

U. Warlord 541

Chapter 541: Swallowed Up

The tablets were only able to stop the whirlpool tyrant momentarily, but that was enough for Zhang Lie.

"[Time's Passing]!" The blades infused with the power of time immemorial landed on the tyrant's body, but they had little effect. A century, a millennium—all that was but a moment to the disaster-grade whirlpool tyrant, who had lived for eons.

The pressure of the sea washed over Zhang Lie. Under the tyrant's control, the pressure hindered Zhang Lie's movements to a startling extent, making him feel as though he were trying to swim in the deep sea.

If not for the strength of Zhang Lie's own constitution, he might have been compressed into nothing more than a ball of meat.

The whirlpool tyrant keened once more with the power of its station and the depth of its being. The entire sea reverberated with it, causing the water pressure to grow stronger and stronger.

It sounded like a warning, or perhaps a threat. It was announcing that it had the upper hand, that all this terrain belonged to him and him alone.

Gritting his teeth and bearing the increased pressure, Zhang Lie rushed forward.

The whirlpool tyrant began to make a move, swimming so quickly that it seemed to drag the entire sea along with it. Caught by the currents, Zhang Lie was swept up by the tyrant's trajectory. He activated the first form of his [Ninecarp Transformation], transformed into a carp, and swam nimbly against the current.

The tyrant's movements became more and more rapid, forming an underwater cyclone that had the entire sea trembling and revolving in its wake. The tyrant opened its maw wide, and the seawater gushed into it as though it were a never-ending abyss.

Everything around it, fish and marine lifeforms alike, coral and granite and debris, was sucked toward its maw. Not even Zhang Lie was able to escape from its grasp.

The whirlpool tyrant's appetite seemed to be endless.

On careful investigation, Zhang Lie noticed that the seawater that flooded into the tyrant's body was forced out through its gills, leaving the solid matter behind.

Zhang Lie felt his whole world turning topsy-turvy as he smashed against all sorts of debris.

A stellar river descended from the heavens. The stellar light contained flecks of gold, green, silver, and blue, and it was a miraculous sight to behold. The sea shimmered with an otherworldly glow.

That river led right into the whirlpool tyrant's maw—under the tremendous suction it created, even the starlight was unable to escape its grasp.

Deep in the sea, despite the effects of [Ninecarp Transformation], Zhang Lie found himself being drawn toward the tyrant's maw. He was certain the tyrant could keep this up for the entire night if it had to—and if that were the case, then he would need to take the initiative.

Instead of resisting the current, Zhang Lie activated his white-grub soulshard and had it envelope his entire body, then allowed the current to carry him toward and into the tyrant's maw.

The moment he was swallowed, the turbulent waters turned calm and placid as the tyrant slowly swam through the sea.

In mid-air, Zhu saw the whirlpool that had suddenly appeared in the sea vanish, and she heard the whirlpool tyrant keen loudly. Her heart skipped a beat. Could Zhang Lie have lost?

After Zhang Lie was sucked into the tyrant's body, he entered a rather large space. He activated his dragon's eye soulshard and looked all around him—he was now within its body. The body of this whirlpool tyrant actually seemed to be connected to an extradimensional storage space, just like that of his potbellied-toad pouch.

A strange power in his surroundings was corroding whatever had been sucked in and causing it all to decay. Once all the solids had liquefied, that liquid was absorbed by the walls of the space and then filtered out of the tyrant's body as waste.

If Zhang Lie's body weren't protected by his superior-grade white-grub soulshard, he would likewise have suffered the same fate. Even with his genetic energy as a barrier against the strange corrosion, he would only be able to survive a little while longer.

Zhang Lie anticipated that none of this solid matter would be able to provide any form of sustenance for the whirlpool tyrant. Its main diet was the evening sunlight and starlight, and it had to consume an entire night's worth of it to feel satiated.

Only that quantity of energy would be able to support such a massive lifeform.

Every day, the tyrant would wake up at sunset, consume a night's worth of energy, before falling back asleep.

That sunlight and starlight was composed of the genetic energy that ran through the entirety of the second realm, though hardly any lifeforms were able to absorb it.

The pocket dimension was unusually corrosive, and even the white-grub soulshard wouldn't be able to protect Zhang Lie for long. Once the soulshard's protection was exhausted, the corrosion would target Zhang Lie himself.

He couldn't waste any more time.

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

The silvery-white glow illuminated the entire pocket space, and the sword seemed to turn immaterial, as though it belonged to another plane of reality. No matter how large this space was, it was still part of the whirlpool tyrant, and it connected to its belly.

As long as the whirlpool tyrant had a soul, Zhang Lie's soul-targeting attack would have an effect.

The whirlpool tyrant howled as its body was suddenly attacked and its soul impaled from within. The seawater began to froth, and tall waves formed over the surface of the sea.

The whirlpool tyrant could hardly believe that its prey had hurt it from within. Every other foe it had met could be swallowed cleanly into its stomach, where the foe would be dissolved into nothing. What was so different about this puny fighter?

In the past, the whirlpool tyrant had only encountered oceanic lifeforms, none of which could target the soul directly.

The whirlpool tyrant's body was particularly large, so large its outer walls could hardly be found. Even if its prey somehow ended up against a wall, those walls were sturdy and protected by a durable barrier.

On the other hand, Zhang Lie was different. He could strike at the whirlpool tyrant's soul directly, a direct counter to its physical-based attacks.

The tyrant was only now realizing how fearsome an opponent Zhang Lie was...

Chapter 542: The Victor Has Been Decided

"[Blades, Extinguish]!" Spiritual energy condensed into shining waves. Like a tsunami, the waves filled the entire pocket dimension and smashed against the whirlpool tyrant's soul.

Though the whirlpool tyrant's strength lay in its physical body, no part of a disaster-grade lifeform was weak. The tyrant's soul had been refined and honed by the sun and stars, and two spiritual attacks wouldn't be able to kill it.

The tyrant's body tossed and turned in the sea, sending huge waves cascading down its body. Zhang Lie's attacks were surprisingly effective, and it felt unimaginable pain that it had never experienced to date.

Even before evolving into a disaster-grade lifeform, it hadn't ever experienced such soul-splitting pain, one that struck at the heart of its body.

It had battled with quite a few stronger oceanic lifeforms in the past, but those had only hurt his physical body. None like Zhang Lie had the ability to target an enemy's soul.

Given the whirlpool tyrant's massive body, a physical injury was easily ignored and negated. After evolving into a disaster-grade lifeform, it no longer had any enemies to speak of—all it did, day in and day out, was absorb the essence of the sun and stars before returning to the depths of the sea. No one offended it; no one dared to offend it.

That day, however, the whirlpool tyrant experienced the greatest pain it had felt since its birth—and all that was caused by an insignificant, diminutive lifeform.

The whirlpool tyrant sucked in great gulps of seawater.

"One last blow!" The twin blades Guicang and Hanguang emitted a fearsome aura, shining as brightly as the sun and moon in the dim pocket dimension of the tyrant's body. Sword energy materialized from Zhang Lie's blades into a blood dragon that revolved around him.

Before he could attack, however, a great quantity of seawater rushed into the pocket dimension. Zhang Lie was still in the middle of charging up for an attack, and he was sucked away by the changing pressure due to his inattention.

A pair of wings sprouted from Zhang Lie's back, allowing him to stabilize himself in mid-air. He raised his hands, and the image of a dragonturtle appeared behind him.

The whirlpool tyrant expelled Zhang Lie from its body through its blowhole with incredible force, sending him out of the sea and into the air. Under the moonlight, he seemed to turn into a silvery-white pillar of light.

The whirlpool tyrant repeated its actions several times, and Zhang Lie had to flap his wings to remain steady.

Waves surged up in a circle around the whirlpool tyrant for miles on end.

It was truly incensed—as the tyrant of the whirlpool strait, the sea was its domain. No lifeform could challenge its authority, especially not a minuscule bug that had come out of nowhere!

The whirlpool tyrant's body burned with blood-red flame as it summoned its reserves of solar energy. Red light streamed from its body and illuminated the entire sea—it turned into a miniature sun that rose up high into the sky.

On a faraway shore, the merpeople hiding in a cave by the cliff were roused awake in a dazed stupor. It hadn't seemed like that long since they fell asleep—was it daybreak already?

All the races of the sea, not just the merpeople, could see a rising sun from the midst of the ocean, one so bright it eclipsed the radiant moon.

The entire sea turned red. 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.

The sea turned turbulent. Under the red light, gigantic waves crashed down beneath the sun the whirlpool tyrant had transformed into.

Even without getting close, Zhang Lie could feel a hot, scouring wind burning his skin. From afar, Zhu's face fell. She had never before seen such potent strength. The whirlpool tyrant looked as though it were about to devour everything in sight, and she was so scared she was paralyzed with fear.

The moonlight wyrm Whitey evacuated with Zhu; just the fallout from Zhang Lie's fight with the whirlpool tyrant was something it couldn't bear.

"Is this the true strength of the whirlpool tyrant?" Zhu wondered.

It was far stronger than the sea god that her tribe had worshiped. With one move, it could send waves rippling over the entire sea. With one act, it could send light flaring into the sky so brightly that it created a new dawn. This was a true god—how would Zhang Lie be able to challenge it?

Zhu found it incredibly hard to believe that there could be other existences able to match the tyrant in strength. Zhang Lie seemed as though he were about to be swallowed up by the red sun himself.

Facing the scorching wind, the approaching sun, Zhang Lie only smiled coldly. "Don't you find it interesting that my white-grub soulshard—forget it, you wouldn't understand."

Zhang Lie snapped his fingers at the sun, causing the tyrant to stop in mid-air.

The tyrant's body rippled with energy that was not its own. As the ripples spread out over its body, time and space froze around it.

"[Rune: Resonate]!" Within the whirlpool tyrant's body, the four dragonturtle tablets formed a black domain. They began to resonate as one, sending ripples that melded with the space and forming an absolute domain over all things within and without.

The whirlpool tyrant had made a terrible mistake in swallowing Zhang Lie—it didn't have the appetite or strength to contain him.

Before being sent out of the tyrant's body, Zhang Lie had stuck the four dragonturtle tablets to the interior of the pocket dimension by making use of the adhesive properties of his white-grub soulshard, all for this very moment.

The tyrant's defenses were crippled; it was nothing more than a target now.

The whirlpool tyrant would have been able to expel the tablets from its body with seawater except for the fact that Zhang Lie had adhered them to the pocket dimension, a space that even the whirlpool tyrant didn't have direct control of.

"The victor has been decided!"

Zhu stared openmouthed at the scene. The tyrant might have turned into a sun, but Zhang Lie had frozen that sun with just a snap of its fingers! Zhang Lie was even stronger than that godlike existence!

She stared at him in awe.

Nevertheless, the whirlpool tyrant hadn't given up. Despite the slowed time, it continued to open its maw, from which a beam of golden light formed.

Zhang Lie knew that he had to end the fight immediately.

Chapter 543: Radiance of the Golden Qilin

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

A dragon of blood rushed out of the tide accompanied by a series of dark, black waves.

The whirlpool tyrant ignited his body. Red light flared all over the sea. Beneath the tyrant was a roaring patch of frothing red sea.

With a gigantic torrent of energy, it broke free of Zhang Lie's spatiotemporal constraints and shot out a beam of red light at him.

The beam struck the dragon that Zhang Lie had summoned and burst apart in mid-air, igniting the heavens in flame. The sea shook, and all the shores bordering the sea were beset with tidal waves.

Far into the distance, the spectacle that was unfolding in the air shocked almost everyone in Renhuang awake. Sun Mengmeng leaped up onto one of the crag eagles' watchtowers. Quite a few hunters had already done so; everyone was observing the blood-red sky.

Sun Mengmeng frowned. "What's going on?"

No one knew whether this was an omen or a blessing.

The hunters gathered in Renhuang watched the skies with unease. The red sky felt imposing; whether for good or for ill, it seemed to portend a major event.

Above the sea, the tyrant's beam continued to clash against Zhang Lie's dragon. Its energy gradually dissipated, leaving behind the physical projectile that was the source of the attack, a ball of unknown material shining red-hot with heat.

The energy of the beam might have been sapped away, but not the momentum of the projectile.

Zhang Lie felt an immense pressure forcing him back, and he was surprised that something had survived [The Boundless Blade]. With both his swords together, he sent the ball of matter flying up into the air.

Any regular object would have been disintegrated by his sword technique; what could the whirlpool tyrant be hiding? Was this... a whale gallstone?!

When the whirlpool tyrant ingested seawater, all solid material was sent to its pocket dimension, whereas liquid was filtered out. Its corrosive ability was very strong, but there were still some materials that even it couldn't dissolve. All that matter would accumulate in its digestive tract, forming a solid mass.

The bottom of the sea boasted large quantities of heavy metals or creatures that had ingested heavy metals. Massive lifeforms like whales had little control over what they consumed, let alone the whirlpool tyrant—it was as though it sucked up everything within a patch of ocean like an underwater vacuum cleaner.

The indigestible matter would aggregate, and Zhang Lie had seen that solid mass when he was swallowed into the pocket dimension. The matter that had survived the intense corrosion was unbelievably hard and resistant to corrosion.

The whirlpool tyrant had to clean out its digestive tract daily, and the "moonlight" it spat out were these gallstones, which formed what seemed like a second moon hanging in the night sky.

In some sense, it was akin to the whirlpool tyrant's vomit, but it was undoubtedly a treasure that even Zhang Lie's sword technique couldn't disintegrate. It was sturdier and more durable than almost any metal, and there were plenty of alien races who would purchase it at a high price.

This particular gallstone had been formed when the whirlpool tyrant sucked Zhang Lie into its body, and it ejected the stone now as a weapon against Zhang Lie.

The tyrant's body burned with a bright red flame. Although it moved very slowly, it possessed an almost inexhaustible source of energy, and it was so massive that Zhang Lie wouldn't be able to avoid it no matter how he moved.

Zhang Lie activated the fifth form of his [Ninecarp Transformation]—the golden qilin. The red sky turned a brilliant gold, and even the moon turned golden.

Zhang Lie's body was encased in golden scales, almost like armor, and antlers grew out of his head. Golden flames burned all around him, releasing a holy aura. The black sun to his back and bloody moon beneath his feet made him look like a god that had descended from the heavens.

The sea continued to surge and frothe, its surface gleaming gold. The golden sky and golden sea seemed to merge into one cohesive whole.

Zhang Lie glowed as brightly as the sun.

The sky that suddenly turned red one moment and gold the next caused the entirety of the second realm to panic, especially those that lived by the sea. No one knew what was going on; this time, even the sea had turned to gold.

The races that had lived by the sea for their entire lives had never seen such a phenomenon. Some were certain it was the precursor to an apocalypse; others, a blessing from the heavens. No one could agree.

Zhu stared open-mouthed. "Just who are you?"

She didn't know what race Zhang Lie came from, but she was certain that his race was a mysterious one. In the span of the fight, he had gone from a hairless monkey to a wolfman to a draconian fighter. Just which form was his true form?

In his golden qilin form, Zhang Lie no longer felt the scorching heat that the whirlpool tyrant was releasing.

As he faced the whirlpool tyrant, Zhang Lie smiled casually.

As his twin blades danced, he bisected the whirlpool tyrant through its center. The cut met no resistance at all. The two halves of the tyrant's body split apart on either side of Zhang Lie and fell to the sea with a great splash.

Zhang Lie sheathed his sword and canceled his transformation as the will of the world's voice rose in his mind.

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

Zhang Lie let out a long breath. The whirlpool tyrant had been far stronger than the double-headed spider he had found in a mountainous cave; the disaster-grade spider was little more than an ordinary spider in comparison.

The will of the world had been paying careful attention to the fight. The power that Zhang Lie and the disaster-grade lifeform gave off clearly exceeded the limit of the second realm, but the will of the world chose not to make an appearance, as though it were scared by Zhang Lie...

Chapter 544: Disaster-Grade Soulshard

Under ordinary circumstances, the will of the world would cordon off any battle that Zhang Lie took part in. For other people, that barrier would be sufficient to curtail the aftermath of the fighting, but Zhang Lie had, without fail, smashed apart all such barriers unintentionally. The will of the world would have to re-establish each cordon it put up in just a few moments.

As a result, it had simply given up—the fight between Zhang Lie and the whirlpool tyrant was beyond its ability to restrict.

Against the two combatants, its barriers might as well have been made of papier mache.

[You successfully killed a disaster-grade dragonturtle and obtained its soulshard.]

Zhang Lie's eyes lit up. Even he hadn't expected to obtain one so early—this was a treasure he hadn't obtained even in his past life.

"A disaster-grade soulshard!" Zhang Lie glanced at the resplendent object that condensed in his palm. Within the soulshard floated an ornate blue-gold ring inset with a miniature dragonturtle whale—it was an equipment-type soulshard!

Zhang Lie's lips quirked into a smile as he stored the ring in his soulspace. He was rich! Although this disaster-grade soulshard wasn't designed for battle, it was an extremely rare spatial-type soulshard that would be a marked improvement over his superior-grade potbellied-toad soulshard.

Not only was it able to store items, it could even store living creatures, perhaps because it was water-attuned. He might even be able to drag an enemy unwillingly into this soulshard, though it didn't possess the same digestive properties that the whirlpool tyrant's stomach did.

Regardless, Zhang Lie was very satisfied with his new acquisition.

After he put on the ring, Whitey floated down with Zhu in tow. The moment Zhu stepped down from the wyrm, she circled Zhang Lie as though she had discovered something novel.

Zhang Lie frowned. "What're you doing?"

"Just what race are you?"

"I'm a human."

Zhu's eyes sparkled. "Are all humans so strong? Can they all become a wolf one moment and a dragon the next?"

Zhang Lie mulled her words over. "More or less. Why?"

As long as these humans possessed a transformation-type soulshard, they could transform into whatever they wanted—a wolf, a bird, a chimpanzee, a gigantic dragon.

Suddenly, he kicked Zhu into the sea. Moments later, she emerged sputtering, "What are you doing?!"

"You smell bad."

Zhu's face flushed. When the whirlpool tyrant had used one of its strongest techniques, she had been so scared that she had peed herself! She hurriedly dove back down into the water to clean herself.

Zhang Lie instructed the moonlight wyrm, "I'm going to be absorbing the disaster-grade core in a moment. Guard me and make sure that that girl doesn't approach."

After the moonlight wyrm devoured the monarch of stars' tens of thousands of souls, it had gained a consciousness of its own, and it was even able to materialize a physical body. At present, it could appear no different from an ordinary lifeform.

Zhang Lie could hardly wait to devour that disaster-grade core. He felt as though he was becoming a gourmet, and this was his food of choice. He wanted to grow stronger and stronger, and the more that craving grew, the more he coveted disaster-grade lifeforms.

Zhang Lie extracted the whirlpool tyrant's core from the left half of its body.

It was significantly larger than the double-headed spider's core that he had absorbed, and it was different in quality as well. The core of the double-headed spider was black and thorny, whereas the whirlpool tyrant's core was like a miniature sun.

The sun's energy swirled within it like seawater. The core was encased in a transparent exterior. Zhang Lie could see a sea of flames burning within, and a starry sky above it.

After extracting the core from the whirlpool tyrant's body, the entire orb turned blood-red.

The orb was about the size of a fist and made of an impressively hard material. It was scorching to the touch, almost debilitatingly so.

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

Just from holding it in his hands, Zhang Lie could feel an oppressive energy radiating out from it. The heat lapped at his skin, and he felt as though his whole body was burning up.

Zhang Lie knew that this wasn't just a mental sensation. Part of his palm had already blackened as a result of holding it for just a few moments—and his body had already been strengthened significantly with his limit fragments and by consuming disaster gene fragments. Anyone else would have disintegrated upon touching the orb.

Zhang Lie cut his palm with his sword, then dripped blood onto the core. The moment it touched the 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. After another ten minutes or so, the entire core had softened completely. Blood-red seawater flowed steadily within the core, shining with the rays of the evening sun.

When Zhang Lie clutched the orb once more, what he felt wasn't a scorching pain, but rather a palliative warmth, as though he had developed some unusual sense of kinship with the orb, as though it were 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.

"Ah—Ahhh!" Almost immediately, Zhang Lie took on the color of a boiled prawn. He hissed into the air, and his blood began to froth and boil.

Flames burst out of his body; fire erupted over his skin. He became a man of flame, a burning sun.

Despite how resilient Zhang Lie was, he still fell to the ground in unimaginable pain. His head spun as he forced himself upright one stumbling step at a time.

Scarlet flames came out of his mouth and ears, and the skies were dyed a lurid red once more.

Zhang Lie's blood boiled away entirely.

He had never before absorbed twenty disaster gene fragments, not even in his past life. As a result, he didn't know that he had just reached a new threshold of being.

The blood that left his body was replaced by scorching liquid energy, and his heart crystallized completely, burning and fuelling his body like a miniature sun, an immense and frightening source of boundless energy...

Chapter 545: Anointed by Fire

The process of absorbing gene fragments from genetic lifeforms was, in principle, a gradual transformation from a human hunter to a genetic lifeform. Absorbing basic gene fragments gave a human the strength to fight at the level of a regular-grade lifeform.

With sufficiently many mutated gene fragments, that human would become a mutated-grade lifeform, and subsequently a superior-grade lifeform.

Zhang Lie was undergoing such a process now.

Disaster-grade lifeforms were, in some sense, life on another level of existence. They were to superior-grade lifeforms what genetic lifeforms were to regular animals.

Disaster-grade lifeforms no longer possessed blood, and their organs were all crystallized. This was a fundamental difference into their genetic code, and Zhang Lie's body faced an incredible challenge in bridging the gulf between these two paradigms of life.

He had absorbed enough disaster gene fragments to initiate the evolution of a peak-grade to a disaster-grade lifeform.

The pain was unimaginable.

His skin crisped as it burned and flaked off his body. The heat was so intense that it caused the seawater all around him to evaporate and sent salt crystals flying.

The blood in Zhang Lie's circulatory system was replaced with scorching liquid energy that made his body burn up as it spread.

His cells exploded from the heat before being forged anew, once and again, changing his body from the inside out.

Zhang Lie circulated his [Ninecarp Transformation]. Filled with energy, each revolution of the framework took mere moments— just over half a minute, an incredible and previously unimaginable speed.

Even Zhang Lie himself could barely believe it, considering that this had previously been an hour-long process that required his full concentration.

Even more shockingly, this speed was increasing moment by moment. His new 'blood' proved to be incredibly conductive to his genetic energy, and his evolution was spurred further and further onward by the energy of the whirlpool tyrant's core.

By the very end of the process, Zhang Lie felt as though he was able to finish hundreds of revolutions of his framework within a minute.

His body creaked and ached as it reached its breaking point, his bones breaking and regrowing time and again, his capillaries bursting before coming back thicker and thicker.

His body was being rebuilt from the inside out.

Upon reaching the threshold of twenty disaster gene fragments, the process of absorbing disaster gene fragments grew even more strenuous. Energy from the core was being transferred directly to Zhang Lie and consolidated as his own strength.

Flames burst out of his eyes, mouth, nose, and ears, singeing his eyeballs and tongue. He blazed like a furnace, and the blood-red skies were saturated with heat and brightness. The seawater turned red all around him, seething and frothing in a white cloud that covered Zhang Lie's body. The entire world seemed ablaze; a pillar of fire rose into the air, expelling all impurities from Zhang Lie's body.

In these flames, Zhang Lie would be reborn.

Stricken by flame, his body was no longer able to support his human form. His body temperature rose to an incredible degree, and even his water-attuned framework was unable to cool him down. His evolution was growing entirely out of control.

This evolution was life-or-death for Zhang Lie. If he made it out alive, he would possess incredible power; if not, he would perish, disintegrated into nothingness by the overwhelming energy coursing through him.

If not for his overwhelming willpower, Zhang Lie would long since have been rendered unconscious. Even so, with his body at its breaking point, consciousness didn't matter. That he had survived absorbing disaster gene fragments in the first realm was shocking enough, but the potency of this evolution in the second realm went even a magnitude beyond the first.

With the last shred of his consciousness, Zhang Lie activated the fifth form of his [Ninecarp Transformation].

The clouds above him turned golden. Golden scales encased Zhang Lie's charred body, almost like armor, and antlers grew out of his head. Golden flames burned all around him, releasing a holy aura. The black sun to his back and bloody moon beneath his feet made him look like a god that had descended from the heavens.

The golden sky and golden sea seemed to merge into one cohesive whole.

After taking on his draconian form, the strength and constitution of his body became much more potent than before. More importantly, the qilin was innately adept at controlling and manipulating fire, and Zhang Lie was able to curb the flames from scouring his body away.

As the flames of evolution continued to burn within him, his golden qilin scales grew brighter and brighter, twisting the very air with heat.

The flames continued to temper his body from within, and sparks of fire would flare out of his scales from moment to moment.

After an interminable period, when the flames finally subsided, Zhang Lie let out a hissing breath and canceled his transformation, returning to his original body.

His charred skin was growing back at a clip visible to the naked eye, revealing new skin as unblemished as white jade, as though he had been born anew.

Zhang Lie's eyeballs and tongue grew back. His tongue hadn't changed, but his eyes were completely different from before. His pupils looked like miniature scarlet suns, brimming with energy.

Even his bones and capillaries were well on their way to crystallizing, but the transformation was yet incomplete. Blood no longer flowed through his body.

Zhang Lie felt indefatigable, that he had boundless energy he would never be able to spend in its entirety.

Zhu swam back toward him from afar. He had caused such a great disturbance during the process of his evolution that she simply couldn't draw near; the air had turned superheated, and the sea had begun to boil. Zhu would surely have died if she had dared to venture closer.

Chapter 546: Disaster-Grade Transformation

Only when Zhu saw Zhang Lie's surroundings calming down did she finally dare to approach.

"What happened to you just now?"

Zhang Lie didn't reply. He sent a casual punch to his right, away from where Zhu was standing. He used no technique and barely any force.

A huge boom caused the sea and sky to tremble. The sound waves that resulted struck them both. Over the distance, the surface of the sea erupted in a wave hundreds of meters tall.

Wave after wave shook the sea. The seawater exploded into the air and dropped back down as rain, causing the surface of the sea to cave in, as though a large part of the ocean had been eaten up.

Zhu stared open-mouthed at the scene. Although Zhang Lie could have caused such a commotion with his original strength, he wouldn't have been able to do so so casually.

She could clearly sense the growth in his abilities. In the past, he had seemed to her like a boundless ocean, wide without end, deep without bottom. Now, however, Zhang Lie felt like a burning sun.

Even the boundless ocean would vaporize under his infinite energy and relentless heat. No one would be able to touch him; even looking directly at him made one's eyes burn.

Zhang Lie clenched his fists as he felt the power frolicking through his body, the tremendous strength that seeped into his very bones. He didn't know just how strong he had become, but he was certain nowhere in the second realm was closed to him now. Even if another whirlpool tyrant were to appear, he would be able to take it on easily without his golden qilin transformation.

Zhang Lie retrieved a set of clothes from his potbellied-toad soulshard and threw it toward Zhu.

"Change into these clothes and let's set off."

Zhang Lie's attitude toward Zhu had changed considerably. She knew more about the seas than he had expected, and he had only found his second disaster-grade lifeform because of her presence.

Zhang Lie's trust in her was now far higher than his trust in the compilation of the monarch of stars. For one thing, he wouldn't have learnt of the seven forbidden zones of the sea without her.

Zhu nodded as she climbed up onto the moonlight wyrm. Her face red, she asked, "Can you turn around?"

Zhang Lie nodded. To be frank, given the development in his sensory organs, he would be able to sense her actions keenly even from a hundred meters away.

Zhu quickly put on her new outfit, but it was rather too large—her body was much smaller than Zhang Lie's, after all.

After a long and tiring battle, followed by an even more strenuous transformation, Zhang Lie didn't want to continue flying. Zhang Lie snapped his fingers. "Whitey, let's head onward to our next location!"

Whitey nodded. It swam toward the main half of the whirlpool tyrant's body and began to push it along. Ever since the fight against the monarch of stars, Whitey had been able to take on material form.

The whirlpool tyrant's body was crystalline in nature, and it wouldn't release any nauseating odors even in death. It was able to float on the sea because of its relatively low density.

The reason Zhang Lie wanted to bring the whirlpool tyrant's body with them was in order to repel weaker lifeforms. If any disaster-grade lifeforms were to approach him, however, so much the better.

Zhu asked curiously, "Now that the whirlpool tyrant's dead, will the whirlpool strait no longer have any whirlpools?"

"Perhaps not at night, but there are still those scallop-like lifeforms during the day."

Zhu asked, "Where are we going next?"

"To a nearby village so you can get a new change of clothes."

According to the monarch of stars' map, there was a nearby location that had a peak- or higher-grade lifeform. Since it was on the way, Zhang Lie decided to go have a look.

Back in the sura lands, after the gathering of the sura, the generals of each sura kingdom's army began rallying their forces toward Renhuang.

"Renhuang has created a poison that will doom us sura. This is a war for the survival of the sura—if we don't destroy Renhuang, we will be destroyed! It's us or the humans—only one race will survive this war!"

The sura kings exaggerated the development of the Yeluo poison and depicted Renhuang as a den of evil. This was a common strategy—to vilify your opponents and, by extension, to sanctify yourself. The sura kings even made use of the unusual phenomenon that had appeared in the skies overnight.

"That phenomenon was an omen from the heavens, a sign from the asura themselves! We have to destroy Renhuang—we have to win this war!"

The sura kingdoms began sending their forces toward Renhuang. The five sura monarchs combined their strength and set up a military headquarters from which they would command the upcoming battle.

The monarch of the moon announced proudly, "The last group of sura forces has just set off. Over a thousand sura kingdoms are attacking Renhuang simultaneously, with over a hundred million combined forces!"

"This will be a war of unimaginable scale. Given our numbers, the tiny Renhuang has no chance of success at all. Even if it somehow gains the cooperation of all the alien races in the sura realm, their forces will perish just by the sheer discrepancy in our numbers."

The monarch of the sun frowned. "Don't get ahead of yourself."

The monarch of the moon chuckled at himself. "I apologize. I've been making too many speeches as of late, and I'm starting to believe my own drivel too."

The monarch of the sky asked, "What do all of you think about this battle?"

The monarch of the moon shrugged. "What else? Who can withstand the might of a hundred million sura?"

The monarch of the sun frowned. "Who knows? No one believed that Renhuang would be able to survive a seven-kingdom coalition, but it continues to stand. When the empire of stars sent its forces against Renhuang, the monarch of stars had to believe that victory was assured—but once again, Renhuang emerged unscathed."

He narrowed his eyes. "Let's observe the battle carefully. Renhuang has to die, no matter what. We'll have these sura kings test the waters for us."

What the sura kings didn't know was that the sura monarchs were simply treating them like cannon fodder; to them, the sura kings were so numerous and so weak that they might as well be ants.

Chapter 547: Another Brat

The monarch of the sky steepled his fingers in anticipation. "I'm very curious as to the origin of the governor of Renhuang, as well as his strength."

At that moment, the governor of Renhuang had just made it to a small village of an alien race right by the shore.

The residents of this small village were rather similar to the merpeople, but they were different in that they had gills by their ears.

On the other hand, the merpeople didn't have such features. The villagers had deep blue skin and rather stout statures. Scales patterned their skin. Whereas the merpeople tended to look more humanoid, the villagers here looked more like fish.

In order to avoid unnecessary trouble, Zhang Lie draped a large cloak over his body. On the other hand, Zhu's features were similar enough to those of the villagers that she didn't need a specific disguise.

Zhang Lie had already helped Zhu purchase a set of new clothes, but they were more revealing than he had expected. Her new outfit was a crop top and a short skirt made of a material that was unknown to him. It looked like swimwear, which was particularly fitting for her.

According to the villagers, it was made with a special type of seaweed, and Zhang Lie had bartered just about fifty pounds of peak-grade meat for it.

To Zhang Lie, peak-grade meat was all but worthless—he had tons of it, literal tons, in his storage, but fifty pounds was a considerable amount for the villagers. There wasn't much food available in the sura realm, and the only races that didn't have concerns about food were ones that had established cities and farms.

Food was still rather scarce and difficult to come by in small villages, let alone anything as nutritious as peak-grade meat. The other party was astounded that Zhang Lie was willing to pay so much, but he didn't mind as long as Zhu was happy.

After she put on her new clothes, Zhu was so happy that she began to pirouette on the spot, unable to rein in her smile. After her mother had died, this was the first time she was receiving new clothes.

Zhang Lie had stored the whirlpool tyrant's body before approaching the village, and he had flown himself and Zhu over.

Whitey wasn't able to swim at a rapid pace if it had to push the whirlpool tyrant's body along, and that body was far too eye-catching. Zhang Lie even considered getting a boat, but they wouldn't be able to steer a large one, and a small one was far less useful than his wings.

A small craft wouldn't be able to survive at sea; it would be overcome by peak-grade lifeforms in no time. Of course, given Zhang Lie's strength, he had nothing to fear, but there was always the possibility of capsizing. A peak-grade lifeform swimming past or under the boat could easily create enough turbulence to cause it to flip.

When he asked Zhu for suggestions, she shook her head. "I don't know. The merpeople don't need boats..."

It was unrealistic to find a boat that could defend against a disaster-grade lifeform's attack, so what he had to do was find an appropriate soulshard instead. He was a human, and soulshards were a human-only enterprise. That was the best place for him to start.

Zhang Lie continued asking, "Have you seen any genetic lifeforms that look like boats—forget it, you haven't seen boats before."

Zhu frowned and crossed her arms. "I might not have seen boats, but my father has! He told me about them himself."

Zhang Lie reached out and rubbed her head. He was about to ask her about where she had seen these boats when cries came from the village. "A lifeform is coming, a lifeform is coming! Help!"

Zhang Lie's eyes widened. Had he found the lifeform of the monarch of stars' notes so quickly? According to the monarch of stars, it was a 'seaweed beast'. There was nothing else listed but its name. It was unlikely to be a disaster-grade lifeform, but who could say for certain?

If it were, Zhang Lie would hate himself for missing out.

A child continued to yell, "A lifeform is coming, a lifeform is coming! Help!"

The nearby villagers didn't seem to care about the child at all.

Zhang Lie walked up toward the child. "Where was this lifeform you saw?"

The child said, in exaggerated fashion, "I'm telling you, it was a frightening beast! Covered in seaweed all over, as large as a mountain—"

A middle-aged man grabbed the child from behind and yelled, "You're still here making things up and trying to swindle others!"

The child struggled to break free. "I'm telling the truth! A frightening lifeform is coming—didn't you all see how the skies lit up in red and gold last night? I bet it's because of that lifeform!"

Zhu sent a mischievous smile at Zhang Lie, but Zhang Lie's face didn't change.

The man turned to Zhang Lie and explained, "You're from elsewhere, aren't you? Don't listen to this little rascal. After his father left, he seemed to become addled in the head. He shouts and tells us daily that a lifeform is approaching—initially, we were all shocked by his claims, but as the days passed and no lifeform approached, no one would trust him anymore.

The child continued to struggle as the man continued, "We don't know what happened last night. It was as if the seas themselves were enraged, with waves pounding on our village, the skies turning gold and red... and perhaps because of all that, this brat's at it again."

The child suddenly opened his mouth and made to bite at the man, who yelped and let go. The child struck the ground with a pained grunt, but he scrambled up and ran off.

"What a rascal." The man didn't seem to mind; this wasn't his first time grappling with the child. He sighed. "Actually, he's a pitiful child himself. His father left him and his mother behind, never to return—ah, where did they go?"

When the man raised his head, he found that Zhang Lie and Zhu had vanished from his sight like a puff of smoke.

The man rubbed his eyes. "I can't be seeing things, can I?"

The child ran toward the back of the village and began to claw at the bark on a tree. "I'm not lying—the beast really does exist!"

"Can you tell me about this mysterious lifeform?"

When Zhang Lie's voice suddenly appeared from behind, the child yelped and turned around.

"When did you get here?!"

"That's not important. I want to hear more about this mysterious lifeform from you." It was trivial for Zhang Lie to follow a little kid.

The child seemed very surprised. "You believe me?"

Zhang Lie nodded. "Rather than that, it's more like I came here in search of the beast."

The child's mouth was agape.

Zhu said, "I believe you too. My father told me that there was a very strong lifeform around."

Zhang Lie turned to Zhu. "You knew? Why didn't you say anything?"

Zhu rolled her eyes. "My father told me about countless such lifeforms. How should I remember them all? I simply remembered once I got close to this village."

Furthermore, Zhu didn't know much beyond the fact that it was around this village.

The child's eyes brimmed with hope as he asked again, "Do you really believe me?"

Zhu folded her arms. "Of course!"

"No one would believe me—my father left in search of this beast. There's no way he would leave me and my mom behind!"

Chapter 548: A Lucky Charm

"Tell me more." Zhu seemed very curious about the child's circumstances.

"My name is Huai Geng. When I was very young, about thirteen years ago, a few outsiders came to the village to search for my father. They had learned of the mysterious beast that lived around the village, and they threatened to kill everyone in the village if he didn't lead them to the beast. They were very strong, and my father was no match for them. He had no choice but to follow suit."

"Thirteen years ago?!" Zhu shouted. "How old are you?"

"I'm seventeen."

"You're seventeen?" Zhu looked him up and down. Seventeen, truly? He hardly looked anything more than a child. Perhaps his life in the village was hard, and he wasn't able to eat enough.

Huai Geng looked down, aggrieved. "Ever since my father left, he never returned. Everyone said that my father ran off because he was tired of his family, and they laughed at me for being fatherless."

Zhu patted Huai Geng on the shoulder. "It must hurt, doesn't it? Don't worry, my father left me as well. I fully understand your loneliness."

Huai Geng raised his head in shock. "You, too?"

As though he had just found a companion, Huai Geng's eyes lit up brightly.

Zhu patted her chest and announced proudly, "But I'm even luckier. After my father died, my mother also perished a short while later because of her broken heart. I was sent to live with my uncle, a deplorable human, and subsequently became the sacrifice to a sea god."

Zhang Lie sighed. "And just what part of that was lucky?"

Despite his initial desire to be rid of her, he looked at her with no small amount of pity.

What was most unlucky about her wasn't the depressing and upsetting events she had to go through, it was the fact that she didn't have the time to feel depressed or upset about what had happened.

Huai Geng glanced at her with compassion. At the very least, he still had his mother.

Zhu frowned at the twin gazes directed his way. "What are all of you looking at me like that for? I'm living an excellent life—this mister's going to take care of me, and we're traveling the realm! I'm finally going to be able to see sights that I've never been able to see before, oceans and seas that I've never explored—I'm finally understanding why my father loved adventure, because this world is truly glorious."

Zhu's eyes shone like stars, like precious gems, innocent and pure. Her excitement was contagious.

Zhang Lie glanced up at the sky. He had barely done anything...

"Is it really so exciting?" Huai Geng asked. "Why don't you come home with me? It's the first time I'm meeting people who are willing to believe me, and I'd like to be a good host."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "We don't have much time. We came here in search of that lifeform, so please tell us what you know."

Although Zhu might have been happy to find a friend of around the same age as her, they wouldn't be sticking around the village for long. If he and Zhu were to become friends, it would only make both of them sad when Zhang Lie had to depart.

Huai Geng shook his head. "I don't know where the lifeform is, either."

If he did, he wouldn't have had to suffer being called a liar for so long, after all.

Zhang Lie replied, "Think carefully. In which direction were your father and those mysterious figures headed?"

Although Huai Geng had been very young, the events of that day had been so memorable to him that they had all been ingrained in his memory.

After thinking for a moment, Huai Geng said, "If I'm not wrong, they headed toward the direction of the nearby cave. My father also told me before that the lifeform was in that direction."

Zhu replied, "We're not familiar with the surroundings."

"In that case, let me bring you over." Zhu was the first person to have believed him, and Huai Geng was already treating her like a friend. That he would help Zhang Lie out was solely a courtesy for her.

Zhang Lie was certain that, if he had come alone, Huai Geng would have all but ignored him. Zhu's age and appearance, along with their shared background, caused him to sympathize with her. If Zhang Lie had asked him for specifics, Huai Geng might have mentioned the cave, but he certainly wouldn't have brought him there.

Zhang Lie had to admit that Zhu seemed to be a lucky charm; with her around, everything became far simpler.

Zhu asked curiously, "Just who were these outsiders who asked your father to be their guide? What did they look like?"

Huai Geng gnashed his teeth. "Some had red skin, others had blue skin. They had horns on their forehead and didn't look like seafarers."

Zhang Lie frowned. "Did they look fierce and carry a scent of blood around them?"

"Right, do you know them?"

"More or less." These were none other than sura!

It looked as though Zhang Lie didn't have as good an understanding of the empire of stars as he had expected. Just a decade before, there were sura interested in peak- or higher-grade lifeforms.

"How curious." According to the autobiography of the monarch of stars, he had given up this search over a century ago. This list of lifeforms had been created then, and it hadn't changed since.

"Or perhaps it wasn't the monarch of stars?" Were there other sura searching for such lifeforms, and for what purpose?

Huai Geng tugged on his shirt. "Do you know what race they are? What they're called?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "If you want to seek revenge, I advise you to give up. With your strength, they'd pummel you to death."

Huai Geng clenched his fists. "I might be short, but believe me, among those of my generation—"

Zhang Lie suddenly unleashed a tremendous aura, the aura of a scorching sun, as though a disaster-grade lifeform stood before Huai Geng. Huai Geng's eyes rolled back as he fainted to the ground.

Zhu stomped her feet. "Mister, he fainted!"

"Che, he's far too weak!"

Zhang Lie had been trying his best to restrain himself; if he had unleashed his killing intent as well, Zhun Gang might have gone crazy or even died on the spot.

With him unconscious, it would be very difficult for them to find the cave. Zhang Lie retrieved a bit of drinking water from his extra-dimensional storage and splashed it over Huai Geng's head, startling him awake. He glanced to his left and to his right before shuddering as he recalled the events that led to him fainting.

Zhang Lie shook his head in exasperation. "Just how do you expect to seek revenge like this? You can't even survive my aura!"

Huai Geng had grown more than a little scared of Zhang Lie after that experience, and his body trembled upon hearing Zhang Lie's voice.

"I'll grow stronger for sure!" Huai Geng clenched his fists.

"We can talk once you've actually grown stronger." Zhang Lie pointed ahead of him. "Now, lead on!"

Huai Geng asked, "Will you help me become stronger?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't have time." Zhang Lie had no intention of becoming a nanny.

"In that case, when will you have time?"

"Once you've become strong."

Zhu:...

Chapter 549: A Lifeform's Lair

Zhu broke Zhang Lie off. "Alright, alright, let's go! I'd like to see this lifeform for myself!"

Very quickly, the three of them ended up at a mountain close to Huai Geng's village, one filled with rocks and a sharp cliff. Waves lapped the cliff and broke against it.

This wasn't a particularly eye-catching location, filled with nothing but rocks and sea. Zhang Lie activated his dragon's eye soulshard. He didn't spot the soul of a disaster-grade lifeform, but there were some remnant traces of spiritual essence.

"Follow me!"

Remnant spiritual essence was produced when a lifeform was killed. In general, that essence dissipated very quickly. Most people were unable to see or sense the soul or spiritual essence, so such phenomena didn't tend to receive much attention.

That remnant spiritual essence would appear here, in such great quantities that there were still traces remaining, suggested that at least over a hundred lifeforms had recently died in the area.

With the two youths in tow, Zhang Lie flew around the cliff until he found a cave whose entrance seemed to have caved in. Huai Geng's eyes opened wide. "There was a cave here?"

Zhu asked, "You didn't know?"

Huai Geng shook his head. "The elders in the village told us that the cliff was extremely dangerous, and that we should avoid it if at all possible. I came over here a few times, but I can hardly traverse the cliff wall so easily. Mister, I'd like to learn how to do this too. Won't you teach me?"

Zhu rolled her eyes at him. "Even I haven't asked mister to teach me—it'd be my turn before yours!"

Zhang Lie ignored the squabbling children and picked up a piece of rubble. "This cave should only have caved in recently."

Zhu asked curiously, "How did you know, Mister?"

If it hadn't caved in recently, the spiritual essence would already have dissipated away. In other words, there had likely been something or someone living in the cave beforehand.

Huai Geng suddenly spoke up. "Ah! Perhaps this was the source of the commotion yesterday?"

Zhang Lie:...

Zhu: ...

Neither Zhang Lie nor Zhu spoke up, knowing the exact reason for the disturbance last night.

With a wave of his arm, Zhang Lie sent all the rubble flying into the sea.

Huai Geng shouted in excitement, "Mister, teach me that!"

"It's not your turn—it's mine!" Zhu shouted back.

A rotten odor swept over all three of them, causing the two youths to rear back and pinch their noses.

"Let's have a look at what's within." Zhang Lie stepped forward, trailed somewhat unwillingly by the other two youths. As he had expected, there were quite a number of bones within—both of peak-grade lifeforms and of the villagers that lived nearby.

"This might have been a lifeform's lair."

Huai Geng's gaze landed on a pile of bones and a bone flute that lay beside them. His body moved of its own accord; he walked up to the flute and murmured to himself, "What's this? How could it be here?"

Zhu crept up to him. "What's this?"

Huai Geng turned to her with tears in his eyes. "This is, this is my father's flute!"

Zhang Lie's gaze turned from the flute to the pile of bones nearby.

"My father said he would give me this flute as a gift for coming of age, but when the sura came, my father had no choice but to leave with them..."

Huai Geng wiped the tears from his face as he turned to the pile of bones.

Zhang Lie sighed. "Your father was a hero."

He pointed at the bones. "There are sura bones in here. How could the sura have died? Perhaps your father thought that the sura would terrorize your entire village if he let them leave, so he chose to sacrifice himself rather than to let them succeed."

Huai Geng raised his head. "Really? Could it be true?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "It's very possible—in order to protect the village, your father deliberately provoked the lifeform and sentenced him and the accompanying sura to death."

Huai Geng smiled in relief. "Is that so? In that case, my father didn't desert me and my mother—he died to protect the village!"

Zhu looked toward Zhang Lie, who shrugged. Zhang Lie didn't know what had occurred himself, but it was certainly a plausible explanation. It was also possible that the sura had been the one to provoke the lifeform, and that Huai Geng's father had died as a side effect. No one could say for certain; it didn't hurt to give Huai Geng some hope.

Zhang Lie knelt down and went through the sura's bones in an attempt to find something to identify the sura.

"This is... Fenghe's emblem!"

When the seven-kingdom coalition had struck at Zhang Lie, he had taken the time to go through their insignias.

He pretty much understood what was going on now. About a decade ago, the monarch of stars handed his research materials to Fenghe, including the list of peak- or higher-grade lifeforms that he had collated. For some reason or another, Fenghe had dispatched some of his sura to seek them out.

Later, perhaps because he felt that his strength was lacking or because he realized he didn't have the ability to capture them, he gave up on his plan. Of the seven kingdoms, the only one which could take down higher-than-peak-grade lifeforms was Fenghe's, and even he would have a hard time capturing them alive. The effort that it would take to do so was far more than it was worth, so he had called a halt to the plan.

On the other hand, Zhang Lie was certainly well equipped to hunt these lifeforms down—he was now so strong that he didn't even have to fear disaster-grade lifeforms.

Zhu asked, "Right, now that this lair's been destroyed, where could the lifeform within have gone?"

Zhang Lie countered, "What would you do if your house collapsed?"

Huai Geng carefully stored the bone flute away. "I'd move, of course."

"Are there any locations well-suited to such lifeforms nearby?"

Huai Geng shook his head. "I didn't even know about the existence of this cave, and I don't know the region outside the village well."

Zhu frowned. "Could there be another possibility? That the lifeform didn't leave to find a new lair, but rather some food instead."

Huai Geng cocked his head. "Why would it go find food?"

Zhu replied, "According to my father, genetic lifeforms are very interesting creatures. If their lairs are destroyed, they will preferentially seek out a new lair far away, not nearby."

Zhang Lie mulled over her words. "It's possible."

Doing so might be a natural safety precaution—the fact that a lifeform's lair had been found and destroyed might mean that it was being targeted by an enemy.

"But what does this have to do with hunting for food?" Huai Geng asked.

Zhu countered, "What do you have to do before a big move?"

"Prepare as much food as possible, of course—oh!"

Chapter 550: Another Disappointment

Huai Geng cocked his head. "Why would the lifeform go find food?"

Zhu replied, "According to my father, genetic lifeforms are very interesting creatures. If their lairs are destroyed, they will preferentially seek out a new lair far away, not nearby."

Zhang Lie mulled over her words. "It's possible."

Doing so might be a natural safety precaution—the fact that a lifeform's lair had been found and destroyed might mean that it was being targeted by an enemy.

"But what does this have to do with hunting for food?" Huai Geng asked.

Zhu countered, "What do you have to do before a big move?"

"Prepare as much food as possible, of course—oh!"

Zhang Lie nodded his head. They weren't in a developed country anymore, and the alien races couldn't simply make use of storage-type soulshards like humans.

This was one of the primary reasons the Yeluo had so coveted the humans' storage-type soulshards, which were so convenient that they were almost a necessity for life.

The first thing that Zhang Lie and his ilk had to do when moving from place to place was to pack up, but those races of the second realm would have to prepare large quantities of food, especially if they were making a long voyage. If they didn't have food or the ability to hunt for food, they would starve halfway through their journey.

Disaster-grade lifeforms surely had it better off, but Zhu's suggestion that it might be trying to find one last meal before it departed was certainly quite likely.

Huai Geng asked, "In that case, where do you think the lifeform might go to hunt for food?"

Zhu replied, "Are there any easy sources of food nearby?"

"Of course not! Even if there were, the village would have—" Just as Huai Geng replied, a huge explosion and countless terrified yells could be heard from their surroundings.

Zhang Lie frowned. "It looks like the lifeform's just found that easy supply of food!"

Huai Geng rushed out of the cave, followed swiftly by Zhang Lie and Zhu. Huai Geng glanced stupefied at the village in the distance as he stepped out of the mountainous cave.

Zhang Lie stood by his side. Indeed, as he had expected, half the village was a pile of smoking ruins. Its buildings were destroyed, its inhabitants exposed, and the sea threatened to swallow it all up. With Zhang Lie's enhanced eyesight, he could see what was going on within the village. It was under terrible danger—a black lifeform covered in seaweed was invading the village.

Some fighters from the village were trying to put up a resistance, but they were no match for the seaweed lifeform.

Naturally, the easy supply of food nearby for the lifeform was the little village by the sea.

The disturbance that Zhang Lie and the whirlpool tyrant had caused during their fight had long since scared the nearby oceanic lifeforms away, and the only readily available source of food nearby was the village.

Zhang Lie peered at the village carefully. "Given the scale of the damage, this isn't a disaster-grade lifeform."

If a disaster-grade lifeform were to attack, the entire village would be destroyed in just an instant.

Huai Geng ignored the two of them and leapt into the sea, causing Zhu to stomp her feet. "Oh, that fellow—!"

He was so weak he had fainted just from Zhang Lie's aura! Did he really think he could save his village? Zhu glanced toward Zhang Lie, her eyes sparkling. She didn't speak, but her eyes harbored an obvious plea.

Zhang Lie scratched his head. "In some sense, I was the one who caused this disaster. I would have saved the village even if you didn't say anything."

Zhu smiled.

Huai Geng returned to the village to find it in shambles. Half the buildings had fallen. The seaweed monster was continuing to destroy his surroundings and the villagers around.

A frond of seaweed shot toward Huai Geng, who was wholly unprepared to respond. A figure rushed up and blocked the attack. "Kid, what are you doing back here?!"

The person who blocked the attack was the middle-aged man who had scolded Huai Geng for yelling about a seaweed monster in the village square.

"Where's my mother?"

"She and the other villagers went to seek shelter. Go with them!"

"No!" Huai Geng shouted back. "I'm a man of the village too—it's my responsibility to fight!"

"The rest of us haven't died yet—it's no time for kids like you to join in. Scram!"

Black fronds of seaweed came toward them from all directions, as though they were in the center of a hurricane. The man was decently strong, and he managed to block all the fronds coming his way.

He howled out, "Come at me, you brainless monster! Come at me if you dare—I'll pull out all your hair!"

Just then, a black frond of seaweed silently crept to the man's back and made to target Huai Geng. When the man noticed, his eyes widened. He pushed Huai Geng away and allowed the frond of seaweed to penetrate his chest. Huai Geng's eyes widened as he rushed toward the man.

As the man spat out blood by the mouthful, he murmured, "I'm sorry, I never revealed that I believed you. I saw your father leave with a few members of an alien race with my own eyes, and I knew that he was trying to protect the village, but I was never able to convince others of the truth."

Rumors spread far more easily, after all, and no matter how much the man had tried to explain what he had seen, the rumors only got worse and worse. To protect the unfortunate mother and son, the man chose not to argue any further.

It was difficult for a single mother to raise a child, and Huai Geng was half brought up by the entire village. Huai Geng couldn't help but remember how mischievous he had been as a child, and how it was always that man who had caught him and brought him to all the nearby houses to apologize.

The man coughed up more blood. "Ignore me—leave!"

However, it was far too late. The fronds of seaweed nearby had entombed Huai Geng and the man, and they were about to be torn to shreds at any moment. Before that could happen, however, a violent gust of wind shredded those fronds.

A familiar voice rang out, "Didn't you want me to teach you a few lessons?"

Zhang Lie walked slowly forward with Zhu. They stepped into the disaster-stricken village so casually as though they couldn't see the calamity unfolding all around them.

"Your first lesson: only do as much as you can handle. Find an opponent that you're able to challenge. Challenging stronger and stronger foes is a shortcut to becoming strong, but also a path that can easily lead you down to hell. It's important to become strong, yes, but you need to survive to be able to do so."

Zhang Lie sauntered forward.

"Please, Mister, please save this man!" Huai Geng shouted.

Zhu ran forward and poured the vial of potion that Zhang Lie had given her over his prone body.

"Do you understand what I said?" Zhang Lie asked.

Even more fronds of black seaweed appeared. Zhang Lie turned to those fronds and unleashed his aura. "And when did I allow you to move?"

The genetic energy, ancient and primordial like the sun, sapped away all strength from those around him. The seaweed monster, never having felt such immense power, was so scared that it curled up into a tiny ball...