

U. Warlord 521

Chapter 521: Temporary Departure

The Bluemoon representative had blue skin and a pair of bright, lustrous dark eyes.

According to the Yeluo chieftain, the Bluemoon clan and Redmoon clan were known as particularly vengeful races. Any amount of disrespect was met with swift retribution in kind.

The Bluemoon representative glanced askance at the Yeluo chieftain, who immediately fell silent. If the Bluemoon representative were to maintain a grudge against him, he would never hear the end of it.

The representative smiled and said, "Compared to the Redmoon clan, we're actually rather mild. At the most, we'd poison you, not chase you to the ends of the realm."

Even Zhang Lie seemed rather taken aback by the Bluemoon representative's malicious smile.

The Bluemoon clan was as skilled at making poisons as the Yeluo clan.

"Thank you for introducing yourselves. I have just one question for you all—why have you come to Renhuang?"

The three representatives lowered their heads at the same time. The Lightborne representative stepped forward and formally requested, "Governor of Renhuang, we seek to join your city!"

"For what purpose?" Zhang Lie pressed. He didn't intend on allowing just anyone to join Renhuang.

"Because Renhuang is opposed to the sura, and it's the only known force that has managed to take down a sura empire."

The Lightborne were still being hunted down by the sura on sight, and it would be terribly difficult for them to survive in the second realm. As such, they sought to find shelter among one of the other races, but none would dare offend the sura by taking them in.

Fortunately, they were simply afraid of offending the sura rather than lackeys of the sura; indeed, many of the races of the second realm were dissatisfied with the sura's tyranny. It was thanks to these races that the Lightborne had even survived for so long—otherwise, the sura would long since have hunted them down to extinction.

The Goldherald representative also spoke up. The Goldheralds wanted to take revenge on the sura, but also to ally themselves with Renhuang. They needed quarries, which the sura monopolized in the second realm. The only other location which had plentiful ores and minerals was Renhuang. Without these ores, the Goldheralds would only get weaker generation by generation.

In truth, in the past few decades, they had already begun weakening dramatically.

Fortunately, the rock spirits were still digesting the resources they had amassed during the invasion of the empire of stars, and Renhuang had quite the supply of quarries at present.

That said, Zhang Lie didn't intend on offering these resources for free—the Goldheralds would have to offer something in exchange for them.

With the rock spirits temporarily immobilized as they digested their gains, there was plenty of labor opportunities for the Goldheralds. The rock spirits tended to be the ones who picked up dangerous hunting requests from the hunters' guild, and the Goldheralds would be reasonable substitutes for the task.

As for the Bluemoon clan, they wanted to join Renhuang because the sura had killed some of their clan members, and Renhuang was the most promising force inimical to the sura. Furthermore, they had heard of this unusual Yeluo poison that Renhuang had made use of, and believed that their specialty at poison would be useful to Renhuang.

Renhuang had already destroyed a sura empire, and it showed signs of being able to break the sura's hegemony over the second realm. The sura surely wouldn't give up on their position lightly, and there would be a showdown between the two forces sooner or later.

"Governor Zhang Lie, we hope you'll accede to our request!"

The three representatives each made their stance clear, and Zhang Lie agreed that a mutual partnership would be beneficial. After informing them of the primary laws within Renhuang, he instructed them to seek out Yun Bing.

On the hunters' forums, many hunters were still eagerly trying to find out just what had transpired during the fight between Zhang Lie and the monarch of stars, and the Renhuang hunters who had participated in the fight eagerly regaled them with what they had witnessed.

"I can't believe it either—the monarch of stars stepped into the battlefield himself, even before the rest of his army! It scared all of us stiff, 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.

"The monarch of stars is known to be the existence closest to an asura, and his appearance was absolutely appalling. He had four heads and eight arms, and was followed by all sorts of demonic shadows, each of which looked like a rampaging beast.

"When his aura hit me, I was struck dumb, moments from collapsing. Despite his horrifying appearance, the champion of mankind, Zhang Lie, stood stoically in front of all of us, his clothes fluttering in the wind. He unsheathed his twin blades and drew first blood..."

The bragging hunters spun a tale so fanciful it almost seemed to have come out of legend, and Zhang Lie's status took on a mythical quality.

"It was incredible! Even the legendary monarch of stars was no match for Zhang Lie. Except for an asura himself, no one could hope to best him!"

"The champion of mankind, Zhang Lie! He's never been defeated in the second realm, and I'm proud beyond belief to be a hunter of Renhuang. With him around, there's no need to worry about the fate of mankind!"

One of the hunters continued, "The fight between Zhang Lie and the monarch of stars shook heaven and earth. Zhang Lie ultimately claimed victory, but he paid a heavy price for it.

At the very end, the monarch of stars exploded into a mass of black tendrils, one that sought to swallow up our entire army. It was then that the members of Team Zenith stepped in, blocking their advance until Zhang Lie turned them all to ash with a slice of his sword."

"Zhang Lie is truly a paragon of a hunter, a role model for us all!"

"He's too handsome—Zhang Lie, I'm coming for you, I'm going to have your babies!"

The mockery and insults that had been heaped upon Zhang Lie had turned into the highest of praises.

As brilliant as his reputation now was, Zhang Lie paid these forums no mind.

After the celebration, Zhang Lie left Renhuang after just a few days in order to seek out the disaster-grade lifeforms whose information had been recorded in the monarch of stars' study. How could he rest? This information was so precious it had taken the empire of stars centuries to compile.

Disaster-grade lifeforms were so rare that meeting them generally required flukes of luck, but here was a premade list right for him. All the lifeforms recorded in the list were stronger than ordinary peak-grade lifeforms; even if they hadn't been disaster-grade lifeforms at the time, they might have ascended in the intervening centuries.

Zhang Lie had maxed out all his gene fragments save his disaster-grade ones, and his only remaining goals were to cap his disaster gene fragments and to kill an asura in hopes of going beyond the realm of disaster-grade genes.

Neither goal was straightforward, and he had to begin preparations immediately. Once matters within Renhuang were settled, he left the city with the list and a map in hand...

Chapter 522: An Official Interrogation

As for Renhuang, Zhang Lie didn't expect his departure to pose much of a problem. Renhuang's administrative staff was talented and multipurpose, and they could easily handle matters without him.

Within an office designated for the highest authorities of the world federation, Amurong sighed. Despite his manipulations, he hadn't ended up with the recipe for Zhang Lie's limit-breaking potions that he had been coveting all along.

These potions were enough to shake the entire Milky Way, but trying to wheedle them out of Zhang Lie now was an illogical decision. He had no choice but to postpone his plans.

However, it was already too late. With a huge slam, the door to his office burst open, and Hong Tianqi and a group of Chinese hunters walked in.

Amurong got to his feet in rage. "Hong Tianqi, what are you up to?!"

Martial Sage Hong Tianqi smiled coldly. "Shouldn't that be my question?"

Amurong was incensed by the sudden intrusion, but he feared Hong Tianqi's strength too much to chase him away outright.

"Don't forget the mandate of the world federation—this is an office for its highest authorities. Your barging into my office is the highest mark of contempt—against me, the presiding member of the highest authorities!"

Hong Tianqi marched up to Amurong, lifted a foot, and stomped on his table. "You want to speak to me of contempt, of law, of common decency?!"

Amurong frowned. "No matter what your problem is, you shouldn't have barged in here like this. I know we've never seen eye to eye, but I should hope that you'll at least respect my position!"

Amurong knew that Hong Tianqi wouldn't have barged into his office without damning proof of his involvement in illicit affairs. Nevertheless, he couldn't back down now.

"I respect the highest authorities of the world federation, but I won't respect someone like you. You don't have the right to this title, and it confers you no authority to do what you've done!"

"Hong Tianqi, how dare you malign me!" Amurong thundered, slamming a fist on his table.

Hong Tianqi smirked at one of his subordinates. "Bring the detainee over. Let's see if our presiding authority knows him, shall we?"

A black-clad man was quickly brought up to Amurong. Upon seeing his identity, Amurong's face fell. The man in question was the authority whom Amurong had been working with—not only had he failed in his task, he had failed so utterly that Hong Tianqi had managed to lay his hands on him.

"Hong Tianqi, this is an authority of the world federation! How dare you restrict his freedom—how dare you detain him! Don't you know what this means to your standing in the public eye? You, Hong Tianqi, certainly can't be allowed to act in this manner as a highest authority of the world federation!"

No matter what, Amurong had to feign innocence. He was still the presiding authority, after all, and if he were to continue denying all claims, no one could countermand his authority.

Hong Tianqi chuckled coldly. "As for you, Amurong, I wonder what the world would think of the presiding authority of the world federation inciting kidnapping and terrorism?"

Amurong frowned. "Hong Tianqi, this is a serious accusation, and one that I won't take lightly. Who is this man, and what are you trying to pull?"

"You understand better than anyone else present," Hong Tianqi mocked. "You masterminded an attack on the Zenith Dojo and attempted to kidnap Zhang Hanxiang in order to obtain the recipe for Zhang Lie's limit-breaking potions."

Amurong snorted. "Slander!"

"Slander? You refuse to admit your crimes even with this witness right in front of you? The day I seized this authority, I learned of your involvement. Subsequently, I traced his bank accounts and learned that he bankrolled the attack on the Zenith Dojo and the kidnapping of Zhang Hanxiang."

The caught authority scratched his head. "I apologize, Amurong—the plan was a failure, and I was caught. Please, get me out!"

Amurong wanted nothing more than to slap his face. Just how had he failed so miserably?! Not only had he acted during an inopportune moment, he had even failed; not only had he failed, he was even about to bring Amurong down with him.

He had to have been blind to work with a fellow like him!

Amurong had completely forgotten that the only reason his ally had struck was on his insistence, that it had always been him who believed Zhang Lie incapable of beating the monarch of stars.

With Hong Tianqi right in front of him, Amurong naturally couldn't reveal any of his emotions.

Calmly and coolly, he stated, "Authority Fulong, I've never instigated you to perform such deplorable tasks."

Hong Tianqi began to laugh. "Amurong, are you truly so thick-skinned? I can't believe you think you can get away with this."

Amurong spread his arms. "Hong Tianqi, no matter what you think, I'm sure there's been a misunderstanding—"

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, Amurong," Fulong murmured. "I had no choice—I can't defeat Hong Tianqi, and I don't want to die, so I actually recorded one of our conversations just in case."

Amurong wasn't a good man, and Fulong knew very well that Amurong might even try to get rid of him once he had obtained his desired recipe. In order to protect himself, he had recorded his conversations with Amurong just in case—and indeed, they were now coming in handy.

This time, even Amurong's cool composure crumbled.

One of Hong Tianqi's subordinates retrieved a recording from a pocket regarding his plans to attack the Zenith Dojo.

"Well, Amurong?" Hong Tianqi asked, smirking. "Do you still intend on denying your crimes? Let me show you why no one dares to go against me."

Even so, Amurong gave a last-ditch effort. "Hong Tianqi, I don't know what this is. I've never said anything remotely like what the recording suggests—you must have falsified it!"

"Amurong, you've been an authority for so long—is this the best you can do? Aren't you even going to own up to your crimes?"

Chapter 523: Schism in the World Federation

"With all this evidence stacked against you, your word means nothing,"

Hong Tianqi summarized. Suddenly, Amurong reached out and grabbed the recording device from his hands, then crushed it to pieces. "Evidence? What evidence?"

Hong Tianqi laughed. "Crush it all you want, Amurong. I have countless copies!"

Amurong slammed a fist on his table in rage. "Hong Tianqi, just what do you want?!"

"Oh? Are you finally admitting to your crimes now? Very well. Let me state my demands, then—given your nature and capabilities, you don't have the right to remain as the presiding authority of the world federation. Step down."

"Impossible!" Amurong stood in a fit of rage.

Hong Tianqi remained unperturbed. "You don't think you'll get away with touching me and mine, do you?"

The two authorities stood directly opposed to each other, and the fluctuations in their genetic energy clashed.

Shapeless energy erupted like a volcano, wrecking the entire office. Its walls began to crack. Neither man made a move; the interaction between their energies, unrestrained, was much like a disaster.

The other hunters in the room ducked down and clung to safety against the floor, trying to stay afloat as though they were canoes in a storm.

The walls of the office continued to crack, revealing the gold alloy within. Even the alloy was making screeching sounds, as though it were about to reach its breaking point. As the pressure in the room rose to a crescendo and the hunters thought they were about to be squeezed into pulp, the walls finally gave out and the office exploded like a bomb.

That such a thing could happen within the offices of the highest authorities of the world federation immediately drew intergalactic attention.

Hong Tianqi and Amurong reined in their genetic energy once more. Given their positions in the world federation, this wasn't a problem that could be resolved by martial force alone. Their fight wouldn't end up remaining as a private dispute; it would undoubtedly draw public attention. The reason that Hong Tianqi had confronted Amurong was to turn public opinion in his favor.

The opinion of the representatives that made up the world federation would decide their fates.

What had happened that day would be the prelude to a great upheaval within the world federation...

The office of the presiding authority of the world federation had exploded, and a schism was about to split the federation into two: Hong Tianqi and Amurong were finally in formal opposition.

The next day, Hong Tianqi held a press conference, explaining his discovery of what Amurong had done and claiming Amurong to be a despicable piece of trash.

He revealed that Amurong was knowingly targeting a pillar of the human race, that he was deliberately trying to provoke unrest and foment disorder. All these charges rendered him incapable of being the presiding authority of the world federation—or even an authority at all.

He admitted to barging into Amurong's office, and he provided the recording which he had shown to Amurong.

"The destruction of the office was caused by tension running rife between the two of us, but that's not the issue at hand. Amurong must be punished for his misdeeds and stripped from office. No criminal should be able to play such a fundamental role in the world federation!

"What has Amurong done ever since becoming the presiding authority of the world federation? Nothing more than to schedule trips to some impoverished star systems! He's never done anything productive or instrumental to the world federation, and I think the world federation deserves a better leader!

"And not only has he been useless, he has even committed a crime by taking advantage of his station!"

As a group of reporters took furious notes, Hong Tianqi made his stance clear.

The conference was being spread live across the galaxy, and any hunters could view it on a livestream as well.

"To think that Amurong was such a man—he's entirely unworthy of my respect!"

"How did he manage to advance to such a position in the first place? I think Hong Tianqi's absolutely right—it's time for him to step down!"

"How could he? He tried to target my idol's dojo! Zhang Lie was fighting for all of humanity in the second realm. Not only did this damnable presiding authority not offer a single measure of help, he even tried to backstab Zhang Lie!"

"Imagine if he had succeeded in his terrible plans!"

"Right? He was taking advantage of Zhang Lie being in the second realm and waging a war against the monarch of stars to try to kidnap his sister!"

Amurong's reputation fell to rock bottom.

By the time Zhang Lie reached the first marker on his map, there was nothing to be seen, let alone a disaster-grade lifeform.

Zhang Lie scoured the region and found an alien race nearby. With a superior-grade lifeform as compensation, he learned that he was too late—there had been an unusual patch of land nearby, but it had vanished two decades ago.

Clearly, that disaster-grade lifeform had moved on to another location.

Otherwise, it would have been impossible for the alien race to have settled here. Disappointed, Zhang Lie had no choice but to continue to the next marker.

A peak-grade lifeform as large as a mountain slumped over, its head bursting apart in a shower of red. As he sat on the mountainous lifeform's body, Zhang Lie crossed out another marker on his map. "This is the third one already..."

It was only then that Zhang Lie realized a significant problem with his quest. The sura had no understanding of disaster-grade lifeforms; the lifeforms they had cataloged were simply stronger than regular peak-grade ones.

There was a big gulf between peak- and disaster-grade, and killing these peak-grade lifeforms who had yet shown no advancement toward disaster-grade provided no disaster gene fragments at all.

He patted the lifeform beneath him. "How could you have been so slow at advancing? How many years had it been—and you still hadn't managed to make it to disaster-grade? Ridiculous!"

Zhang Lie knew that the transition from peak- to disaster-grade was a bottleneck, or the second realm would have been filled with disaster-grade lifeforms by now. Even so, he needed an outlet for his emotions.

Zhang Lie took a swig of water, retrieved his map, and set off toward the next lifeform.

According to the monarch of stars' information, his scouts had clearly experienced the effects corresponding to a disaster-grade domain there.

Zhang Lie arrived at a cave high in the mountains, one whose entrance was covered with all sorts of spiderwebs. Allegedly, deep within the cave was a particularly brightly pigmented disaster-grade spider.

Chapter 524: A Spider's Lair

As he stepped into the cave, Zhang Lie caught a glimpse of the spider-type lifeforms within.

Given his strength, however, most of them seemed to be pitifully weak. They were largely mutated-grade lifeforms, with a few superior-grade ones scattered among them. Zhang Lie would easily be able to take them all down.

As he strode deeper into the cave, Zhang Lie eventually came across stronger spider-type lifeforms. A speckled red-and-black spider approached. It was peak-grade, and barely small enough to fit within the depths of the tunnels.

Zhang Lie's eyes brightened.

Perhaps a peak-grade lifeform would be threatening to others, but it was hardly anything worth worrying about for Zhang Lie himself. Zhang Lie punched forward casually with his right arm.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Quake]!" The entire cave shook. Before the peak-grade spider could retaliate, it had disintegrated into nothing but powder. That was the extent of Zhang Lie's current strength, after all. He encountered three more peak-grade spiders after this one, but they were all dealt with as easily.

Very quickly, Zhang Lie ended up before a gigantic chasm. As he approached, a frightening screech rang out from the lair deep within, like the cries of a demon from the abyss.

Purple fog wafted out of the air like flames. It swallowed Zhang Lie up, corroding the rocks all around him and causing them to hiss and smoke.

Zhang Lie shielded himself with his genetic energy as he smiled. Surely this was a disaster-grade lifeform? It had to be! He was sure he could sense the primordial aura that was gathering all around him.

Two gigantic scorpion-like pincers emerged from the depths of the lair, crystalline, unbelievably sharp, and wickedly beautiful.

Zhang Lie's smile grew even larger. "A disaster-grade lifeform—finally, another disaster-grade lifeform!"

Four pairs of blood-red eyes lit up like flames in the darkness, bringing not light and warmth, but despair and horror. The eight eyes stared pointedly at Zhang Lie; he had clearly been slated as prey.

A screech emerged from the depths of the lair.

Following the spider's cry, countless spider-type lifeforms began to scuttle toward Zhang Lie from all throughout the cave.

The densely packed spiders scurried around Zhang Lie, as though the purple fog that surrounded him was perfectly harmless to them. Their eyes were blood-red, and their legs clicked against the rock with a sound that made Zhang Lie shudder.

From deep within its lair emerged a double-headed spider with a crystalline carapace. Its pincers were like glaives, its teeth like battleaxes.

It was so humongous Zhang Lie wondered at how it had managed to ever make its way within the cave. Zhang Lie was barely the size of one of its leg hairs.

The purple fog in the air thickened, and it began sapping away at Zhang Lie's genetic energy.

Thankfully, Zhang Lie himself possessed two soulshards that were strongly resistant to poison, and the effect of the purple fog could be neglected for the moment.

As he glanced at the spider in front of him, Zhang Lie beamed. "That's more like it!"

He had finally found his first disaster-grade lifeform.

The disaster-grade spider waved its legs, parting the fog as though it were the surface of the sea. The ground of the cave began to crack, causing a huge wave of energy to spread toward Zhang Lie.

A disaster was taking form!

It waved its legs madly, sending out torrents of energy toward Zhang Lie and carving out grooves in the cave floor. The scythes of wind smashed apart everything in their way, even its fellow kin.

The entire cave began to shake. Zhang Lie dodged the attack, sliding between the spider's legs.

"[Rune: Seal]!" The image of a dragonturtle appeared before him as Zhang Lie raised his hand. As the tablets smashed down on the spider's head, ripples spread out from the two tablets, sealing its will and power.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!" Zhang Lie sent a fist smashing down on the spider's brain. A black serpent shot forward with the punch, biting down on one of the spider's exposed eyes and breaking off a small chunk of crystal.

The spider screeched in pain, echoes of sound reverberating throughout the cave. The pressure from the sound waves was so intense that Zhang Lie felt it as a physical force.

The spider's screeches spurred the superior-grade lifeforms into action. All the spiders within the cave went crazy as they began to rampage, their eyes burning with red light as they leapt into the air and toward Zhang Lie.

"Die!" Within the sea of spiders, a black sun appeared behind Zhang Lie's back, and a bloody moon beneath his feet.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!" Large swathes of spiders fell to the ground, immobilized by the aura of [Eclipse]. As Zhang Lie punched forward with a fist, distorting space, more and more spiders began to fall.

Those spiders below peak-grade were completely unable to defend against [Eclipse]'s aura, and even the peak-grade spiders were hard-pressed to guard against the force of Zhang Lie's fists.

However, all the spiders in the cave had entered a rampaging state, and they continued to attack Zhang Lie regardless of the danger to their bodies.

Even as their carapaces cracked, even as their bodies burst open, they continued swarming him.

The disaster-grade spider slammed down with its legs. As it did so, dozens of peak-grade and superior-grade spiders pounced on Zhang Lie at once, preventing him from escaping.

Just as the spider's legs were about to land, Zhang Lie unsheathed his twin blades and defended against the blow. The force of Zhang Lie's attack was sufficient to tear the spider's two front legs off its body. Shards of jade-green crystal fell to the ground.

Gripping the twin blades Guicang and Hanguang, Zhang Lie sent arcs of sword energy into the air, slicing apart the superior--grade spiders that came leaping at him. The peak-grade spiders deflected the attack and continued to scuttle toward him.

A pillar of genetic energy rose from Zhang Lie's body.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" A dragon's howl shook the skies. Before the superior-grade lifeforms could make a move, Zhang Lie struck. An array of blood-red dragons cleared the ground all around Zhang Lie.

Chapter 525: Assimilating Disaster Gene Fragments

By then, Zhang Lie had finished his warm-up, and nothing was left of the dozen or so peak-grade spiders that had scuttled toward him.

Zhang Lie rushed toward the side of the disaster-grade lifeform.

Comically, the disaster-grade lifeform actually tried to flee. Whenever it tried to attack Zhang Lie, it was hurt instead, and it didn't want to risk it any longer.

It howled at Zhang Lie in an attempt to expel him, or perhaps as a threat, announcing that this was its domain, that this cave and all its contents belonged to it and it alone.

The spider's legs struck at Zhang Lie as they whizzed through the air. Meanwhile, the spider devoured its fallen kin, consuming their bodies for the resources to regenerate its body.

"Is this all you've got? [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. The beams sliced through the spider's legs with barely any resistance at all.

The crystallized legs broke and smashed to pieces, but Zhang Lie's blow drew no blood. Except for causing the spider to crash down to the ground, Zhang Lie's attack had dealt almost no damage whatsoever.

A disaster-grade lifeform was more or less impervious to physical attacks, but cutting off its legs and hindering its movement was certainly a viable tactic.

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.

"[Blade of the Heavens: the Sea Swells]!"

The disaster-grade double-headed spider waved its few remaining legs in an attempt to fend off Zhang Lie's blow. Seven of its eyes glowed with blood-red light as the force of Zhang Lie's attack was abruptly countered. Behind the tsunami, however, was yet another sword technique.

Zhang Lie's blade was so fast that even the disaster-grade spider could barely see a blur as he struck.

"[The Boundless Blade: Requiem of the End]!" Black genetic energy covered the blade's tip and ravaged the spider's body from the inside out. As Zhang Lie infused more and more energy into the attack, the spider's remaining eyes burst apart, and his sword energy could be seen from the wounds all over its body.

The head was a critical point. Even the disaster-grade spider screeched in pain, unable to believe that such a small lifeform like Zhang Lie could boast such terrifying strength.

He was trouncing the spider easily; if the spider were to continue fighting, it would surely lose the fight. The spider waved its remaining legs by the front of its eyes as it tried to chase Zhang Lie away, then began to scurry back toward its lair. With its intelligence, it was well aware that it would be no match for Zhang Lie.

Strangely, even though it was retreating, Zhang Lie didn't give chase. He even smiled at the spider. The moment he did, the spider realized that there might have been a trap waiting for it, but it was all too late.

Behind it, a white wyrm blinked into existence. The next moment, the spider felt the presence of a foreign soul invading its thoughts. Its thoughts seemed to slow, and the wounds by its eyes seemed to magnify.

Struck by a mental blow, the spider fell into temporary paralysis. A frightening, corrosive energy entered its brain through the wounds by its eyes, finally prompting it to retaliate with the full force of its might as it tried to retreat.

Zhang Lie slammed a palm against the ground, activating his superior-grade white-grub soulshard and causing the struggling disaster-grade spider to stick to the ground.

As Zhang Lie infused genetic energy into his soulshard, the spider struggled against its restraints to no avail, only becoming more and more entangled as time passed.

The next moment, the spider saw a moonlight wyrm in its mindscape, a sharp horn on its forehead and its maw wide open. Brilliant white soulfire burned over its body.

All faded to black. The spider lost control over its body as its soul was torn to shreds.

[You successfully killed a disaster-grade double-headed spider. By consuming the core of the disaster-grade double-headed spider, you may receive one to ten disaster gene fragments.]

The gigantic spider's body was criss-crossed with cracks. Upon devouring enough souls, Zhang Lie's moonlight wyrm had been able to shred even a disaster-grade lifeform's soul. At the very end of the battle, Zhang Lie had silently released Whitey in order to give the retreating spider an unexpected blow, which made the rest of the fight much simpler.

Zhang Lie quickly recovered the core of the double-headed spider, a black, crystalline orb out of which many spikes protruded.

This wasn't a good place to absorb such gene fragments; Zhang Lie left the mountainous cave and headed to a secluded location nearby, the depths of a forsaken valley. It was unlikely that any genetic lifeforms would pass by; even if they did, with Whitey guarding Zhang Lie, he likely had nothing to worry about.

The black, crystalline orb appeared in Zhang Lie's hand. Just like the first core he had consumed, this one was made of an exceptionally sturdy crystalline material, and it was the size of a fist. It radiated palpable warmth, as though it were still alive.

This was the genetic core of a disaster-grade lifeform, the source of all their energy—their heart.

To be honest, it didn't even look like an edible object.

Just from holding it in his hands, Zhang Lie could feel an oppressive energy radiating out from it. The spikes were far sharper than they seemed, and they were pricking his palm.

Zhang Lie cut his palm with his sword, then dripped blood onto the core. The moment it touched the dark, spiky core, the blood was quickly absorbed into its interior. It sucked up more and more of Zhang Lie's blood until it turned blood-red.

Zhang Lie had to reopen the wound five times before the transformation was complete. Then, he closed his eyes and began pouring concentrated, black genetic energy from his body into the core.

It took him an entire hour before he felt the core start to soften. Ten minutes or so after that, the core softened completely.

As Zhang Lie clutched the crystalline orb, he felt some unusual sense of kinship with it, as though it was already part of his body. Once he felt such a sensation, Zhang Lie couldn't resist his impulses any longer, and he swallowed the core whole.

As the core slid down his throat, Zhang Lie felt a fiery, numbing sensation spread throughout his body. Subsequently, all that energy contained within the core burst apart in his stomach.

Almost immediately, Zhang Lie took on the color of a boiled prawn.

After absorbing disaster gene fragments within the first realm and barely making it out alive, Zhang Lie expected that it would become far simpler to do so in the second realm, after his body had made advancement after advancement. Nevertheless, he had underestimated the strength and potency of the disaster-grade lifeforms of the second realm.

His body couldn't contain and rein in so much energy; he could feel his blood beginning to boil...

Chapter 526: Effects of the Schism

Zhang Lie's blood boiled. Energy ran rampant throughout his body, causing blood to seep out of his pores and boil in the air. A haze of white steam surrounded him.

The pain was unimaginable.

Despite how tough Zhang Lie was, he had curled up into a ball on the ground. His head spun as he forced himself upright one stumbling step at a time.

The agonizing process he was going through was essentially a full-body blood transfusion between him and the disaster-grade lifeform's core, an evolution of the genetic code in his very cells.

Zhang Lie's [Ninecarp Transformation] activated on its own. Because of the genetic energy surging through his body, Zhang Lie was able to complete one cycle of cultivation in just a minute, an unimaginable speed.

As he continued to cycle the genetic energy through his body, he suddenly felt himself starting to swell, as though his body couldn't take it any longer.

Indeed, were Zhang Lie to open his eyes, he would find his body inflating like a balloon; at some point, he would surely pop. As his body continued to balloon, Zhang Lie spat out a mouthful of blood.

Following this, blood began to well out of all of his orifices.

After all, one aspect of his framework was water-attuned, and the fact that his body temperature had somehow ended up so high meant that his body had gone entirely out of control.

To be frank, Zhang Lie was already losing control over his body. If not for his overwhelming willpower, Zhang Lie would long since have been rendered unconscious.

His body ballooned, tearing his clothes to shreds, and he was about to explode. His skin was already starting to crack and tear, and black genetic energy was seeping out from within.

Rocks crumbled. The ground cracked. Black beams of light shot out of his battered body, piercing through every lifeform in sight.

However, the second realm was able to tolerate a far greater output of energy than the first realm, and the will of the world didn't appear to save Zhang Lie from his self-imposed calamity.

As Zhang Lie's body reached its limits, the genetic armor hidden within his body finally activated, suppressing the strength of the disaster-grade core and revitalizing Zhang Lie's body.

Zhang Lie's cells began to function once more. With the help of his genetic armor, a dense layer of genetic energy surrounded him, forming a structure much like a cocoon.

Slowly, his body stabilized, and he fell into a deep coma. There he lay, blissfully unaware of the conflict he had caused within the human world.

"Slander, mere slander! Hong Tianqi falsified that recording to frame me for an incident that never occurred!"

The same day Hong Tianqi held his press conference, Amurong announced one of his own in defense and retaliation.

"I admit that I was once tempted by Zhang Lie's limit-breaking potions, but that was all for the good of the world federation, for all intelligent life in the Milky Way! As the presiding authority of the world federation, I have to think of the good of all!" Amurong was thick-skinned enough to drag the entirety of the world federation into this affair.

"After all, Zhang Lie shouldn't be able to monopolize these limit-breaking potions—they're treasures that belong to every lifeform of the Milky Way! I never carried out any of these plans,"

Amurong asserted. "That said, I stand by my claims—for the greater good, the recipe for these limit-breaking potions must be regulated by the world federation."

The reporters' cameras continued to flash as he spoke.

"You all saw what happened with the Musi clan a few months ago, didn't you? Zhang Lie made use of the scarcity of these potions to shake the entire world federation to its very foundations. You've all seen the havoc he's wreaked with these potions, and if we allow Zhang Lie to continue monopolizing them, we'll only doom ourselves. I simply want jurisdiction over these potions to pass to the world federation. Am I mistaken in this belief?"

"I swear on my conscience: all that I've done has been for the greater good, for the good of the world federation. Compare this to my main detractor, Hong Tianqi, who's still trying to shield Zhang Lie! If we allow Zhang Lie's actions to go uncontested, he will ruin the entire world federation—mark my words!"

"So what if he's had a few successes in the second realm? He brought down a sura empire, but how will the rest of us benefit? He would do the entire galaxy some good if he were able to rid the second realm of the sura entirely, but will he be able to achieve such a lofty goal?"

The contrasting press conferences led to vigorous debate on the forums.

"The presiding authority of the world federation's absolutely right. Zhang Lie has to be reined in, or he might end up becoming a calamity."

"Indeed. Isn't it unfair that China and Zhang Lie are monopolizing these limit-breaking potions for themselves? The entire Milky Way should have access to it!"

"It truly is unfair. Zhang Lie's working for his own good, not the good of humanity!"

Of course, others held dissenting opinions.

"Your wife's a valuable good—why don't you share her with us? It's for the good of humanity!"

"Why don't you share your money with us, then?"

"Zhang Lie made that discovery by himself, with his own resources, using his own talent. Why shouldn't he profit from it?"

"We've already had this discussion countless times, and there's never been a consensus. But if you listen carefully to what the presiding authority wants, he would be satisfied with Zhang Lie ceding control of the recipe to the world federation, not sharing it with the public."

"What's the difference?"

"If he were to share it, everyone could make use of it, but if he were to cede control of it to the world federation, only those vetted by the world federation would qualify to see the recipe."

Chapter 527: Old Boy Network

Amurong's words were contentious, but they had achieved their desired effect.

The authorities of the world federation had been concerned with whether or not Amurong was guilty of the crimes Hong Tianqi had accused him of—now, he had deftly changed the topic toward seizing control of Zhang Lie's research.

All of the Milky Way was hoping to see this mysterious recipe, after all.

Even so, Amurong didn't get off scot-free—not everyone was so easy to fool.

"Isn't it despicable of Amurong to be trying to attack the Zenith Dojo while Zhang Lie was fighting off the monarch of stars?"

"Regardless of the justification, this is behavior unbefitting of the presiding authority of the world federation—shameless, petty, and despicable."

Zhang Lie had garnered quite a few fans throughout the Milky Way, and they continued broaching the subject of Amurong's crimes.

Not only was Amurong accused of attacking the Zenith Dojo and attempted kidnapping, he had even instigated others to do so on his behalf. Yesterday, the highest court of the world federation had detained Amurong for investigation, and he had had to pay heavy bail to even host his press conference.

There would be a court of law to try him for his actions, and his reputation and amount of resources available to him dipped sharply. Nevertheless, considering what he had amassed over the years, he wouldn't be put down quite so easily.

One scandal wouldn't be enough to topple him from his vaunted position, and he would be largely shielded from his actions because he had acted through an intermediary. Amurong had recruited the services of the best lawyer in the world federation, and he would soon emerge free from the morasses of court.

Nevertheless, Hong Tianqi surely would not let him go easily. If Amurong wanted to stabilize his position, he had to fend Hong Tianqi off somehow—and the four prime races as well.

The four prime races were cooperating with Zhang Lie to obtain limit-breaking potions amenable to their respective races, and they had no intention of going easy on anyone who dared to meddle with their plans.

Fortunately for Amurong, he wasn't working alone. As the presiding authority of the world federation, he had plenty of politicians and businessmen on his side.

The attack on the Zenith Dojo reached a new peak of publicity as Hong Tianqi released all the evidence he had obtained on Amurong's illicit activities.

He had long tried to gather evidence on Amurong's machinations and plotting, and he had amassed a veritable stash by this point. Some pieces of evidence were concrete, and others were circumstantial; nevertheless, Hong Tianqi released it all.

No one could have imagined that the presiding authority of the world federation had gotten his hands so dirty. The release of all that information landed the world federation in a crisis of faith: the public had lost their trust in a cornerstone of their society.

The world federation had neither its own army nor power in its own right, only the trust of the masses. That Hong Tianqi had chosen to release his cache of evidence in spite of this was a disastrous blow.

Hong Tianqi wasn't finished. In a stunning proclamation, he declared that he would found a new world federation.

The entire galaxy was abuzz. Amurong's reputation was more or less ruined for the short term, but the corporations that worked closely with him and depended on him for beneficial partnerships naturally had to protect him. They launched smear campaigns against Hong Tianqi, accusing him of acting against the greater good.

Hong Tianqi himself wasn't alone; behind him stood the four prime races and countless other subordinate races like the blood demons, all of whom were counting on Zhang Lie to obtain their race-specific limit-breaking potions.

Once again, Amurong publicly requested that China and Zhang Lie share the recipe for the limit-breaking potion for the good of all.

Even now, Amurong didn't regret what he had done. These limit-breaking potions had the power to shape the future of the galaxy. If he didn't control this power, it would soon be used against him.

That was why Amurong had taken such a grave risk.

Indeed, Amurong's predictions were accurate. Hong Tianqi's coalition, built upon the strength of these limit-breaking potions, loomed over Amurong's old boy network.

The schism between the two halves of the world federation grew even more pronounced. On one side was Amurong and his team of politicians and mercenaries from all over the galaxy.

On the other was Hong Tianqi, the four prime races, and all sorts of subordinate races. Everyone knew that Hong Tianqi was unconditionally supportive of Zhang Lie, and they were essentially proxies of each other.

Amurong had attacked the Zenith Dojo, and in doing so, roused Hong Tianqi's ire. Zhang Lie's supporters wouldn't take this lying down.

The subordinate races who had sided with Hong Tianqi viewed this as an investment to get in Zhang Lie's good graces.

They were counting solely on Zhang Lie for his limit-breaking potions. If something were to happen to Zhang Lie before he could obtain any results, they would go home empty-handed and devoid of whatever investment they had made.

As a result, Hong Tianqi found more and more supporters on his side.

If not for Amurong's tireless efforts all these years in solidifying his connections with the largest corporations in the galaxy, he would have lost all his influence already.

Even so, as these races continued heaping pressure on Amurong, he felt as though he were on a raft amidst a gathering storm, barely able to keep himself afloat.

He was very glad that Zhang Lie hadn't made any further progress in his research with the alien races. If that were to happen, Hong Tianqi's forces would consolidate, and his would be crushed by their onslaught.

Amurong feared the fruits of Zhang Lie's research, the power of the limit-breaking potions he had devised. Just the promise of that name alone had resulted in the support of countless alien races all over the galaxy.

In terms of reputation, Amurong couldn't stand up to Zhang Lie. Zhang Lie had just raided a sura empire, and his renown and reputation had instantly reached its apex.

From every perspective, it looked as though Amurong was on the losing end; if he didn't turn the tides, all that awaited him would be death and destruction...

Chapter 528: Gathering of the Sura

Deep within a secluded valley, a fist broke through a gigantic black cocoon, and a humanoid figure emerged from within. His hair was black, his skin white, his muscles filled with strength, his eyes with a glint.

Zhang Lie had finally finished absorbing the disaster gene fragments he had obtained from the disaster-grade spider, and his body was filled to the brim with explosive strength. By now, Zhang Lie was peerless within the second realm, with only the asura able to fight on the same level as he did.

His clothes had become mere tatters upon the assimilation process for his disaster gene fragments. Luckily, he had packed a change of clothes, which he brought out now from his potbellied-toad soulshard.

After consuming his first disaster-grade core in the second realm, he continued searching for more and more disaster-grade lifeforms, knowing nothing of the fiasco that was shaking the human world.

Following the monarch of stars' information, he approached a patch of desert.

There, he walked for a month on end, with nothing in sight but yellow sand all around him. There were barely a few genetic lifeforms that he had encountered, and none were strong enough to be worth a fight. He hadn't caught even the barest shadow of the promised disaster-grade lifeform in the monarch of stars' notes.

Fortunately for Zhang Lie, food and drink wouldn't be a problem. He had packed a large quantity of water in his soulshard, and he was a water-attuned genetic hunter in his own right.

However, navigation within the desert proved to be difficult. There was sand all around him, and the horizon remained the same no matter which direction he looked. He suspected he was tracing out circles in the desert; he didn't know how long he would have to continue such a seemingly fruitless search.

Meanwhile, the sura had convened a gathering of the kingdoms. Such a gathering required the uniform approval of all sura empires, and every sura kingdom that mattered would be present.

Such meetings always portended great changes in the realm of the sura.

"As you all know, the empire of stars has been defeated."

The ancient, weathered hall was filled with sura. Only nine seats were placed at the very center, each as ornate as a throne. However, of those nine seats, only five were occupied.

The sura on the thrones released fearful auras, ones that identified them as sura monarchs themselves. To the back of the nine thrones was a gigantic statue of an asura, thrice the size of that within the monarch of stars' palace.

Everyone seated in the hall was a sura king.

Without fail, such meetings produced results, and these results would permeate the entirety of the second realm.

The five sura on stage were each sura monarchs, and they held vaunted positions in the gathering. Each had a single veto available to them.

"It's hard to believe that the empire of stars has fallen—and harder still that it was brought down by an alien race, a human settlement called Renhuang."

The sura kings sitting in the stands gaped. Although word had since spread among the sura, and although everyone present had heard the news, the fact that a sura monarch was confirming these rumors for themselves made them suck in a breath.

"Apparently, the governor of Renhuang is a human!"

"When did these humans get so strong? They can even destroy the empire of stars now?!"

The sura kings whispered to each other.

The leftmost sura monarch on stage began, "Renhuang's currently massing forces to target we sura at large. Many among these forces were once bitter rivals of the sura."

The throne on which this sura monarch sat was patterned with a shattered sun.

The monarch of the sun boasted the second strongest of the sura empires, barely weaker than the empire of stars.

Of course, by this point, it was now the strongest sura empire. The throne that had once been at the left was the monarch of stars'; it had since been replaced with the monarch of the sun's.

Below the stage, one sura king chuckled coldly. "Insolence! Don't they think we can beat them easily?"

"It looks like we must have been too lenient to the alien races in the past for them to think that such behavior is acceptable."

"They've forgotten who the true rulers of the sura realm are—it's time we teach them a lesson."

Upon hearing of the forces amassed against the sura, the sura kings were all incensed. They felt as though their authority was being challenged.

The second sura monarch affirmed the monarch of the sun's words. Behind his throne was a pitch-black moon. The empire of the moon was just slightly weaker than the empire of the sun.

The sura had quite a few subordinate races, and Renhuang had become a melting pot of sorts among the races of the second realm. They had managed to sneak in a few spies, and the sura monarchs were very well informed regarding Renhuang's affairs.

One sura king asked, "But isn't that what we want?"

I heard that the Lightborne sought sanctuary in Renhuang. We were trying to hunt them down, weren't we? If we allow all our enemies to gather in Renhuang, we can defeat them in one fell swoop."

"Ants will be ants—they can never devour a dragon."

The sura kings rubbed their palms greedily, as though they were getting ready to charge toward Renhuang at any moment.

The third sura monarch began to speak. "I understand your feelings. Renhuang is strong enough to possess a threat to us, a threat to all sura. If we don't make a move, they might take the initiative instead."

The third sura monarch's throne was engraved with the sky.

The fourth sura monarch nodded in agreement with the third. Behind his throne was the roiling sea.

The fifth monarch concluded, "We have decided to launch an attack against Renhuang."

His throne was patterned with a crumbling mountain peak.

The monarch of the moon had silver hair and seemed to be getting rather corpulent. He warned, "Don't forget that all our enemies are gathering at Renhuang because it managed to take down the empire of stars."

The sura kings below the stage fell silent. Indeed, no matter how prideful they were, that was a truth they would have to keep in mind. The strongest empire of the sura and its monarch had died to Zhang Lie's hand...

Chapter 529: The Yeluo Poison

Zhang Lie finally emerged from the endless desert into what seemed to be a rainforest.

He sighed. "How did it end up like this, just how did it end up like this..."

He had spent one and a half months within the desert before finally giving up. He was certain he could sense the presence of a disaster-grade lifeform within, but he simply wasn't able to find it.

It was evident that the disaster-grade lifeform was hiding from him.

Zhang Lie was exasperated—as a human, he had always been underestimated by his foes. However, despite the fact that he had traveled through the desert while stealthed, the disaster-grade lifeform within still managed to detect and avoid him somehow!"

"I wonder if the monarch of stars' information is accurate?"

The disaster-grade lifeform within the desert, which the monarch of stars had named the shaji, had the ability to burrow deep into the sand and an almost precognitive ability to sense danger. It was likely this latter ability that had allowed it to avoid Zhang Lie for so long.

In the end, Zhang Lie gave up. According to the monarch of stars' information, there was a stronger-than-usual peak- or higher-grade lifeform, a golden chimpanzee, within a nearby rainforest. Whether it was a disaster-grade lifeform remained to be determined.

Zhang Lie walked through the forest, crowded with trees that had grown to a massive size. To hug one such tree would take fifty hunters circling it hand to hand.

Among the chimpanzees that lived in the forest, the black-furred ones were over five meters tall. There were also silver- and golden-furred ones present, each on a higher level of strength than the last.

Beneath Zhang Lie's feet and surrounding him were the carcasses of many such chimpanzees. The unceasing rain swept their blood away as Zhang Lie walked through their corpses.

Not long after Zhang Lie had entered the rainforest, the black-furred chimpanzees began to swarm over him. Unfortunately for them, they had picked a terrible target.

They were so persistent that Zhang Lie didn't have a choice but to kill them.

After killing a few of the chimpanzees, however, he seemed to have angered the entire pack. Zhang Lie killed all the chimpanzees that came for him; by the time he was done, the entire forest was littered with carcasses.

Subsequently, the ground began to shake. As the shaking grew more and more intense, Zhang Lie's eyes began to brighten. Could he have found his target already?

As a gigantic tree before him was uprooted, a chimpanzee about a hundred meters tall and covered with golden fur appeared before him. The trees that were so tall Zhang Lie couldn't see their tops even when he craned his head were nothing more than tall grasses to the chimpanzee.

As it craned its head down and roared, sound waves rushed toward Zhang Lie like a flood. The sound waves alone caused no little amount of pressure to Zhang Lie.

The chimpanzee's eyes were blood-red. It opened its mouth wide and bared its sharp, fierce teeth. Its golden fur stood stiff and upright, and it was clearly enraged that Zhang Lie had been killing its kin.

Zhang Lie picked at his ears. "Is it really only this strong...?"

He was rather upset that, despite trudging all the way out of the desert and into the forest, despite being bitten by mosquitoes and having to kill what seemed like an endless wave of chimpanzees, his only reward was a peak-grade lifeform.

It was true that this golden chimpanzee was quite close to disaster-grade, about as close as the golden roc that he had initially encountered, but the difference between peak- and disaster-grade was like a chasm, and the two types of lifeforms were fundamentally distinct.

Disappointed, Zhang Lie turned to leave, but the golden chimpanzee refused to let him go. It slammed a fist onto the ground, cratering it and causing Zhang Lie to stumble.

"I was just about to leave. What's the matter with you?" Zhang Lie's voice emerged from the canopy—out of nowhere, he had managed to scramble up onto a tree.

The golden chimpanzee roared again, so loudly it forced the rain aside with the force of its breath. Zhang Lie tutted in exasperation. "What, you're blaming me? If your kin didn't attack me, I wouldn't have attacked them."

The golden chimpanzee's muscles bunched up. In anger, the chimpanzee unlocked its latent potential. As it smashed its fists against the ground, a frightening shock wave spread out around the point of impact, crushing boulders into powder and uprooting countless trees.

Indeed, this was the strength of a peak-grade lifeform about to ascend to disaster-grade.

The golden chimpanzee lifted its fists to discover that nothing was beneath them.

"Rather brutish, aren't you?" Zhang Lie's voice appeared by the chimpanzee's shoulder. "Why am I speaking with a beast, anyway? Did my brain get fried from being in the desert for so long?"

There had been absolutely nothing of note in the desert. No matter Zhang Lie's willpower, it was impossible not to have been affected by such a prolonged period of solitude.

The golden chimpanzee's pupils widened as fear leaked out of its gaze. It hadn't even seen Zhang Lie's movements, and it didn't understand how such a small creature could move so rapidly. Despite its rage, the golden chimpanzee understood the threat that Zhang Lie posed.

Obeying its instincts, it tried to run away, but it was already too late.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Quake]!" Zhang Lie waved a hand carelessly. His fist landed on the golden chimpanzee's head. A shiver spread throughout its body, and the mountainous form of the golden chimpanzee slumped to the ground.

Zhang Lie jumped down from its body. "Well, I don't think I'll kill you. I hope you've learned your lesson."

He had gotten tired of killing endless hordes of lifeforms along his journey, having killed more than his fill of even peak-grade lifeforms. If he didn't have to, he had no intention of making a move.

He turned around sharply, then vanished from sight amidst the downpour.

At the gathering of the sura, a heavy silence had fallen on the stage and its surroundings after the sura kings verified that the monarch of stars himself had been defeated by Renhuang.

The monarch of the sun declared, "Now, all of you should be aware of just what kind of threat Renhuang possesses to us. Apparently, they have developed a toxic poison that's targeted specifically at us sura. No matter what, we have to level Renhuang and prevent any of this poison from spreading!"

Renhuang was strong, but five sura monarchs and countless sura kings were present at the gathering. Together, they were a force that even the monarch of stars wouldn't have dared to provoke.

"Indeed, Renhuang has to die for what they've created—we can't let this poison spread!"

"We have to raze Renhuang to the ground!"

"No matter what, knowing what they've done, we can't let them survive."

The sura kings had realized that Renhuang's continued existence threatened not only their hegemony over the sura realm, but even the existence of the sura.

If this poison that they had developed could be mass-produced and purchased by alien races, how were they to survive?

This was the primary reason the sura monarchs had convened this gathering.

"For the future of the sura, we have to destroy Renhuang. This isn't just mere conflict between our races, but rather a battle to the death. As long as Renhuang lives, the sura will perish!"

Despite knowing that Renhuang had the strength to destroy even the empire of stars, the sura had no choice but to wage war against Renhuang.

Renhuang represented far too big a threat to the sura.

"Kill these humans!" one sura king stood up and shouted.

"Destroy Renhuang, kill the humans, and defeat the alien races that have made themselves our enemies!" the other sura kings echoed.

The sura monarchs and sura kings were very confident in their success, believing that they were far stronger than the monarch of stars. After all, the monarch of stars was just one sura monarch, whereas they had five working in tandem.

"Silence!" the monarch of the sun commanded, raising his hands.

The sura kings quieted down.

The monarch of the moon began, "From now on, we will no longer call the humans livestock. Our opponents are worth paying careful attention to; after all, they did manage to defeat the empire of stars and gather an alliance of alien races against us."

The monarch of the sky, whose body radiated a mysterious aura, murmured, "We cannot afford to underestimate this opponent."

The scarred monarch of the sun replied, "Since it seems like we're all in agreement, let's discuss our plan of attack."

The monarch of the sun was surrounded by superheated air at so blistering a temperature that the air seemed to twist and shift all around him.

The monarch of the moon emphasized, "We have to be cautious of this poison that they possess."

One of the sura kings in the crowd spoke up. "From one of my fighters who participated in a battle against Renhuang, the effects of this poison are particularly debilitating. Being in contact with just one drop will cause your body to begin to melt, and you'll lose all your combat strength."

Another sura king added, his face pale, "First the seven-kingdom coalition, then the empire of stars... if even these forces weren't able to defeat Renhuang, well, that tells us just how strong this poison is."

The sura kings' faces fell.

Not a single sura king had escaped unscathed from the battle against Renhuang, and it seemed quite plausible that this mysterious poison was effective against them. Otherwise, it was impossible to imagine that they could be defeated by humans.

The monarch of the sun nodded gravely. "We've received important information from those who escaped the fighting, and we monarchs have some strategies ready for dealing with this poison."

The space around the monarch of the sky began to crack, shatter, and reform. This wasn't something that he did intentionally, but was rather a side effect of his strength.

Although the empire of the sky was third in the rankings, the monarch of the sky's strength was almost at the level of the monarch of stars'. The only reason his empire was third was because he was too lazy to improve its ranking; it was rumored that, if he wanted to, he could turn into the second monarch of stars at any point.

To date, neither the monarch of the sun nor the monarch of the moon had faced him in combat, and neither had a measure of his true strength. Of the monarchs of the nine sura empires, he was the most mysterious.

The sura kings all perked up as they leaned forward and waited for the monarchs to speak. Had they already come up with a countermeasure so quickly?

Chapter 530: Unreliable Rumors

The monarch of the sky cleared his throat. "We have not, regrettably, found an antidote. Even with our five empires working together, we haven't been able to get beyond a preliminary analysis."

The sura were not particularly skilled at herbalism and potion-making, and the only sura empire that had excelled at science and research was the empire of stars. The five surviving empires together didn't even have half its research capacity.

If the empire of stars were still around, it would have found at least some countermeasure to the Yeluo poison. Unfortunately, it was one of the first casualties of Renhuang's ascent. It would take at least one or two years before the five empires' research would bear any fruit, and twice that for the production of any promising antidotes.

However, Renhuang was almost right at their doorstep; they didn't have the time to wait any longer. The sura monarchs had no choice but to find a more expedient approach.

The monarch of mountains was a man filled with muscles that shook when he moved. "No matter how potent this poison is, Renhuang's method of tossing it from the skies is easy to defend against.

As long as we avoid touching the poison, everything will be fine."

The monarch of the sea was a svelte, handsome sura. "At this gathering, we will disseminate a technique that allows all sura to summon a flame. If you see poison approaching you, activate this technique and burn the poison away before it can land."

The monarch of the sun added, "Once we disseminate this technique, you should teach it to all your sura fighters—and better yet, all the sura you govern."

This wasn't a foolproof technique, but it was an effective countermeasure.

The sura kings glanced at each other, smiling in relief at having attended the gathering.

The monarch of the moon added, "We have another technique prepared. It forms scabs of blood from foreign blood, which both grants you some defense and prevents poison from entering your body. Any source of blood suffices: your enemies', genetic lifeforms', or even your own."

"That said," the monarch of the sea cautioned, "we don't know whether it'll prevent the poison if you use your own blood, and we don't recommend trying that on the battlefield."

The sura kings marveled at the intelligence of the five sura monarchs for having come up with two countermeasures so quickly.

The monarch of the sun continued, "We must also focus our attention on the unusually strong hunters that have emerged from within Renhuang. Some are as strong as sura kings."

When did humans grow so strong? This was a question that the sura kings had been asking themselves repeatedly. Not only that, their strength seemed to have come out of nowhere, without giving the sura any time to prepare.

The sura kings gritted their teeth. Having such a rapidly developing enemy wasn't a good sign; they had to take down the humans at any cost.

The monarch of the moon took out two portraits that were nominally of Li Feng and Fang Yi.

One man was covered in brilliant flame, radiating so much light he could eclipse the sun himself. Scales crept up his arms and feet, and he looked half-draconian. The other was wreathed in wind and thunder, with the aspects of a tiger and a dragon.

There were only portraits of Li Feng and Fang Yi because the only sura to have escaped came from the raiding parties that had encountered the two hunters.

Shouta's forces had all died. Shicang's were corpses. Suiyue's had all perished in an attempt to save their liege from being taken away as a baby. Gaoyuan's syphilis had been so potent that it had claimed the lives of all his own forces.

The portraits were made following the descriptions provided by those sura that had escaped from Renhuang, and were somewhat unreliable to begin with given the circumstances. As a result, the finished portraits were so embellished that even Li Feng and Fang Yi would be hard-pressed to recognize them as themselves.

"According to reports we received from within Renhuang, the hunters who killed the allied invasion forces are part of this 'Team Zenith', and their strength is on par with the strongest sura kings. They're the elites of Renhuang," the monarch of the moon explained.

The sura kings had found it hard to believe that mere humans had been able to take down a sura monarch, but after looking at these portraits, everything seemed to make sense. These weren't humans—they were basically peak-grade lifeforms!

Indeed, it made sense that only such monstrosities would be able to take down sura kings.

Those sura who had escaped from the battle had, to some extent, exaggerated the humans' capabilities intentionally. It was embarrassing to have lost to humans, but far less so to lose to monsters in human guises.

The monarch of the moon continued, "According to our sources in Renhuang, the man on the left is known as Li Feng, and that on the right is Fang Yi."

The monarch of the sky added, "Although Li Feng looks like a human, he transforms into a half-draconian form in battle. He's said to possess the bloodline of an arclight dragon, and he has frightening capabilities."

The sura's sources weren't particularly accurate; even in Renhuang, they would have to sift out fact from fiction, exaggeration from lie.

Some of the sura kings gasped. "A peak-grade dragon's bloodline? Surely this Li Feng isn't a half-breed!"

Beside him, another sura king rolled his eyes. "That's impossible. Don't you remember the monarch of stars' experiments? He's tried it countless times, and it hasn't ever succeeded. Members of different species might still be able to have sex with each other, but their biology doesn't allow for interbreeding.

"If you have the time, you should have a look at the science magazine series distributed by the empire of stars. The monarch of stars came up with the idea himself in order to improve the sura's understanding of the world as a whole, and it includes details of many experiments that the monarch of stars conducted."

In truth, the monarch of stars had distributed this magazine in order to find useful research assistants—this was how he had found Fenghe. However, Fenghe was his lone success from this venture. Most of the sura preferred physical, rather than intellectual, domination.

"Could the humans have found a way to perform this interbreeding, then?"

"It's very likely. You know of Fenghe, the monarch of stars' godson, don't you?"

The sura kings nearby shuddered; no one thought highly of mad scientists.

"Surely half-breeds are just the next step up from Fenghe's creations—it's not strange at all."

The monarch of the moon held the portraits in his hands up high. "We monarchs agree with this sentiment. It's very likely that the humans' breakthrough had to do with combining their own bodies with those of genetic lifeforms to produce superpowered mutants.

"This Li Feng might be an exception, but how about Fang Yi? All our eyewitnesses report seeing him transform into a dragontiger with dual elemental attunements in wind and thunder. I've never heard of such a beast, but it's clearly peak-grade or higher."

The sura kings nodded earnestly as they glanced at the portrait of Fang Yi.

The monarch of the sky warned, "We suspect that there are far more of these mutants than were reported to us. At the very least, the six members of Team Zenith are all such mutants."

The sura kings became even more serious. They couldn't treat the humans in Renhuang like humans; they were mutants, a new race in their own right.

Of course, if Li Feng and Fang Yi were to hear of such a conjecture, they would fall over laughing...