

## U. Warlord 581

Chapter 581: Preparations for the Rite

"I think it's time," the monarch of the sun affirmed.

The monarch of the moon glanced at the other sura. "Just who are you talking about?"

"The asura." The monarch of the sun turned around and glanced reverently at the statue behind him, his tone serious and respectful.

The monarch of the sea and the monarch of mountains traded glances. "The asura? The legendary gods of the sura?"

Did the asura truly exist? Ordinary sura revered the asura, but they believed them more fiction than fact. Even some sura monarchs felt the same way.

Only a rare few sura monarchs knew of the existence of the asura, the oldest of the sura, who were born in the infancy of the second realm. It was the asura who first found lifeforms that were compatible with the sura race and who set the foundations for the sura's current grandeur. Subsequently, they even found a second compatible race, which ultimately gave rise to the sura's dominion over the second realm.

The asura were the oldest and strongest of the sura. Their presence alone hurt the realm; as a result, they had chosen to go into deep slumber. Only when the sura were in critical danger would the sura monarchs be able to summon the asura for aid.

"Colleagues, fellow kings, it's time to act. Now that Renhuang has developed such a potent weapon against the sura, who knows what else they might be hiding? We have to retaliate with full force to prevent the destruction of our race."

When the other sura monarchs learned of the imminent summoning of the asura, they were all in shock.

The asura held a venerated position among the sura, and the sura monarchs had all grown up hearing about their legends and exploits. When sura kings were crowned, they swore to be loyal not to their citizens, not to heaven and the second realm, but rather to the asura. It was no exaggeration that the sura respected the asura above all else.

The monarch of mountains smiled in relief. "With the asura around, we won't have to test this poison for ourselves."

The monarch of the sea cried out, "Not only that, the asura will be able to take down all our foes!"

The monarch of the moon warned, "Indeed, we do have the qualifications to call on the asura, but don't forget about the ritual sacrifice we have to prepare."

"Indeed—a hundred million sura corpses is no easy number to acquire," the monarch of the sky added, sighing.

The monarch of the sun glanced at the others with a sinister and frightening smile. "Under ordinary circumstances, no, but our circumstances are anything but ordinary. The sura are facing an

unparalleled crisis, and I think many of the sura would be willing to give up their flesh for the good of the race."

The monarch of the sky nodded. "I understand. Since all the sura kings have perished on the battlefield, their territory is unguarded and uncontested. We can claim their citizens without affront."

The monarch of the moon's eyes lit up. "An excellent solution!"

The monarch of mountains shrugged. "We're doing them a service, after all. Without the protection of a sura king, they'd be killed by the alien forces eventually."

To the sura kings, ordinary sura were nothing more than ants. To the sura monarchs, the sura kings were nothing more than tools—they had served their purpose as cannon fodder, and now, the sura monarchs would lay claim to their citizens.

The sura kings were truly a pitiful breed.

The monarch of the sun's frightening smile never dimmed. "I imagine they must think it a great honor to be sacrificed for the awakening of the asura."

The monarch of the sky palmed his jaw. "We can't announce what's going on to the realm at large. We have to find a more palatable excuse so that the sura will come seek us out themselves."

The sura monarchs had all amassed their strength by internal conflicts that allowed them to swallow up nearby kingdoms. All five monarchs gathered here had advanced through their abilities at scheming.

The reason that the sura had all but turned on themselves was because they had grown so strong as to have no significant enemies in the second realm.

Without any enemies to pillage or plunder, the sura kings had no choice but to turn on each other for resources instead, resulting in the creation of sura monarchs and sura empires.

The summoning ceremony required significant resources and preparation, and the sura monarchs turned their focus from the ongoing war to preparing for the ceremony.

The skirmishes between the sura and the forces of Renhuang grew less and less frequent as the sura monarchs motioned for the sura to cede their territory in preparation for a final stand by the five sura monarchs' empires.

In the human world, on the other hand, another war was brewing.

"You understand what I mean, don't you?"

A new committee member sat facing Amurong in Amurong's newly repaired office. This committee member boasted a sterling reputation, and he was one of the first of Hong Tianqi's allies.

Now, however, he sat in Amurong's office in a panic, sweat beading on his forehead. "Can you let go of my wife and daughter first?"

Amurong replied coolly, "Oh? And here I thought you had come to seek me out because you understood that Hong Tianqi was a vile and corrupt leader. Why don't you join my alliance?"

The man trembled in fear. "Whatever the case may be, my wife and daughter are innocent. Please, let them go!"

"I have something to show you," Amurong replied, ignoring his pleas. He turned on a monitor, from which the committee member could see his wife and daughter tied to a bed.

The man stood up. "Wife! Mei!"

Amurong massaged his ears. "There's no need to shout. They can't hear you."

Dozens of men of all races appeared on the screen, walking into the bedroom. They tore apart the clothes of the woman and the girl, smiling lecherously as the females screamed.

Amurong smiled in delight. "An exciting sight, isn't it? I wonder how long your family will be able to survive their assault. Quite a few have died midway through the proceedings, and others committed suicide almost at the very beginning."

The man clawed at Amurong's collar with a fist. "Y-You—my daughter's fourteen!"

Amurong licked his lips. "Even better."

The committee member's eyes filled with despair, as though he were looking not at a person, but an incarnation of sheer evil.

Amurong pushed the man aside as he admired what was happening on-screen.

"I hear that there are several planets on which child prostitution is particularly in vogue. I'm sure there would be a large market for your daughter."

The committee member's eyes turned red as he shrieked in madness, "Amurong! When others find out what you've done—just you wait!"

Amurong poured out two glasses of wine, cradling one in his hand. "How long do you think they'll last? One hour, two hours, three hours, a day, two days?"

His tone was calm and unperturbed, as though nothing out of the ordinary were happening at all...

## Chapter 582: The Depths of Evil

In rage, the committee member tried to punch Amurong's face, only to be kicked aside by Amurong's foot. He curled up in a corner of Amurong's office like a shrimp.

Amurong sipped at his wine. "I quite like these so-called rock demons. They're considered one of the bottom rungs of society, despised by most of the races in the Milky Way. However, I have to admit that they're truly quite... virile. How would you feel about me having them take your daughter's virginity?"

On the screen, the girl began to shriek in panic. "Save me, save me!"

Amurong took another sip of wine as he admired the screen. "No ordinary person would be able to survive such assault, I think. Even if they live on, their mental health will be irreparably damaged, and they'll become shells of their former selves. They won't be able to interact with the outside world, and their lives will turn into a series of nightmares."

The committee member had, by now, prostrated himself on the floor of Amurong's office. He reached out and tugged at the hem of his pants, begging with a face filled with snot and tears,

"Please, I beg of you, let them go! My wife and daughter are innocent. Take whatever you want from me, make me do whatever you want—I'll do anything!"

"Ah, it looks like my shoes are dirty."

The man immediately stuck out his tongue and made to clean Amurong's shoe, but just as he did so, an explosion rang out on-screen. The door to the bedroom was blasted open as a number of figures rushed inside and defeated the assailants within.

Hong Tianqi appeared in the screen. "Long time no see, Amurong. How have you been?"

Amurong froze. The next moment, the wineglass in his hand shattered.

"Ah, you can't respond to me? How boring." Hong Tianqi snapped his fingers as the girl was brought to the screen. "Amurong, I have to say, I knew you were an immoral man, but I hadn't expected you would stoop this low. You were once the presiding authority of the world federation—don't you remember that? Is this the type of scum you always were?"

Now that Amurong had ceded his authority as the presiding member of the world federation, he no longer had to maintain a good name and reputation.

Just then, his secretary rushed into his office. "Sir, something's wrong! I've just received a call from your estate—your son was seized while returning from school, and his whereabouts are unknown. We've already dispatched a staff to look for him."

Amurong shook his head. "No, there's no need."

"Sir?"

Amurong pointed at the screen. "Look, there he is."

Hong Tianqi was holding on to a child as though he were a chick. "To be honest, I'm not used to such methods either, but I don't mind wallowing in the mud with you. You won't regret this, will you?"

Amurong's son cried out, "Father, save me! Father!"

Hong Tianqi smiled. "Send everyone you've kidnapped safe and sound to their residences. If any of them are hurt in any way, I'll do the same to your son. If any of the women have been harmed, I'll castrate your entire family. Don't doubt my words—you know I have the ability to accomplish this."

Hong Tianqi's words didn't perturb Amurong; Amurong seemed to behave like a statue of everlasting ice. He dragged the man on the floor up, carefully brushed off his clothes, then said politely, "Everything's fine. Hong Tianqi did very well, so please tell him that I won't touch any of his men again."

The man stared at Amurong in bewilderment. Moments ago, his family had been in the likes of hell; the next moment, Hong Tianqi had turned the tides completely. He was unbelievably and immediately relieved that he had chosen to side with Hong Tianqi. If he had sided with Amurong instead, Amurong would surely have discarded him like a pawn in times of peril.

He spat a glob of saliva at Amurong's face. Amurong didn't dodge. Instead, with a clap of his hands, he signaled two muscular bodyguards to enter and escort the man out.

The moment the man left Amurong's office, he began to cry. Shivering and quaking, he called Hong Tianqi. "I'm sorry, I—"

Hong Tianqi met him with a sunny smile. "Don't you worry. I'm sorry I couldn't have gotten to the place sooner, but I'm glad nothing worse happened. I pride myself on helping out my allies in times of need."

"I really don't know how to thank you, Hong Tianqi. Without you, I simply can't imagine what would happen to my family. I swear, I'm willing to do anything for you, absolutely anything!"

Compared to the man's emotional outburst, Hong Tianqi was a bastion of calm. "Alright. Wipe away your tears, and go make sure your family is safe and sound. They had quite a bit of a scare, so any comfort you can provide them would be good."

"Thank you, thank you!"

Inside his office, Amurong wiped away the saliva on his face. "Has my son been released?"

His secretary replied, "Don't worry, sir, he's safe and sound. At the very least, Hong Tianqi is honorable and trustworthy."

Amurong's expression was cold. "A son means little to me. Even if he dies, even if more were to die, I can always breed more."

What Amurong was afraid of wasn't his son being injured, but Hong Tianqi becoming mad. If Hong Tianqi were to start kidnapping those around him, then his associates would be in danger.

Amurong was shrouded in darkness, and he feared nothing except the darkness turning on him. If Hong Tianqi were to do something like that, his faction would splinter and break apart. He was only holding his faction together because they were bound by common profit; if something were to threaten that profit, then Amurong would have no leverage.

More importantly, he had always believed that Hong Tianqi was an honorable man, unwilling to succumb to the level of evilness and cruelty that his methods led to.

However, it seemed as though that weren't the case—Hong Tianqi simply didn't deign to use such underhanded approaches.

But if Amurong were to go to even greater extremes, then Hong Tianqi might well follow suit. At that point, he would be even harder to handle.

Amurong's secretary couldn't help but shiver. He asked, "Sir, in that case, what should we do next?"

"We can't touch Hong Tianqi and his allies. In that case, let's try to bring the moderates to our side."

Quite a few of the authorities had chosen to watch matters unfold without declaring for one side or another. Amurong felt that it was time to force their hand.

The secretary retrieved a list that he had prepared beforehand.

Amurong tapped on one particular person and instructed, "Ah, I remember this man—he's a lolicon, with a particular preference for young girls aged ten and under. Find some incriminating evidence and send it over."

"Next..."

"I've seen his information too. He's afraid of his wife, so seduce him with a mistress and threaten him that way."

"The subsequent person, sir, is a young commander in the military who was orphaned at a young age."

"The hot-bloodedness of youth, hmm? He's single, so arrange him a girlfriend and have her kidnapped."

Of course, this kidnapping would be faked. This 'girlfriend' would be one of Amurong's direct subordinates tethered to his control.

"Any person has something they value above all, and that induces weaknesses that we can control. And if they don't already value something, we'll make them value it."

The secretary couldn't help but sigh internally at the darkness in Amurong's heart.

Amurong continued, "Make sure the kidnappers look like Hong Tianqi's men."

"I understand, sir!"

Once he had everything planned out, Amurong poured himself a glass of wine.

"I read a book in the past about a billionaire who bought an entire planet. After doing so, he denied the lifeforms within free access to resources like air, sunlight, and so on."

The secretary blinked speechlessly. If that were to happen in real life, such poor governance would immediately be reported to the world federation, and the idiotic billionaire would immediately be made an example of.

"I admire that billionaire, but I also find him spectacularly stupid."

"Indeed, sir."

"That said, I still admire him. In my childhood, my dreams were to become just like that man, with the status and authority he possessed. Subsequently, I found that such acts were against the laws set out by the world federation. Undeterred, my next dream was to change those laws."

Amurong turned toward his secretary. "If you were that billionaire in control of an entire planet, what would you do?"

The secretary joked, "Well, perhaps I'd force them to watch a minute of advertisements of my commercial holdings each day to gain access to fresh air..."

Amurong smiled. "Is that it?"

"I'm sorry, sir?"

"Force everyone on that planet to purchase your companies' goods to gain access to fresh air and sunlight—and even then, force them to watch advertisements beforehand."

The secretary lowered his head. "Indeed, sir, your suggestion overwhelms mine."

Amurong laughed loudly. "You still have much to learn, I see!"

He turned and looked out the window, stretching out a hand that seemed to grasp at a planet in the dark void of space.

"When I become rich, as rich as that billionaire—no, even richer than that, I want the entire population of the Milky Way to bow to my whims. I want them to seek my approval before breathing, before having access to sunlight, before drinking a sip of water!"

This was the puerile and frightening dream of a puerile and frightening man.

This was why Amurong had been so perturbed when Amurong saw Zhang Lie control the entire galaxy with his limit-breaking potions. That was exactly the strength of his dreams, and how he had garnered the support of so many conglomerates in the first place—the promise of immense profit through the process of Amurong realizing his dreams.

Chapter 583: Awakening the Asura

Amurong quickly delegated the rest of his devious plan to his secretary.

"At this rate, in just half a year's time, Hong Tianqi's faction will become isolated. In the end, he's too weak to contend with me." Amurong stepped toward the window and stared placidly at outer space.

The secretary smiled. "Perhaps you're the only one who dares say something like that in the entirety of the Milky Way, sir."

Amurong shook his head. "I'm not saying that Hong Tianqi is weak—in terms of pure strength, I might not be his match. I'm talking about fortitude."

Hong Tianqi was, even after all he had done, a man of morals.

Amurong sighed. "Hong Tianqi has the support of Zhang Lie and the four prime races of the galaxy, and his fame is higher than ever before. He has a hand of aces, so it's a pity that he doesn't know how to use them well."

The secretary smiled and flattered Amurong, "No one in the Milky Way can best you, sir."

Amurong smiled. "In truth, if Hong Tianqi were any better at manipulating others, we would truly have lost."

"But you were the victor in the end, sir."

In time, Hong Tianqi's faction would be ostracized and alienated, and Amurong would take over. He would easily be able to manipulate Hong Tianqi's faction into turning on itself, to crumble and fall apart.

These were his plans for the future, unrealistic though they may have seemed to a neutral observer's eye. At present, his faction was currently the far weaker, and his daydreams of crushing Hong Tianqi could only remain dreams.

Hong Tianqi, with the support of Zhang Lie and the four prime races of the galaxy, feared no challenge. Perhaps Hong Tianqi might not be able to take down Amurong, but he certainly was able to consolidate his power and authority.

Back in the second realm, the sura were facing a dilemma of their own.

On a giant altar that the sura had constructed knelt a hundred million sura, filling the altar to the brim.

"Kin, the sura are at the crossroads of destiny. If we are unable to overcome this challenge, our race will perish."

At the center of the altar, beneath a great statue of the asura, the monarch of the moon began to speak. All the sura looked toward the statue, a hundreds-of-meters tall statue that rose into the clouds, carved with such painstaking care that it looked as though it could come to life at any moment.

The five monarchs were all standing on the altar.

"The foolish alien races have banded together in an attempt to challenge our might. They've found a group of evil demons who have helped them come up with poisons and biological lifeforms that target the sura. For the survival of our kind, we have no choice but to eradicate these humans from our realm. This is a crusade, a crusade by the sura against the humans and their allies."

The monarch of the moon's hypnotic voice echoed throughout the altar.

"Unfortunately, as a result of these demons' poisons and biological warfare, our sura fighters have been faltering on the battlefield, and their sacrifice will not be in vain."

The monarch of the sky continued, "Now, the alien races are attacking our territory in earnest. We've been forced back time and again, and we don't have any other means of dealing with their poison and biological warfare. I ask for your strength, for the strength of the asura!"

The sura who were at the altar had heard all this before; it was the truth.

The monarch of the sun called out passionately, "Fellow kin, we have no choice but to awaken the asura who have been trapped in long slumber, to awaken those who are our gods! We need your strength for an ancient rite, one which will awaken the asura with your hearts and voices."

The sura trapped in the altar were unbelievably excited to be able to meet their legendary gods, the asura. Only a rare few realized their fate. Most of the sura began cheering for the asura, their voices echoing through the altar and resounding over the horizon.

The next moment, the monarch of the sun raised a miniature sun in his hand, and a black moon appeared behind the monarch of the moon.

Space shattered around the monarch of the sky, and a tsunami roared behind the monarch of the sea. The monarch of mountains cracked the ground beneath his feet.

The five sura monarchs made their moves as one. The sun exploded. Flames flooded the ground, scorching the earth. The monarch of the moon's power surged forward, corroding everything it touched.

The sacrificial ritual reached its peak, and the hundred million sura died without knowing just what had happened.

Veins of blood trailed from the altar. The corpses of the dead sura shone with blood-red light that was absorbed by the statue.

The statue shook. Its surface began to crack as a pillar of blood-red light rushed into the sky, dyeing the heavens red. An ancient aura emanated from the statue, causing even the sura monarchs to stagger back.

The entire realm shook as all lifeforms in it saw a blood-red pillar rising to the sky.

The five monarchs each got on one knee. "We greet the asura, who have awakened from their slumber!"

The cracked surface of the statue crumbled away to reveal an asura in its interior, one who looked exactly like the statue—a true asura!

Immense energy could be felt from the asura. The sura monarchs instinctively bowed their heads, and every lifeform in the sura realm trembled. A massive upheaval was on its way.

The asura slowly opened his eyes. When he glanced at the five sura monarchs, they felt drowned by the full force of his aura. Their bodies trembled; their blood frothed.

"How many years has it been?" the asura wondered, almost to himself. His voice shook heaven and sky. His breathing and speaking alone caused the space around him to shatter. The asura's eyes seemed to be able to penetrate all layers of reality. "Tens of thousands, surely."

As though he had detected something, the asura raised his head. The will of the world had appeared; from the spatial distortions around him, it seemed to be trying to expel him from this realm. The asura snorted and yelled out, "Scram!"

The will of the world instantly fell motionless.

The asura frowned. "For what reason have you woken me from my slumber? Is the sura race near extinction?"

Before the asura asked his question, none of the five monarchs had dared to speak.

The monarch of the sun, his forehead beading with sweat, trembled as he spoke, "My lord, a fearsome force has appeared within the sura realm, one that has engineered poisons and biological lifeforms that specifically target the sura. During the most recent sura attack, all our sura kings perished in the onslaught. We five monarchs are the only sura kings that remain in this realm, and our race is facing a tribulation beyond all known to date."

#### Chapter 584: Three Days' Time

Before the monarch of the sun could finish speaking, the asura understood everything.

"You pieces of trash!" The asura's words were accompanied by pressure that made the five sura monarchs feel as though a mountain was pressing down on their backs. They began to vomit blood. "If you can't even protect our land, what's the point of keeping the five of you around?!"

"No, please, my lord! We've tried our best to stop the onslaught, but our opponents are dastardly and wicked!"

The five monarchs pleaded for their lives. The asura didn't respond. With a snap of his fingers, the five sura monarchs all lost a part of their body. Before they could scream, the asura stepped forward, piercing the boundaries of space as he appeared atop Renhuang.

After their massive victory and the subsequent withdrawal of the sura, the forces of Renhuang had been able to lay claim to city after city. Renhuang's territory grew to ten times its original size, until it was larger than even the average sura empire.

When the asura appeared out of thin air, space began to distort and the earth began to crack. The space around Renhuang seemed like an apocalyptic nightmare. The asura's strength was much like Zhang Lie's strength after having swallowed the disaster-grade core in the first realm. Just his presence alone was sufficient to affect the entire realm.

However, the will of the world wasn't trying its hardest to send the asura out of the realm, for two reasons. First, the asura's effect was localized around a rather small region; and second, the will of the world didn't have the strength to counter an asura.

The second realm was large and robust, and it was mostly able to sustain the asura's strength for the time being. He had slumbered in the world for millennia, and the realm had had time to get accustomed to his presence.

The asura's gaze swept across the city, his eyes seeming to wander into past and present. "Zhang Lie, is it? Interesting."

A guard of Renhuang walked up to the asura. "Who are you?"

With a casual wave of his arm, the asura sent a tsunami of energy toward Renhuang. The walls fell; the guards were sent flying. Half of Renhuang was destroyed in a mere instant, turning into nothing more than a pile of ruins.

By the time the citizens of Renhuang reacted, there was a deep abyss scarring the borders of Renhuang. The force that had struck the walls of Renhuang proper was, shockingly, only a side effect of the asura's attack.

The asura continued calmly, "I'll give you three days to find this so-called Zhang Lie. If he doesn't appear by that time, all of humanity will go extinct."

The asura, a god among men, didn't spare a single glance for the human sentries scampering about in the aftermath of the attack as he departed.

When word of the terrifying event spread to the real world, the hunters' forums immediately exploded.

"Just what is this asura? He's more frightening than anything I've seen to date in the second realm!"

"Oh, I know, I know! I saw it in a history book once. This looks to be an asura, one of the gods of the sura."

"What?! Isn't that a myth, nothing more than a legend?!"

"The legendary asura are apparently able to make the heavens quake when they breathe out and the seas tremor when they breathe in. When they raise their arms, they can crack heaven and earth, tearing the very space apart. It looks as though there's some merit to this description, doesn't it?"

"Do the asura truly exist? And they've even made an appearance in Renhuang? We're doomed, we're doomed, Renhuang's doomed!"

When Amurong learned of this news, he raised his head to the sky and laughed madly. "Very good, very good! Spread the news immediately. We have to target Zhang Lie and Hong Tianqi now!"

On Amurong's command, countless people took to the forums and began besmirching Zhang Lie and Renhuang's reputation.

"Zhang Lie thinks that amassing a coalition of alien races will be sufficient against the sura, does he?"

"If nothing else, the sura have ruled over the second realm for millennia. Now that they've awakened their god, Renhuang is bound to fall."

"Renhuang's far too ambitious to think that the humans alone can overturn the sura's tyranny!"

"No one has been able to accomplish anything against the sura, not us, not hundreds or thousands of races before us. Who do you think you are?!"

"Renhuang's army is nothing but a joke. Do you really think that the sura can be vanquished with nothing more than a few limit-breaking potions?"

"The culprit behind this entire affair is Zhang Lie. If he hadn't sparked such conflict, matters wouldn't have deteriorated to this extent."

"In my opinion, no one should enter the sura realm for the moment. In fact, we might as well leave it for good!"

Amurong's crude tactics were stunningly effective.

"I was shocked to learn that Renhuang was amassing forces against the sura, so shocked my hands and legs turned cold. Does Zhang Lie really think that being able to take down a sura empire means that he can take down the entire sura race, too?!"

"Look at what he's done. Because of Zhang Lie, none of us can enter the second realm—he's blocked off all our access to the second realm, and we won't be able to grow stronger as hunters!"

The ordinary hunter hadn't been able to reap any rewards from Zhang Lie's successes, but his perceived failure had certainly saddled them with penalties. As a result, Zhang Lie's reputation came crashing down again.

"It's all Zhang Lie's fault! Now look at what he's done..."

"Damned bastard! Now it's not just the humans who can't enter the second realm, but all of us!"

"You humans were the ones being persecuted by the sura, not the rest of us. If you want to overthrow the sura, leave us out of it!"

Protesters even staged demonstrations outside the Zenith Dojo, which was fortunately well guarded by the Chinese military.

"Come out here and face us!"

"Zhang Lie, you wretched bastard, get out here!"

"You don't speak for the entire human race. How dare you drag us all down with you!"

Meanwhile, Hong Tianqi and his faction were deep in the midst of their planning.

"Are we ready?"

"Everything's ready," his trusted aide confirmed. "But sir, are you really going to do this?"

One of his allies advised, "Martial Sage, you'll have to pay too heavy a price to return to the second realm..."

"And yet it's a price I must pay. No one in the second realm can stop an asura. All of Renhuang will perish, and what Zhang Lie has reaped will go to naught. More importantly, the entirety of the Milky Way will be barred from advancing into the third realm."

The soldiers standing behind Hong Tianqi glanced at his back with respect.

"But if Zhang Lie were to return, all these problems would be solved, surely?"

Hong Tianqi shook his head. "I'd prefer for him not to return."

"Ah?"

"Zhang Lie has more potential than any other fighter I've seen. At worst, I'll lose much of my combat ability upon returning to the second realm—but if Zhang Lie were to face the asura himself, China and all of mankind might lose their hope for the future."

Hong Tianqi had always viewed Zhang Lie as the hope for the next generation, but even he didn't think that Zhang Lie would be a match for the asura.

Chapter 585: Against the Asura

Within his office, Amurong cackled when he learned of the news of Hong Tianqi's impending actions. "Are you sure that Hong Tianqi's about to make a move?"

His secretary replied, "Yes, sir."

"I knew it! I knew Hong Tianqi would do something—he surely wouldn't leave matters be in the second realm. Ha, he's too weak!"

The secretary smiled. "Perhaps you're the only one who dares say something like that in the entirety of the Milky Way, sir."

Amurong waved the glass of red wine in his hand. "I've mentioned it before, haven't I? Hong Tianqi might be strong, but he's not vicious enough to accomplish anything truly great."

The secretary asked, "What should we do next, sir?"

"Once Hong Tianqi enters the second realm, initiate a full-scale battle against Earth. We'll capture all their humans in one fell swoop!"

Three days passed in the blink of an eye as everyone awaited Zhang Lie's appearance. Nevertheless, even when the asura appeared above the skies of Renhuang once more, Zhang Lie was nowhere to be seen.

The asura sighed and slowly raised an arm...

On the hunters' forums, countless messages denigrated Zhang Lie. "Zhang Lie, you coward! It's clear you're unwilling to take responsibility for your actions!"

"And here I thought he was an honorable man! He's no hero—champion of mankind? Feh!"

"Coward, sniveling little coward!"

Hong Tianqi stood by the teleportation apparatus, ready to use a special technique to break through the boundaries between realms.

Just then, across the blue skies of the second realm, a black streak fell from the skies above Renhuang like a meteor. The streak of light left a long scar in the sky. It moved so rapidly that it appeared in front of the gathered crowd almost immediately as it appeared in sight.

The black streak struck the asura, leaving the five monarchs standing agape. They were unable to react in time; almost as the streak appeared, the asura fell from the skies and smashed into the ground.

A man stood hovering in the air, genetic energy shining from him more radiantly than the sun.

"You've all worked hard in my absence."

Even the members of Team Zenith were astounded by the man hovering in front of them.

"You're... Zhang Lie?!"

In his absence, Zhang Lie had grown unusually ravishing, and there was a depth and breadth to his aura that had previously been lacking. He bore the intensity of the sun itself.

"I'm back now. Leave everything to me!" Zhang Lie extended an arm in the direction of Renhuang, where his water-attuned genetic energy extinguished the blood-red flames within.

Yun Bing stared at him in shock. Just how strong, how immense of a reservoir of genetic energy did Zhang Lie have to have to accomplish such a feat? Being able to extinguish fire with water-attuned genetic energy was trivial, of course, but for Zhang Lie to be able to engulf the entire city with his energy was anything but.

Zhang Lie's face was calm and unperturbed, as though he had done something entirely ordinary. Given the magnitude of his energy reserves, he could even spawn an ocean out of thin air, let alone quash a burning fire.

"You must be the governor of Renhuang, Zhang Lie!" the monarch of the sun shouted, stepping forward.

"Scram!" Zhang Lie replied, his eyes blazing with fury. No one saw how he struck, but the next moment, the five monarchs found themselves bleeding out of all their orifices.

A cloud of dust mushroomed from the ground as the asura emerged unscathed.

"Hah! Interesting. I hadn't expected that anyone else would be able to achieve a level of strength comparable to mine. You must be Zhang Lie, then."

"And you an asura? At least you've saved me the effort of having to hunt you down."

Zhang Lie glanced at the three-headed, six-armed nightmare whose aura marked him as an existence even stronger than disaster-grade with surprising casualness. A thorn grew out of each of his elbows.

"Oh? I'm a little curious—why would you want to find me?"

"I need an asura's thorn. Enough talking—[Fists of the Silent Sea: Quake]!" Zhang Lie seized the initiative, striking at the asura with a rapid blow that was nothing more than a blur to the onlookers below.

Water surged beneath them. As a frightening gust of genetic energy emanated from Zhang Lie, the five sura monarchs were sent flying.

"Oh? It looks like I'm being underestimated."

The asura likewise unleashed his strength. Space warped around him. The ground split as giant boulders took to the air. The illusion of a sea of blood manifested behind the asura's back, and overwhelming energy corroded at the foundation of the realm, turning his surroundings to void.

The asura and Zhang Lie exchanged blows at a pace so frenetic that the spectators were only able to see their afterimages. Where they collided, space shattered like glass.

A storm raged outside the borders of Renhuang as Zhang Lie and the asura destroyed the entire world around them. Their fight was in another dimension of strength entirely.

The five sura monarchs were certain that, were they participants in the fight, they would be defeated in the blink of an eye. The tempo of their battle was intense; it wasn't merely a matter of speed and strength.

Recognizing that Renhuang might fall if he were to keep fighting around its borders, Zhang Lie tried to lure the asura away from the city. The asura recognized this point, but he immediately followed suit.

The two of them clashed with fist and leg, arm and foot. A frightening battle ensued in the air, causing all the spectators to quail. The weaker among them, buffeted by the energy released in the aftermath of their attacks, were sent flying.

The space around them was cracked and torn, oozing with void and the ravages of outer space. Their power went beyond what the realm could handle.

The asura sighed. "This realm's too weak for the two of us. It's impressive enough that you're able to match my pace to this extent."

"What a coincidence—I think the same."

The sunlight paled in contrast to the energy that radiated from Zhang Lie, causing the realm's stability to deteriorate even further.

By this time, he had capped out his disaster gene fragments, and thanks to a series of unexpected events, he had evolved into a disaster-grade lifeform in his own right.

The asura gave him a smile that showed off his teeth. "Excellent."

As they left the confines of Renhuang, Zhang Lie began to muster his full force. "[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!"

A wave of genetic energy swamped the asura, drowning him alive...

## Chapter 586: Annihilating the Asura

As he brandished his two fists, the asura summoned two mountains of flame around him, countering the assault of Zhang Lie's genetic energy. Neither party backed down; space began deteriorating at an ever-increasing rate.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade!]" Zhang Lie loosed another blow. Genetic energy transformed into a frightening dragon, one which rushed toward the asura with domineering authority.

The asura punched forward with his six arms, sending a sea of blood to devour it whole.

Zhang Lie's body flashed as he summoned his dual blades, with which he defended against the onslaught of the sea. With a slash of both blades, he cut a cross in the asura's chest, but no blood leaked out. Instead, Zhang Lie saw a pulsating mass of red crystal.

The asura had, of course, undergone the disaster-grade crystallization.

"You won't be able to beat me, lad—I'm the god of the sura realm! Now, die!"

With black flames wreathing his left arm and a wave of bloody water circling his right, the asura morphed into a gigantic demon over hundreds of meters tall. He was an asura, hegemon of the realm! How could he lose to an outsider a few thousand years his junior?

"Asura, times have changed!" With his blades in his hands, the aura surrounding Zhang Lie seemed to grow even sharper. "[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!"

The sword energy bisected the gigantic demon in half, leaving another scar on the asura's chest.

Roaring in anger, the asura charged forward. Blood-colored flame covered his body and filled heaven and earth.

Zhang Lie activated his blood ant and dragonwolf soulshards simultaneously, transforming into his draconian form. His blades, gleaming with rainbow light and a timeless authority, slashed down.

"[Ninesoul Dragonblade—Fourth Form: Warping Space and Time]!" His blades sliced through the flame, the sea of blood, and even the asura's disaster-grade form cleanly, as though they were all made of nothing more durable than papier mache.

It bisected the asura's soul and simultaneously the constraints of space and time.

The asura's eyes widened and gradually lost their color. "H-How could this be? I'm a god of the sura realm!"

He was among those who had brought the sura to glory and dominion, a status that had lasted for millennia. The sura's current strength could, in large part, be attributed to him—as was the fact that this realm was commonly termed the 'sura realm'. In that case, how could he have lost to an outsider, a weak and paltry human?

The asura stared in shock at the sword that had impaled his chest. His indomitable will refused to succumb to Zhang Lie's genetic energy. As a sea of blood and red flame roared behind him, he once again transformed into a gigantic demon.

Flames burned earth and sky, but Zhang Lie called out with a cool smile, "It's useless. Your soul has already been cut apart—it's time to perish! [Blades, Reverberate]!"

Zhang Lie's twin blades struck the asura's chest in the shape of an X, sending crystalline flakes of red flying. Sword energy gathered at the tip of the blades in the intersection of the X and culminated in a massive explosion that consumed them both.

Even so, the battered asura didn't give up. As energy swirled around the gigantic demon, the six thorns on his elbows began to spin.

Wreathed in flame, he seemed to be at the eye of a tornado that extended high into the sky. This was the asura's strongest attack, as well as the last one he would ever use. He sacrificed his lifeforce and steeled his will for a single deathblow, one so intense that, if it were to strike the ground, the entire continent might sink into the ocean.

Zhang Lie glanced at the technique casually. Before he had maxed out his disaster gene fragments, he would surely have perished, but now, even an asura's deathblow was straightforward for him to deal with.

"[The Boundless Blade: the River Lethe]!" An underworld river hurtled into existence, roaring into the skies. Sword energy suffused the air like a thick mist and overwhelmed the asura's sea of blood immediately.

The asura's deathblow was nullified; his technique was sucked into Zhang Lie's underworld river and destroyed.

After that, the asura had no choice but to recognize his defeat. All the energy had been drained from his body, his soul had been split in two, and he was on the verge of drawing his last breath. With listless eyes, he dropped from the sky and fell to the ground like a puppet.

A god of the sura had fallen...

"Y-You, how could you be so strong?!" The asura had been at the peak of the second realm. Even among his kin, he was unparalleled and unmatched, let alone to outsiders or alien races far beneath his scrutiny. And yet, despite all that, the asura had been soundly defeated, crushed by Zhang Lie's strength.

He simply couldn't understand how Zhang Lie had come into his strength—but that was natural. Zhang Lie's path to evolution had long since deviated from what was rational or plausible; he had gone to extremes in everything he did, acquiring disaster gene fragments, the status of a peak-grade lifeform, and hitherto unknown limit fragments in the first realm.

Even before maxing out his superior gene fragments in the second realm, he had sufficient strength to kill a disaster-grade lifeform.

After he had used the seven forbidden regions of the sea as his own personal farm, he even managed to max out his disaster gene fragments and elevate his status into that of a disaster-grade lifeform.

Zhang Lie's true strength was far beyond the limits of the second realm, and he even had to hold back during the fight against the asura so as not to trigger a cataclysmic instability in the second realm as he had in the first.

As a result, in response to the sura's question, Zhang Lie sighed and replied, "Because I'll never stop advancing. If you had chosen to ascend rather than to continue guarding this small fraction of the universe, perhaps you would have accomplished far more yourself."

The asura glanced up at the shattered sky, at the ground veined with magma, and his lips curled up in a smile ringed with self-mockery.

Zhang Lie stepped forward, thrust his sword into the asura's forehead, and claimed his six thorns.

All the ingredients he needed for Potion #5 were now complete. Times had changed, and the asura who had refused to ascend had fallen prey to a rising star. Thus the world ever moved forward; to halt in the path of cultivation was to fall prey to time and the clutches of history.

The asura's body slowly crystallized. Crystals emanated from his body and spread throughout the ground, causing a whole field of red spider lilies to bloom. The cracked skies slowly began to repair themselves, absorbing whatever energy they could from the realm.

The crystals that now pervaded the ground were filled with energy; if used appropriately, they would become a valuable resource for Renhuang.

In death, at long last, the asura gave back what he had reaped from the realm...

#### Chapter 587: The Five Monarchs' Demise

By Renhuang's border, the monarch of the sun asked, "How do you think the battle is going?"

None of the five sura monarchs dared to chase after the two fighters; their fight was on a different level entirely than anything they had ever witnessed.

Even the aftermath of their techniques could kill them—the sura kings would be of no help at all.

They didn't know how far away Zhang Lie and the asura had gone, but even from a distance, they could still see the damage wreaked by their techniques.

As a result, the five monarchs stayed close to the borders of Renhuang as they waited for the battle to conclude.

The monarch of the moon rolled his eyes at the monarch of the sun. "Was the asura's victory ever in doubt? Our god can hardly lose to a mortal."

The monarch of the sky snorted, "There won't even be a trace of Zhang Lie's body left behind when the asura's done with him!"

Just as the monarch of the sky made this remark, however, a deep male voice sounded by the sura monarchs' ears.

"Who were the five of you talking about, hmm?" Zhang Lie had appeared behind the five sura monarchs out of nowhere, scaring them stiff.

They were all sura monarchs, but even their senses hadn't caught a trace of Zhang Lie's motion!

The monarch of the sky's eyes bulged as he trembled. "Z-Zhang Lie! A-Aren't you supposed to be fighting the asura?"

Zhang Lie grabbed the monarch of the sky's head with a hand. "Whose body did you say would be turned into nothingness, hmm?"

The five monarchs paled. If Zhang Lie were here, then the asura must have... They couldn't believe it; no, they couldn't believe it at all! The asura was the god of the sura, an undefeated legend! How could he have lost to an outsider, and a paltry human at that?

Just what insidious tricks had Zhang Lie used? Did Renhuang have some sort of poison that was effective even against an asura?

Regardless, the fact that Zhang Lie was standing right in front of them meant only one thing: the asura had perished.

With a light squeeze, Zhang Lie burst the head of the monarch of the sky. The remaining four sura monarchs trembled. Why had they come to Renhuang? Were they just courting their own deaths? It was no longer important to find out how Zhang Lie had defeated the asura—they just wanted to preserve their own lives.

The monarch of the sun hurriedly made an overture. "Please, there's no need to fight! We sura are willing to become your slaves. Surely having strong, sturdy slaves like us is a benefit?"

The monarch of the moon nodded. "Indeed. There aren't many who possess the strength of a sura monarch among the humans. Team Zenith might be strong, but they're still a bit weaker than we are."

The strength that Zhang Lie had demonstrated was enough to make the sura monarchs fear him. Knowing that they weren't his match, they surrendered simultaneously.

The monarch of mountains boomed, "If you allow us to live, the sura will become subordinate to the humans."

As sura monarchs, they had learned quite a bit from the awakened asura. Someone as strong as Zhang Lie would have to leave the second realm sooner or later, or be forced into deep slumber like the asura. His overwhelming, burgeoning strength would force him out of the realm—or destroy it for one and all.

In other words, he only had two choices left to him, each of which represented an opportunity for the sura. As long as they were able to secure their lives now and preserve the strength of the sura, they would easily be able to spark rebellion once Zhang Lie left.

"No, I think not. They're far stronger than you are." Zhang Lie smiled and waved a hand. In a flash of rainbow-colored genetic energy, the monarch of mountains' body popped like a bubble.

The remaining three sura monarchs realized that they wouldn't be able to convince Zhang Lie with words alone. "Attack!"

The monarch of the sun burst into flames like a sun. The ground cracked, shining with the red light of lava, and the entire world seemed to be dyed red for a moment.

The monarch of the moon evoked darkness, and behind the monarch of the sea rose a towering wave.

With a wave of his hand, Zhang Lie quelled it all. The lava from the monarch of the sun, the darkness from the monarch of the moon, and the waves from the monarch of the sea—all of it vanished without a trace.

The three sura monarchs each took a step back in shock. Their attacks, their strongest attacks, had been quelled in the blink of an eye! It was clear that Zhang Lie was operating in a different dimension of strength entirely.

No matter how strong they were, they were only able to use their techniques to influence the realm—but Zhang Lie was manipulating the realm directly.

Put differently, whereas they had to use paints or colored pencils to apply color to a piece of paper, Zhang Lie could do it with nothing more than an idle thought. Any color he wanted would appear on it; any color he didn't want would disappear.

This was a level of manipulation that marked Zhang Lie as a higher-dimensional being.

In some sense, Zhang Lie felt the same way. Ever since he had maxed his disaster gene fragments, he found that his perspective of the world had shifted, as though he were a four-dimensional being who could see through the entirety of the three-dimensional realm. No one who wasn't on the same dimension as he was would be able to deal him a blow.

His body seemed to be trying to escape this dimension entirely, but he forced himself to remain within. If his body were removed, he would immediately begin to destabilize the world rapidly with his presence, just like trying to force a watermelon to fit inside a cup of water.

The second realm was more resilient than the first, and as long as no large-scale fighting broke out, Zhang Lie's presence could be just about tolerated.

With a wave of a hand, the three monarchs' bodies were entirely destroyed.

The battle had been a short one, but Renhuang had sustained more damage than any that had come before. The buildings that had taken the larger part of two years to construct had been destroyed in one fell swoop.

Yun Bing stepped forward and apologized. "I'm sorry I couldn't protect the city and its buildings."

"It's not your fault at all. I can hardly expect you to muster a defense against an asura."

Zhang Lie might not be a god, and he wasn't able to manifest an entire city out of nothing, but it wasn't problematic for him to spearhead the rescue efforts. With a wave of his hand, he unleashed his genetic energy and lifted the rubble from the ground. "Save everyone you can, then send me a report of the casualties."

Yun Bing gaped at him; she had never seen anyone do something on such a large scale so casually.

Chapter 588: Potion #4

Zhang Lie snapped Yun Bing out of her daze. "Well, let's start work."

Yun Bing nodded and departed immediately, arranging for the remaining fighters in the vicinity to begin searching through the rubble immediately.

There were quite a few casualties, and a significant number of people had gone missing in the aftermath of the conflict between Zhang Lie and the asura.

Fortunately, most of the core personnel of Renhuang had survived safe and sound. The Yeluo chieftain, Chu Feng, and the others had all remained behind, making rebuilding a far less daunting process than it would otherwise have been.

Yun Bing asked, "What should we do next?"

"We have no other choice but to rebuild atop these ruins." Zhang Lie surveyed the ruins of the city. The asura had gone easy on them, in principle—he didn't deign to target anyone, but his indiscriminate attack on the city was sufficient to level it whole.

None of the buildings in the city had survived intact, and there were quite a few people sobbing by corpses that had been excavated.

Because the majority of the human fighters had left with Team Zenith, there were relatively few human deaths compared to alien ones, but Zhang Lie was upset regardless. If he had seen the emergency notice that Sun Mengmeng had sent him just a bit earlier, if he had rushed back to Renhuang an hour or two beforehand, this tragedy wouldn't have happened.

Beside him, Yun Bing gently patted him on the back. "Zhang Lie, you did what you could. No one could have expected the sudden arrival of the asura. Furthermore, you've already managed to get revenge for them. Compared to the worst that could have happened against an asura, I think this was already quite a mild outcome."

Zhang Lie didn't know how to console those who had lost loved ones. Instead, at the very least, he could meet their material needs.

"Do we have enough construction materials and food to begin rebuilding immediately?"

Yun Bing nodded. "The rock spirits have survived unscathed, and we certainly have plenty of construction material. As for food, we still have a significant portion remaining in our storehouse.

We can make up the difference from the frontline troops. Sun Mengmeng and the rest of Team Zenith have made significant headway in usurping sura territory, and they'll certainly be returning with supplies.

With a wave of Zhang Lie's hand, a veritable mountain of lifeforms appeared before Yun Bing, causing her eyes to bulge. Most of these lifeforms were peak-grade.

She had no idea how Zhang Lie had managed to acquire such a large supply of peak-grade lifeforms, considering how rare a resource they usually were.

She swallowed a gulp of saliva. "Zhang Lie, did you kill all these lifeforms?"

He was able to remove the rubble studding Renhuang with just a wave of an arm, quench the flames with a press of his palm, and conjure a mountain of peak-grade meat out of nowhere...

"You haven't become a god already, have you?"

From Yun Bing's perspective, only a god could accomplish such miraculous feats.

Zhang Lie only smiled. "Is this enough? If not, I still have more meat in my supply."

Yun Bing's eyes widened. She continued pursuing her train of thought. "Zhang Lie, have you really become a god?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "No. Gods don't exist in this universe. These supposed gods are just stronger hunters or stronger fighters. I'm not a god, just stronger than average. When you get to my level, you'll understand that these miraculous acts aren't as miraculous as they seem."

During his adventure in the sea, Zhang Lie had not only finished maxing out his disaster gene fragments, but also found a large number of important herbs that had never been harvested.

Now that he had his own peak-grade farm, he could also obtain as many peak-grade lifeforms from his whirlpool-tyrant extradimensional space as he needed.

"Make sure you're not falling behind on your cultivation, do you understand?"

"Y-Yes, Zhang Lie!"

After delegating Yun Bing with a number of responsibilities, Zhang Lie left. He wouldn't be of much help with reconstruction, and he had tasks that he needed to accomplish himself. His subsequent objective was to produce a vial of Potion #4, which would allow him to enhance his peak gene capacity.

Before concocting the potion, however, he wanted to check in on Team Zenith. As Yun Bing had reported, the members of Team Zenith were doing very well, and they were particularly excited for Zhang Lie's return.

The alien races and forces of Renhuang had been taking down sura city after sura city, but they had been worried about the possibility of encountering a sura monarch.

Upon hearing from Zhang Lie that he had killed the rest of the monarchs, the members of Team Zenith brightened up. They no longer had any threats to be worried about—they could claim the entirety of the sura territory for themselves!

Once everything was settled, Zhang Lie found a quiet, secure location where he began to brew Potion #4.

He retrieved all the fruits and herbs he had obtained throughout his travels in the second realm—one of which he had found in Hong Tianqi's personal treasury, another which he had uncovered from Xueju's quarters, and a third, blessed by the wind, in Mt. Wanren after helping out the crag eagles. He had acquired these ingredients at no small expense, and they represented records of his journey through the second realm.

The last and most important ingredient was an asura's thorn.

The other ingredients were rare and precious, but they could be found again at great cost. However, these were likely the only six asura thorns he would ever be able to acquire in the second realm.

Unless he were able to find a substitute ingredient, he had to handle those thorns with utmost care—it was looking very likely that he would only be able to produce at most six such potions in this realm.

As far as he knew, only one asura had remained in the sura realm, and Zhang Lie had already hunted him down.

The four fruits that he had collected, which formed the basis of the potion, represented the four base elements of alchemy: earth, water, wind, and fire.

Zhang Lie had been ruminating over how to complete the recipe almost as soon as he entered the second realm. The higher the grade of these limit-breaking potions, the more taxing their concoction became. The preparation for these ingredients was so intricate that no ordinary hunter could imagine its like.

Furthermore, he didn't have complete information about Potion #4, so he had had to research, contemplate, and work out a refined recipe given what little he knew of it. Even if he were to complete every step perfectly, Zhang Lie didn't know whether his concoction would be a success, but he would surely try his very best.

He carefully retrieved the ingredients he had prepared, meditated for half an hour, and then began the concoction process in earnest...

#### Chapter 589: Birth of a Supernova

Zhang Lie took almost half a month to finish the concoction. He treated the ingredients with care and devoted attention, and after one soul-crushing failure, successfully brewed a vial of Potion #4.

Glancing at the rainbow-colored potion in his hand, Zhang Lie felt a burden fall from his chest. It had taken longer than he had expected, but he had finally done it.

He downed the potion in one gulp.

Unlike the previous three potions, Potion #4 didn't taste like anything. It trickled down his body as though he were swallowing a cloud. However, his body responded immediately. A scorching heat enveloped him from head to toe, as though he had immersed his entire body in a vat of chili peppers.

Zhang Lie could clearly sense how, under the dominating effects of this potion, his pores seemed to breathe out fire.

Sweat poured down his back. Zhang Lie felt as though he had been running laps in the rain, his body wet and damp all over. His body, which had already crystallized, radiated light. The few impurities remaining in the crystal structure were wiped away.

His body seemed to turn into a miniature universe. The primordial elements of earth, water, wind, and fire tempered his organs and made them anew.

Marshaling the herbal energy of the potion, Zhang Lie began to circulate his genetic energy according to his [Ninecarp Transformation].

The outer layer of crystal flaked off his body like the shell of an egg, revealing an interior as hard and clear as diamond.

After ten full cycles, the genetic core in Zhang Lie's dantian grew to twice its size, and began to take on an opalescent sheen. The gene fragments that augmented his body seemed to have been converted to pure genetic energy. Zhang Lie directed all that energy toward the [Ninecarp Transformation] engraved on his genetic core.

His body bulked up, compressed, and bulked up again, increasing both his stamina and capacity for explosive force.

Zhang Lie's stomach rumbled. After advancing to disaster-grade, he was able to live off the ambient energy in the realm, but consuming the potion had given him an insatiable hunger. His body still remained crystalline, as did his bones, but the position of his organs had shifted in order to accommodate the internal world that had sprung out of thin air.

In order to replenish his body's supply of energy, Zhang Lie ravenously consumed all the meat he had prepared in his extra-dimensional storage beforehand.

Only when he had consumed everything he had did he sigh in relief. His body had grown far stronger; he was now easily able to strike with twice his original strength. More importantly, his peak gene capacity had gone up by another fifty points. Furthermore, after successfully concocting Potion #4, Zhang Lie was now able to set his sights on a Potion #5, for disaster gene fragments, and then a Potion #6, for a level of strength even Zhang Lie currently had no idea about.

At any rate, however, those were plans for the future. It was just about impossible to be able to concoct those potions in the second realm.

After all the meat Zhang Lie had consumed, he reached his new peak gene capacity immediately. By this point, his data were so far out of the norm that he was basically a human asura.

Zhang Lie: a disaster-grade lifeform

Framework: Foundation, Lv. MAX, Ninecarp Transformation, Fifth Form: Qilin

Techniques: Rippling Walk (pinnacle), Three-Wave Crescendo (pinnacle), Calm Waters (pinnacle), Fists of the Silent Sea (pinnacle), The Boundless Blade (pinnacle), Eclipse (pinnacle), Syzygy (advanced), Ninesoul Dragonblade (advanced),...

Genes: Basic, 160; Mutated, 150; Superior, 150; Peak, 150; Disaster, 100

Soulshards: White Grub (superior), Galewolf (mutated), Blood Ant (superior), Potbellied Toad (mutated), Venombane Scorpion (superior), Eternalspring Cocoon (superior), Dragonwolf (superior), Flamewing (superior), Runic Salamander (superior), Moonlight Wyrms (peak), Dragonturtle (disaster), Mistmeld Clam (disaster),...

Zhang Lie was so excited about his data that he howled into the air.

A massive gust of wind erupted around him. The sea began to froth, and all the genetic lifeforms within trembled as they lowered their heads. The alien races felt a staggering strength overwhelm them, one that seemed to have come from the heavens themselves.

The races who believed in gods and deities all prostrated themselves on the ground.

The will of the world appeared and honed in on a specific spot in the sea. It didn't do anything to stop Zhang Lie, nor did it drop down a cordon of light—it knew that doing so was meaningless. The strength that Zhang Lie possessed would shatter such a barrier instantaneously, and it would hardly be of any use.

Energy burst from Zhang Lie's body in one long breath, sending a cyclone into the air. Beneath him, the waves churned, forming tsunami after tsunami that struck the shores of the sea. The entire second realm was trembling from Zhang Lie's strength.

The energy that filled his body was unbelievably dense, almost as though he had captured a supernova. His body began to crack. Blistering energy erupted from that crack and shattered everything around him; he was more blinding than even the sun.

Most of the energy gathered around his heart and genetic core.

If Zhang Lie hadn't crystallized them both beforehand, he would never have survived the absorption process for Potion #4. Even with his heart strengthened, Zhang Lie felt as though it could explode at any moment.

He finally understood how disaster-grade lifeforms evolved, because he was undergoing that process himself.

A disaster-grade lifeform's genetic core was located where its heart would be. Upon evolution, the energy spread out all over its body would concentrate in its heart, which caused a staggering amount of pain.

Zhang Lie had killed over ten disaster-grade lifeforms, but this was the first time he was able to learn more about the disaster-grade evolution.

He spat out a mouthful of fresh blood, after which blood began streaming from his orifices. The blood that left his body evaporated instantly, revealing just how hot his body had become.

A frightening current of energy seemed poised to tear Zhang Lie to shreds, then rebuild him from whatever remained.

Zhang Lie witnessed his own dissolution, unable to do anything about it. His mind and soul had been fortified after absorbing the disaster-grade mistmeld clam, and he retained consciousness throughout the entire process.

Unimaginable quantities of energy burst from his body, warping the world around him and shattering the realm...

Chapter 590: The Refinement Process, Redux

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.

The rate at which he circulated genetic energy through his body increased further and further, until the energy moved so quickly it formed what seemed to be a continuous loop, whose speed Zhang Lie was no longer able to sense.

The circulation of his own genetic energy through his framework induced the herbal energy all around him to flow in a specific fashion and accelerate his growth. He slowly reined in the rampant genetic energy, then guided it where he needed it most.

Just as Zhang Lie's situation was about to stabilize, the will of the world struck at the worst possible moment.

[Energy has exceeded maximum threshold. Activating third-realm transferral routine.]

A familiar voice rang out in his mind.

[Energy has exceeded maximum threshold. Activating third-realm transferral routine.]

[Energy has...]

After the warning sounded three times, before Zhang Lie could do anything, a seven-colored pillar of light shot down toward Zhang Lie and transforming him into a gigantic cocoon.

As the refinement energy from the realm wrapped around him, the tamed disaster-grade energy began to run rampant again, scouring Zhang Lie's body with its strength.

This refinement process, much like that which had occurred between the first and second realms, was a key step to advancing toward the third realm.

The refinement energy would allow the gene fragments that a hunter had amassed within the second realm to permeate throughout the hunter's body, elevating a hunter's status on a fundamental, genetic level.

Every ascension would be accompanied by a refinement process—in the first realm, in the second, and in the third and higher realms—and this boon was what motivated hunters to ascend.

Zhang Lie was undergoing such a process, but his example was clearly extraordinary. His forced teleportation into an extradimensional space wouldn't kill him, but he would have to suffer the ravages of the herbal energy for a little while longer.

The herbal energy from Potion #4 and the refinement energy from the will of the world represented two disparate sources of energy, one which was rebuilding Zhang Lie's body, and the other of which was trying to seep into it.

Where they clashed, Zhang Lie's body suffered—for instance, while sugar and mustard could both enhance the flavor of food, using them together would create a discordant flavor profile.

As the two types of energies ravaged his body, they began to clash with and destabilize each other, treating Zhang Lie's body like a battlefield.

To be honest, Zhang Lie was astounded that he was even still alive. The two frightening sources of energy continued warring over his body, and the sensation of his body tearing itself apart from the inside wasn't something he wanted to bear for even an additional second.

From the moment the two energies mixed in his body, his fate was sealed. Caught in the grasp of two forces beyond his control, Zhang Lie sought the only refuge he could: his framework.

However, the disaster-grade genetic energy which was running rampant around his body was far stronger than what his framework could generate and control. Whenever he cycled his framework, he would be able to process a small portion of that disaster-grade genetic energy, nothing more—each cycle processed the equivalent of a drop of water, and he had an entire sea's worth of energy to filter.

His body felt like a neverending fractal of pain; Zhang Lie was impressed with himself for not going mad on the spot.

If not for the fact that he had already evolved into a disaster-grade lifeform, which had granted his soul-space and mental fortitude massive enhancements, he could very well have gone into a coma from which he would never awaken.

The refinement process in the second realm was almost an order of magnitude more intense than that in the first.

The disaster-grade energy tangled with the refinement energy, and the explosions that resulted were strong enough to crack the extra-dimensional space to which he had been transported.

As the will of the world tried to repair that space, even more refinement energy came pouring in.

His stats had gone beyond the peak of the second realm, and, more importantly, the will of the world didn't like how much havoc and damage he had wreaked. As a result, his refinement process deviated significantly from the norm.

With the disaster-grade herbal energy running rampant throughout his body, the refinement energy was unable to pervade Zhang Lie's body the way it was supposed to. As a result, when Zhang Lie circulated genetic energy through his framework, he was blocked from accessing that refinement energy due to the herbal energy's presence, so he would have to strip the barrier of disaster-grade herbal energy surrounding his body first—and with nothing more than his own framework to do so.

Forcing himself to ignore the pain that felt poised to send his body into shock, Zhang Lie gritted his teeth and began the arduous task of cycling genetic energy throughout his battered body.

The longer it took Zhang Lie to absorb the herbal energy, the longer he would suffer the pain carving away at his body. Unusually, however, Zhang Lie found himself slowly getting acclimated to the pain.

After undergoing so many painful evolutions, Zhang Lie's tolerance for pain was immense. The pain he was experiencing now was little worse than the excruciating pain he had suffered through in the past, and if he had managed to survive such ordeals before, why couldn't he do it again?

Zhang Lie expected that, if he were to keep circulating genetic energy through his framework, he would be able to slowly consume the herbal energy and finish the refinement process just like he had done in the first realm, but what he didn't consider was that he had a hundred disaster gene fragments now, and only ten disaster gene fragments before.

As the two disparate sources of energy clashed again and again within Zhang Lie's body, something unusual began to happen. Zhang Lie's battered crystalline body began to crack, but just as the cracks seemed as though they would cause his body to shatter, the herbal energy and refinement energy would repair those cracks.