

U. Warlord 511

Chapter 511: The Desolate Cities

The commander of the sura forces stood hovering in the air, quelling the fighting with nothing more than his aura.

The generals of the empire of stars shouted impassionately, "Without a sura monarch present, no one can defeat our commander! Clean your necks and prepare to die!"

"Shut up!"

As space rumbled, a punch came out of nowhere, shot through the entire battlefield, and landed straight on the commander's body. Space rippled where the commander once stood. He fell from the skies and cratered into the ground.

There he lay, his four limbs distorted, blood spouting from his mouth like a fountain. He was severely injured, on the verge of death.

The generals who had started to become cocky again gaped at their commander in shock. What in the world was going on? His aura had managed to suppress the entire battlefield, but the next moment, he was somehow lying in a hole on the ground!

Even the commander himself was stupefied. Everything had happened too quickly for him to be able to react; he hadn't even sensed the punch at all. By the time he came back to his senses, he was lying in a pit, glancing up at the skies, and so badly hurt that he could barely move his fingers.

Even the members of Team Zenith and the representatives of the four prime races hadn't caught a glimpse of what had happened, but they at least recognized the voice. They turned back toward Zhang Lie to see him retracting a fist and sitting leisurely on a stool, as though he had done nothing surprising.

Naturally, he was the one who had attacked the commander.

After maxing out his peak gene fragments, Zhang Lie's strength had reached a truly ridiculous level, and he was easily able to deal with anyone who wasn't yet a sura monarch—with just a single punch.

When they saw their commander being pummeled to the ground in a mere instant, the sura fighters' morale dropped to peak bottom, and they looked at each other in despair.

The sura fighters who were still alive began to flee; none of them had the will to fight any longer.

But why would Renhuang's forces let them go? Over the next hour, they slaughtered the rest of the initially three-million-strong army that the sura had fielded.

The hunters of Renhuang couldn't believe the feat they had just accomplished. How could they have killed all of the three million sura within no more than an hour? Renhuang only had a hundred thousand forces!

This was a miraculous victory, one that made use of no battle tactics or strategy, one that relied solely on the Yeluo poison.

"Perhaps this is Renhuang's miraculous strength..."

The morale of Renhuang's forces rose sharply.

When the fallen commander was tied up and brought over to Zhang Lie, he didn't look at all as though the sura had lost. He shouted angrily, "Don't think the battle's over—the monarch of stars and the entirety of the sura await you! Even if you use such underhanded tactics, you'll never be able to defeat the monarch of stars. He's far too strong for the likes of you to defeat!"

The forces of Renhuang stared at the fallen commander with a knowing smile.

The commander's gaze swept over everyone present before naturally landing on Zhang Lie. "You must be the commander of Renhuang's forces."

It was very easy to distinguish Zhang Lie from the others; he had an aura of leadership that none other possessed, that he hadn't seen on anyone but his monarch before, and the forces all glanced at him from time to time.

The commander of the sura forces raised his head and spoke proudly, "I recommend that you send me back to the empire of stars, then to beg his majesty for mercy! Renhuang killed all nine of his godsons, and his majesty is extremely enraged. Now that you've also killed four-fifths of his army, his anger will surely reach a breaking point. If he takes to the battlefield himself, all of you will surely perish."

Li Feng couldn't help but laugh, prompting everyone else to do so as well. He hurriedly waved his hands. "Don't worry, keep going, I just can't bear it any longer, haha!"

The commander of the army snorted in displeasure. "You might be able to laugh now, but once his majesty pays you a visit himself, I assure you, you won't ever laugh a day again in your life. If you don't want Renhuang to be destroyed, follow my advice. Perhaps his majesty will show clemency and let go of some of you."

Sun Mengmeng couldn't watch him prattle any longer. "Actually, we've already encountered this monarch of yours."

"What?!" The commander's eyes bulged, unable to believe what he had heard.

Li Feng spread his arms helplessly. "He did pay us a visit, and then he died."

"No, that's impossible! His majesty is the closest the sura have to an asura!"

Li Feng explained, "It truly was an astounding battle, but your ruler was the one who perished. The man he faced in battle is sitting right before you!"

Zhang Lie smirked at the fallen commander. "Do you have any more interesting information for me?"

The commander furiously struggled against his bonds as he roared, "That's impossible! You have to be lying to me! It's useless—no matter your lies, his majesty will still appear before you all! Just you wait. You're all going to die!"

With a snap of his fingers, Zhang Lie made the commander's body explode like a rotten tomato.

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Should we have killed him just like that?"

Li Feng nodded. "We didn't manage to get any useful information out of him, after all."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "There's no reason to keep someone as delusional as him alive. We'll get more information just by heading toward the empire of stars."

After a night's rest, the forces of Renhuang set off once again.

They reached the border of the empire of stars easily, only to find it completely unguarded. The cities that they passed through were stranger than the last, each filled with heaps upon heaps of yellow sand, without any sura left alive. The cities all seemed to have become ruins overnight.

Zhang Lie and the others initially thought that this was some strategy or another that the empire of stars had employed, but even after a few days, they couldn't detect anything amiss.

There were still quite a few sura present in villages and in the mountains, and there were some cities which still had living sura, but the majority seemed to have been wiped out.

Zhang Lie couldn't help but feel an eerie premonition. "Could it be..."

Sun Mengmeng asked curiously, "Captain, do you know just what happened to the empire of stars?"

This was the question that Zhang Lie had been considering over the last few days.

"More or less."

Zhang Lie captured and extracted the memories of a sura guard via his moonlight wyrm, which allowed him to understand roughly what had happened. Before the cataclysm, the skies above the empire of stars had turned blood-red, and a beam of light had shot out of the capital.

In that case, the answer had to lie within the capital.

Renhuang's forces made their way toward and inside the capital without any obstacles whatsoever, and they didn't meet a single sura along the way. It was impossible that the capital of a sura empire could be so empty; any such capital was at least populated by a million sura.

A migration of a million sura would take at least a few weeks to plan and execute, and it was impossible for this event to happen so rapidly. Nevertheless, the proof of that impossibility was right before their eyes...

Chapter 512: An Overnight Fortune

As Renhuang's army entered the palace, Zhang Lie found an elder of the empire of stars seated on the throne. "Ah, you're all here. I've been waiting for you for quite a long time."

The elder seemed to have known that Zhang Lie would make his way here sooner or later.

The members of Team Zenith prepared to fight, but Zhang Lie stopped them. The elder didn't seem to have any fighting spirit at all.

The elder stood up and patted the throne. "How uncomfortable."

Zhang Lie frowned as he asked, "Where has everyone else gone?"

The elder replied slowly, "Upon hearing that you all were passing through the border, I had the others leave with whatever fighters remained."

He knew that the monarch of stars had left in search of Renhuang's forces. Since Renhuang's forces had made it all the way here, the monarch was most likely dead.

"I think it's rather obvious at this point, but please allow me to confirm—has his majesty perished?"

"Indeed!"

"As expected." The elder stumbled in his dejection. "I'd like to ask how you managed it—ah, I probably shouldn't."

"You may, but you'll have to answer one of my questions first. What happened to the empire of stars? Was this caused by the monarch of stars himself?"

The elder replied frankly, "The monarch of stars was a madman. He sacrificed three sura empires and half of his own for strength, but it looks like it was all for naught."

This was essentially what Zhang Lie had expected. He had noticed an extraordinary number of souls trapped in the compass in the monarch of stars' possession when he glanced at it with his dragon's pupils. It was now apparent that those souls came from the citizens of these sura empires.

In some sense, this meant that there were fewer sura that Zhang Lie had to deal with.

"I know where the treasury of the empire of stars is located," the elder volunteered.

"And what do you want in exchange for that information?" Zhang Lie knew that there was no reason the elder would give them that information freely.

"The sura of the empire are innocent, and they shouldn't have to foot the cost of this battle."

Zhang Lie's voice was cold. "And what of the human captives you've taken over the years?"

The sura treated humans like livestock; how many had they killed since the inception of the dimensional world?

The elder frowned. "In that case, you won't be able to get a single thing out of me. I've already consumed poison upon receiving word of your arrival, and it looks like I have about half an hour left."

With one step, Zhang Lie suddenly appeared in front of the elder and caught him by the head. "Half an hour is enough."

The elder looked at him with steely resolve. "I won't reveal a single thing."

"That's not a problem for me." Zhang Lie summoned his moonlight wyrm and had the elder's soul forcibly extracted.

As he had guessed, the reason for the desolation he and his troops had witnessed was the compass that the monarch of stars had created. He saw the elder watch on coldly as huge groups of humans, trapped in cages like livestock, were sent deep into the palace. Zhang Lie clenched his fists tightly.

The elder had never intended on giving them the location of the treasury. Important files and the portable valuables had all been carried off by the remnant fighters of the empire of stars. Indeed, the elder had intended on taking this opportunity to lure Renhuang's forces into a trap.

Zhang Lie turned around and strode outside the palace. Sun Mengmeng asked, "Captain, where are you headed?"

"To take some things back."

By then, the fighters were already some distance away from the palace.

They turned back and glanced toward the capital. "What do you think is happening to the elder now?"

His comrade replied, "Who knows? I hope he's successful in buying us some more time, at least."

The first sura nodded seriously. "We have to preserve the empire of stars' remaining combat strength and prepare to revive our kingdom anew."

Just then, a figure appeared before all the fighters.

Thanks to the elder's memories, Zhang Lie easily found out where the fighters were headed, and he slaughtered them to the last.

Then, he brought the documents and valuables they carried with them back to the palace. The elder had never expected that he would become the "culprit" behind these fighters' death, that he would be the one to reveal their location to Zhang Lie.

By the time he returned, the members of Team Zenith had found the treasury. As they opened it up and saw countless herbs, artifacts, and treasure within, their eyes lit up.

As expected of the treasury of a sura empire! All sorts of ores and herbs, treasures that none of them recognized, the plants and reagents that were needed for limit-breaking potions—all of them could be found within the treasury.

Renhuang had, in a matter of moments, become the richest human settlement around. After all, it had just acquired the accumulated wealth of a sura empire.

In order to deal with the forces of the empire of stars, the Yeluo had emptied Renhuang's storehouse of herbs to manufacture large quantities of the Yeluo poison. Now, they made back ten times that quantity in herbs.

Even more impressive than the treasury was the monarch of stars' private study, which contained notes on all his research to date, including vital information on the soul, spiritual matter, blood, and genetic lifeforms.

Zhang Lie thought that his research on grafting sura together with genetic lifeforms could be particularly invaluable. Although the resulting hybrid creatures were monstrosities, he had to admit that it was a very effective way of increasing one's strength.

The sura themselves had astounding constitutions, and there were rare few lifeforms that surpassed them. On the other hand, humans tended to be weak, and they only grew by assimilating gene fragments into their bodies.

If Zhang Lie could improve and mature this grafting technique, humans would immediately become much stronger. Zhang Lie himself wasn't willing to become a mutant, but that didn't mean other hunters weren't. It would immediately provide strength, despite the many drawbacks it possessed.

In addition to research on this technique, the monarch of stars had also penned monographs on transferring wounds and sacrificing one's blood for temporary boosts in strength. These techniques were particularly difficult to learn, and Zhang Lie passed them on to the members of Team Zenith in case any of them were interested.

The technique that Zhang Lie was searching for was the basal form of Gaoyuan's specialty—the ability of rapid regeneration and regrowth.

The fundamental idea of the technique was to extract growth factors from his sperm, concentrate and refine them, and use that concentrated essence to facilitate regeneration.

This was a crazy idea, one that only a genius like the monarch of stars could have brought to fruition. Lunacy and genius were two sides of the same coin—the nine godsons of the monarch of stars had proven this point.

Despite the ingenuity of the technique, it wasn't as efficient as Zhang Lie had expected. He would only be able to recover from one serious injury at once; if the injury was too serious, he might even exhaust his sperm and give himself erectile dysfunction.

Furthermore, while storing up and refining his sperm, he would be barred from all sort of sexual activity unless he wanted to get more sperm cells from external sources like Gaoyuan did, or install testicles all over his body like the monarch of stars did. Neither option was palatable to Zhang Lie.

Chapter 513: Autobiography of the Monarch of Stars

The monarch of stars' research on souls and spiritual matter was invaluable.

He had even managed to create life from spiritual matter alone. According to his notes, Shicang was such a creation. He was an alter ego of the monarch of stars' [Thousand Beasts], which the monarch of stars tried to separate from his main body.

In some sense, the experiment was a success—the monarch of stars had succeeded in extracting that soul and giving it a new vessel—but it was simultaneously a failure, because the separated soul wasn't a clone of the monarch of stars. Instead, it was an independent entity, a true son of the monarch of stars derived from asexual reproduction.

Zhang Lie decided to hand these results to the research laboratories of Renhuang in hopes that they would be able to derive something from it. The research materials of the empire of stars would save close to three hundred years' worth of research time and an astronomical investment besides.

Sun Mengmeng pulled out a thick tome from among the bookshelves. "Captain, this is an autobiography written by the monarch of stars himself!"

Li Feng glanced at it curiously. "That self-absorbed fellow even wrote an autobiography?"

Fang Yi likewise looked at it with interest. "Anyone successful would want to do something similar, I should think."

"Read it, please!" Zhou Ying strode closer to Sun Mengmeng.

Everyone was interested in this depraved monarch, after all.

Zhang Lie smiled as he shook his head, then continued to look for useful materials among the monarch of stars' study. It was as large as a library, and Zhang Lie was searching for information on genetic lifeforms. This would be useful to all hunters, including himself.

The empire of stars had existed for centuries, and there was surely information about disaster-grade lifeforms recorded somewhere.

In his past life, he had heard that there were a few pseudo-disaster-grade lifeforms in the second realm, but he only knew of their approximate locations. He had no information of their abilities or of their natures at all. If he were able to find this information in the monarch of stars' treasury, he would be able to amass disaster gene fragments much more easily.

Of course, just pseudo-disaster-grade lifeforms wouldn't be enough—it would be ideal if there were cataloged information about true disaster-grade lifeforms as well.

As Sun Mengmeng began to read aloud, Zhang Lie listened in.

Zhang Lie hadn't paid the monarch of stars much attention while the monarch told him his life story because he had had to keep an eye on what the monarch of stars was doing, and whether or not he was simply trying to distract Zhang Lie.

The basic story was simple. In his youth, the monarch of stars very much enjoyed copulating with genetic lifeforms and members of alien races.

Some of these lifeforms were so strong that the monarch of stars was unsuccessful in his attempted rape; they beat him up instead. It was truly a miracle that the monarch of stars had stayed alive all this time—an ordinary sura would have been killed by these lifeforms instead.

In order to continue his deplorable acts, the monarch of stars had no choice but to grow stronger. As he continued cultivating and subduing more and more genetic lifeforms, the monarch of stars grew into his strength.

Subsequently, because of his powerful physique, he accidentally killed a genetic lifeform while having sex with it. The spiritual essence of the lifeform, filled with horror, anger, and malice, exploded into the air. The monarch of stars absorbed it and instantly felt as though its soul had merged with his.

The monarch of stars remarked in some detail on the inimitable sensation of this cohabitation.

The rest was history. As the monarch of stars absorbed more and more such souls, he turned mad due to the influence of subsuming all these foreign souls, but he also grew stronger and stronger.

"Almost as though he's grinding up his level by killing mobs," Li Feng murmured.

As the monarch of stars developed, he began to challenge stronger genetic lifeforms all over the realm. In the end, he began hunting down peak-grade lifeforms. What changed his life forever was his chance encounter with a certain genetic lifeform.

Perhaps if he hadn't met that lifeform, the monarch of stars would still be roaming the second realm.

That lifeform was a gigantic, beautiful serpent, whose body was sparkling and translucent, covered in speckled, refracting scales. The monarch of stars' heart thumped.

Everything else the monarch of stars had raped paled in comparison with this serpent. "In others' eyes, this might be a frightening lifeform, but to mine, she's a beautiful girl, just waiting for my grasp..."

The members of Team Zenith shuddered as they listened to Sun Mengmeng read the monarch of stars' words.

However, the monarch of stars failed miserably. He was beaten to within an inch of his life, and he barely got away.

"What?!" All the hunters present were shocked. According to his narrative, the monarch of stars had been able to defeat even peak-grade lifeforms. At that point, he was a top-tier sura king, almost on par with a sura monarch. How had he still lost to a genetic lifeform?

Among them, Zhang Lie was the most excited.

If that lifeform were able to defeat the monarch of stars, it had to be a disaster-grade lifeform—and one that Zhang Lie didn't know about!

Zhang Lie urged, "Quick, find out where this lifeform's at!"

"Let me see. I think there's a record!"

Through his autobiography, Zhang Lie and the others confirmed the location of one disaster-grade lifeform. Zhang Lie listened eagerly to Sun Mengmeng's words, expectant that the monarch of stars would leave more such records.

He challenged the serpent a few more times, but barely escaped with his life each time. It was then that he learned how to temporarily augment his strength by burning his blood.

As he continued to cultivate and challenge this lifeform, the monarch of stars unknowingly advanced to the level of a sura monarch.

Afterwards, the disaster-grade lifeform, annoyed by how frequently the monarch of stars was pestering it, suddenly vanished without a trace. The monarch of stars tramped through half the second realm in search of it, to no avail.

As he continued searching for the serpent, he continued his old habits until he developed such a reputation that the lifeforms around him began to cower and hide the moment they caught wind of his presence.

Tiring of his travels, one day, the monarch of stars decided that he would establish a sura empire, then use the resources and manpower such an empire would have to search for this mysterious disaster-grade lifeform.

Thus he embarked on a path of conquest. Because his fists embodied those of a thousand beasts, because he manifested those beasts as he fought, the sura crowned him the beast king.

Slaughtering any enemy that got in his way, the monarch of stars quickly managed to establish a kingdom in his own right.

His scouts were unable to find any information about this serpent. The monarch of stars, displeased by their inefficiency, began to conquer more and more kingdoms in order to obtain more manpower.

As he continued his expansion, the monarch of stars' holdings grew into a sura empire, the empire of stars. When that occurred, the monarch of stars who was once the beast king gave himself his eponymous title, intended to represent his dominion over the entire realm.

Nevertheless, he continued searching for the mysterious serpent that had eluded him for so long. With countless scouts, his search finally bore fruit. That disaster-grade lifeform had returned to where he had initially found it.

Tempered by war, the monarch of stars believed that he was strong enough to challenge the serpent, that he could match the serpent's strength. He left to challenge the serpent, full of confidence, only to return to his empire barely clinging to life...

Chapter 514: Location of the Disaster-Grade Lifeform

Despite participating in countless battles, the monarch of stars' personal strength hadn't increased, and he was still no match for the disaster-grade lifeform.

Zhang Lie expected that this lifeform was rather strong even for disaster-grade lifeforms. Roughly speaking, the disaster-grade lifeforms of the second realm should be as strong as sura monarchs.

However, because disaster-grade lifeforms had particularly high resistance against physical attacks, they were generally more difficult to kill.

That said, the monarch of stars' armor was half-spiritual in nature, so the fact that the disaster-grade lifeform could defeat him so utterly suggested that it was strong even for a disaster-grade lifeform.

The monarch of stars returned to his empire dragging his defeated body along. After some recuperation, he again focused his entire attention on strengthening his body. As long as he could reach the realm of an asura, he would be able to defeat the disaster-grade lifeform.

At the same time, however, he began to feel weaker and weaker. He understood that he was far from reaching the realm of an asura, that there were bottlenecks in the development of the sura. Once he reached such a bottleneck, he would be unable to progress further—akin to hunters who had capped their gene fragments.

He didn't know how it was possible for the asura to be so strong given that they too were sura. In order to uncover their secrets, he dedicated himself to research.

Perhaps because of the thousands of bestial souls trapped within him, or because of his innate craziness, his research became more and more perverse. Once he realized that the essence of life was spiritual matter, he was nigh unstoppable.

The monarch of stars began to forget his original purpose. As he continued diving into research, he found that his mental state was beginning to deteriorate.

In the meantime, he had taken on several godsons. He gave his treasured blade to the first, divesting himself from its madness-inducing nature, and then handed several fruits of his research to the others, in hopes that they would be able to develop it further.

He extracted part of his soul and transferred part of the negative emotions he had incurred over.

In theory, by that point, the monarch of stars should have been freed from the influence of his thousand bestial souls, but in truth, his madness had already seeped into his bones and couldn't be dispelled any longer.

The pinnacle of his research was a compass powered by spiritual matter. He was confident that, the moment he produced this compass, he would have strength on par with that of an asura. To this end, he was willing to sacrifice millions of souls.

By that time, the monarch of stars had yet to realize that he had walked down a forbidden path, but it was already too late.

He spent almost two decades charting his path forward, provoking three sura empires into attacking the empire of stars, destroying them, then sacrificing their people for the compass of his dreams.

The monarch of stars succeeded in this objective, encountered Zhang Lie, and was swiftly trounced by Zhang Lie.

As Sun Mengmeng flipped through the newest pages to the monarch of stars' autobiography, a note fell out. Zhang Lie picked it up and found, to his delight, a list of known disaster-grade lifeforms and their locations.

Before finding the first love of the monarch of stars, the scouts of the empire of stars had explored much of the second realm and discovered the locations of quite a number of peak- and disaster-grade lifeforms.

The monarch of stars had patiently gone through all his scouts' reports to compile this information, and Zhang Lie would now reap the rewards.

To be frank, by the time the monarch of stars acquired his compass, he had gained the strength to defeat his first love. By then, however, he had long since forgotten about the serpent.

Just as Zhang Lie was going through the monarch of stars' treasury, the Zenith Dojo was undergoing a sneak attack.

News of the clash between Renhuang and the empire of stars had spread far and wide across the Internet. However, the participants in that fight were still in the capital of the empire of stars, and no word of their victory had been leaked to the public.

As such, the raiders who had planned to attack the Zenith Dojo made their move right then and there.

The area around the Zenith Dojo was densely guarded by the Chinese military, and the raiders couldn't hide for long. The longer they waited, the more likely it would be for them to be found.

As an explosion rang out, a group of black-clad raiders rushed into the Zenith Dojo, but the dojo was prepared for them. The moment they rushed in, Jun Jiuxiao rushed forward with his [Blade of Heavenly Wind], cutting one raider apart in a matter of moments.

Night descended on the dojo. Ye Xianchen attacked with [Nightmarish Strike], decimating the raiders. Hong Xiao yelled out as a black sun rose behind his back and a white moon by his feet. He charged forward, downing every raider he encountered.

Behind them, Lin Xiu, Zhang Hong, and a subordinate of Martial Sage Hong Tianqi stepped out of the shadows, glancing at the raiders as though they were clowns.

It was evident that word of their supposedly covert operation had leaked; they were under the watchful eye of the staff of the Zenith Dojo this entire time.

Zhang Lie only had one sister, and he would protect her with his life. A plan as foolhardy as kidnapping Zhang Hanxiang to control Zhang Lie... Amurong had to be crazed with anger to do such a thing.

The raiders clearly didn't expect that Team Zenith would be so hard to take down. There were countless expert hunters within the dojo which easily took down the raiding team.

The leader of the raiders was completely flummoxed. He had just received an important piece of news—"Renhuang was victorious against the empire of stars. Retreat immediately!"

His eyes bulged, and his mind went blank. How could Renhuang succeed against all odds? Its opponent was a sura empire, the strongest of all sura empires! Wasn't it too late to retreat now?!

They were already surrounded by a group of Chinese soldiers. With Lin Xiu and the others around, the raiders surrendered without a hitch.

This was nothing more than a minor interlude to the Zenith Dojo of the present; they didn't even feel that it was worth informing Zhang Lie about.

It took Zhang Lie a few days to find all the information that the monarch of stars possessed about disaster-grade lifeforms. Within that time, the forces of Renhuang had taken control over the empire of stars' capital.

Thanks to the generous "aid" of the monarch of stars, the empire of stars was unable to defend against Renhuang's takeover. Because the three neighboring sura kingdoms had also been sacrificed, Renhuang's forces didn't even have to worry about attacks from the neighboring kingdoms.

They had plenty of time to search through the capital and inspect the nearby cities.

The sura within the capital had left behind countless assets when they perished—gold and gems, special ores and minerals, spiritual herbs and plants. These ores and minerals were particularly valued by the rock spirits, and could be used to hire a band of rock giants as mercenaries. Meanwhile, the herbs and plants could be traded to the Yeluo or the wood spirits for special potions.

The monarch of stars had left behind a whole city of treasures.

Zhang Lie and the other members of Team Zenith, who had taken control of the treasury, didn't stop the hunters and reinforcements from sacking the capital.

There were far too many miscellaneous trinkets scattered about the residential districts and the like. To be frank, Zhang Lie and the others didn't feel it worth their time to hunt for treasure, but the hunters at the scene felt differently.

Zhang Lie had a few trusted hunters and the leader of the rock spirits maintain order within the capital and guard the monarch of stars' study before motioning for his team to follow him to the monarch of stars' treasury, where the monarch's most valuable possessions were kept.

Thanks to the elder, Zhang Lie knew precisely where this treasury was, as well as what booby traps lay in wait for him...

Chapter 515: Twelve Stelae

There were three doors within the treasure, one gold, one silver, and one studded with jewels.

The silver door had already been opened. The silver door represented knowledge, and it contained records of the monarch of stars' research—on the soul, on spiritual matter, on blood, on rare and special techniques, and even on the construction of the compass that he possessed.

The elder had retrieved important information from within this treasury, which he handed to the remaining fighters of the empire of stars. Zhang Lie had killed those fighters and subsequently claimed that information for himself.

The gold door represented time. All things were mutable, but time was eternal, just like gold.

On the gold door was engraved a large grandfather's clock. Although the surface of the door looked golden and resplendent, it wasn't made of gold, but rather a rare and precious gold-like material. The door was particularly heavy and difficult to open; only the monarch of stars knew the proper means of opening it.

"Stay back!" Zhang Lie punched the door, which caved in easily. He knew roughly what was behind the door. Judging that it was unlikely for the contents of the vault to be destroyed, he opened the door by force.

A purple haze spread toward the members of Team Zenith from within. Zhang Lie warned, "Beware of the poison."

The members of Team Zenith moved even further away. "Captain, give us some time to prepare before you just break in like that!"

"There's no need." Zhang Lie waved an arm, dispelling the purple haze.

The vault that was revealed behind the golden door was rather expansive, and it contained twelve steles spaced some distance apart from each other.

Each stele was saturated with an aura of the mysterious force of time. Upon each stele was engraved an unknown runic script, filled with mystery. The steles were uniformly black, whereas the runic script glittered in gold. It was thick in certain patches, thin in others, sometimes engraved in deep strokes and sometimes in light.

What meaning did the script have? Perhaps there was meaning to be extracted from it, but from a careful inspection, the script didn't seem to possess any meaning. The engraving was haphazard and followed no rules; it looked almost like a child's scribbles.

The elder's memories contained a little information about these steles. Apparently, the monarch of stars had obtained the steles rather unexpectedly, and their origin had something to do with the asura.

Thinking about the techniques that the monarch of stars and Suiyue had displayed, Zhang Lie came to a sudden realization. "These have to be the steles that impart a time-manipulation technique!"

Quite a few of the sura had tried to glean something from these stelae, but the only ones who had succeeded were Suiyue and the monarch of stars. Furthermore, the nature of that technique differed drastically between them.

The monarch of stars gained the ability to speed up time locally around him, whereas Suiyue gained the ability to reverse time.

Different people understood time differently, but for an ordinary lifeform to grasp the power of temporal manipulation required a heavy price. All such techniques came at a cost to their user; the monarch of stars would age faster when he used the technique, whereas Suiyue would lose the time and experience he had acquired.

In the end, by overusing the technique, Suiyue had ended up as a baby. Even the Yeluo chieftain didn't know what to do with him, so he was temporarily being kept within Renhuang's palace. He would be studied and observed carefully during that period of time. As yet, he seemed to be no different from an ordinary sura child.

Zhang Lie had always been very interested in the monarch of stars' time-manipulation technique, and it had caused him no small bit of trouble in his fight against the monarch of stars.

As he glanced at the stelae, he was suddenly overtaken by a strange falling sensation.

Zhang Lie saw his past life and his present life simultaneously. His present life was far more successful, of course, but the two lives nevertheless seemed to overlap.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Zhang Lie boasted the strongest affinity to time than any other hunter of Earth. As a reincarnator, he had experienced two lives for himself, and he was particularly cognizant of the passing of time and his lack thereof.

He could remember his past life vividly, as though it had only happened yesterday; but he had no choice but to live in the present.

As Zhang Lie continued to stare at the stelae, the members of Team Zenith walked into the vault. They treated the stelae as a riddle and fell into deep thought. Suddenly, Fang Yi began to wave his spear as he stared at one stele.

Sun Xiaowu, taken aback, asked, "What are you doing?"

Fang Yi frowned. "I can't help but feel as though the engravings on these stelae look like spear techniques."

Yang Ze nodded. "It's possible that the answer to these stelae will be different for each of us. Perhaps we should even consider circulating our genetic energy following these engravings?"

Hong Xi rolled her eyes. "According to you, maybe I should treat these engravings as arrays, instead."

Zhou Ying took out a sketchpad and began to sketch the stelae.

Hong Xi glanced at her in surprise. "I wasn't being serious!"

Zhou Ying shook her head. "It's not that. I'm planning on capturing an image of these stelae so that I can think more about them when we're back in Renhuang. This was how I always studied as a child, after all.

After a moment of silent contemplation, Zhang Lie opened his eyes again. He felt as though he was only moments away from a revelation, but he wasn't quite there yet.

Sun Mengmeng suddenly called out, "Look at those small stelae! It looks like the monarch of stars and Suiyue recorded their thoughts there upon coming to their own revelations."

Beside the twelve large stelae were two much smaller ones, on which the monarch of stars and Suiyue had left their own interpretation of time to help other sura come to their own revelations.

Zhang Lie glanced at the two tablets.

To the monarch of stars, time was a river that couldn't be traversed backwards, and people were canoes on that river always heading forward in time. The monarch's revelation was that he could speed up his canoe and pass through the river of time more rapidly. To him, the engravings on the stelae represented how he should circulate his blood to speed himself up.

This was a revelation and mechanism for that revelation uniquely suited to the monarch of stars; no other boasted such a strong constitution that they could do the same without injury. Any normal person who tried to copy the monarch of stars would surely have their heart explode.

Suiyue's revelation was fundamentally different. Time was like an hourglass. It was impossible to change the direction of time in general, but for a little speck of sand to suddenly reverse its trajectory and fall upwards was difficult to notice and had little effect on the whole.

People might not be able to reverse time as a whole, but they might be able to reverse their own passage through it.

Suiyue's understanding involved projecting his soul out of the passage of time, then manipulating and reversing his physical body.

Suiyue's interpretation was abstract and difficult to comprehend, but he had succeeded in realizing that revelation. Only now could the members of Team Zenith understand Suiyue's genius; if he hadn't met with the members of Team Zenith, and if he had had enough time to grow, he would surely have surpassed the monarch of stars. If he walked this long road to its end, he could well become the second known asura.

Neither the monarch of stars nor Suiyue's revelations would be directly relevant to the hunters present: the monarch of stars' was impossible for a human body, whereas Suiyue's was too abstract. Everyone's revelation was uniquely their own.

That said, the common theme of the two revelations was to begin with their own interpretation of time, to place it in synecdoche...

Chapter 516: The First Revelation

The monarch of stars made time a river; Suiyue, an hourglass. Their perception of time was different, and the technique they received was likewise different.

For Zhang Lie, time was a clock. His past life was the night; his current life, the day. A clock displayed only twelve hours of time—when the clock hands pointed at '12', it could refer either to midday or midnight.

Zhou Ying had already finished sketching out all twelve stelae, and she was trying to piece together her revelation by putting the twelve stelae in certain orientations.

As he looked at what Zhou Ying was doing, Zhang Lie suddenly had a thought. He walked forward, lifting up the heavy stelae as though they were as light as feathers. He arranged the twelve stelae

into a dodecagon, each marking one hour of a clock. The engravings on each stele continued seamlessly from one to the other.

"Just like this."

Each hour had its own unique engraving, but each hour also simultaneously represented two times at once. His past life was independent from his present life. He lived in the present; he lived in the past.

Unlike Suiyue, Zhang Lie infused his revelation into his blades rather than use it to strengthen a mental image. After all, at his core, he was a fighter.

Slowly, he opened his eyes.

A pair of blades appeared in his hands, the sword Guicang and the saber Hanguang, the weapon-type post-peak-grade soulshards he had obtained from the golden rocs. One represented the day, and the other the night, always twelve hours apart.

As the sword shot forward, Zhang Lie appeared by the wall of the vault in the blink of an eye. The members of Team Zenith stared at him in shock.

In the past, if they concentrated and strained themselves, they could barely see Zhang Lie's motion as he drew his blade and thrust forward. This time, however, they couldn't catch even the barest hint of movement.

If Zhang Lie wanted to kill any of them, none of them would have been able to react in time; the same would be true for any enemy below the level of a sura monarch.

Zhang Lie slashed forward with his saber, gleaming with the complexity and majesty of the passage of time. Where the strike landed, the vault which the monarch of stars had commissioned with great effort and expense began to decay.

The members of Team Zenith turned to their captain with shock and awe. "Have you already developed your revelation to this extent, Captain?"

"More or less." Zhang Lie had just barely managed to evoke the sensations and concept he was going for, but it remained to incorporate the most important of his revelations: his reincarnation. This was yet an incomplete technique, but Zhang Lie was in no rush.

Sun Mengmeng asked, "What's your new technique called, Captain?"

"For now, it's only a simple infusion of my revelation into my blades, and I haven't developed it into a full technique yet."

"What side effects does it have?" Yang Ze followed up.

Zhang Lie frowned as he scanned his body, then smiled. "As far as I can tell, it hasn't affected my body at all."

Zhang Lie's bladework was somewhat weaker than the techniques that the monarch of stars and Suiyue had developed, but he was certain that, once he incorporated the notion of reincarnation into it, it would become far stronger than either of those two examples.

Upon seeing Zhang Lie's display, Fang Yi seemed to get closer to his revelation, but it was still somewhat hazy in his mind.

"Captain, could you describe your revelation?"

Zhang Lie described his analogy, though he had to keep his reincarnation a secret. That was the secret closest to his heart, that he couldn't reveal even to his trusted confidantes.

Upon hearing Zhang Lie's recounting, Fang Yi sat cross-legged on the floor of the vault, his spear lying beside him. The other members of Team Zenith returned to their own contemplation or watched him quietly.

"Time flies quick as lightning, and old age comes for us all."

Fang Yi's eyes suddenly opened wide as he thrust forward with his spear, as quick as lightning. Black thunder skimmed past the members of Team Zenith, and a swathe of Fang Yi's hair turned white.

"Time passes like wind, leaving naught but smoke behind."

His spear blurred like a cloud of smoke before shooting forward once more, draped in Fang Yi's revelations, intent, and meaning.

As he leapt backwards, a clone appeared where he stood, mirroring his movements action for action.

When Zhang Lie asked for the name of his new technique, Fang Yi replied, "[Born of Lightning, Swallowed by the Wind]."

Fang Yi's techniques were built on the foundation that Zhang Lie had taught him, but they were uniquely his own. The first part of the technique would cause his opponents to decay, but it would also affect him to a lesser degree. The second part of the technique spawned a clone, a temporal echo of his own actions.

Fang Yi was certain that combining the two parts of the technique more seamlessly would dramatically increase its impact, but this wasn't something he could achieve as yet.

Li Feng again asked the same question—what were the drawbacks?

Fang Yi replied, "[Born of Lightning] ages you, whereas [Swallowed by the Wind] might destabilize your memories."

"Destabilize your memories?"

Fang Yi thought for a moment. "To be more precise, it destabilizes your perception of time. When my temporal echo was present, it was difficult for me to figure out which was the true me—the one who had struck first, or the one who was about to strike."

Zhang Lie hummed. "The manifestation of your echo leads to a duplication of your memories and senses."

It wasn't a particularly serious drawback, and the technique was certainly worthwhile.

Upon seeing Fang Yi's success, the other members of Team Zenith tried even harder to glean what knowledge they could from the stelae, but no matter what they tried, they didn't have any success. The only ones who managed something were Zhang Lie and Fang Yi.

Time and space were fundamental principles, and it was fiendishly difficult to comprehend and incarnate even part of it.

Fang Yi's combat abilities were on par with the rest of Team Zenith's, but he had unparalleled talent in comprehending, understanding, refining, and constructing new techniques in both Zhang Lie's past and current lives...

Chapter 517: An Overnight Fortune

Once he finished looking over all twelve stelae, Zhang Lie headed toward the door studded with jewels while the members of Team Zenith remained in the room of gold.

The jewel-studded door blazed with color whenever a beam of light struck it, and it would surely fetch a high price at least with the rock spirits—though the rock spirits didn't have much money in their own right.

Zhang Lie again used his lockpicking technique—his fist—to break open the door. Within the vault was a pedestal. Zhang Lie walked closer to see a rainbow-colored scale on top of it, as beautiful as a gemstone in its own right.

It was evident that the scale had come from the disaster-grade lifeform that even the monarch of stars had been unable to take down. There were materials from quite a few more genetic lifeforms within the vault, and Zhang Lie even found a few caged soulbeasts—perhaps prototypes that the monarch of stars had been working on.

Zhang Lie had the members of Team Zenith come over and kill them all, but, unfortunately, no soulshards condensed.

The news of Renhuang's victory spread across the sura kingdoms before it reached the world federation.

Many of the sura had been paying attention to the conflict between the seven-kingdom coalition and the humans. They had expected that the tiny Renhuang would be crushed in a matter of moments, but they were dumbstruck to learn that Renhuang had actually defeated the coalition. Not only that, the empire of stars had even sent eighty percent of its forces toward Renhuang.

The sura couldn't help but become even more curious about this mysterious Renhuang. No sura kingdom would dare to cross a sura empire, and especially not the empire of stars—but a small human settlement had done so!

The more seriously the sura looked into the matter, the more shocked they became.

Was this really a human settlement? How could they even have offended a sura empire to begin with? They belonged to two entirely different realms of existences!

It was only with further research that the sura determined that Renhuang was a settlement composed of many races. Even so, its governor had to be crazy to offend a sura empire. Was he hoping for his city to be destroyed?

The sura were even more curious as to why the empire of stars had to send 80% of its forces out to deal with such a tiny city. Was there something unusual about it that required the monarch of stars to expend so much in terms of resources?

What secrets could be hidden within that tiny settlement?

Several of the sura empires dug deeper into the mystery of Renhuang and found out that it had managed to raid Xuechi.

The sura were alarmed. To have taken down the godson of the monarch of stars—no wonder the empire of stars was reacting so disproportionately!

Meanwhile, the forces of Renhuang had finished raiding the capital of the empire of stars, and they learned what it was like to become wealthy overnight.

Zhang Lie distributed the contents of the treasury according to each hunter's contribution in the battle.

Of course, those who truly contributed were the hunters of Team Zenith and the representatives of the four prime races, but everyone would receive something for their troubles. In Renhuang's moment of direst need, despite knowing that they might end up sacrificing their lives, reinforcements had nevertheless appeared. Zhang Lie would remember what they had done.

Many of Renhuang's forces decided that they would participate in the rest of Renhuang's wars and battles no matter what.

The empire of stars was simply too affluent a target to ignore. After defeating three sura empires, it possessed a treasury containing four sura empires' wealth.

Even after distributing the spoils of war, there were countless treasures remaining within the treasury—rewarding a hundred thousand fighters had only consumed about 5% of its accumulated wealth.

Zhang Lie mulled things over for a moment before deciding to bring the forces through the nearby cities of the empire of stars. After all, it wasn't every day that they managed to take down a sura empire, and they might as well ransack the nearby cities as well as the capital.

It was only then that the sura learned of the news of the empire of stars' defeat—the empire of stars, the strongest of the known sura empires!

Even three sura empires working in tandem had lost against the empire of stars! Who could believe that it had been destroyed by a puny human settlement?

Where had the monarch of stars gone? He was heralded as the sura closest to becoming an asura, and surely he wouldn't watch his own empire fall to ruins.

The sura began dispatching scouts everywhere, and it was only then that they learned of the Yeluo poison that Renhuang had employed.

A rare few fighters from the seven-kingdom coalition had made it out alive and escaped back to sura lands.

A few more survivors had appeared from the fight against the empire of stars. No matter how strong the poison, the hundred thousand troops of Renhuang couldn't expect to chase down all three million sura from the empire of stars. A rare few survivors had managed to escape, bringing news of destruction to the nearby sura kingdoms.

Upon learning of the terrible news, the sura were all enraged.

"We can't allow them to produce more of this poison!"

"No matter what, we have to destroy any trace of this poison."

"The sura can never rest easy with this poison around—Renhuang has to be eradicated at all costs!"

The sura's fear gave rise to anger; they worried that their position as the hegemon of the sura realm would be shaken.

Even the empire of stars had been destroyed by Renhuang because of this poison—and the empire of stars was the strongest known sura territory!

When the other sura empires learned of the news, they too fell silent. They knew far more of what the monarch of stars had done than did their ordinary citizens; the fall of the empire of stars might have been partially Renhuang's fault, but the monarch of stars had dealt it the killing blow himself.

Nevertheless, they had to treat Renhuang seriously. Despite what the monarch of stars had done, Renhuang had managed to defeat an army composed of 80% of the monarch of stars' forces.

In the end, the monarchs of each sura empire would convene, then begin a mass conscription of troops for war—but that was all to happen in the future.

Meanwhile, the forces of Renhuang headed back to Renhuang, their bellies full, their storage pouches filled to bursting, carrying wagons after wagons of treasure behind them. The rock spirits were the happiest among them all—the ores, minerals, gems, and jewels they had consumed over the past few days would last them for almost a decade.

Chapter 518: Conquerors of the Sura

The reason Renhuang's forces had to resort to carting around their spoils in wagons was because they had filled up their storage pouches to the brim—yes, none of the hundred thousand fighters had any space remaining in their storage pouches!

In the end, they had no choice but to resort to carrying around their treasures as though they were troops from a medieval period.

The treasures of four sura empires were concentrated among the forces of Renhuang.

The rock spirits had consumed such a great deal of ores and minerals that they had become picky and fussy, refusing to consume anything that didn't contain precious gold.

According to the leader of the rock spirits, the rock spirits had consumed too much in too short a period, and they needed some time for their bodies to digest it properly.

Regular rocks and minerals were far too mundane for the forces of Renhuang to bring back, and all sorts of herbs and plants were tossed along the roadside.

Zhang Lie invited the reinforcements from the four prime races to return to Renhuang with him for a celebratory feast. None of the races refused; indeed, they were even feeling somewhat guilty that they had reaped the spoils of war without contributing much to the battle against the empire of stars.

Renhuang's forces made it safely back to Renhuang, with no deterrent or obstacle in their way.

When the sentries at Renhuang's walls saw the triumphant forces, they alerted the Yeluo chieftain at once, who rushed out of the city to welcome them home. The outcome of the battle was obvious given their happy smiles and generally jovial mood.

Zhang Lie walked up to the Yeluo chieftain. "A complete victory," he summarized.

The Yeluo chieftain and the sentries on the city walls knelt as he approached. "Congratulations on your successful campaign, Governor!"

Zhang Lie extended a hand to help the Yeluo chieftain up, then brushed the dust from his robes. "You've worked hard as well."

The Yeluo chieftain replied respectfully, "No, no, it wasn't hard at all. We've not had any trouble while all of you were gone—you must all have had it harder."

"Here, something for you."

Zhang Lie clapped his hands. The fighters of Renhuang unloaded wagon after wagon, revealing gems and jewels, treasures and artifacts, plants and spiritual herbs. The Yeluo chieftain's eyes bulged at the sight.

Amidst the herbal aura the spiritual herbs and plants gave off, amidst the resplendent light from the gems and jewels that dazzled the eyes, the Yeluo chieftain could almost visualize how Renhuang would develop over the next few years.

The herbal aura was strong enough to attract the wood spirits over, as well as the other sentries guarding the city in the absence of Renhuang's forces.

Zhang Lie waved his arms as he shouted, "Let all of Renhuang know that we've defeated the empire of stars! We return triumphant!"

The hunters' forums had been relatively quiet in absence of news from Renhuang.

"Hasn't it been quite a few days? Why don't we know anything about the outcome of the battle between Renhuang and the empire of stars yet?"

The forces of Renhuang had had to travel a great distance to get to the empire of stars, and they were the only ones who could inform the hunters of Renhuang's victory. With no access to the forums in their own right, they hadn't been able to spread the word—until now.

"What news do you need? It's evident that they've been destroyed to the last!"

No one viewed Renhuang's advance favorably; it was almost a given that Renhuang would lose. Their opponent was the empire of stars, after all, the strongest of the known sura kingdoms, and they had sent three million sura against Renhuang.

"With the four prime races helping out, surely at least some of the troops would make it out alive?"

"It's hard to say. They're fighting against three million sura, three million!"

"It's obvious that Renhuang will lose—the question is, by how much."

"Isn't Zhang Lie an idiot? Rather than defending his city, he chose to attack with a fraction of the sura's forces!"

"Renhuang's walls wouldn't have done anything against the sura. Attack or not, the outcome would have been the same."

"At the very least, Zhang Lie's a hero for daring to resist the sura invasion. We should commemorate that, if nothing else."

"You idiot—don't you mean that he's a fool for deliberately provoking the sura?"

Suddenly, an urgent announcement sent the hunters gasping.

[After a month-long campaign, Renhuang's forces return successful in battle. This is a grand victory for Renhuang, the grandest victory for mankind!]

"Are you dreaming? Renhuang, victorious?!"

The post continued, "We defeated three million sura and made our way into the empire of stars' lands, where we sacked their capital."

The poster was one of the hunters who had participated in the battle. The moment he returned to Renhuang, he left via teleportation array, informed his family of his safety and well-being, and began posting on the forums.

"What? The opponent has three million forces—surely the fight would drag out for a few months at least, if you wanted to defeat them all! And you claim to have taken only a month to do so? Are you a fool, or do you think we're all fools?!"

"Claiming to have defeated three million sura and sacking the empire of stars' capital... you must be living in a dream! Are you sure you're alright?"

The poster defended himself. "What I've relayed is the incontrovertible truth. If you don't believe me, you can do some research for yourself—or come visit Renhuang or walk into the empire of stars' lands. It's safe now—we've taken care of all the sura we've seen."

Within the dimensional world, it was impossible to use regular technology, and there was no way to provide irrefutable evidence.

Just as more hunters were preparing to mock the poster, another hunter replied, "As a member of Renhuang's forces, I can testify that he isn't lying. We beat the sura, and we beat the empire of stars!"

"I'm also from Renhuang. It really does feel like I've been living in a dream all along."

"I'm from Renhuang too. The empire of stars is gone, and the champion of mankind, Zhang Lie, killed the monarch of stars himself!"

Despite more and more posts, the other hunters refused to believe this new reality.

"Ridiculous—the monarch of stars is known as the sura closest to becoming an asura! How could Zhang Lie have killed him?"

"We've witnessed it with our own eyes—all of us did!"

"I couldn't believe my eyes either, but it's true!"

"Zhang Lie possesses the ability to kill the monarch of stars—perhaps he's already on the same level as an asura!"

"I'm a human that was rescued from imprisonment within the empire of stars. I can verify that Renhuang really did destroy the empire—he's saved us all!"

That last reply was from an account that hadn't been active for over twenty years.

Chapter 519: Resource Distribution

Rescuing hunters from the sura certainly sounded like something Renhuang had done in the past. As more and more imprisoned hunters returned to Earth, to their families that had given up all hope of ever seeing them again, the tide of the verbal battle turned in favor of Renhuang.

One person's words could have been easily dismissed, but with so many people speaking up for Renhuang...

The hunters on the forums gradually began to believe that Renhuang really might have won a victory after all. Some hunters began to investigate, and the truth easily surfaced.

The empire of stars was so massive that research on it wasn't particularly difficult. Word of what had happened in the empire of stars was already spreading among the sura, and it would reach the other races sooner or later.

The destruction of the empire of stars wasn't something that could be hidden for long, and the sura had no intention of hiding it.

When word finally reached the first hunters, the tone in the forums shifted immediately. No one dared to besmirch Zhang Lie again.

Zhang Lie naturally didn't know about what was happening on the forums; even if he did, he wouldn't have cared. Renhuang was hosting another celebratory banquet, and a festive atmosphere spread throughout all of Renhuang.

Everyone in Renhuang was happy—not just because of their victory over the empire of stars, but because of the spoils they had reaped.

Zhang Lie specially slaughtered a peak-grade lifeform as the centerpiece of the hunters' feast. Unfortunately, the peak-grade lifeforms that they had obtained from the empire of stars weren't yet mature and ready to be consumed, or he would have slaughtered them all.

Luckily, Zhang Lie had been rearing a few peak-grade lifeforms for just such an event.

Sun Mengmeng reported, "Captain, we've prepared the same cauldron as last time."

Zhang Lie ordered that all the peak-grade lifeforms in the farm be slaughtered and replaced with the new ones that they had acquired from the empire of stars.

All the hunters of Renhuang gathered at its central plaza.

There, the Yeluo had finished their preparations. Zhang Lie stood on the stage as he infused genetic energy into his voice, which echoed as he spoke, "First, my heartfelt congratulations to everyone—for witnessing history, and for partaking in its creation!"

Huge cheers resounded from the crowd, echoing in the skies, marking mankind's success and triumph.

Zhang Lie continued stirring up the crowds. "Before the battle, I told you all that it was a good thing that the empire of stars attacked—and now you can see that my words were entirely truthful! We stand here, in Renhuang, at the forefront of history! We were the first city to ever destroy a sura empire, the first alien race to ever destroy a sura empire—all of us here will be immortalized in legend!"

The fighters' morale, already high after the surprising victory, rose to its zenith.

"Renhuang's success is due to all of you here, all your hard work, so I'd like to invite all of you to partake in this feast in gratitude for your effort. Eat whatever you want—I promise you you'll all go home with your bellies full!"

The entire city shouted Zhang Lie's name.

As the peak-grade meat stewed, the entire plaza began to fill with the aroma of meat.

Once everything was ready, Zhang Lie motioned for the members of Team Zenith to maintain order as the crowds surged toward the food.

The hunters squeezed and shoved each other, as did the members of the four prime races, followed leisurely by the Yeluo, crag eagles, and wood spirits. The rock spirits had no interest or ability to consume the meat broth, so they stood by the outer border of the plaza.

Even so, the line of hunters waiting for the food snaked all throughout the plaza and toward its outskirts.

"Praise Renhuang!"

The hunters who had managed to get their food early immediately began to eat by the wooden tables that had been laid out.

Under ordinary circumstances, they would never have been able to consume such high-quality food. Despite the danger and uncertainty of the battle, they had ultimately succeeded in taking down a sura empire and sacked centuries' worth of treasure from their capital.

The empire of stars was the strongest of the sura empires, and its treasuries were comparable to three other sura empires.

In other words, echoing what Yun Bing had once said, it was sufficient wealth and resources to propel Renhuang forward by a hundred years of development; once its researchers had fully digested the research materials, it might even be worth three hundred years instead.

After the banquet, Zhang Lie began dividing up the spoils of war on the spot.

Everyone present, including both the forces that had participated in the battle and those that had stayed behind to protect Renhuang, would be eligible.

In some sense, it was like investing in the stock market—now that the war was over, Renhuang would pay out dividends. The four prime races were the ones that stood the most to gain.

They had invested in Renhuang since before the battle started, and they would each rake a thirtieth of the profits from the battle. A thirtieth didn't seem like much, but given the magnitude of the empire of stars' treasury, it was enough wealth to build a city from the ground up.

The herbs that were immediately usable were handed to the Yeluo chieftain, and those that weren't were left to the wood spirits to cultivate. Ores, gems, jewels, and minerals were ceded to the rock spirits.

A few remaining oddities, trinkets, and other treasures were kept in Renhuang's national treasury, filling it up to the brim.

The Yeluo chieftain smiled beatifically as he looked at all the resources that Renhuang had gained.

"These resources might be significant, but they're not the best of the treasures we claimed from the empire of stars," Zhang Lie reminded him.

The Yeluo chieftain stared at Zhang Lie agape. What could beat these resources that had taken even the empire of stars centuries to amass?

Zhang Lie handed over the research materials that he had claimed from the monarch of stars' study.

He didn't dare cart them around or leave it for anyone else to handle—the research went straight into his own potbellied toad pouch. They were so precious as to be worth more than even the twelve stela of time.

The Yeluo chieftain's eyes bulged. His gaze turned scorching, and he gaped at the papers Zhang Lie deposited in his hands without fully believing that they were real.

He murmured in shock, "Th-These will speed up our development by centuries!"

The research institute that Zhang Lie had ordered to be built was currently specialized for herbalism, and it lacked significant research on other topics of interest in the second realm.

With the research materials from the empire of stars as its foundation, Renhuang would be able to reach the frontier of modern knowledge much more quickly, and it would even be able to evolve beyond it.

The Yeluo chieftain flipped carefully through the papers, particularly those pertaining to herbalism. The empire of stars' centuries of work wasn't as specialized as the Yeluo clan's, but it was comprehensive and worthy of careful perusal.

Chapter 520: Arrival of the Three Races

On the other hand, the empire of stars' research on genetic lifeforms and their biology was so detailed that the Yeluo chieftain could hardly believe what he was reading.

The empire of stars was particularly advanced when it came to biological research both with regards to the sura and to genetic lifeforms at large, and it would certainly have synergy with the Yeluo's research into herbalism.

Much of the biological research had been performed by no less than the monarch of stars himself.

Zhang Lie said, "The empire of stars is far beyond us in terms of biological research. Do you think it's feasible that their grafting methods will be applicable to the hunters of Renhuang?"

The Yeluo chieftain perused the research materials for long moments. "The records are detailed, so learning how to perform the procedure won't be a problem. We don't have skilled specialists for such procedures, but our advances in herbalism should be able to make up for it. It's only a matter of time, and whether there are hunters brave enough to be willing to give it a try."

Zhang Lie thought it over for a moment. "It might be a risky endeavor, but I think some hunters will be willing to do it for augmented strength. Take any volunteers who are willing to give the procedure a try."

"I understand, Governor!"

"Will this research be useful?" Zhang Lie continued, handing the Yeluo chieftain the monarch of stars' work on souls and spiritual matter.

The Yeluo chieftain frowned as he scanned its contents. "Spiritual matter? Soulshards are formed from condensation of spiritual essence, another facet of spiritual matter... the researcher responsible for this had to be a once-in-a-lifetime genius," he murmured.

Lunacy and genius were two sides of the same coin, after all.

"Governor, do you know who authored this work?" If it were possible, the Yeluo chieftain wanted to meet this researcher for himself. It would be a waste of talent to kill him or to leave him among the sura; he should be brought back to Renhuang at any cost.

"It was the monarch of stars."

"The monarch of stars?!"

"That's right. Well? Will this research be useful?"

The Yeluo chieftain chuckled bitterly. "I can't say. These notes were written by a genius researcher, but I can hardly claim to be one such. It doesn't look too difficult to comprehend, but I'm not sure if I'll be able to make practical use of it. If you don't mind me being honest, I'm not sure anyone in Renhuang could."

"It's a shame, then."

Zhang Lie felt as though he had acquired the rights to a gold mine without being able to mine gold from it. Spiritual essence was truly a mysterious quantity; space, time, and the soul represented three of the deepest subjects of research in the entirety of the second realm.

The Yeluo chieftain continued, "If you want to pursue research on the soul, Governor, it's not entirely impossible. None among the Yeluo are capable of such a feat for the moment, but we can hand this task to our descendants. Now that Renhuang is flush with resources, I think we should build a facility to nurture our youth."

"A school, you mean?" Zhang Lie asked the chieftain. "How did you learn about schools?"

The Yeluo chieftain smiled. "I didn't know about these schools initially. It was only through a chance conversation with Miss Yun Bing that I learned about the existence of such facilities and the military. I think building a school in Renhuang should be of utmost importance, but Miss Yun rejected my suggestion out of hand given that we didn't have enough resources. Education is a long-term investment, after all."

Indeed, education was a long-term investment that would take immense effort and wouldn't produce any results in the short term.

To be frank, by the time an academy was established and running smoothly, Zhang Lie and the rest of Team Zenith might have advanced to the third realm already.

However, there were certainly many benefits to developing the next generation of Renhuang hunters; at the very least, Zhang Hanxiang would be able to benefit greatly from whatever investments into Renhuang's infrastructure that Zhang Lie made now.

"I'll consider this carefully. Right now, we don't have enough members of the younger generation in Renhuang to make this a priority, but I'll certainly discuss this with Yun Bing."

Just then, Yun Bing rushed toward Zhang Lie and the Yeluo chieftain. Zhang Lie turned toward her with a smile. "Ah, wonderful timing, Yun Bing! I was just mentioning you to the Yeluo chieftain."

"I apologize for interrupting, Zhang Lie, but there are representatives of three alien races here to see you!"

"Representatives from three alien races? Where are they from?"

"I don't know. They're respectively from the Lightborne, Goldherald, and Bluemoon clans, and their clan leaders are seeking an audience with you."

Zhang Lie frowned. "I've never heard of these races."

Just then, however, the Yeluo chieftain interrupted, "I've heard of them over the course of my travels."

These are races that the sura have been suppressing quite harshly lately, and the Lightborne were almost hunted to extinction because of the sura. They had no choice but to go into hiding, though I'm not sure what they could be doing here now..."

"Perhaps they're here to congratulate us for vanquishing the sura?" Yun Bing suggested.

"Well, there's one way to find out."

The world federation was shocked to learn that Zhang Lie's Renhuang had managed to vanquish no less than the empire of stars. This was impossible—it had never been done in history, and Zhang Lie had created a miracle!

Countless human hunters all over the galaxy puffed out their chests upon hearing of the news—no longer would the humans be like cattle to the sura. No, they would rise up and take control of the second realm!

Even more hunters were curious as to just how Renhuang and Zhang Lie had managed such a feat, and the hunters of Renhuang were happy to answer them.

"We all received a huge shock when the monarch of stars suddenly appeared before us."

"What? How could the monarch of stars appear right before all of you?"

Their assertions were met by stark disbelief.

"Right? I can barely believe it myself. He arrived even before his entire army did, but the champion of mankind, Zhang Lie, didn't seem to be startled at all, as though he had anticipated the monarch of stars' arrival."

Meanwhile, Zhang Lie agreed to the audience with the three clan leaders.

As expected, their biology was near-incomprehensible to humans.

The Lightborne, Goldheralds, and Bluemoon clans were from entirely different races. The Lightborne were wrapped in brilliant light, as though they were miniaturized suns. Apparently, their light was harmful to the sura, and they were targeted severely as a result.

The Goldheralds had bodies fashioned out of a golden alloy, and they too radiated golden light. Their heads were haloed, and golden wings sprouted from their backs. They were divided into four classes based on the composition of their bodies: the highest class, gold; the second, silver; the third, bronze; and the fourth, steel.

Zhang Lie was surprised to learn that such a small race nevertheless had four stark divisions.

The leader of the Goldheralds explained that the gold class currently consisted of him and his family; the silver class were their guards and some of their fighters; the bronze class were, by and large, ordinary citizens; and the steel class were the weakest of their lot.

Their composition didn't dictate their status in society, but it was a measure of their strength. In some sense, they were much like the rock spirits, who were able to grow stronger by consuming relevant ores. Furthermore, there was a class beyond gold, but none of the Goldheralds currently possessed that class.

With every generation, their composition would decay by one class.

After being expelled from contested territory by the sura, the Goldheralds were forced to leave their hometown. Once, they had consisted largely of golds and silvers, with bronzes and steels hardly anywhere to be seen, but their clash against the sura had prompted rapid deterioration among their ranks.