

U. Warlord 531

Chapter 531: A New Deity

While the sura were coming up with plans to deal with the Yeluo poison, Zhang Lie had given up on the map left behind by the monarch of stars. He had decided to explore the realm by himself instead, based on the information he recalled from his past life.

In the end, after half a month, he found... absolutely nothing.

Zhang Lie's memories of disaster-grade lifeforms in the second realm were incomplete and rather haphazard; he had been far from being able to challenge such lifeforms so early in his past life.

He simply had too little information. As yet, information about disaster-grade lifeforms hadn't been publicized in the second realm, and no hunters would have the ability to take one down even if they had known about it.

Furthermore, these lifeforms often made their habitats deep in dangerous areas for hunters, which were naturally unexplored as a result. Without detailed information, it would be difficult to find their lair and hunting grounds, and waiting for these lifeforms to appear naturally would take far too much time and energy.

In the end, Zhang Lie had no choice but to pull out the monarch of stars' map and set off for his next destination anew.

According to the map, there was one such lifeform in Mt. Mulan.

Along the way, Zhang Lie encountered his fair share of alien races. Instead of interacting with them, however, he simply stealthed and headed straight for the mountain.

Unfortunately, once again, he found nothing but a peak-grade lifeform waiting for him.

If nothing else, it did look very cool. Its body glowed with golden light, making it seem almost saintly. It looked lupine but actually wasn't. When Zhang Lie headed toward its lair, he found it lying at the top of the mountain, sleeping on a gigantic rock.

Zhang Lie was about to leave when the lifeform suddenly attacked him, and Zhang Lie immediately counterattacked.

With his strength, the outcome of the fight was obvious. However, what came next was the problem.

This lifeform turned out to be the guardian deity of an alien race that lived nearby. After Zhang Lie killed it, a group of aliens charged toward him in a frenzy.

Zhang Lie was very much alarmed; he hadn't expected that there would be aliens that treated a peak-grade lifeform like a guardian deity. He tried to explain himself, but the aliens refused to listen. They insisted on tying him down and sacrificing him on an altar in the mountains.

Zhang Lie had no choice but to bring them to their senses with his trusty fists...

"Deity, our new guardian deity, please, protect us all!"

An hour later, Zhang Lie found himself seated on a gigantic golden throne, a group of aliens prostrating themselves by his feet.

They had found him almost right after he had killed the lifeform in battle. Apparently, they were here to bring it a few offerings, but they had witnessed its last moments instead.

Zhang Lie and the group of aliens stared at each other for quite some time before the priest of their group shouted, "This is an evil demon, a heavenly tribulation!"

"The demon dared to kill our guardian deity!"

"Demon! Today is the day you perish!"

The aliens' eyes all turned red, as though they had suddenly become feral wolves.

Because they were bringing their guardian deity offerings and praying to him, the group of aliens was rather diverse. Young and old, males and females alike had made their way up the mountain to pay respects to their guardian deity.

Zhang Lie frowned. "Surely you're not talking about that lupine lifeform up above?"

The priest rapped the ground with his cane. "That's our guardian deity, the manifestation of our faith! With him around, no one would dare attack our village."

Zhang Lie's eyebrows rose. He could understand worshipping a higher force, but not if that higher force was a genetic lifeform...

"Everyone, attack this evil demon! Only then will our tribe be safe for another day!" the priest urged.

Zhang Lie scratched his head. "Listen up—that wasn't a deity, just a genetic lifeform. And I'm not an evil demon, just a passerby."

However, the priest paid him no mind. He shouted, "Bind this demon, then prepare to sacrifice him atop the mountain! Only with the blood and lifeforce of the demon can we pacify the heavens' anger!"

Zhang Lie shook his head when he noticed the aliens charging toward him. As a kind, righteous man, he naturally had to correct these aliens' mode of thinking.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Quake]!" His fists sent a tremor down the mountain as the nearest aliens were sent flying. Zhang Lie controlled his strength very well; the aliens were only injured, not dead.

His face turned cold. "This is a warning. Don't come closer, or I won't hold back."

The priest slammed his cane on the ground. "Damned devil! How could you hurt our kind—everyone, we can't submit to the devil! This is a trial from the heavens!"

The aliens brushed themselves off and rushed toward Zhang Lie once more.

"I warned you." Zhang Lie struck with a fist—and this time, he didn't hold back.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!" Waves of energy, so intense they warped space, radiated from his arm. As the ripples of energy spread from Zhang Lie, the aliens at the front of the pack fell limply to the ground, their blood draining into the rocks of the mountain.

The priest stood stupefied, as did the other aliens fortunate enough to not be standing at the front.

"Evil demon, how dare you slaughter my kind! I shall be your opponent!" One of the aliens leaped up into the air and fell down like a meteor.

When the other aliens saw him move forward, their eyes lit up once more with hope.

"Look! That's the strongest warrior of our clan!"

"With him around, I'm sure the demon will fall in no time!"

"Warrior, slaughter that evil demon!"

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!" One errant fist from Zhang Lie was all it took to crush the top warrior of the alien race.

The excited aliens choked on their yells as their best warrior died in front of them.

He wasn't that weak—he seemed to have been on the verge of reaching the level of a sura king. Compared to Zhang Lie, however, that level of strength was meaningless.

Zhang Lie asked again, "Do you still want to fight?"

The aliens were so shocked that their legs began to tremble, and they fell to the ground in a kneeling position.

Even the priest dropped his cane. His face beatific, he announced, "Our old deity has fallen, and a new one arises in his place!"

The aliens all knelt on the ground.

Zhang Lie: ???

The priest continued, "We were mistaken. Our guardian deity has simply shed his old form and metamorphosed into a new one! Ah, our deity!"

The aliens lay prostrate on the ground as they venerated Zhang Lie, whose eyes were bulging.

What on earth were they doing? Zhang Lie knew that there were all manner of alien races in the second realm, each with its own customs, but he had never seen one that praised their opponents as deities if they couldn't beat them...

Chapter 532: Pilgrimage

Zhang Lie truly hadn't expected such an outcome.

He had displayed his strength, been venerated as a deity, and forced onto a golden throne dripping with overstated opulence. He had no choice. If they refused to listen to his explanations, then he... would accept his new role as guardian deity.

It took a serious bout of questioning before Zhang Lie obtained the answers he was looking for.

These alien half-beastmen, whose faces were painted with white streaks and who had rather imposing statures, used to be a very weak race in the second realm. They called themselves the Baimei.

Their ancestors were subordinate to another race, but when they were killed in a war, the Baimei were cast adrift. They roamed the second realm before finally settling in this mountain protected by their guardian deity.

There were some benefits to being weak: the guardian deity was a peak-grade lifeform, and it wasn't interested in the Baimei at all. Furthermore, the entire mountain was enveloped in his peak-grade aura, dissuading any genetic lifeforms from drawing near. As a result, the Baimei found sanctuary here.

The Baimei slowly grew stronger as their environment became more and more favorable to their growth. They hunted nearby and tithed the best part of their hunt to their guardian deity.

The peak-grade lifeform was intelligent enough to accept this agreement. It lazed around the top of the mountain and allowed this arrangement to persist on account of the free food it was receiving.

As the years went by, the Baimei grew stronger and stronger, until they were developing fighters on the level of sura kings. However, they were largely unaware of their newfound strength. When they found themselves bested by Zhang Lie, who was even stronger than their previous guardian deity, they naturally submitted once again.

Zhang Lie rather liked this race, because they would remain loyal as long as he was stronger than any of them.

The priest gathered all the Baimei and shouted, "Today, our guardian deity has cast off his old form for a new one. Let us rejoice!"

In order to win the favor of their guardian deity, the Baimei spared no expense. They had feted Zhang Lie immediately. All sorts of specially prepared meat filled a gigantic table, and Zhang Lie even noticed the meat of peak-grade lifeforms among them.

Two Baimei women, their clothing half-exposed, sat on either side of him, carefully pouring him wine and feeding him small pieces of meat.

Zhang Lie shuddered and dismissed them. He asked the priest, "Do you know if there are any strong lifeforms nearby? Stronger than your previous guardian deity."

"No stronger lifeform could reside in the regions surrounding this mountain. Our guardian deity is the strongest of all," the priest replied definitively.

Zhang Lie clutched his face, certain he was asking these questions to the wrong target.

The priest began to pray. "The guardian deity will shield us from the invasion of genetic lifeforms, the pain of illness and disease, and protect us and ours."

"Oh, guardian deity!" The Baimei lay prostrate on the ground as they kowtowed.

"The guardian deity will protect the weak. He will grant us fortitude, mental sanity, strength of the body, our lifeforce, the light and heat we sense," the priest continued reciting.

Zhang Lie winced. In some sense, this was a mass brainwashing of the entire tribe. By repeatedly hosting such sermons and ingraining these words in the tribe, the Baimei would instinctively fear and venerate the strong

Zhang Lie didn't have time to allow them to idolize him, and he certainly wasn't a god or deity of any sort. Nor was he willing to provide for them and shield them from harm, or all that nonsense. He had to keep searching for more disaster gene fragments.

The only reason he had stayed was to try to get more information out of the Baimei.

Zhang Lie raised his hands. "Stop, stop, all of you!"

The priest turned and asked, "Have we done anything to dissatisfy you, guardian deity?"

Zhang Lie responded directly, "I have my own affairs to deal with, and I can't stay here forever. I come from a settlement called Renhuang. If you're interested in seeing the world at large, head there—I don't have time to play with you anymore."

Zhang Lie activated a soulshard, sprouted a pair of black wings from his back, then flew up into the air.

The stunned Baimei didn't react until Zhang Lie was long gone.

"You can't leave us behind, guardian deity! Without you, we can't survive!"

"Guardian deity, you can't give up on us, and we can't go on without you!"

"Without the guardian deity's light to guide our path, how will we make our way in this world of darkness?"

Zhang Lie looked down at the Baimei from his vantage point high above. "You all already have the strength to eke out a living in the sura realm, and you don't need any deity at all."

The Baimei weren't weak. The only reason Zhang Lie could dominate them so easily was because he was too strong.

After generations of stable growth, the Baimei had quite a few promising fighters who were almost on par with sura kings, and they would be a force to be reckoned against anyone but the sura and Renhuang.

They might not be the strongest in the realm, but they certainly weren't weak. Much of their hunting even focused on bringing down peak-grade lifeforms.

The priest hurriedly asked, "Is there anything that dissatisfies you, guardian deity? Please, tell us outright—we'll do anything for you to stay!"

The Baimei all fell to the ground prostrate in despair. "Please, don't desert us! Without a deity, how will we live on?"

"Rely on yourselves!" With a beat of his wings, Zhang Lie vanished from sight. A map slowly drifted down toward them.

The Baimei were silent where they stood. What were they to do? Their deity had left them behind!"

One of the Baimei murmured, "Our god is gone..."

Some of the Baimei clutched their heads in pain as they ululated. "What have we done? Why would our god desert us?!"

Some were in such despair that they tried to commit suicide.

"No! This is a trial handed to us by the deity himself!" the priest shouted.

He picked up the map that had drifted down toward the ground. This was a copy of the map that they had found in the sura king's treasury, and it marked Renhuang's location.

The priest continued seriously, "Before our deity left, he told us to embark on a pilgrimage."

"A pilgrimage?"

The priest spread his arms wide. "He left us behind to return to the skies, but before he did so, he provided us with a trial, one to determine the worthy who would be able to accompany him there. We need to leave this safe haven and head into the wilderness of the second realm. We need to head toward Renhuang!"

Chapter 533: The Horns of War

"Toward Renhuang?"

The clan head of the Baimei stepped forward. "I understand! When the deity told us to rely on ourselves, he didn't mean that we would need to live independently of him. He meant that we had to make our way to Renhuang by ourselves!"

The priest held the map in his hands up high. "This is a trial from our god himself! Let us follow in his footsteps and head to the holy city! There, an important task surely awaits us. The success of this pilgrimage will determine the fate of our clan!"

The rest of the Baimei nodded fervently. Although they didn't know what awaited them in Renhuang, they would surely obey an edict from their deity.

The priest continued, "We will surely encounter trial and tribulation along the way. There will be paths we've never gone down, mountains so tall we won't believe we can cross them, oceans and rivers we've never seen, foes we've never encountered.

"We might become injured and lose our resolve, but all this is a trial from our deity. As long as we work together, we can break down these obstacles in our way. These obstacles won't defeat us; we'll only grow stronger as a result."

As the priest gave his speech, the eyes of the Baimei grew ardent.

"Now, we move toward Renhuang, to the holy city of our guardian deity, in search of his continued presence!

The Baimei began their grave and perilous undertaking toward Renhuang. For countless generations, they had been protected in the mountain they made their home—but a few words from Zhang Lie was sufficient to send them packing.

Deep within sura territory, the gathering of kings continued.

The sura kings' faces were ashen. Renhuang had developed a potent poison against the sura, and it had even made a breakthrough in creating mutant half-breeds.

No ordinary sura empire had such innovation.

The monarch of the sun continued, "There are more and more alien races amassing at Renhuang, some of whom possess fighting strength on the level of sura kings themselves. The longer we wait, the more aliens will arrive at Renhuang, and the more unfavorable this war will become for us."

"At the very least, however, we do know of Renhuang's own forces," the monarch of the sky added. He motioned toward the monarch of the moon.

"The vanguard of Renhuang's forces are from a race known as the rock spirits, a powerful nomadic tribe whose exploits were widely known over ten thousand years ago. Even back then, their fighters were on par with sura kings, and they boasted a combined strength equal to that of our sura empires. However, there were no records of their ever waging war against a sura empire, and we don't have a good sense of their abilities."

The monarch of the sea emphasized, "Regardless, we are confident that the rock spirits possessed the ability to raze an ordinary sura kingdom to the ground. According to our ancient records, some sura kingdoms did clash against the rock spirits. The names and identities of those sura kingdoms have been lost to time, but the rock spirits have persisted for over ten millennia.

"Ten thousand years ago, the rock spirits weren't willing to contest the sura, but we don't know what has happened to them since. Their return now, ten thousand years later, might see them a far stronger foe than before."

"The rock spirits possess indomitable bodies of rock, and they can strengthen and upgrade their bodies by consuming rare ores, minerals, and metals. Beloved by the earth, they can regenerate endlessly from dirt and rock as long as their cores aren't broken. Most importantly, their physical defense is extraordinary, and even we have only a select few techniques that can break through it," the monarch of the moon explained.

"According to our records, there were sura kings that had fought against these rock spirits before. They had wounded the rock spirits and pierced their defense at grave expense, only to have that defense regenerate in the blink of an eye," the monarch of the sky concluded.

The gathered sura kings couldn't help but think of two infamous sura kings.

"Like Gaoyuan and Suiyue?"

The monarch of the sea pondered the question for a moment. "Their regenerative abilities are unlikely to be on par with Gaoyuan's. Closer to Suiyue, I would think."

The sura kings nodded. Gaoyuan was truly disgusting.

The monarch of the sun warned, "Their regenerative abilities might be weaker than Gaoyuan's, but it'll be almost as hard to kill them as it would be to kill Gaoyuan. Remember: as long as you don't break their cores, these rock spirits can regenerate endlessly."

"Furthermore, Renhuang boasts three other alien races. Two of them tend to remain behind to guard the city, and won't participate in the battle. The race that will assuredly do so is the crag eagles, but we don't know much about them," the monarch of the moon began.

The crag eagles were indigenous to Mt. Wanren, and they rarely traveled beyond its boundaries. There were at least tens of thousands of races in the sura realm, and even the sura couldn't keep extensive records on each.

The monarch of the moon continued, "Our records suggest that the crag eagles were known for their speed. They used to be a stronger race, but were gravely weakened by some calamity or another. They should no longer be at their heyday, but for some reason, they seem to have developed new abilities.

"The crag eagles have been reported to be able to control flocks of avian lifeforms, even superior-grade ones. Dealing with these crag eagles will involve destroying the flocks that they control, as well."

In some sense, the crag eagles were avian summoners.

The monarch of the sea nodded. "The crag eagles will be invaluable scouts in the battle to come. We must kill every bird we see in the region."

The sura kings' faces were pale. They thought that the human half-breeds would be Renhuang's trump card, but Renhuang seemed to boast force after force.

They had the Yeluo poison, the half-breed mutants, strong and versatile alien races, some of whom had recently gained new powers and others of whom had revived from millennia of slumber...

Some perceptive sura kings asked the natural follow-up question, "Why would such strong races submit to Renhuang?"

The rock spirits had had the ability to fight a sura empire in their heyday, and the crag eagles had gained a powerful new ability. Both races would have done very well for themselves as independent entities, but they had chosen to submit to Renhuang instead.

Why would they be willing to do so? What had the governor of Renhuang offered them?

The monarch of the sun's face turned serious. "This is the third and most important point of our discussion: be wary of the governor of Renhuang, Zhang Lie."

The monarch of the moon said, "Based on our scouts' reports, it was he who took down the monarch of stars. He can fight on our level. These reports might be exaggerated, but we believe that none of you will be able to take him on. If you encounter him, don't try to oppose him. Report back to us immediately, and allow the five of us to take him on at once."

The sura kings all sucked in a deep breath. All five sura monarchs would challenge him simultaneously?

The monarch of the sun repeated, "Renhuang is a grave threat that has to be eradicated at any cost. With the poison that they've developed against us, they surely will continue their aggression.

We have only two routes ahead of us: to cower and hide, or to mobilize our true strength. Let us strike fear in the hearts of all who live in the sura realm. Let them tremble in the face of our majesty!"

The five sura monarchs stood up simultaneously. "The sura will live on for eternity!"

The sura kings lowered their heads and prayed, "May the asura guide us!"

They faced not the five sura monarchs, but rather the statue of the asura behind them. Their fervent prayers ended the gathering of kings and marked the beginning of a great war...

Chapter 534: Legend of the Sea God

The merpeople were an alien race that lived by the seaside. According to the monarch of stars' information, there was a peak- or higher-grade lifeform in the vicinity, which the merpeople worshiped as their guardian deity.

After his experience with the Baimei, Zhang Lie shuddered at the idea of wasting his time and slaughtering so many foes pointlessly.

This time, if he were to discover that this supposed guardian deity was only a peak-grade lifeform, he would leave immediately before anyone could stop him.

Despite all his travels, he had only amassed ten disaster gene fragments, for a grand total of eleven. He was very dismayed at the results he had obtained.

Of course, it wasn't unexpected. The sura were unaware of the existence of disaster-grade lifeforms, and the monarch of stars had only specified that the lifeforms be stronger than ordinary peak-grade ones.

In other words, many of the lifeforms on the list were still far from evolving into disaster-grade, and a century or five wasn't enough time to breach that gap.

Disaster-grade lifeforms were so rare that they were difficult to find even with the monarch of stars' information. Dredging through the memories of his past life, he recalled the existence of three disaster-grade lifeforms in the second realm, but none as clearly as were recorded in the monarch of stars' files.

The monarch of stars' information was detailed and described the nature of the lifeform in question. Zhang Lie's memories were vague and imprecise, and he had killed one of them, the golden roc, before it had fully morphed into disaster-grade.

Furthermore, information about disaster-grade lifeforms was mutable and quickly became outdated—without specific information, it would be difficult to find their lairs and hunting grounds, and there would be no way for Zhang Lie to strike.

The monarch of stars' information had been compiled some time ago, but it at least provided a start. Indeed, Zhang Lie had only found the double-headed disaster-grade spider thanks to the monarch of stars' compilation.

Although he wasn't sure how many disaster-grade lifeforms he would ultimately find, he had no other recourse.

Zhang Lie headed to the merpeople's village, which was situated right by the sea. The buildings were worn-down, and the tribe didn't seem to be prospering.

A small, thin merchild rushed out of the village.

This was the first time Zhang Lie had ever met her like. Her hair was blue and draped down her shoulders, her skin was smooth and shiny, scales crept up her arms, and she had wide soles, almost like flippers, covered with a thin membrane.

These merpeople seemed more like a cross between man and dolphin rather than man and fish.

The merchild's body was heavily wounded and bruised. She was as thin as a stick, and she seemed to be running away in a hurry from something behind her. She banged against Zhang Lie's body and stumbled to the ground. Behind her came a number of loud voices. "Catch her, quick, catch her!"

"Please, save me!" The merchild dragged herself up from the ground and caught the corner of Zhang Lie's hem as though she were grasping at a lifeline. Her wide, lustrous eyes pleaded at him. In human years, she looked to be a child about thirteen or fourteen years of age.

A mob of merpeople followed after her, waving all sorts of tools and implements. They frowned upon seeing Zhang Lie with the merchild.

"Human, scram! This is none of your business!" the leader of the mob warned.

Zhang Lie stepped back and extricated himself from the merchild's hands. He didn't much care about the conflict between the child and the rest of the tribe; who knew what she had done?

The mob seemed rather surprised that he had acquiesced so easily. One of the men from the mob strode forward and caught the child's arm.

She screamed and turned to Zhang Lie again. "Please, save me! They're going to feed me to a genetic lifeform!"

The man slapped her on the face. "How dare you call the sea god that!"

Zhang Lie's eyes widened. Had he found a trace of the sea god so easily?

The child cried out, "Even if you sacrifice me, there's no way you'll find more fish around! The reason there aren't any fish near this village is because that creature's eating them all!"

The man gave the child another slap. "Nonsense! The only reason we've been able to thrive for this long is because of the sea god's blessing. It's an honor for you to be a sacrifice, to be able to serve the sea god for eternity."

The child continued to struggle even as her face turned red. "If you think it's an honor, why don't you serve the sea god yourself?!"

The man's face turned dark. "The tribe raised you, and your life belongs to the tribe. It's time you pay it back."

The child's words seemed to provoke an immediate response from the rest of the mob.

"That your flesh and soul will forever be with the sea god is an honor. If we were chosen, we would gladly be the sacrifice, but we weren't chosen."

"What better reason to live could there be? We dedicate our entire lives to the sea god."

"Your sacrifice will bring peace and prosperity to the entire village."

The unfortunate child was unable to overcome the mob, and she was quickly dragged back into the village.

Zhang Lie suddenly spoke up. "Can I participate in this ceremony?"

The man who had spoken earlier frowned. "You're not from this tribe. What reason would there be to permit you in?"

Zhang Lie naturally wasn't interested in the ceremony, but rather this sea god.

"I'm a reporter—no, a wandering bard. I roam the second realm in search of different cultures and experiences, and I'd like to write an ode based on this ceremony to disseminate your culture and beliefs," Zhang Lie explained.

The man still remained suspicious. "There has never been an outsider allowed to witness the ceremony."

"Aren't there exceptions to every rule?"

The man waved a hand at him impatiently. "Scram!"

Zhang Lie spread his arms. "Alright, I won't lie about my identity any longer—I'm actually a devout believer of this sea god myself! While I was exploring the region, I've heard countless tales of his exalted visage, and I've always wanted to witness the sea god in person."

The man glanced at the rising tide, which had crept all the way up to their ankles while they were talking. "I don't have time to waste with you. I don't care if you're a wandering bard or devout believer. Leave immediately, or I won't go easy on you."

Moments later, the merman felt himself sailing through the air, not knowing just what had happened. He landed right by the mob's side. Taking advantage of the commotion, Zhang Lie grabbed the merchild.

He shouted, "I repeat, I want to see this sea god for myself!"

Despite the fact that Zhang Lie had made a move, the merpeople weren't enraged—they looked around them with shock and fear. What Zhang Lie didn't notice was that the tides were behaving erratically. By this time, the water level was already past his legs...

Chapter 535: The Sea God's End

"Return us our sacrifice! The sea god is on his way here!" the anxious merpeople shouted.

One of the elders spoke up. "This brat ran off right as the sacrificial rites were about to take place, and we've wasted enough time already. The sea god is almost here, and if there's no sacrifice in sight, none of us will be able to bear the brunt of his anger."

Zhang Lie smirked. "Is that so? I'd like to see this sea god for myself, then."

With a terrible tremor, roiling waves gathered by the sea and were about to smash down onto the village when Zhang Lie strode forward.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Quake]!" His fist sent a shockwave of force outward, causing heaven and earth to tremble. The wave fell apart before it could land on shore.

More and more tidal waves appeared over the horizon. Zhang Lie leapt high into the sky. The waves swamped the merpeople, who begged the sea god for mercy even as they were swept into the sea.

The skies filled with dark clouds that came out of nowhere. The sea roared, and waves continued crashing onto the beach, swallowing the village whole.

Nine twisters of water broke the surface of the sea like dragons ascending to the skies, so thick that thirty men hand-in-hand wouldn't be able to encircle them. Zhang Lie flew out to see this so-called sea god for himself.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!" Zhang Lie's technique possessed such strength it made the very air warp. Ripples of energy spread out all around him, tearing the pillars of water apart.

Zhang Lie's gaze landed on the shadow barely visible under the surface of the water. "Found you. [Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!"

The image of a serpent appeared behind him. As he punched downward, the serpent splashed into the ocean and caused water to explode all around the point of impact. It tussled with something underwater and finally managed to drag it up toward the surface.

The creature that emerged was pitch-black with an elongated body and nine heads. Out of its coarse black skin grew long feelers, and each of its nine heads was equipped with an unusual and frightening proboscis.

This was a gigantic nine-headed sea cucumber.

"Che! It's still a peak-grade lifeform!"

Even though it was almost at the level of a disaster-grade lifeform, it hadn't quite managed to breach that boundary.

"This can hardly be considered a sea god."

Indeed, it was overwhelmingly difficult to find disaster-grade lifeforms.

The merchild that Zhang Lie still held in his arm looked toward him in shock. Even though she didn't believe that there were gods in the world, the nine-headed sea cucumber looked unimaginably strong—but Zhang Lie didn't seem to pay it any heed.

The surface of the sea began to ripple. Waves, growing magnitude and reaching an impossibly high crescendo, swept toward the beach. A disaster was taking form!

The nine-headed sea cucumber launched another attack. Its body ballooned, and nine pillars of water spouted from its heads. Its body contracted as the pillars twined about each other and focused on Zhang Lie, who was forced to dodge the attack.

The pillars of water brushed the surface of the sea, dividing it in two. When it struck land, a huge spray of water burst into the sky, causing the nearby cliffs to crumble.

The sea cucumber looked monstrous, but it did have monstrous strength as well.

The merpeople swam back to land. They were particularly talented swimmers, and it would be very difficult for them to drown.

They frowned when they saw Zhang Lie.

"How dare you challenge the sea god! Your death is nigh!"

"Could a mortal like you compete against a deity? Everyone, look at this example of what will happen if we invoke our sea god's wrath!"

"No lifeform can defeat the sea god in the ocean!"

They couldn't wait for Zhang Lie to perish. If he hadn't interrupted the ceremony, their village wouldn't have been destroyed by the tidal waves. All they had to do was sacrifice the kid—but Zhang Lie had taken her away! Otherwise, the sea god surely wouldn't have become enraged.

The nine-headed sea cucumber launched another attack. Its body ballooned, and nine pillars of water spouted from its heads. They merged to form a gigantic dragon that looked as though it would swallow Zhang Lie whole.

Rather than dodging, Zhang Lie manifested a pair of blades.

With strokes so swift none of the spectators could catch his movements, Zhang Lie sliced the dragon apart. Scales appeared over his hands and arms, and he transformed into a dragonwolf in the blink of an eye.

The nine-headed sea cucumber manifested even more tidal waves.

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

The attack arced toward the sea cucumber, slicing it apart. However, the sea cucumber boasted particularly strong regeneration. It managed to take Zhang Lie's attack head-on, healing rapidly even as its body became wounded.

"Oh? Take this—[The Boundless Blade: the River Lethe]!" An underworld river hurtled into existence, roaring into the sea. The sword energy roiled like black waves as they tore the sea cucumber apart so wildly that even its regeneration faltered in light of Zhang Lie's attack.

The merpeople gaped as they saw their deity perish at this outsider's hands. That was their sea god—and now it had been killed!

Unexpectedly, Zhang Lie had taken on their god and survived. None of them would have been able to replicate the feat, but Zhang Lie refused to bow down to their constraints. He had taken up his blade against the sea god, and he had succeeded in what they would have claimed to be an impossible task.

"God-killer!" a merman shouted.

"He's a god-killer!" the other merpeople echoed.

The merpeople began to run from Zhang Lie in fear that he would target them.

Indeed, unlike the Baimei, the merpeople behaved rationally and sensibly.

Zhang Lie sighed. "This supposed sea god was far too weak. Where will I find stronger lifeforms to hunt?"

Chapter 536: An Astute Merchild

The merpeople screamed as they ran away from him.

Zhang Lie was very pleased with the merpeople's reactions; it would have been very strange if they had revered him like the Baimei. The merpeople were, as expected, scared.

What Zhang Lie didn't notice, however, was that there was one exception among the merpeople—the little girl in his hands. Her eyes glowed with bright light as she turned to Zhang Lie, who had vanquished an impossible foe.

The sea god which had been strangling the village of life and resources—Zhang Lie had killed it in two or three blows. He was clearly stronger than the sea god, and if she could learn something from him, she would be secure for the rest of her life.

As though he were used to failing to find disaster-grade lifeforms by now, Zhang Lie didn't feel perturbed by his failure. Indeed, he was starting to distrust the efficacy of the monarch of stars' information, given how many failures there had been.

Zhang Lie hovered above the surface of the sea, let the child in his hands go, and turned to leave.

"Wait!" the merchild yelled out. "Please, take me with you!"

For a child, she was particularly perceptive, and she knew that she wouldn't be able to stay in the village any longer. She would be lucky if the incensed villagers didn't burn her at the stake.

Neither did she want to remain in the village any longer—why would she want to live with people who tried to sacrifice her?

The only one who could save her was Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie continued walking away, pretending to not have heard her words.

"I know where many strong lifeforms live!"

Zhang Lie stopped short.

The child continued, "There are many strong lifeforms nearby, and I can promise they're no weaker than this sea god—no, they're even stronger!"

When she saw Zhang Lie stop, she knew that she had grasped a lifeline.

Although she didn't know why Zhang Lie was searching for them, she had guessed that those were his targets. If she revealed her knowledge, he would surely bring her with him.

Zhang Lie whirled around and asked, "How do you know what I'm searching for?"

"You expressed your displeasure at the sea god being so weak twice over."

Once was at the start of the battle, and the other was at the end. From her perspective, Zhang Lie seemed to be searching for an opponent strong enough for him to battle. Her deceased father had told her tales of strong heroes and strong fighters doing the same, in hopes of ascending to a higher realm.

Given how strong Zhang Lie was, she didn't know what heights he was aspiring to, but that didn't matter. She was certain she could make use of the fact that Zhang Lie was trying to hunt down strong lifeforms.

If she were wrong, that didn't matter; it wasn't as if her situation could get any worse. On the other hand, if she were right, her circumstances would immediately improve for the better.

Zhang Lie glanced at her skeptically. "Why should I trust you, little girl?"

To be honest, he was rather tempted by her offer. He hadn't been very successful with the monarch of stars' information, and he didn't know just how long it would take him to find a second disaster-grade lifeform.

The merchild might be another opportunity for him.

Zhang Lie didn't know how large the landmass of the second realm was compared to the oceans and seas, but he was certain that there were many strong deep-sea lifeforms. In general, oceanic lifeforms were stronger than terrestrial ones.

In the deep sea, the water was icy cold, and such lifeforms would have to bear the brunt of immense pressure every time they moved. The deeper they went, the stronger the lifeforms would get.

If he couldn't find any disaster-grade lifeforms on land, doing so at sea wasn't a bad idea.

"I know that there's a demonic lifeform at the center of a gigantic whirlpool nearby, that there's a hulking beast of steel in a nearby ocean, why the sea of storms is always stormy..."

The merchild revealed the existence of quite a few seemingly strong lifeforms in the region. "You see, we merpeople know quite a few legends about the seas, and behind each legend is a genetic lifeform. My father was responsible for surveying the nearby seas in order to see if there were another place where we might be able to make a village. He left the domain of the sea god and traveled to many places. All my knowledge came from my father."

The merchild looked pleadingly at Zhang Lie.

"Very well. I'll recruit you as a guide."

The merchild's eyes widened, and she smiled radiantly— but the very next moment, Zhang Lie released his aura and kept it hanging around him until she was gasping for breath.

"But if you lie to me, if I can't find a trace of these lifeforms you describe, I'll toss you into the mouth of a peak-grade lifeform myself."

The merchild gulped and nodded.

Zhang Lie handed her a vial from his potbellied-toad pouch.

"Drink this."

The merchild drank it without asking a single question. Her stomach suddenly seemed to warm up, and she could see her wounds healing with her naked eye. What Zhang Lie had given her was a healing potion concocted by the Yeluo.

She felt as though she were immersed in a hot water bath, comfortable and content. She had never even heard of such potions before! Despite all she knew of the seas, the world was so much larger than that.

Zhang Lie carried the girl in his hands as he flew off. She called out, "My name's Zhu. What's yours?"

Zhang Lie seemed unwilling to reveal his name, so Zhu didn't press him. "Mister, why are you searching for these genetic lifeforms? Are you trying to find stronger opponents to defeat?"

Zhang Lie countered, "Won't your family be worried that I'm kidnapping you?"

She smiled sadly. "If I had an ordinary family, I wouldn't have become a sacrifice for the sea god. My father used to be the head of the village, and he believed that sacrificing members of the clan to appease the sea god was inexcusable. He's always wanted to escape the sea god and to find somewhere better for us all to live."

The rest of the tribe, however, didn't agree with his actions. They viewed the sacrifice as a necessity, as part of the status quo; that was how they had always lived, after all.

Chapter 537: The Seven Forbidden Zones

Zhu continued, "I don't understand why my fellow kin won't leave. Because of the sea god's continued presence, none of us can catch any fish around here—and the tribe has had to travel to more dangerous waters in order to find food. There's been so much pointless death as a result. We're all but living in these dangerous waters, but we have to sacrifice our people to this disgusting 'sea god' as well!"

Zhu became more and more enraged as she spoke.

For the weak, survival was a particularly difficult problem. There were many races that found it difficult just to survive, let alone eat well. At the very least, the sea cucumber would prevent any dangerous oceanic lifeforms from encroaching upon its domain.

Zhu believed this to be an idiotic decision because of her father's influence.

Indeed, it was foolish of the merpeople not to continue looking for better places to live, but their circumstances had given them no choice. This was how they lived; they would move their village to a more prosperous location if they could, but they had never found such a location.

What happened to Zhu's father was the last straw, and it was what prompted their seclusion thereafter. Despite searching the waters far and wide for many years, Zhu's father hadn't found a suitable place to start a new village, and he had even died in his quest.

The remaining merpeople believed that the rest of the world was too dangerous for them, that they surely wouldn't be able to find anything better than what they already had. Only with the sea god's blessing would they be able to live on.

This was a form of survivorship bias: Zhu's father's generation was upset with the status quo, and they wanted to imagine a life where they weren't subservient to the sea god. However, none but Zhu's father had had the courage to set out in search of a better life.

Meanwhile, the generation before that had long since grown too used to their life to be able to question it, and Zhu's father's generation ended up much the same way.

That Zhu's father had been willing to brave dangerous waters for his ideals was commendable; unfortunately, he didn't have the strength to see it through. Once Zhu's father died, the entire tribe was even more certain of their belief that the outside world was too dangerous. From then on, no one had suggested searching for a new place to live.

To the nine-headed sea cucumber, these merpeople wouldn't make a filling meal; at most, they were just like snacks.

All peak-grade lifeforms had at least rudimentary intelligence. The reason the sea cucumber hadn't killed the tribe might have been because it was interested in the novelty of their worship, or perhaps because it thought of itself as rearing the tribe for an annual snack or two.

Zhu had been influenced by her father from birth, and she had a craving for the outside world that none of the other tribespeople could match.

According to Zhu, her mother had contracted depression after her father's death, and her body slowly wasted away. Ever since then, she had lived with her uncle.

"Where's your uncle, then?"

Zhu shrugged. "He was the one you knocked aside at the entrance to the village."

Zhang Lie:...

"My uncle's a terrible man, a layabout who does nothing but gamble all day long. He took over my parents' house and sold all our furniture. In the end, when he ran out of money, he sold me as well. If he were to offer me as a sacrifice, he would receive a large pearl from the village."

The village used pearls as its main currency.

"You know the rest, Mister."

Zhu didn't want to be a sacrifice, so she ran away from the altar and, fortunately, crashed into Zhang Lie. Otherwise, with a child's strength and stamina, she would ultimately have been caught and sacrificed.

By the time she had finished telling her tale, they had arrived at their first destination.

Zhu pointed forward. "Ahead lies the whirlpool strait."

Zhang Lie glanced in the direction of her hand. Countless whirlpools lay ahead of them. Wind blew in huge gusts, sending huge waves crashing down all around them.

"This strait is one of the seven forbidden regions of the seas."

"What are the others?"

Zhu raised three fingers. "The only other regions I know are the sea of mists, sea of storms, and sea of bones."

Zhang Lie made up his mind then and there—if he had a chance, he would visit all seven of these forbidden regions.

The monarch of stars had listed a few peak-grade lifeforms in the seas, but the sura scouts had largely focused on terrestrial lifeforms instead.

"Tell me about this whirlpool strait."

"According to the ancient legends of the merpeople, the whirlpool strait is home to a tyrannical creature who can consume the sun and the moon alike, the stars in the sky. The sun falls from the sky to be consumed by the tyrant, and its droppings morph into the moon, which rises from the

strait. After the moon hangs above the sky for some time, it dissolves, and a new sun rises above the horizon.

"The day proceeds until the next time the tyrant wakes up, at which point it devours the sun anew. Thus forms the cycle between day and night. My father once told me that the reason there are so few stars in the sky is because the tyrant has swallowed them all."

"Heliocentrism? An interesting belief..."

"Heliocentrism? What does that mean?"

"Well, our world is round and spins on its axis even as it revolves around the sun—hold on, does that apply to the second realm?"

Who knew if the world of the second realm was truly spherical? No one had managed to head into outer space before. Once hunters reached a certain altitude, they were bounced back toward the ground by the will of the world.

As they spoke, Zhang Lie and Zhu had approached the nearest whirlpool. Despite the fact that they were in the air, Zhang Lie still felt a strong suction force pulling him toward the sea. This was clearly an unusual phenomenon, and it hinted at these whirlpools' artificial nature.

No lifeform, avian or oceanic, would be able to pass through these whirlpools unscathed.

Zhang Lie activated his dragon's eye soulshard and glanced toward the center of the whirlpool, where he saw several scallop-like creatures.

"It looks like there are indeed lifeforms generating these whirlpools from below."

The whirlpools were of various shapes and sizes. The weaker and smaller ones were generated by mutated-grade lifeforms, and the whirlpools grew larger and stronger as the grade of their corresponding lifeforms went up.

Zhang Lie seemed a little disappointed. "Is this the true face behind this whirlpool strait?"

It was nothing more than a horde of unusual genetic lifeforms.

Zhang Lie was a little unhappy.

"I hope the next location you're guiding me towards does have lifeforms stronger than the nine-headed sea cucumber, or I'll throw you into the sea and have these lifeforms gobble you up," Zhang Lie warned.

Chapter 538: The Whirlpool Tyrant

Zhu cocked her head. "Even the sea god is unwilling to brave the perils of the whirlpool strait. Doesn't that make these creatures stronger than the sea god?"

Zhang Lie:...

Zhu wasn't wrong, but this wasn't the type of strength Zhang Lie was looking for. He snorted, unfurled his wings, and made to leave, but Zhu called him back.

"Hold on, hold on! The tyrant of the strait hasn't appeared yet!"

Zhang Lie pointed a finger at the whirlpools that lay beneath him. "Aren't these the tyrants you're talking about?"

"No!" Zhu replied. "The tyrant makes a huge commotion when it emerges from the depths. It's incomparable to these smaller whirlpools—you'll see."

Zhang Lie's expression was complicated. He was shocked and somewhat disbelieving of Zhu's claims, but his expectations swelled.

"The tyrant of the whirlpool strait tends to awaken in the evening."

Zhang Lie hovered in the sky until evening, when the scallops closed up and the whirlpool strait became calmer than at any point during the day.

The evening light filtered through the clouds and reflected dazzlingly over the surface of the water. The sparkling blue water and rosy clouds evoked a startling sensation of natural beauty, one which Zhang Lie hadn't expected to see.

Just above the horizon was a luminous, glowing sun, whose rays shone red as they pierced through the clouds, making the sky look as though it were burning up. Beneath the sun was an idyllic patch of crystal-clear sea, one which seemed to turn red from the evening sunlight.

A sea breeze began to blow, and Zhang Lie felt unexpectedly comforted by the scenery. No matter when, no matter where, a sunset by the beach was a wonder to behold.

The scallops each spouted out one final pillar of water, not to attack Zhang Lie, but to expel all the water from their bodies and replace it with air before sinking toward the sea floor for a night's rest.

When the fading sunlight struck these pillars, they glowed golden, only adding to the natural beauty of the scene.

He had visited the beach with his family once before. Back then, his parents were hale and hearty, and he had witnessed the sunset with Zhang Hanxiang. Suddenly, the image of Zhang Hanxiang seemed to become Zhu, still in his hands—they were both orphans who had lost their parents. Unexpectedly, Zhang Lie revealed a gentle smile as he reminisced about his idyllic childhood.

"In a few moments, as the sun sets, we'll see a corona of green light. Do you know why that happens?"

Zhu: ???

"As we know, when sunlight hits the atmosphere, it begins to refract. Sunlight might look white, but that light is actually a combination of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet light—the seven colors of the rainbow. Each color of light has its own wavelength, red light having the longest and violet the shortest. The angle of refraction is determined by this wavelength—red light is refracted the least, and violet light the most.

"As a result, when the sun sets, the last color we should see should be violet or pale blue, but the wavelength of that light is so short that violet light largely diffuses away in the atmosphere, leaving only green light behind."

At the time, he was still a clueless youth, who had parroted that paragraph from a book he'd found in a library in an attempt to impress his sister. Zhang Hanxiang clapped her hands in amazement at his explanation, and Zhang Lie had become quite pleased with himself for some time afterwards.

Instead of reacting with amazement, however, Zhu frowned. "I've never seen this green light..."

It was Zhang Lie's turn to be surprised. Before he could inquire further, an extraordinary spectacle occurred.

Tremors shook the sea and sky. The surface of the sea reverberated, as did the very air.

An earthquake? No, that was impossible! The tremors were stronger than an earthquake. The surface of the sea began to rise, and choppy waves smashed against each other.

An ancient voice came from deep underwater, as though the owner of that voice had lived for millennia. It echoed lowly from beneath the sea, much like the baying of a whale or the keening of a dragon. The surface of the sea darkened, as though a gigantic cloud had covered the sun. From above the surface of the sea, Zhang Lie looked down and saw a shadow of unbelievable magnitude beneath the water.

Despite being high above the surface, he couldn't see where the shadow ended. Ripples of energy spread about the shadow's body, and a primordial aura emerged from the sea.

The feeling was so intense that Zhang Lie felt as though he weren't able to breathe, and an instinctive tremor shook his body. Zhang Lie couldn't help but smile—after all this time, after all this effort, he had finally experienced this aura once again.

The aura of a disaster-grade lifeform.

Even if he couldn't see its full appearance just yet, its aura was proof enough. The incandescent sea seemed to come alive. Water spun more and more rapidly, as though the sea itself were breaking up, as though there were a mysterious force churning through it.

Even the air began to swirl as a gigantic whirlpool formed in the sea and everything was sucked within. The effect extended beyond even the sea—a twister formed in the air as a result of the pressure differential, and the suction force was so intense that the entire sky seemed liable to collapse.

Despite his strength, Zhang Lie was unable to remain steady in the air. The whirlpool seemed like a gigantic maw that consumed everything in its path. Even before Zhang Lie could make out its appearance, the world seemed to turn apocalyptic.

Zhang Lie barely managed to remain in the air, straining against the pull of the whirlpool, when he suddenly felt a blinding light.

The sun was setting. No—the sun was being dragged down by the whirlpool!

"Swallowing the sun and the moon... isn't that merely a legend?"

No, it couldn't be. Zhang Lie could feel the burning, scorching energy of the sun all around him, and his forehead beaded with sweat.

In the blink of an eye, he flashed away. The whirlpool hadn't sucked down the sun, but it had somehow managed to take in some of the sun's boundless energy for itself.

Chapter 539: Another Disaster-Grade Lifeform

It felt as if a massive drain had opened up in the sea. Seawater whirled around it in a corkscrew, trying to fill the gaping hole. The air above the whirlpool formed a twister, one so strong that space distorted around it.

Zhang Lie felt unfathomably small, as though he were nothing more than a bug.

This wasn't a whirlpool; it was a black hole that would swallow everything up!

Indeed, this had to be a disaster-grade lifeform, a disaster-grade lifeform on the level of an apocalypse. Not only did it manage to consume the seawater, it even consumed the radiant light of the sun. No—to be specific, what the whirlpool was consuming was the energy of the sunlight incident on the surface of the sea.

No matter how strong a disaster-grade lifeform was, it wouldn't be able to swallow up the sun. What the whirlpool swallowed up was its remnant energy. That was why it was impossible to see the few seconds of green light that emerged at the end of a sunset—the whirlpool was swallowing it all up.

Zhang Lie's gaze turned complicated. He was excited, but he had to take the measure of this foe carefully. This was a true disaster-grade lifeform, one that had grown into its prime.

The energy of the sun was all but an infinite reservoir of power, even if the lifeform was only taking it in indirectly and at reduced efficiency.

The sun's power was greatly diminished at sunset, but even then, the energy that coursed through the lifeform was immense. What the sunlight lacked in intensity, it made up for in volume—the whirlpool lifeform was sucking up the incident sunlight in an unbelievable region all around the whirlpool strait.

They were quite some distance from the merpeople's village, but if Zhu had never seen that flash of green light, then the whirlpool lifeform had to be absorbing sunlight in at least a humongous area around it—a circular region with a radius of at least ten nautical miles.

Zhang Lie could hardly imagine just how strong such a lifeform had to be, if this was its daily intake of energy.

As the remaining sunlight was swallowed up, night descended on the realm.

Subsequently, a white pillar of light connected the sea and the sky, tearing apart the darkness and illuminating the entire world. It was almost like a thick pillar of lightning, whose crackle echoed through the sky long after the light had dissipated.

The pillar lit up the moon, and the stars began to twinkle.

Rain fell from the skies. Zhu tried it. "It's salty."

Zhang Lie grinned maliciously. "Open your mouth wide! This is the snot from the whirlpool tyrant of the deep sea. It might extend your life—who knows?"

Zhu shivered. "What?!"

The beam of light was the energy from the sunlight that the whirlpool tyrant was unable to consume, which it subsequently released back into the sky.

Under the light of the moon, the water vapor falling through the sky formed a rainbow.

The conjunction of a rainbow and a starry, moonlit sky would have almost been romantic if not for the fact that the water vapor that was still drizzling down was essentially vomit from the whirlpool tyrant.

Such was the facade behind which romance hid, after all. An "I LOVE YOU" formed from 999 roses was, in some sense, the same as an "I LOVE YOU" formed from 999 cockroaches. After all, growing so many roses surely needed a great deal of fertilizer, and fertilizer came from nothing but feces.

Zhang Lie glanced up at the sky. "Why are there two moons in the sky?"

Zhu cocked her head. "Haven't there always been two moons in the sky?"

Zhang Lie: ? ? ?

Zhang Lie glanced carefully at the second moon, the one that he didn't recognize. It was slowly moving, and it radiated silver light as it did so.

"Could it be another byproduct of the whirlpool tyrant's vomit...?"

Even after the tyrant had spat out the remnant sunlight, the suction force was as strong as ever. Indeed, it was so intense that even the starlight was being sucked toward its maw, forming a river of stellar condensate that trailed down the sky and toward the center of the whirlpool.

The stellar light contained flecks of gold, green, silver, and blue, and it was a miraculous sight to behold.

Zhang Lie sucked in a deep breath. This was where the legend of a monstrous lifeform swallowing up the sun and stars had come from!

This was surely the largest and most dangerous disaster-grade lifeform that Zhang Lie had met to date. It consumed not only sunlight, but starlight as well. Just how large was the whirlpool tyrant's appetite?

"I've caught a big fish."

Even before he came, Zhang Lie was certain that oceanic lifeforms would be stronger than terrestrial ones, and the same would be true for the disaster-grade lifeforms at sea. He simply hadn't expected just how much stronger such lifeforms would be.

It had taken him months to find this one disaster-grade lifeform, and there was no way Zhang Lie was giving up on it now. He summoned Whitey and had it bring Zhu away to safety so he could fight without any distractions.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!"

Because of the fact that he was at sea, all his water-attuned techniques would grow far stronger as a result.

Sword energy filled the air, cutting apart the massive whirlpool. However, the suction from the whirlpool was so intense that it captured even the sword energy itself, which was consumed in its entirety in the blink of an eye...

Chapter 540: Battling the Disaster-Grade Lifeform

"[Rune: Control]!" Zhang Lie raised both his arms into the sky, and the image of a dragonturtle appeared behind him. The two gravity-controlling tablets smashed into the ground... before being swallowed up by the whirlpool.

"You can't eat everything you see." Zhang Lie snapped his fingers and detonated the two tablets. The swirling water suddenly began sloshing around, and the sea level began to fall.

A black shadow was emerging from the depths of the sea.

Zhang Lie activated his blood ant and dragonwolf soulshards simultaneously. Thick fur grew from his skin, followed by scales and a dragon's claws, as he transformed into a draconic wolfman.

"[The Boundless Blade: the River Lethe]!" An underworld river hurtled into existence, roaring into the seas. The haunted souls of the underworld could almost be seen in the darkness.

Zhang Lie caught a glimpse of the gigantic lifeform beneath the sea, but before he could do more, huge waves rose all around him, trying to sweep him within. He sent the waves crashing down with a slice of his sword, only to be met with the humongous tail of a whale, which swung down at him with the force of the boundless sea.

In its domain, the whirlpool tyrant was able to fight at full strength, but Zhang Lie avoided the attack deftly.

Subsequently, a silvery-white pillar burst out of the surface of the sea. Zhang Lie moved to dodge, only to see the remnants of his stone tablets being spat out by the whirlpool tyrant. Its gigantic tail slammed down on the surface of the sea and split it in two. Wind wailed, battering Zhang Lie, and a torrential downpour began to fall.

"[The Boundless Blade: the River Lethe]!" Zhang Lie thrust his blade toward the sea as the ocean was dyed black all around him. The sword energy roiled like black waves as they spread out around the whirlpool tyrant.

Only at sea could Zhang Lie's [The Boundless Blade] show off its true potential.

The waves of the underworld river smashed against the whirlpool tyrant's tail, causing a huge explosion of genetic energy. The ramifications of the fight extended from shore to shore.

Zhang Lie's technique broke against the underworld tyrant's tail, but the tyrant didn't go unharmed. It howled in pain, and the surface of the sea morphed into a giant tsunami.

"[The Boundless Blade: Dragon's Wrath]!" A blood-red dragon tore apart the forming tsunami and out its other end.

Zhang Lie immediately felt an aura that threatened to stop his body cold as a humongous black figure, wreathed in seawater, appeared before him. It was so large that Zhang Lie seemed like an ant in comparison. The blood dragon smashed into the seawater and landed on the black figure's skin, leaving nothing but a faint scratch behind.

The surface of the ocean trembled. Thanks to the moonlight, Zhang Lie was finally able to discern the true appearance of the figure that had previously been shrouded in shadow. It was a genetic lifeform that combined the characteristics of three lifeforms: the turtle, the dragon, and the whale. It had the form of a whale, the shell of a turtle, and the claws of a dragon.

Its gigantic body was covered by a thick, sturdy shell, and four claws grew out where a turtle's flippers would be. Its skin looked like a starry sky. Seawater revolved around it, as though the ocean itself was submitting to its presence. It was the tyrant of the whirlpool strait, the hegemon of the entire sea, the legend that swallowed the sun and stars.

It opened its mouth and shot a golden beam of light at Zhang Lie.

His eyes wide, Zhang Lie's body split into dozens of clones. The golden light scoured the entire ocean before exploding over a nautical mile away. It vaporized part of the sea instantly. A wave of superheated water vapor smashed into Zhang Lie from the back, and he turned to see a cloud of steam rising into the air.

The golden light left a deep furrow over the surface of the sea for minutes afterwards.

Zhang Lie's lips quirked into a smile. "Not bad, not bad!"

He knew that oceanic lifeforms were stronger than terrestrial ones. After his battle with the nine-headed sea cucumber, he estimated that they were roughly 30% stronger, but he hadn't expected an oceanic disaster-grade lifeform to be so much stronger.

The whirlpool tyrant opened its mouth again. Its starry skin seemed to glow and shift rapidly as stellar radiance shot toward Zhang Lie like a thunderstorm, the brightness so piercing that it filled the entirety of Zhang Lie's vision.

"[Blade of the Heavens: the Sea Swells]!" But Zhang Lie didn't fear the attack. 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.

Zhang Lie's attack clashed against the stellar beams. The force was such that the very sea parted in two, forming a front where the attacks clashed against each other.

Gleaming light honed the edge of Zhang Lie's sword, and a beam of sword energy rose into the air. Zhang Lie continued pouring more and more genetic energy into the technique, until it shot up a thousand meters high into the air.

The whirlpool tyrant then expelled a beam of red light, one so scorching-hot steam trailed its path along the sea. This was surely the essence of the sunset, part of the strength that the whirlpool tyrant had accumulated over the years.

"[First Form: Parting the River]!" As Zhang Lie's sword technique clashed against the red beam, a large quantity of seawater evaporated as steam.

Zhang Lie's technique might have been able to part a river, but not the sun. That said, the whirlpool tyrant's attack was hardly as strong as the sun, and Zhang Lie's own strength eclipsed his technique's.

With a loud shout, Zhang Lie infused more and more genetic energy into his blade, until he was able to split the beam in two. The energy whizzed around him and exploded to his back, sending his hair and clothes fluttering.

Sensing that its attack had failed, the whirlpool tyrant tried to duck back underwater.

"I won't let you run off! [Shadow and Light]!" Zhang Lie's blade gleamed brightly as it cut across time and space, and he appeared right behind the whirlpool tyrant.

The tyrant reacted near-instantaneously. As Zhang Lie emerged, it tried to sweep him away with its tail.

"[Rune: Control]!" Zhang Lie raised an arm into the air and sent the gravity and anti-gravity tablets crashing down by the tyrant's side...