zhang Lie wouldn't let him go. Rage and malice filled the monarch of stars. How had he landed in such dire straits that he would be begging a human for mercy?

"Blame yourself for forcing me down this path!" the monarch of stars roared. He grabbed the black orb from his compass and pressed it to his chest.

The orb's eye and mocking smile appeared once more. This time, it smiled more widely than ever—as though its long-laid plans were about to come to fruition.

Alarmed, Zhang Lie tried to stop the monarch of stars, but it was all too late.

Blood-red light erupted from the monarch of stars, and eyes and mouths appeared all over his body. The pupils of those eyes were darker than the abyss, darker than the night, filled with corruption and chaos.

As the monarch of stars began to scream, countless tendrils exploded out of his body. The monarch of stars opened his mouth, and even more black tendrils squirmed out of his eyes and throat.

"Let's die together!" Covered from head to toe with corruption, the monarch of stars transformed into a monstrosity.

Zhang Lie's dragon's pupils revealed this monstrosity to be composed of pure malice along with an extremely high density of spiritual matter.

The monarch of stars had barely consumed a hundredth of the energy encapsulated in the black orb. The remaining 99% erupted at this very moment. The will of the world shrunk back, escaping to the recesses of the realm.

These tendrils had torn part of its incorporeal body off once before, and it didn't dare appear in front of them again.

Zhang Lie hurriedly took a stance, his blades in his hands.

"[Blades, Extinguish]!" A blood dragon revolved around Zhang Lie. Energy poured out of him in waves, honing the edge of his blade. The pulses of energy struck the realm like a tsunami, devouring everything within.

A dragon of blood rushed out of the tide. The rampaging dragon of blood snuffed out a few tendrils, but even more grew out of the monarch of stars' body. As the monarch of stars' body exploded, even more tendrils shot out from the pulsing mass. Eyes appeared on the tendrils themselves, repulsing everyone who saw it.

The monstrosity's eyes and mouths were of various shapes and sizes—the only thing that they had in common was their contempt for the world.

Curiously, this monster gave Zhang Lie a familiar sensation, much like the dragonsoul he had killed in the valley that had been described in Xuechi's diary. The similarity was only superficial; Zhang Lie was certain that the origins of the two creatures were different, and he didn't even know if the monster in front of him could be considered alive.

Countless eyes gazed at Zhang Lie, and countless tendrils shot toward him. The tendrils targeted all lifeforms nearby. Quite a few headed toward Renhuang's forces, who stood stock-still, petrified by fear.

Zhang Lie sliced off tendril after tendril, but more grew out of the pulsating mass.

Upon realizing that quite a few were heading toward Renhuang's forces, Zhang Lie became anxious. His bladework faltered, and a swarm of tendrils quickly enveloped him.

Moments after the tendrils closed in on him, however, shining flames erupted from the center of the mass, breaking through the scarlet heavens and bringing light back to the world. Blinding light melted all the tendrils that got close to him.

"[Heaven's Judgment]! [Tiger's Howl, Dragon's Bellow]!" Fang Yi's spear took on the aspect of a dragon of the winds and a storm tiger.

"[The Boundless Blade: Shark's Wrath]!" Yang Ze swung down with his greatsword. A giant shark flicked its tail and bit down on a mass of tendrils.

"[Golden Divide]!" Sun Xiaowu's body blurred into hundreds of clones as resplendent golden light pierced the skies and wiped out all the tendrils before him.

"[Dance of the Incandescent Wurm]!" Li Feng summoned dozens of serpents, flaring with blinding light. They clashed with the tendrils and burned them to nothingness, then continued charging forward.

"[Storm of Leaves: Void Cut]!" Zhou Ying waved the daggers in her hands. Thousands of cuts erupted over the tendrils' surface.

"[Netherworld's Torrential Flame]!" Sun Mengmeng's hand blurred as she shot out an entire field's worth of arrows. A frightening fan of flames poured out from Sun Mengmeng's bow, decimating the tendrils wherever she shot.

Chapter 508: Thirty to One

Despite working together, the six of them couldn't hold back the tendrils for long. The tendrils continued spawning at a rapid rate, and the six of them wouldn't be able to keep holding them off without consuming their reserves of genetic energy.

"Retreat!" Sun Mengmeng shouted.

The hunters didn't know from how far away the tendrils could target them, but retreating was surely a safe choice. The black tendrils were less an enemy they had to face and more a disaster for the entire realm at large.

As the Renhuang forces regained their senses, the leaders of the four prime races and Zhou Liao immediately began directing the evacuation.

The members of Team Zenith and the four leaders stayed at the very back to ensure that the forces of Renhuang could evacuate, fighting off the dark tendrils all the while. They were all approximately of equal strength; Xing Bai and the others had been among the top ten competitors of the Void Cup.

Even without having consumed any limit-breaking potions, Xing Bia, Lianna, Hong Yu, and Pu Kui all had strength comparable to that of a sura king.

Working together, they were able to fend off the black tendrils for long enough for their subordinates to evacuate.

The members of Team Zenith glanced at Zhang Lie, who was embroiled in his own fight in mid-air. "You can do it, Captain!"

"[Blades, Extinguish]!" Spiritual energy condensed into shining waves. Like a tsunami, the waves rushed toward the mass of inky darkness and drenched it whole. The silvery-white waves, infused with Zhang Lie's spiritual energy, proved particularly damaging.

A huge hole was torn in the mass of black tendrils, and the monstrosity's mouths began to scream in unison. The screams were so shrill that they seemed to strike at the very soul. Even from afar, the forces of Renhuang clutched their ears in pain.

The black tendrils snaked toward Zhang Lie in denser throngs than before, as though he had been marked as an enemy to get rid of at any cost.

Zhang Lie sliced off tendril after tendril, but more grew out of the pulsating mass. No matter how quickly he slashed, there seemed to be more and more replacement tendrils surrounding him. Once again, he was trapped in a cage of tendrils, with no salvation to be seen.

The hunters watching the fight sucked in a deep breath. Zhang Lie, who had defeated even the monarch of stars, seemed to be struggling...

Suddenly, from within that cage emerged a few thumps, as though the cage had suddenly developed a heartbeat. Soon enough, the tendrils were no longer able to contain the energy within, and brilliant flames emerged.

The flames were so bright that the entire sky dulled in comparison. The monster's eyes were forced closed, and even Renhuang's forces had to avert their gaze.

The tendrils that tried to trap Zhang Lie disintegrated into nothing but ash. Golden flames crept up the tendrils all the way to the monstrosity's main body.

Zhang Lie himself had transformed. His body was covered by dark golden scales, and a dragon's helm enclosed his head.

Golden flames burned all around him, releasing a holy aura. The black sun to his back and bloody moon beneath his feet made him look like a god that had descended from the heavens.

This was the power of the fifth form of Zhang Lie's [Ninecarp Transformation], his strongest to date. The qilin's energy circulated throughout Zhang Lie's body, and he felt energized as he never had before.

The mass of black tendrils, unknowing of the change to Zhang Lie's body and unintelligent enough to understand him, attacked him furiously with tendril after tendril, so many they seemed to cover the skies.

Zhang Lie ignored the tendrils. He murmured to himself, "With this much genetic energy, I should be able to use that attack... [Ninesoul Dragonblade—Third Form: Separating Earth and Sky]!"

Zhang Lie's blade made a horizontal slash. Dark golden genetic energy shone radiantly, turning all that it touched to dust. The void of outer space seemed to be visible through the cut, and it swallowed up the black mass.

However, the black mass didn't give up. Countless tendrils poked through from the other side of Zhang Lie's cut, but it was to no avail. As Zhang Lie turned around and the gap in the void closed up, everything seemed to return to normal. The void seemed never to have existed. If not for the

tendrils that spasmed and twitched on the ground where they had been cut off, Zhang Lie could almost believe that everything he had just seen was an illusion.

Whether the unusual space that [Separating Earth and Sky] had uncovered was truly a portal to the void, Zhang Lie didn't know. The universe was too large for all its mysteries to have been uncovered, and Zhang Lie didn't feel confident delving into such arcane concepts as yet.

With a casual wave of his sword, the remaining black tendrils disintegrated into ash. The scales retreated from his body, and Zhang Lie returned to where the forces of Renhuang awaited him.

Moments later, cheers erupted from the crowd.

"Zhang Lie is invincible! Renhuang will not fall!"

"Zhang Lie is invincible! Renhuang will not fall!"

"Zhang Lie is invincible! Renhuang will not fall!"

The monarch of stars' demise caused the morale of Renhuang's forces to soar instantly.

The representatives of the four prime races glanced at Zhang Lie with a complex mix of feelings, as though they were yet unable to accept the truth that Zhang Lie had killed the monarch of stars. They were certain that they wouldn't be able to achieve the same feat even if they were in his shoes, even if they had access to these limit-breaking potions.

The forces of Renhuang stared at Zhang Lie with pride, because Zhang Lie was a human.

No human had ever defeated a sura king; Zhang Lie had done it.

No alien had ever defeated a sura monarch; Zhang Lie had done it.

No one had ever defeated the monarch of stars; Zhang Lie had done it.

Zhang Lie was writing his own legend, his own epic, one step at a time.

After the end of the battle, the forces of Renhuang had a short rest before setting off toward the three million sura that the monarch of stars had dispatched their way.

The sura army was making its way toward Renhuang, unaware of what had happened to the empire of stars or to its monarch.

"Do these humans really think that they can stand against us sura just because they've enlisted the help of a few alien races?"

"So what if they've defeated the forces from the seven-kingdom coalition? We're the army from the empire of stars itself!"

"This is a farce. We'd better take them down quickly so we can return home!"

The army of the empire of stars was prideful and arrogant, and it believed that Renhuang would be a simple target to crush.

The general of the forces stared at Renhuang's troops and laughed coldly. "What, they only have that few people?"

Renhuang's troops numbered barely a hundred thousand, whereas there were three million sura lying in wait for them.

Each Renhuang fighter would have to take down thirty sura on average. From the sura general's perspective, his fighters would dominate over the enemy's in a one-on-one melee, let alone thirty-on-one. The outcome was obvious.

One general laughed. "How did this ragtag army beat the seven-kingdom coalition?"

Beside him, another general shrugged. "Did we really all have to mobilize for this? Surely a fraction of the monarch's forces would have been sufficient to destroy them all."

"The monarch of stars must have gone crazy after hearing that all nine of his godsons had been killed!"

In truth, the monarch of stars simply wanted to preserve his empire's combat strength, and sending all his troops away would prevent them from being sacrificed for his compass.

The commander of the forces called out, somewhat lazily, "Troops, charge! Slaughter our enemy to the last!"

Chapter 509: Confrontation of Two Armies

The commander of the empire of stars' forces yawned. "I'm going to go have a nap. Wake me up when you're done. Deal with them quickly, you hear?"

Before the forces of Renhuang arrived, a flock of birds flew across the sky. Some were regular-grade, others mutated-grade, and yet others superior-grade. They filled the sky, blotting out the sun and darkening the entire world.

None of these birds seemed particularly strong, but each of their claws held a vial.

A general of the army frowned as he looked up at the birds. "An aerial attack?"

He dispatched a few archers to shoot down the birds; another group of fighters flew into the sky to engage in melee combat.

As the birds perished, the vials burst open in mid-air, splashing their contents on the fighters below. At that point, none in the empire of stars' army knew how serious the problem was.

The archers and fighters killed most of the birds in the flock, but the birds didn't show any proclivity to fight. As though they were just passing by, the birds scattered once they crushed the vials of potion between their claws.

A heavy mist descended on the army, and a few cracked glass vials dropped on them.

Given the sura's constitution, however, they could easily shrug off being hit by a glass vial or two. Such attacks would cause them no harm; they even incited laughter among those who were hit.

The generals frowned. "What do the forces of Renhuang think that they're doing?"

"Surely they aren't just trying to disgust us with these antics?"

In the middle of the army, a nightmare was starting to bloom.

"Maybe they're just giving up on defending entirely."

Just as one fighter finished speaking, his eyes bulged and he dropped to the ground, his body spasming as it dissolved. Startled, his comrades jumped back, only to find themselves losing their balance and falling to the ground as well, dissolving bit by bit...

"Poison!" a sura general hissed. "All fighters, retreat! Don't let the poison land on your skin!"

By the time the generals reacted, it was too late. Over 70% of the sura fighters had been poisoned, and all those who had been poisoned were slowly dissolving.

This genetic poison affected not their bodies, not their immune systems, but rather their cells and genetic code themselves. It was far stronger than any infection known to date, and it spread more quickly than any virus.

The rare few survivors yelled as they backed away from their dissolving comrades. Some tried to dispel the poison, but to no avail. The sura didn't have the technology or equipment to deal with poison of this nature; even the Yeluo couldn't claim that they understood it fully.

The poison had been developed by chance, not intent. Despite their best efforts, the Yeluo hadn't been able to make any progress toward an antidote. If someone were to concoct a similar poison targeted at the humans or at the Yeluo, the Yeluo would have no recourse—such was the strength and complexity of the poison they had invented.

The generals frowned when they realized that standard antidotes had no effect. The poison had also landed on the generals, but all that it inflicted on them was paralysis. The generals of the empire of stars were as strong as sura kings in their own right, and they were by and large immune to poisons and toxins.

However, Renhuang had somehow managed to manufacture a poison that was effective even against the sura generals, and worse, could be produced in such great quantities as to be applied to all their forces at once.

The thirty-to-one ratio of numerical superiority that the sura had boasted about was completely pointless after the release of this poison—no matter how many troops the sura had, this poison could destroy them all.

Zhou Liao glanced open-mouthed at the scene. "To think you had such a devastating secret weapon..."

Once the poison had been released, the forces of Renhuang took advantage of the sura's panic and confusion to charge forward. This was their best opportunity to strike.

The generals gritted their teeth. They had to prevent the Renhuang forces from striking them now! The large majority of their fighters were incapacitated; it would be a one-sided slaughter.

A few of the sura generals rushed forward, appearing in front of Renhuang's forces. Their bodies were aglow with genetic energy. As generals of the army, they were each comparable to a sura king in strength, and it wouldn't be impossible for them to hold back a hundred thousand forces for some time.

However, they had underestimated the strength of Renhuang's forces.

Renhuang's army continued charging forward despite the sura generals' appearance; instead, a barrage of purple flames shot toward the sura fighters.

Countless arrows of purple flame shot out of Sun Mengmeng's bow like a meteor shower, tinting the air purple and giving the world a phantasmagorical appearance. The air turned dry and arid, as though a cataclysm was nigh.

"You dare?!" The sura generals tried to protect as much of their forces as possible, but Sun Mengmeng had launched so many arrows that it was nigh impossible.

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

Very quickly, even the sura generals were unable to defend their troops any longer—they were being attacked by Team Zenith themselves.

"[Netherworld's Torrential Flame]!" Sun Mengmeng's hand blurred as she shot out an entire field's worth of arrows. A frightening fan of flames poured out from Sun Mengmeng's bow, swallowing up the sura forces whole.

"[Heaven's Judgment! [Tiger's Howl, Dragon's Bellow]!" Fang Yi's spear took on the aspect of a dragon of the winds and a storm tiger.

"[The Boundless Blade: Shark's Wrath]!" Yang Ze swung down with his greatsword, and the giant shark flicked its tail and launched itself forward.

"[Goldenscale Palm: Split]!" A frightening golden punch shot forward like a golden blade before exploding in the middle of the sura forces.

"[Dance of the Incandescent Wyrms]!" Li Feng summoned dozens of serpents, flaring with blinding light.

"[Avatar of the Fae: Earthbound Prison]!" Zhou Ying stomped on the ground, her feet seemingly becoming rooted. The patch of ground beneath and all around her began to glow green, and hundreds of jade-green roots flew into the air.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Sun and Moon]!" A black sun and white moon revolved around each other, sending ripples of genetic energy spreading out around it.

Even the young leaders of the four prime races, caught up in the moment, attacked the sura forces...

Chapter 510: An Overwhelming Defeat

Xing Bai roared out as his body grew hundreds of meters tall. His jaws widened to an unbelievable extent as he swallowed a battalion whole.

"[The Lily Blooms]!" Lianna splayed out her hands, and a gorgeous patch of water lilies came to life by her feet. The lilies were large but intricate, and covered in a crystalline sheen that made them resemble delicate pieces of art.

"[Kingdom of Water]!" At the same time, she summoned countless merwarriors from deep within the ocean.

Under attack by the mermen, the sura forces were like a small boat about to capsize amidst an incoming storm.

Sun Mengmeng and Lianna stood back to back, smiling at each other. Lianna was like a water lily, Sun Mengmeng a red rose. The two of them had once been competitors in the Void Cup, but they were now comrades-in-arms.

Hong Yu sent countless red feathers whirling into the air, and Pu Kui turned day to night. The dozen or so generals from the empire of stars were barely able to fight back.

Who would have expected that they who had once been competitors would now work hand in hand with each other?

Zhang Lie himself watched the confrontation from afar.

Renhuang's forces had gained such an advantage that it was only a matter of time before the empire of stars' forces were wiped out.

With the members of Team Zenith and the young leaders of the four prime races around, even the dozen or so generals wouldn't be able to turn the tide of battle. Renhuang's forces slaughtered sura by the dozen. Many of them were already dying from the Yeluo's genetic poison; Renhuang's forces simply sped that process up.

The fighters of Renhuang laughed. How good it felt to finally get back at their enemies, the sura!

The confrontation between the sura and Renhuang's forces was completely one-sided, an outcome that not even the sura fighters, sura generals, or Renhuang's reinforcements could have predicted.

Shouldn't it have been easy for the army of a sura empire to take down forces from a mere human city? Wasn't the outcome of the fight supposed to have been obvious? When the sura saw that their opponents consisted of only a hundred thousand forces, they did feel this way—until the birds flew overhead and poured gallons of poison over their forces.

The sura generals had never expected that Renhuang would be able to deal them such a serious blow with a mere trick.

There were a dozen fighters in Renhuang on the level of a sura king, and six of them could take on even the strongest of sura kings. Although they knew that Renhuang had to boast such forces if they were able to take down the seven-kingdom coalition, they hadn't expected to face quite so many talented hunters.

Renhuang's combat strength was on the level of a sura empire itself!

Most importantly, however, was the poison that they had somehow developed to specifically target the sura. The generals had never heard of the like.

Renhuang's reinforcements had heard of this Yeluo poison, but only when they saw its effects for themselves did they realize just how frightening it was. No wonder three thousand of Renhuang's forces could take down the seven-kingdom coalition!

With this sort of poison in hand, Renhuang could take down even an invasion force ten times larger. The reinforcements came to Renhuang prepared to die, only to find that the deadly battles they were prepared for were laughably trivial.

All they had to do was wait while the crag eagles controlled a flock of birds to poison the sura, then to charge forward and kill the sura that hadn't yet died... It was as straightforward as killing poultry. They had never had such an easy fight against the sura, and the hunters were taken aback by their straightforward victory.

Quite a few had had to defend their cities from a sura invasion in the past. Those had always been hard-fought victories, and most of the veterans present had lost a friend or loved one to such invasions.

This was the largest battle against the sura they had been part of, the one at which they were at the most numerical disadvantage... and also the simplest they had ever fought.

None of them would ever forget this battle—as expected of Renhuang, which had produced miracle after miracle!

Even the young leaders of the four prime races couldn't have predicted such an easy victory for the humans. Zhang Lie really was a talented herbalist, able to come up with such miraculous creations as these limit-breaking potions and this poison...

What the four prime races didn't know was that this poison was created by the Yeluo clan rather than Zhang Lie himself. The Yeluo had devised it as a strengthening potion for themselves, but it turned out to have exceptional effect against the sura.

The four young leaders believed that only someone like Zhang Lie, who had come up with the limit-breaking potions, could develop such a ridiculously overpowered poison. They swore that they would never make Zhang Lie their enemy. If they made him mad enough to develop a race-specific poison against them, they couldn't imagine the consequences that would result.

As they stared at the decomposing bodies of the sura before them, the four young leaders shuddered. How could this world be so unfair? Not only did Zhang Lie boast extreme personal strength, he even had ridiculous talent at herbalism!

The sura commander's eyes widened as he saw his forces collapse against nothing more but a human city.

The sura had defeated countless nearby kingdoms over the years, and one tiny human city was nothing compared to what they had faced in the past. When he saw the majority of his forces dead and the rest struggling, the commander could barely believe that he wasn't dreaming.

He took a deep breath and forced himself to come to his senses. Now wasn't the time to think.

He soared into the air, releasing such an aura of strength that the members of Team Zenith and the four young leaders stilled for a moment. All he could do now was make use of his strength to quell the enemy.

"Halt, all of you!" His shout rang across the entire battlefield, declaring his strength and imposing presence. He was almost at the level of a sura monarch himself, almost...