

U. Warlord 591

Chapter 591: Disruption of Natural Law

The confluence of the two streams of energy led to the synthesis of a new, refined energy source. There was just a little of this synthesized energy at the beginning, but that was enough to spark a chain reaction.

This new energy began to devour the two streams of energy that fed into it. The will of the world continued supplying more and more refinement energy to the extra-dimensional space, but it still wasn't sufficient.

However, Zhang Lie's situation only went from bad to worse. The new energy seemed to be entirely incompatible with his crystalline body, and it corroded the crystals on contact.

The new energy ran rampant throughout Zhang Lie's body and began dissolving it from the inside out, though it wasn't able to harm his soul.

Instead, while the energy dissolved his body, it also incorporated itself within it.

The bead of energy grew larger as it devoured Zhang Lie's body, and subsequently the entire extra-dimensional space. Energy radiated out from Zhang Lie, then condensed into the facsimile of a human body.

Zhang Lie sat up and clenched a fist. His body was no longer composed of crystalline disaster-grade material; it was pure energy now.

With a moment's thought, Zhang Lie was able to solidify that energy into what seemed to be corporeal form. He poked himself tentatively; there didn't seem to be any difference relative to a body of flesh and blood.

His soulspace had expanded by almost an order of magnitude, and all the genetic energy in his body was being infused into his genetic armor.

Zhang Lie's attention turned to his genetic core, but his eyes bulged upon seeing it anew. His [Ninecarp Transformation] had evolved again!

Caught within the recesses of pain, Zhang Lie had focused singularly on his framework. He had expected significant advancement as a result, but not a full evolution.

After the qilin came a lifeform that looked somewhat draconic, but not entirely so. Lightning crackled and wrapped around it; the accompanying thunder seemed to strike at his soul.

However, it wasn't the time to be carefully studying the changes in his framework. The refinement process was still ongoing. Zhang Lie marshaled the energy of his genetic core to surround his body and those of the disaster-grade lifeforms he had killed to date.

As the refinement energy entered the mix, it looked as though Zhang Lie suddenly became wrapped up in a seven-colored cocoon. Within that cocoon, Zhang Lie began forging the next refinement to his genetic armor. He melted down the crystalline exterior of the disaster-grade lifeforms, then incorporated all sorts of precious materials that he had prepared beforehand into the mix.

Time lost all meaning as Zhang Lie worked on forging his new armor.

After the inclusion of the various disaster-grade lifeforms, his new genetic armor turned black, giving it an imposing and domineering appearance, its edges so sharp they seemed to be able to tear space apart.

While Zhang Lie had established a form for the armor, that form had yet to solidify. The cocoon of energy surrounding Zhang Lie dissipated as the bulk of the energy, along with the genetic armor, melded with Zhang Lie's body.

[The refinement process has concluded. Please advance to the third realm immediately!]

The moment Zhang Lie's genetic armor was wholly incorporated into his body, the will of the world rang out in his mind, and Zhang Lie's data automatically appeared for his inspection.

Zhang Lie: ???

Framework: Foundation, Lv. MAX, Ninecarp Transformation, Sixth Form: River Dragon

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),...

"? ? ?"—the first line of Zhang Lie's data sheet alone was shocking enough. He knew what techniques he had mastered and what gene fragments he had, of course; what he hadn't been certain of was what grade of lifeform the will of the world would assign him.

After his evolution, he had grown to a level beyond even the will of the world's ability to evaluate! If he weren't mistaken, however, he had to be stronger than at least a standard disaster-grade lifeform.

[Because your status exceeds the threshold of the second realm, you are unable to return to the second realm. You must ascend to the third realm immediately!]

The next notification, however, was like a bucket of cold water.

"As expected..."

The extradimensional space around him began to melt away. He felt as though he was being forcibly expelled. Zhang Lie had predicted such an outcome. The feeling of expulsion was strong, but not entirely irresistible, and Zhang Lie certainly didn't intend on being expelled against his will.

"I'm not ready just yet. Don't force my hand," he warned the will of the world, but it only repeated the same warning.

[Because your status exceeds the threshold of the second realm, you are unable to return to the second realm. You must ascend to the third realm immediately!]

Pitch-black genetic energy exploded from Zhang Lie's body as he turned into pure energy, destroying the extradimensional space with an explosion of multicolored light. The space was already in tatters from the bursts of energy that were expelled from Zhang Lie's body during his evolution; now, he destroyed it outright.

In the flash of an eye, Zhang Lie returned to the ocean, but that patch of the ocean seemed to have lost all its ability to sustain life.

[Your continued presence in this realm is warping natural law. Please ascend to the second realm immediately!]

[Your continued presence in this realm is warping natural...]

[Your continued presence in this realm...]

Chapter 592: Two Factions

Zhang Lie ignored the warning thrice over.

Where he landed in the sura realm, the skies shook and the ocean quaked.

The space all around Zhang Lie was fragmenting. His strength had reached the peak of what the second realm could withstand, but it was thankfully stronger and more resilient than the first. At the very least, Zhang Lie's presence alone wouldn't destroy the realm for the moment.

To the will of the world, however, Zhang Lie was a nuisance and a pesky disturbance.

[Warning! Your continued presence in this realm will cause irreparable damage! Expulsion procedure commencing!]

[Warning! Your continued presence in this realm...]

[Warning! Your continued...]

Zhang Lie felt an immense force, much like a formless hand, reaching down toward him.

"I've told you, I don't intend on advancing for the moment!"

Zhang Lie shot a beam of black genetic energy into the air, fending off the formless hand that sought to capture him.

A huge shock rumbled through the ground. The devastating force of the attack caused the skies to warp, and cracks began to propagate all across the realm.

Zhang Lie, stubborn as he was, refused to be compelled to another's will again.

Energy roiled through the cracked and leaking skies, as though an apocalypse was nigh. His surroundings suddenly turned gray, and the oceans lost all sign of life. As the grayness spread, all the lifeforce it captured was transferred to the will of the world as energy, strengthening its attacks.

In order to deal with Zhang Lie, the will of the world had begun consuming the lifeforce of the lifeforms within the second realm, as well as the ambient energy present in the realm itself. Back in the first realm, it had done so as well; Zhang Lie was now fighting against the entire realm itself.

After the refinement process, Zhang Lie's strength had grown dramatically, and he could easily distort natural law with his attacks. In order to suppress him, the will of the world would need a far stronger source of energy.

As they clashed with each other again and again, destruction spread across the realm. Now that Zhang Lie was a post-disaster-grade lifeform, he would irrevocably damage the land beyond repair if he were to use even a fraction of his total strength.

In terms of strength, he was now far stronger than even an asura. The will of the world, believing that Zhang Lie had the capacity to wreak tremendous havoc, was trying to remove him at any cost.

Zhang Lie had suffered the same fate in the first realm already.

"I've told you, I don't intend on advancing for the moment!" Black genetic energy burned brightly around Zhang Lie, shining with tiny pinpricks of light that were reminiscent of a galaxy of stars. With a casual flick of an arm, he shattered the constraints the will of the world was trying to impose on him.

"If you keep bothering me, I'll crush you whole!" Zhang Lie's words caused the will of the world to go silent. It didn't depart immediately, but it didn't strike at Zhang Lie, either. It knew that doing so would be meaningless.

Once the will of the world stopped attacking him, Zhang Lie reined in his energy and repaired the cracks in the world all around him. He sealed off much of his energy within an extradimensional space to reduce the burden on the realm.

By the time he returned to Renhuang, the battle between the sura and Renhuang's forces was over.

Sun Mengmeng glanced at him, overjoyed. "Zhang Lie, you're back!"

Zhang Lie nodded with a smile.

Sun Mengmeng looked him up and down. She felt as though something had changed, but she couldn't say what. He seemed too approachable, so approachable his aura felt like that of an ordinary human. Where had that domineering aura gone? It felt as though he had no gene fragments at all.

This was clearly impossible for anyone in the second realm.

Sun Mengmeng tried to scrutinize him carefully; he seemed like a deep lake, placid on the surface, but with a depth that belied the senses. Just sneaking a peek at him made her feel as though she were staring into the heart of the sun. She shivered, and cold sweat beaded over her forehead.

Zhang Lie pretended not to notice anything. "How did the battle go?"

Sun Mengmeng replied, "We've dealt with all the sura. There are a few alien races opposed to what we're planning to do, so we're convening a meeting to discuss what happens next."

"About what? We'll build a kingdom the likes of which have never been seen atop the ruins of the sura empires. Those who are willing to stay can stay; those who aren't should scram."

From Zhang Lie's perspective, these races that had contributed barely anything to Renhuang's victory had no right to dictate what happened to the spoils of war afterwards.

Sun Mengmeng nodded fervently. "With you around, Zhang Lie, I agree that there's no need for a meeting. We can simply announce our plan and let the alien races themselves decide whether or not to continue working with us."

Zhang Lie nodded. "I'll leave you to it, then. I need to return to Earth—it's been too long since I've visited. I wonder how Hanxiang's doing?"

"It hasn't been too long, has it? Two years in the dimensional world, but fewer than three months in the real world. Right, speaking of Hanxiang, I remember something that happened recently. Are you aware of it, Zhang Lie? No, no, of course you wouldn't be—you haven't been in Renhuang."

Zhang Lie immediately grew interested. "What happened?"

Sun Mengmeng replied, "I'll tell you, but you have to promise me not to get upset."

"Go ahead, tell me."

"The Zenith Dojo was attacked a while back. If we're not mistaken, the target was your sister, Zhang Hanxiang."

Zhang Lie's eyes widened. A fearsome aura emanated from him, and the air around him began to hiss.

Sun Mengmeng stepped back in shock and fear. "Zhang Lie, calm down, calm down! Nothing happened to the Zenith Dojo or to your sister. We have plenty of experts in the dojo, along with the protection of Martial Sage Hong Tianqi and troops from the Chinese military. We suffered no losses at all—"

"Who did it?!"

"Amurong!"

"That damned authority from the world federation?" Zhang Lie narrowed his eyes, which glinted with killing intent. "Rather daring, isn't he?"

"Hold on, Zhang Lie!" Sun Mengmeng shouted. "He's not the presiding authority of the world federation anymore. Hong Tianqi forced him to cede his role. It's precisely because of this incident that the world federation has been divided into two factions."

"Divided? The martial sage really is working hard on my behalf..."

"He really supports you, Captain. Of the two factions, one is formed primarily by you, Hong Tianqi, and the representatives of the four prime races. Many are in support of you."

Zhang Lie seemed a little surprised, but he motioned for Sun Mengmeng to continue.

"The other faction, naturally, is composed of Amurong and the conglomerates that support him. Our faction currently has the upper hand, but Amurong's more wily than we expected. The two factions are holding each other back in an unstable equilibrium for the time being."

"That's natural. If a fight really breaks out between the two factions, it won't benefit anyone in the Milky Way. I think I had better go have a talk with this Amurong fellow."

Chapter 593: A Recipe and Some Information

Sun Mengmeng called Zhang Lie back. "Wait, Captain! We've acquired a lot of resources and rich, fertile land as a result of conquering the sura. Won't you have a look at it first?"

The distribution of land would have to await the meeting, but much of the treasures they had obtained from sacking the sura cities were already in hand.

The staggering amount of resources they had acquired through combat shocked anyone who saw it all, but Zhang Lie only waved a hand. "There's no need. Just leave me the sura corpses to feed my fish."

The extra-dimensional space he had set up in his whirlpool tyrant soulshard needed a huge amount of food. Although the bone-corroding shrimp was a good source, more was always better.

Every day, Zhu would bring an assortment of hypnotized peak-grade lifeforms into the ocean with her to fight and capture more such lifeforms. Those who perished would be used as food, and those who were caught alive would be reared in his soulshard as well.

Zhang Lie intended to expand his farm whenever he could; it could be a permanent source of gene fragments for humanity. Furthermore, he would later be able to pass this farm down to Zhang Hanxiang.

Hong Tianqi sat in his office dealing with the documents on his desk. Over the course of the last few months, he had continued exchanging blows with Amurong, who always seemed to be able to come up with the most malicious ideas—recently, he had tried to kidnap a member of a neutral authority's household, then to lay the blame on Hong Tianqi.

In a great twist, Hong Tianqi managed to turn the tables and uncover the truth—that it was Amurong's men who had done so. The neutral authorities had intended on staying well away from the conflict, hoping that both Amurong and Hong Tianqi's factions would be weakened, without expecting that they would end up as the targets themselves.

Hong Tianqi at least had the courtesy to send his men out to rescue Amurong's hostages, but Amurong became even wilder than he had before. He even set up a team specifically for such kidnappings, and they became far more frequent than before.

As Amurong's faction warred against Hong Tianqi's, the neutral authorities were the ones who suffered the most casualties.

Some among them deduced that the two factions were about to declare war on each other, and they were getting rid of potential enemies beforehand. In the end, they had no choice but to join one of the two factions, speeding up the rate at which the world federation was splitting apart.

After perusing a few documents, Hong Tianqi suddenly received a call from Zhang Lie.

"Zhang Lie, have you finished with your objectives in the second realm?"

Zhang Lie replied, "Martial Sage, given your network, I'm sure you're aware of what's been going on here even without my reports."

Hong Tianqi smiled. Of course he knew—if not for Zhang Lie arriving just in the nick of time, he would have descended on the second realm himself.

"Everything's dealt with, including the asura. The second realm will now be ruled by humanity," Zhang Lie summarized.

"I wasn't confident that you would be successful against the asura, but my confidence was clearly misplaced. Given the talent you showed in the first realm alone, I should have known better—but even then, I could hardly have expected that you would be able to kill him! Truly, you're a genius of your generation."

Hong Tianqi was lavish in his praise of Zhang Lie.

The sura had once been the hegemony of the second realm, and they had even reared humans like livestock back then. However, Zhang Lie alone had ended the tyranny of the sura and forevermore changed the landscape of the second realm.

Hong Tianqi continued, "On behalf of mankind, I thank you for what you've done."

Humanity would no longer be relegated to such a demeaning role, and tens of thousands of humans would be freed from the captivity of the sura. Furthermore, the members of Team Zenith would build a new kingdom in the ruins of the sura territory, one in which humans and aliens could coexist.

Because of the crucial role they had played in the battle, the members of Team Zenith had a commensurate say in dividing the spoils of war. With the four prime races backing them up, the humans would surely be able to advance their plan.

However, Hong Tianqi had expected that several of the alien races would try to advance their own agendas, and he was surprised that Zhang Lie had the time to return to Earth and to contact him.

"I'm part of humanity, after all. Furthermore, I didn't achieve all that much—it was largely thanks to Team Zenith's hard work."

Zhang Lie's words were unusually modest; if not for his killing the asura at the end, no matter how many alien races there were opposing the sura, they would all have lost in the end.

Hong Tianqi sighed. Zhang Lie, who had seemed like nothing more than a rascal during the Void Cup, had matured greatly since then.

Hong Tianqi had expected that it would take another three to five years before he would become a major player in the world federation, but Zhang Lie had corrected him with his actions alone. All it had taken him was less than a year in Earth's time.

"Don't you have to organize a meeting with the other alien races after the end of the war?"

"Well, the members of Team Zenith are going to handle everything for me. All I have to do is make an appearance."

Hong Tianqi sighed. "You rascal!"

He wanted to do the same thing Zhang Lie did, but there was no way he would be able to do so.

"How's stuff going with Amurong?"

"It's getting to be a real problem, but declaring a feud in earnest will have massive ramifications for the entire galaxy, so..."

Amurong was afraid of declaring a feud, whereas Hong Tianqi was worried about the results of doing so. Countless lives would have to be sacrificed if they truly began to fight, and it would be a terrible waste. Of course, if Amurong insisted on forcing the matter, Hong Tianqi wouldn't hold back, either.

"I have the means for a bloodless victory," Zhang Lie suddenly asserted.

"What? Don't joke around with me—Amurong and the conglomerates under his control aren't that easy to handle."

"What if I release the recipe for the limit-breaking potions #1 and #2? Would that help?"

"What? Are you really willing to do so?" Hong Tianqi looked at him in shock, then broke out into a smile. "If you do that, we really might be able to avoid a battle entirely, but... would you be willing to do so?"

"Well, I've been collecting a large quantity of herbs required for these potions, and I do want to start selling them off..."

"Oh, you!"

"Furthermore, I have some important information about disaster-grade lifeforms."

"Disaster-grade?"

"The rank above peak-grade in strength."

"Is that so? I've never heard of it."

Zhang Lie summarized the information briefly for Hong Tianqi, leaving him so excited he almost crushed his transceiver to pieces.

"With these two bargaining chips, Amurong's faction will surely crumble, I just know it!"

Chapter 594: Evanescent as a Dream

Indeed, things went according to Hong Tianqi's plan. The moment the Zenith Dojo revealed that it was ready to share that information, Amurong's faction collapsed.

All notable organizations in the Milky Way immediately signaled that they would work with Hong Tianqi. Amurong lost in the blink of an eye—no one was willing to give up on such rare and precious information for the tenuous promises that Amurong was making.

In Amurong's office, his secretary asked, "Sir, are you heading to China immediately?"

"Yes. We have to make our move before our power base crumbles entirely. We need to seize the initiative, even if that means using the crudest of methods."

"You mean—"

Amurong's eyes glinted. "We might not be able to touch Hong Tianqi, but Zhang Lie's nothing more than a greenhorn. Even if he can defeat an asura, I'm surely stronger than he is. As long as we can catch Zhang Lie, all our problems will be solved immediately—and if we can't, we'll grab his sister, Zhang Hanxiang."

"I understand, sir. I'll begin preparations immediately." After Amurong's secretary left his office, he sent a message through his transceiver: Amurong's heading to China.

Amurong himself didn't know that his trusted secretary had already betrayed him.

Once again, the Zenith Dojo was packed to the brim with people. This time, the excitement was because of the news that the recipe for Potions #1 and #2 were going to be released to the public.

After learning that the Chinese government would be handling the distribution of the recipe, the hubbub quieted down—until a batch of research results made headlines again.

The world federation had expected that it would take quite some time until other races gained the ability to make use of these limit-breaking potions, but the research results had arrived surprisingly quickly.

Was Zhang Lie a genius, or had the four prime races done everything in their power to speed up the research?

That the recipes were slated to be published caused a stir; the revelation of the new research results was a bombshell. Strong as the limit-breaking potions might be, they were thought to only be suited for human consumption—until now.

Countless alien races made a visit to Earth with the hopes of securing a cooperation with Zhang Lie for their race. The Zenith Dojo and its environs were jam-packed with people, so much so that Zhang Lie wanted to retreat back into the sura realm.

Fortunately, there were staff around to handle the visitors, and Zhang Lie only had to meet the most important ones.

As he walked out of the teleportation array, he saw Zhang Hong there to welcome him. "Zhang Lie, you're finally back—quick, I need all the help I can get!"

Zhang Hong, whom Zhang Lie had left in charge of the dojo, was now a powerhouse at business management, and she had a whole staff of administrators under her command. The stronger the dojo network became, the more impactful and influential Zhang Hong was.

Suddenly, Zhang Lie glanced toward the door. "Who's that?"

Zhang Hong glanced at the black-robed envoy who had just walked in before looking down at her notes. "He's the representative of the ghost dragons."

Zhang Lie's eyes turned slitted as he activated his dragon's eye soulshard. He smirked. "Indeed? I wonder why the previous presiding authority of the world federation is trying to sneak into my dojo."

The black-robed envoy's eyes lit up with a cold aura. Killing intent blossomed around him, and a howling wind sent everything around him flying. Amurong gave up on his disguise and struck immediately.

From his perspective, Zhang Lie's strength was limited. Even though he might have displayed incredible strength for a second-realm hunter, he would be nothing in the third realm. Meanwhile, Amurong himself was a fourth-realm hunter. Although he couldn't compare with Hong Tianqi, it would be straightforward for him to capture someone like Zhang Lie.

The moment Amurong dashed toward him, Zhang Lie's eyes gleamed with multicolored light.

Amurong's momentum was arrested as his eyes glazed over with a rainbow sheen. He stood stock-still where he was.

Zhang Lie smirked. "So this is all the strength a presiding authority of the world federation amounts to? Pathetic."

Zhang Lie stepped forward and slapped Amurong on the face. A crisp smack rang out, and a streak of red appeared on Amurong's flesh. "This is for trying to attack the Zenith Dojo!"

Zhang Lie slapped him once more. "This is for running around and causing trouble for Martial Sage Hong!"

"And this is for coveting my limit-breaking potions!"

Zhang Lie slapped Amurong once and again, the crisp smacks reverberating about the courtyard. Just as he was starting to enjoy it, Amurong reached out and grabbed ahold of his wrist, causing Zhang Lie's eyes to widen. "How can you still move?!"

Amurong grinned maliciously. "I've survived the second realm and more. Do you really think a petty trick like this can take me down? You really must underestimate me!"

"Is that so? And how are you so certain you're not under my control? You're the one underestimating me, Amurong!"

Amurong smirked as he punched Zhang Lie's stomach, his destructive genetic energy spreading throughout Zhang Lie's body and crippling him.

Hong Tianqi and his men arrived too late to deal with Amurong, who managed to overcome them all with brute force.

A massive palm smashed down from the sky, covering heaven and earth. Those who weren't strong enough to resist its pressure were forced still and rendered immobile. Amurong, however, seemed not to fear the hand at all. He had already prepared an escape route, and he vanished with Zhang Lie in tow in a burst of black fog.

Just as Amurong disappeared, Hong Tianqi's palm smashed down where he stood, causing all of China to quake.

As he escaped out of a teleportation array, Amurong released a long breath. Had he been any slower, he might have been forced to remain in China. He glanced at Zhang Lie and began to roar in laughter. "Haha! As expected, I've won!"

Now that he had caught Zhang Lie, everything would belong to him.

Immediately after having escaped, Amurong received a message from Hong Tianqi.

He replied leisurely, "What's the matter, Hong Tianqi? You seem unusually bothered today."

"Return Zhang Lie immediately, or I'll declare war on you with full force!"

Amurong cackled. "Oh? Why don't you try it? If you do so, I'll kill him immediately! This lad's core to your faction and to how you're keeping it together. Without Zhang Lie, the four prime races wouldn't be supporting you so strongly—the research results for the limit-breaking fragments are already out, as you know, and they can easily keep going by themselves from there."

Hong Tianqi sucked in a deep breath and tried to quash his anger. "What do you want from me, Amurong?"

"Those research results, as well as half the spiritual herbs that China has collected to date."

Amurong thought that those were all the fruits of Zhang Lie's labor.

"Very well," Hong Tianqi replied. "I'll give you half the herbs first, and the research results after you let Zhang Lie go."

"No—I want both."

"And what if you suddenly renege on your promise?"

Amurong chuckled coldly. "You seem to have forgotten that I'm the one calling the shots here. Furthermore, who said that I'd release Zhang Lie just like that?"

Chapter 595: Reality and Illusion

Upon hearing Amurong's words, Hong Tianqi was flabbergasted by his thick skin. "Amurong, just what do you want?!"

"Who knows if the research results you've given me are valid? Surely you need to give me some time to verify them."

"How long do you want?"

"Ten years."

"Ten years—you just want to destroy Zhang Lie's future!" Hong Tianqi shouted.

Amurong shrugged. "I simply want to be cautious. Zhang Lie's a dangerous fellow, as you know, able to defeat an asura in the second realm alone. This sort of existence will surely exceed us two in strength, and I have to at least try to curb it a little."

"I won't agree."

"In that case, I suppose you'll learn of Zhang Lie's accidental death tomorrow in the news."

Amurong was certain that he had a good grasp of Hong Tianqi's personality, that he would surely accede to any request on Zhang Lie's behalf.

If Zhang Lie remained under Amurong's control for ten years, then Hong Tianqi would likewise be under his control for ten years.

"Three years, three at most!"

"No—ten!"

Hong Tianqi shouted back, "In that case, I suppose neither of us will have what we want. Three years—that's it."

Amurong scowled. "If you insist."

The rest of the transaction proceeded smoothly.

When Amurong glanced at the papers in his hands, he raised his head to the skies and laughed. "Haha, Zhang Lie, Hong Tianqi! What you've both worked hard to achieve has become my possession and mine alone!"

Upon confirming the veracity of the documents he had received, Amurong thought he could see a long and illustrious future ahead of him. With these results in hand, his race would be able to obtain limit fragments as well.

Not long afterwards, Hong Tianqi sent half of China's stockpile of spiritual herbs to Amurong. Thanks to Zhang Lie, that stockpile filled the entire suite of warehouses around the harbor. The crates were stacked several dozen high, and there were so many of them that each warehouse felt like a maze.

Amurong happily sent Hong Tianqi a message. "Thank you for the herbs. Don't forget to move your troops further back—I'm uncomfortable having them so close by. And of course you'll resolve all that nonsense about the kidnapping incident for me, won't you?"

Hong Tianqi roared in rage, "Amurong! Don't think you can get away with everything!"

"Hmm? Zhang Lie's doing fine now, with good food and a good place to live, and servants of his own. From your tone, it doesn't look like you think he deserves those amenities. Very well, then..."

"Are you threatening me?!"

"Of course!"

A fearsome aura erupted from Hong Tianqi. Even across the transceiver, Amurong could feel his rage—but his mask of calmness didn't slip.

In the end, it was Hong Tianqi who gave in. "Very well. I'll have my troops retreat, and I'll deal with the kidnapping incident. Is that satisfactory?"

"Haha! I'm very thankful, Hong Tianqi."

Three years' respite allowed Amurong to develop and flourish at leisure.

The limit-fragment research that Zhang Lie pioneered continued to flourish, supported by China's massive stockpile of spiritual herbs.

Amurong himself began leading research into limit-fragment development for his race. At the beginning, he wasn't able to make as much progress as the skilled researchers sponsored by the four prime races, but he quickly began poaching talent from all over the galaxy.

The development went surprisingly smoothly, and he even established a competing organization to contest the four prime races' laboratory for superiority.

The four prime races were against this development, but Amurong's mature results quickly prompted investment into his laboratory.

After all, not every race was on good terms with the four prime races, and not all of them were large or strong enough to get priority in that laboratory.

Amurong's research laboratory successfully broke the monopoly that the four prime races' lab held.

As for Zhang Lie, he had long since been crippled.

Amurong had been secretly adding aphrodisiacs into Zhang Lie's food. Initially, Zhang Lie was able to resist their effects given his constitution, but increasing dosages over the long term eventually wore down his resistance.

As the drugs took noticeable effect, Amurong sent some prostitutes into his apartment.

Zhang Lie's long-term imprisonment and drugged mental state gave him no outlet for his boredom but sex. He neglected his cultivation and growth as a genetic hunter; his honed skills fell by the wayside.

If he had been a sharp blade three years ago, he was nothing more than a rusted old club now—just a piece of worthless trash. When he was finally freed from his captivity after three years, he even looked longingly back at his apartment and the women within...

Amurong had no intention to keep him alive. He had already arranged for his men to find a suitable opportunity to kill Zhang Lie, then to retrieve his corpse and bring it back.

Useless though he might be now, Zhang Lie was still a latent threat. He might seem harmless at the moment, but who knew when he might explode?

As for Hong Tianqi, ever since Zhang Lie had been taken away, he was like a tiger whose claws had been cut off. He had even tried to rescue Zhang Lie two years ago, but after that, he was hard-pressed just to protect himself.

Without Zhang Lie's stabilizing presence, the four prime races gradually took over the limit-fragment research—and without these limit fragments, China was nothing more than a small country in a small planet.

Hong Tianqi had lost his reputation and position after continuously acceding to Amurong's requests. Apparently, he had devoted himself to improvement within the dimensional world, but he had gone missing during one war or another.

Amurong glanced at the starry sky. This was his time to shine.

A decade passed. Amurong managed to re-establish the world federation based on his growing influence. His underhanded means and connections meant that he was prospering day by day, and even the four prime races had to defer to him.

One day, while he was walking through the streets, he saw a beggar by the roadside. Only when his son pointed him out did Amurong recognize the beggar as his erstwhile rival, Hong Tianqi. Amurong shook his head in pity, tossed down a ten-thousand point banknote, then walked away.

Behind him, the beggar suddenly yelled out, "I'm the king of the galaxy, the head of the world federation, hahaha!"

Two decades later, Amurong had no equal.

Three decades later, Amurong was crowned the monarch of the Milky Way. There were no dissenters. Everyone in the world federation was forced to put on a collar. Only by paying a sufficient amount of tax would they be able to breathe freely and enjoy pure, unpolluted water.

Everything was proceeding according to Amurong's dreams, for everything was indeed nothing more than a dream...

"What's this fellow doing?" Hong Tianqi glanced at Amurong, who was standing before the teleportation array and dancing like a fool, in shock.

Upon learning that Amurong was planning to attack Zhang Lie, he and his men had rushed over, only to witness such a sight...

Chapter 596: A Land of Dreams

"I'm the king of the galaxy, the head of the world federation! You'll all be kneeling at my feet!" Amurong's eyes were glazed over. He was shaking his head as his limbs flailed. He twisted his hips from time to time, and he had taken off the clothes on the upper half of his body.

He danced from the teleportation array all the way to the door of the Zenith Dojo. As representatives from all sorts of races watched on, he yelled out, "I'm the king of the galaxy—"

Hong Tianqi was dumbstruck by vicarious shame. Was this really the opponent he had been feuding with for so long? He... was actually very gratified to see his opponent make such a public fool of himself.

He sidled up to Zhang Lie, who was recording the scene in a memory crystal. "What's going on?"

"It's exactly as you can see," Zhang Lie murmured.

Hong Tianqi folded his arms. "I can't tell what he's doing!"

Who would believe that the previous presiding authority of the world federation would be humiliating himself outside the Zenith Dojo?

Hong Xiao sidled over and whispered to Hong Tianqi, "The moment this man saw my master, he roared out, tried to attack him, and then was frozen stiff. Shortly after that, he went mad!"

Hong Tianqi frowned. "Do you think I'd believe you?"

Amurong's a fourth-realm hunter. How can Zhang Lie beat a hunter like him in terms of strength?

You—"

Zhang Lie smiled. "Martial Sage, it's true that I can't beat Amurong in terms of genetic energy and brute strength, but I do think I'm superior in terms of mental techniques."

Hong Tianqi's frown deepened. "Amurong's a member of the ghost dragons, don't you know? His body's half-spiritual, and he's innately gifted with mental techniques! How could you—"

"I obtained a peak-grade soulbeast soulshard in the second realm, then a very interesting disaster-grade mindmeld clam soulshard. With the additional boost from my limit-breaking potions..."

Zhang Lie trailed off, but what he revealed was sufficient to shock Hong Tianqi.

"No, that can't be—he's almost the equivalent of a peak-grade lifeform! How could you have dealt with him so easily?"

"It wasn't as hard as you think. He looked me in the eye, and I gave him a wonderful dream, easy as that."

Hong Tianqi clutched his face. "And what do you think he'll do once he wakes up? If you push a man like that to the brink, who knows what he'll do!"

"No, Martial Sage. He thinks he's in the real world, after all. Unless he's willing to become a servant of my Zhang household, he'll never be able to wake up."

Hong Tianqi blinked a few times, then abruptly nodded. "I'll assume that you know what you're doing—I've never gone wrong believing you just yet."

The representatives of the races who had come to pay Zhang Lie a visit were staring at Amurong and pointing fingers at him.

"Isn't that Amurong, the previous presiding authority of the world federation?"

"Indeed. What's going on here?"

"Perhaps he's gone crazy because he can't take the stress anymore..."

Zhang Lie was getting tired of watching Amurong's antics, and he patted the martial sage on the shoulder. "Can I hand him to you, Martial Sage?"

Hong Tianqi nodded, then motioned for his men to restrain Amurong.

Amurong continued to dance madly, even after Hong Tianqi pummel him in the face. Hong Tianqi gave him two more punches, until Amurong's face was swollen and his eyes were blackening, but he continued to dance. Hong Tianqi was disgusted by the sight of his erstwhile rival.

A rainbow gleam flashed in Zhang Lie's eyes. Amurong suddenly shivered; as if the illusion had changed, he turned left and right before focusing on Hong Tianqi.

"Ah, Hong Tianqi, what are you doing here? Haven't you been begging in the streets lately? Why are you dressed so neatly today? Well, it's good to see you making a man of yourself. I can even consider making you one of the guards in my estate."

Amurong glanced at the nearby onlookers, the many representatives who were gathered outside the Zenith Dojo. When he saw them pointing at him, he shouted irritably, "What are all of you doing? How dare you not kneel upon seeing the monarch of the galaxy!"

Hong Tianqi frowned and turned to Zhang Lie. "Zhang Lie, why don't you dispel the illusion? It'll be too shameful to see him going outside like this."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I can't cancel the illusion now. Unless he sees through it himself, you'll have to break it by force."

Hong Tianqi was taken aback. "By force? If that's the case, surely he'd become a fool!"

Zhang Lie nodded.

Even Hong Tianqi seemed shocked by the versatility of Zhang Lie's technique. If the illusion were broken by force, Amurong would become a fool. Otherwise, even if Amurong were to see through the illusion, he would have to swear to be Zhang Lie's loyal servant before he could escape from it.

Amurong began to shout, "Why isn't anyone kneeling down? I'm the monarch of the galaxy! If you remain so disrespectful..."

Hong Tianqi asked, "What do we do about him now?"

Zhang Lie shrugged again. "Send him to an old folks' home, perhaps? And maybe one day he'll finally realize what happened to him."

Amurong glanced all around him. "Where am I? Am I in a dream?"

What are all of you doing? I'm the monarch of the galaxy!"

Unfortunately for Amurong, he received no response but another punch from Hong Tianqi.

Amurong reeled back and cried out in shock, "Hong Tianqi, you maniac! How dare you hit me—guards, capture this man and send him to a mental hospital! Ah, wait— where have my troops gone?"

Hong Tianqi clutched his face. "He's done for."

Amurong suddenly noticed Zhang Lie. "Zhang Lie! Shouldn't you be dead?"

Zhang Lie sighed. "I know you won't believe me, but here's the truth. You never became the monarch of the galaxy, and you never had troops of your own. You've been living a dream, an illusion! After leaving the teleportation array, you never stepped out of the Zenith Dojo."

Amurong seemed to recall something. His eyes became vacant, and he shook his head vigorously all of a sudden. "No, no! That's impossible—it happened five decades ago!"

"You were trapped in a mental world of your own making. Fifty years might have passed in it, but it's only been five minutes here. I don't know just what happened in your dream, but I can tell you with absolute certainty that this is the real world."

Zhang Lie retrieved his memory crystal and played back the recording, showing Amurong how he was making a fool of himself.

Amurong shook his head. "No, no, that's impossible, this is all fake! I'm the monarch of the galaxy!"

Zhang Lie sighed. "Your subconscious mind knows that you're in an illusion, that you couldn't have had so much success without any setbacks. You just don't want to admit it."

Amurong stilled, but he regained his verve just moments later. "I know I'm dreaming, because all of you are fake, you're all just figments of my imagination..."

Zhang Lie and Hong Tianqi both sighed. Reality or dream, Amurong was done for.

Hong Tianqi formally began, "Amurong, for trespassing in Chinese territory and attempting to assault the Zenith Dojo leader Zhang Lie, you have violated Chinese law. As a defender of China, I formally arrest you."

Amurong roared, "No, no! I'm the monarch of the galaxy! Everyone in the Milky Way must bow to me!"

Hong Tianqi snorted. "No matter who you are, under Chinese law, you'll receive the same punishment. If you've committed an offense, you'll pay for it!"

Amurong began screaming. "I know what you're doing—this is a plot against me, you've kidnapped me! Then, you've used cloning technology to come up with a fake Zhang Lie to make me believe that this is the true reality! Hong Tianqi, I've really underestimated you. So you've actually been pretending to be crazy all this time—for three whole decades!"

The combination of the disaster-grade mistmeld clam soulshard and Zhang Lie's frightening mental strength led to an attack of immense potency.

Amurong had spent what seemed to be five whole decades in a dream, and he refused to believe that it had only been five minutes in reality.

He continued screaming, "Don't think that you'll get away with this! My disappearance will shake the entire galaxy, and my forces will hunt you down! When they do, you'll die!"

Hong Tianqi shook his head, exasperated by Amurong. "Take him away—I don't want to hear his rambling for even a moment longer!"

His subordinates dragged the screaming Amurong away. Despite his protests, Amurong never tried to resist capture with genetic energy, only his body.

For a dream to be reality, and for reality to be a dream— at least subconsciously, Amurong was afraid of this technique and of Zhang Lie. Zhang Lie had experienced these illusions for himself, and he knew how realistic they could be.

Hong Tianqi, on the other hand, despite being a martial sage, had little experience with such illusions. Based on what had happened with Amurong, he harbored a healthy dose of respect and fear against Zhang Lie, who possessed a technique against which he couldn't defend or even comprehend.

Fortunately, they were on friendly terms.

Zhang Lie actually possessed far more frightening variants of mind control: he was even able to create multiple personalities within one's mind, then erode the original personality by the passage of time, a flawless brainwashing technique...

Chapter 597: Intergalactic War

The former presiding authority of the world federation, Amurong, had become a crazy maniac under the power of the disaster-grade mistmeld clam soulshard.

Upon seeing how strong mental abilities could be, Zhang Lie decided to use the soulshard once on each member of Team Zenith and on Zhang Hanxiang herself so that they could learn to identify and break free from mental compulsion.

As for the others around him, he would give them a latent mental compulsion himself—if someone attempted to hypnotize them, they would wake up immediately or attack the hypnotist if they couldn't.

The recording of Amurong dancing naked in front of the Zenith Dojo quickly spread on the hunters' forums.

"Haha, what's this? Who made it? They're really talented!"

"Amurong: I'm a stripper!"

"Amurong: I'll be the king of the galaxy!"

"I never expected I'd see Amurong, of all people, on the forums."

Of course, some doubted the veracity of the video. "Is this real?"

"Of course it's fake! Would the previous presiding authority of the world federation ever strip his clothes in public?"

"Right, even if he did, he'd do it in the comfort of his own home. I bet someone who looked like Amurong was doing it for attention."

"Isn't he worried that Amurong will take revenge on him for sullyng his image? Though I have to say, his popularity play really did work out..."

Someone suddenly shouted, "Look, look at the news!"

"What's the matter?"

"Hong Tianqi is having a press conference now. He's caught Amurong!"

Everyone turned to the news, where Hong Tianqi was speaking to a crowd of reporters. "Last night, we caught a person who was intending to cause harm to the dojo leader of the Zenith Dojo, the head of the limit-fragment research laboratory, Zhang Lie. The identity of that person shocked us all—he turned out to be the former presiding authority of the world federation, Amurong! We are deeply hurt by his betrayal."

The image shifted to Amurong, who was currently in a prison cell.

He was shouting, "You're all dead! How dare you kidnap the monarch of the galaxy—I'll cut off your air supply, just watch me!"

Hong Tianqi continued, "Because the former authority's mental health is in question, we regret that we can't invite him to this press conference."

On screen, Amurong yelled out, "Release me! I'll give you everything you want. Do you want to be an official? If you release me, I'll let you govern as many planets as you've dreamt of. Money is no matter either—it's all just a chain of numbers to me! And—"

Hong Tianqi shut off the monitor, sighing as he kneaded his forehead. Was this really his former opponent? How much time had he spent on a man like this?

A reporter asked, "We've all seen former authority Amurong behaving in an unusual fashion. Could this assault attempt be due to some sort of mind control or mental compulsion?"

Hong Tianqi explained, "To be frank, I've noticed problematic behavior from Amurong in the past. After all, why would a rational person want to start a war in the Milky way?"

My team and I have spent a considerable amount of time cataloging his misdeeds to date. Thanks to his brave secretary, who has chosen to work with us, we've uncovered the truth."

The depths of Amurong's misdeeds, most of which had only been revealed after his madness, shocked even his rival Hong Tianqi. He simply couldn't believe that Amurong had done such ignoble things making use of his station as presiding authority.

Amurong's secretary walked forward and stood before the gathered reporters. "The former presiding authority used to be a reasonable, rational man, but after the failure of his kidnapping attempt, his personality changed. I suspect that he suffered too severe a blow during that time to fully recover."

"What were the signs of that change?" a reporter asked.

The secretary began, "After losing his position as presiding authority, Amurong became a little crazed. He told me that he wanted to become the monarch of the galaxy, that he wanted all intelligent life to put on a collar, that he wanted to charge for clean air and drinking water..."

"Were you responsible for helping him in his misdeeds?"

The secretary clutched his face as he cried. "I was very scared. Amurong was frightening. Despite losing his position, he still maintained a great deal of power, and my family was in his hands. I had no choice. I, I deeply regret what I did as his accomplice."

Hong Tianqi patted the secretary's shoulder. "Amurong's secretary is a little distraught, so let's let him rest for now."

After his departure, the reporters continued asking questions. "Martial Sage Hong, we know that you almost brought about intragalactic war as a result of your conflict with the former authority Amurong. What are your plans now that he's indisposed?"

"The conglomerates that had been working with the former authority have contacted us individually, and most are willing to pursue a long-term relationship with China."

Of course, these conglomerates had all paid a hefty price to do so. Hong Tianqi flashed a brilliant smile. Amurong had fallen at precisely the right time for China to profit.

Hong Tianqi continued, "We'll handle everything that Amurong has left behind. Whatever we can keep using, we will; whatever we can't, we'll discard. Once we have Amurong's estate put to rights, we'll form a new, united world federation responsible for the entire galaxy."

Another reporter raised a hand. "Next, the question everyone wants to know about: how will Amurong be sentenced?"

"According to intergalactic law, the culprit Amurong should be sentenced to the fullest extent of the law, but his mental state prevents such an outcome. Instead, he'll be sent to the best mental institution in the entire Milky Way, whose inhabitants boast not only a "monarch of the galaxy," but also a "champion of void" and "emperor of the starry skies". I'm sure Amurong will find himself in good company. In order to monitor Amurong's mental state, we'll be publicly sharing a stream of security footage from the institution."

The next day, when Zhang Lie began to worry about whether or not Amurong had been faking his craziness, he went searching for the stream of his security footage.

There, he found Amurong standing in front of the camera, a red cape billowing behind him. He yelled out, "I, the king of the galaxy, demand to know the location of my troops!"

That red cape was just a tablecloth.

The moment Amurong appeared, a potbellied middle-aged man shoved him aside. "Your troops shall not stop my assault—me, the champion of void!"

That man subsequently stumbled back as a stick-thin fellow stepped forward. "Ha! I'm the ruler of the Milky Way! Face me, you cowards!"

"You fools! I, the sage of red lightning, shall rule over you all!"

As more and more lunatics stepped into view, the shocked crowds were struck dumb.

"If you want a fight, you'll have it!" Amurong shouted. "Troops, forward!"

Meanwhile, Zhang Lie was curled up on his couch, laughing so hard tears seeped from his eyes.

"Just what is all this nonsense?"

"There surely are a lot of illustrious figures living in this mental institution..."

"Keep fighting, monarch of the galaxy, Amurong! Bring out your courage and your backbone!"

"I can't believe it..."

"Amazing—is an intergalactic war about to erupt? That's the first thing I saw when I turned on the stream!"

"The king of the galaxy against the champion of void, the emperor of chaos against the sage of red flame..."

The stream of the mental institution to which Amurong had been sent immediately drew the public eye. It catapulted into the top ten streams that day, with a huge number of followers. As more and more hunters learned of the stream, that number continued to grow.

The stream included details on the life of former presiding authority Amurong within the institution—it displayed the food he ate, his sleeping figure, the wars he had with the other residents of the institution, and his radiotherapy.

Amurong would never be able to escape his new prison. The doctors and nurses in charge of Amurong all reported to Hong Tianqi, and they would make sure that Amurong consumed pills on a strict schedule. Some of these pills were meant to keep him calm and sedated, but the majority were hallucinatory in nature.

In other words, Amurong would be trapped within the delusions of his mind, never to escape.

In some sense, this was the best possible outcome for him—to live out his fantasies in his mind with dedicated care, rather than to face the consequences of his crimes in the real world.

Just as Zhang Lie was watching Amurong's stream, he received a message from Hong Tianqi. He replied, "Starting a stream was an excellent idea."

Hong Tianqi seemed rather surprised. "You're watching it?"

"Aren't you?"

"Well, of course I am..." Hong Tianqi watched the stream whenever he had time. Seeing his erstwhile enemy making a fool of himself in the public eye was a guilty pleasure of his.

Hong Tianqi asked, "Do you have any interest in becoming an authority of the world federation yourself?"

Zhang Lie seemed surprised by the question. "That's what this call is about?"

Hong Tianqi shrugged. "You know the mess that Amurong left behind, and I do need to find a new committee."

Hong Tianqi had largely managed to deal with that mess, and it remained for him to restructure the world federation. "Your status and reputation have far improved from before. Conquering the sura realm and pioneering research into limit fragments are strong accomplishments that would guarantee your admission individually, let alone together."

"Let me consider it," Zhang Lie replied.

Chapter 598: Dividing the Spoils

As Zhang Lie was dealing with the schism in the world federation, the post-war meeting was occurring in the second realm. That meeting was, more colloquially, when the allied Renhuang forces gathered in order to divide up the spoils of war, as was standard practice.

The same situation had occurred after the second and third intergalactic wars in which the Milky Way had participated.

The result of the second intergalactic convention was the construction of the world federation, and the result of the third was the institution of the highest authorities who would oversee the Milky Way as a whole.

Team Zenith, on behalf of Renhuang, had indicated that they would be building a kingdom atop the sura ruins. In fact, Renhuang was already doing so, led by the human race and the four prime races of the Milky Way, along with the countless races that supported them.

They were starting to settle the land, and the barest outline of a kingdom could be seen amidst the sura ruins. This kingdom would encompass human and alien alike, and it would dominate the second realm.

However, there were quite a few races that didn't want to see the humans supplant the sura.

Renhuang had grown into its strength far too rapidly—in just two or three years, there were countless hunters within who had strength equivalent to that of a sura king.

Some of these contrary races were afraid that the humans would become the next sura. Once this human kingdom were constructed and the humans began devouring the sura's resources, they would surely grow into the second coming of the sura...

No, they would be even stronger than that. At least the eight sura empires had been decentralized, but now there would only be one human kingdom.

The mighty warriors who had slain a dragon were poised to become a dragon themselves—and one mightier than the one that had been slain.

These alien races had been making moves behind the scenes in order to disrupt Renhuang's construction. As a result, it had taken Team Zenith over a month to set up the preliminaries for their new kingdom.

The meeting was held at what had been the capital of the monarch of stars. Originally, this meeting should have taken place in Renhuang, but this proposal had been met with stark refusal from quite a number of the allied races, who were gradually starting to distance themselves from the humans.

As the human representative, Sun Mengmeng was the first to speak. Her declaration of intent to form a new kingdom, however, was met with surprising dissent.

"I've never heard of a kingdom comprising multiple races!"

"Renhuang's already too large. In order to prevent it from growing unwieldy, I think there should be stipulations against its growth."

"We are absolutely against the creation of a multiracial kingdom!"

Hong Yu glanced at these alien races as though she were looking at a bunch of country bumpkins.

"What's wrong with such a kingdom? There are countless successful examples of such kingdoms all throughout the Milky Way."

"I don't know what this Milky Way you're referring to is—we're in the second realm, not everywhere else."

"It's very difficult to broker agreement in kingdoms of multiple races. Each race should have their own kingdom; these kingdoms may then work together in an alliance."

Sun Mengmeng pointed at the map displayed prominently in the room. "Regardless of anything else that we agree on, Renhuang is claiming this territory as its own."

According to the original treatise prepared at the start of the alliance, the sura territory would be claimed by whoever drove back the sura on that plot of land. However, several of the alien races banded together to claim a stretch of land right in the middle of the proposed Renhuang kingdom, forcing it to be split up.

Li Feng said sternly, "You guys don't have to be part of our kingdom, but don't prevent us from starting one!"

"That's not our intention at all. After all, the land was claimed by multiple races working in tandem, and it's natural that there might be conflict over any one piece."

Sun Mengmeng smirked. "Conflict? No, I don't think you understand. We're the ones who took over all this land, not any of you! And even if you did, we claim it by right of force and conquest. If any of you want to challenge our claim, so be it."

Sun Mengmeng's words immediately threw the meeting into a hubbub as the representatives of Renhuang clashed against those of the alien races.

Of course, none of the alien races dared to fight the members of Team Zenith in direct combat; they favored a war of words instead.

Just then, a low voice resounded from outside the hall. "I hear that some object to the founding of the new Renhuang kingdom."

A man appeared in the center of the meeting room out of thin air, his aura so forceful that it felt as though a mountain were pressing down on the representatives' heads. Everyone bowed down, though not by choice. Black cracks splintered the space all around him. "Who dares claim the spoils of Renhuang? Is it you?"

"N-n-no, I, I didn't have such an intention! It was all a misunderstanding..."

Upon hearing the commanding voice, Sun Mengmeng and the others let out relieved smiles, whereas the dissenting races began to sweat.

"Listen up: if you're going to speak, it had better be a valuable contribution to the discussion. Otherwise, the lives of your clan are forfeit. I claim this land by conquest."

The man's palm pressed down on the large map, his fingers smoldering and leaving a scorch mark where Renhuang stood. "We of Renhuang aren't negotiating with you about the construction of a new kingdom—we're just informing you of that fact. Anyone who dares contest this land will be met with immediate reprisal."

The alien races quaked as they countered, "H-how could you?! This land includes our original territory—you're just like the sura!"

"Are you unwilling to accept these terms, then?"

The man turned and glanced at the two speakers, who evaporated away like steam or fog. No trace of them remained.

This demonstration shocked the entire room. None of the alien races dared to speak. They shut their mouths and lowered their heads.

Team Zenith had been far too lenient with them, so much so that they had forgotten just how Renhuang had managed to survive and eke out a place for itself and how it had defeated the sura.

The man standing in front of them killed sura monarchs as if they were nothing more than domesticated animals.

No one believed that an existence at this level of strength would deign to participate in their mortal affairs, but here he was.

"Does anyone else have an opinion?" Zhang Lie asked again. This time, all the alien representatives shook their heads as though they had been shocked.

"No, no, of course not!"

"We were only providing suggestions and recommendations, but the choice is yours, of course!"

"Indeed, please take all the land you want!"

Zhang Lie nodded. "Very well. Remember your words if you want your clan to continue living. To be honest, I don't mind culling more alien races from the second realm, so as to have more space for the rest of us..."

Chapter 599: The Kingdom of Limit

The representatives of the alien races didn't know what to do. Discourse was built on disagreement, but if they couldn't disagree with Zhang Lie, what was the point of the meeting? Were they simply to accept their fate?

The Huoluo clan head was vaporized just for making an errant comment! After his example, none of the alien races dared talk back to Zhang Lie.

One representative whispered, "If our clans find out that we left this meeting losing all our territory rather than gaining any, what will they say?"

How would they survive from now on?

Beside that representative, another shouted, "You bastard! It's a great honor for your land to be claimed, don't you see? Think about how important a person like Zhang Lie is! Of course we have to support his ventures. I'd even be willing to hand over my wife and daughter, let alone my land, to the cause!"

The representatives that had been the most vocal were all cowed into bootlickers.

Zhang Lie stretched out two fingers. "There are two choices for all of you: either join my kingdom, or make a living outside my domain."

"Of course we'll follow you, Zhang Lie! Anything you say!"

"As long as you don't disdain us, Zhang Lie, me and mine will be your loyal citizens!"

The alien races changed their tune as though they were flipping the pages of a book. They stood up and knelt down. "We greet His Majesty, ruler of the second realm!"

Their coordinated motions made Zhang Lie feel as though they had rehearsed it all beforehand.

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Captain, what will our kingdom be called?"

"Let's call it Limit." [1]

That day, the kingdom Limit was born. What had started out as a meeting to divide the spoils of war had ended up being a meeting to announce the creation of a new kingdom, Limit.

The topic of the meeting shifted to the laws and protections in place for humans and aliens alike.

Because of Zhang Lie's presence, the alien races were all in agreement in just a short month. No one dared to hinder the creation of the kingdom; Team Zenith suffered none of the setbacks that seemed to have been omnipresent.

A month later, a grand ceremony was held in the capital of Limit—the city of Renhuang, which had been rebuilt anew and eclipsed any of the former sura capitals in grandeur and prominence.

That day, a group of aliens arrived at Renhuang, having gone through countless trials and tribulations as they made their way across the sura realm. When they saw the majestic city in front of them, they knelt prostrate on the ground. "This is our holy city!"

These were the Baimei, the tribe who had been so impressed with Zhang Lie that they had begun worshiping him. After passing through almost the entirety of the second realm, the Baimei had arrived at Renhuang at long last.

They were astounded by the wealth and grandeur of Renhuang. Led on by their stick-thin priest, the Baimei walked into the city. Their pilgrimage had thinned but strengthened them. A third of their number had perished in the arduous trial, but the remaining two-thirds had grown far stronger than they were before. There were ten who were at the level of a sura king, and three among those ten were comparable to a sura monarch.

They entered the city to see festivities all around them. The residents of the city were all out in the streets, with guards maintaining proper order all around them.

The priest found a bystander and asked just what was going on.

The resident of Renhuang replied happily, "Today, our new king is ascending to the throne. He's the king of us humans, as well as the king of the second realm. I heard that even the realm's name will be changed."

A new king of their holy city?

"He's here, he's here! He's coming!" Amidst the residents' joyous cheering, a carriage drawn by eight peak-grade draconic lifeforms passed by. When the priest saw the inhabitants of that carriage, his face turned rapturous.

Crag eagles filled the sky, dropping basket after basket of flower petals. Thousands of glowing birds swarmed the air, heralding the momentous occasion.

The eight peak-grade lifeforms were likewise shining brilliantly under the sun. They were all draconic lifeforms with indomitable might, and their eyes gleamed with rainbow light.

In order to find the eight most suitable peak-grade lifeforms to draw this carriage, the members of Team Zenith and the alien races in support of Zhang Lie had scoured almost the entirety of the second realm, and the result spoke for itself.

Even one of those lifeforms alone would have required the entire Baimei tribe working together to take down. Just what sort of being could command eight of these lifeforms to drag a carriage for him?

The ornate carriage was painted in black and lavishly decorated in gold, a magnificent piece of art. The interior of the carriage was filled with plush goose down. A young man in his twenties sat within, an imposing aura surrounding him. His authority seemed to eclipse the heavens'; it seemed to be deeper than the sea. Anyone among the crowd strong enough to discern his cultivation instantly began to sweat.

The moment the dragon carriage appeared, the residents on either side of the road began to cheer with overwhelming enthusiasm. The sound reverberated through the air into a deafening crescendo.

When the Baimei saw the man in the carriage, their eyes widened and their hearts thumped.

The sound of bugles carried through the air as hundreds of peak-grade lifeforms called out as one.

The Baimei, however, paid no attention to the cacophony. They were fixated on one thing, and one thing only: the newly crowned king was their god!

Zhang Lie forced a smile as he waved at the gathered crowd. His coronation ceremony had been prepared with utmost care—but Zhang Lie had to be the one to hypnotize the hundreds of peak-grade lifeforms and eight peak-grade draconic lifeforms dragging his carriage along.

It had been a great deal of trouble. Furthermore, he had been forced to wake up at 5 AM that morning. Yun Bing had prepared a robe embroidered with dragons for him to put on for the coronation, but Zhang Lie had vetoed that idea immediately.

How outdated such attire was! Not to mention how difficult it was to put on. Instead, Zhang Lie put on a black coat, one made with peak-grade dragon leather. In some sense, this was a draconic robe as well. Most importantly, it was easy to put on and take off.

However, in order to demonstrate Zhang Lie's majesty, a series of annoying and cumbersome events was slated to take place. He would have to sit in the carriage and be paraded all throughout Renhuang, so that all its residents could see their new king.

It was all very troublesome, and Zhang Lie very much wanted to hypnotize everyone present before sneaking to one of the nearby stalls hawking food, but Yun Bing and the others had put so much thought into this ceremony that he had no choice but to see it through.

Following behind Zhang Lie were the six members of Team Zenith, each riding a peak-grade lifeform. Smiles decorated their faces—smiles of happiness and pride. They waved toward the onlookers.

Trailing the members of Team Zenith were Renhuang's forces, each also on a peak-grade lifeform. These included human fighters and representatives of the four prime races, as well as bodyguards nominally responsible for Zhang Lie's safety.

Chapter 600: Renaming the Realm

Behind Team Zenith were the members of the Yeluo clan, seated in a carriage. As thanks for their contribution in developing the Yeluo poison, Zhang Lie gave them a prominent spot in the procession.

Above them, the flying crag eagles traced out rainbows in the air.

The rock spirits, each as large as a walking castle, followed behind the Yeluo tribe. They were accompanied by the wood spirits, who shone with a glittering green glow.

The four races that had been with Renhuang since the very beginning were treated with respect befitting their station.

As the dragon carriage finally looped around the city and stopped at the newly constructed palace, Yun Bing and the others formed an escort in two orderly rows as they waited for Zhang Lie to step down from the carriage.

Zhang Lie saw many familiar faces—the lord of Qi, Zhou Liao, Xia Na, and so on. He raised his head and glanced at the palace as he steadily walked onward.

The palace had been built in the style of ancient Chinese architecture but updated with modern principles, and it had clearly taken painstaking effort.

Following Zhang Lie were the Yeluo chieftain, the shaman of the wood spirits, the members of Team Zenith—all those who had contributed to Renhuang from the very beginning.

As they were nearing the top of the castle, a slender figure in a black cloak emerged. Her cloak was embroidered with a dragonwolf, one that seemed to be caught mid-leap. It was clearly the work of a talented artisan.

Zhang Lie's eyebrows rose. "You've arrived at the second realm already?"

Zhang Hanxiang stuck out her tongue. "I heard you were going to be crowned king, so I worked hard the last few months hoping to give you a surprise.

Well? Did it succeed?"

"Of course! I'm very glad you could be here for the most illustrious point in my career as a hunter to date."

Zhang Lie took in the sight of his sister that he hadn't seen in years. He flicked her nose and asked her casually, "How are your gene fragments looking?"

Zhang Hanxiang wrinkled her nose. "Sister Mengmeng has already arranged for me to cap my regular and mutated gene fragments, and I just have superior and peak ones left."

Zhang Lie nodded. "There's no need to rush. It won't help you if you take in too many gene fragments without learning how to make use of your new strength appropriately or efficiently."

"Yes, Brother!" Zhang Hanxiang nodded, then clasped a cloak around Zhang Lie's back. She stood back and watched on as Zhang Lie ascended to the dais in front of him, her eyes filled with pride and adoration.

Atop the dais was a crown. At this point in the ceremony, someone was supposed to place it on him, but no one in the second realm dared to claim that honor.

Zhang Lie had no choice but to put it on himself; it was a great honor, but also one saddled with heavy responsibility.

That said, the crown felt surprisingly light on his head.

Zhang Lie summoned his blade Guicang from his soulspace and raised it high into the air. A pillar of light emanated from the blade and shot into the heavens, shining even more brightly than the sun. As the sword flashed, the sky began to crack.

Zhang Lie made what seemed like a series of aimless strokes, but by the time he was done, one word was displayed prominently in the sky for all to see: Limit.

Carved out of Zhang Lie's sword energy, the word didn't dissipate, even after quite some time had passed. It seemed as though it would remain forever above the sky of Renhuang.

Zhang Lie sheathed his sword and announced, "Witness the rise of our new kingdom—the kingdom of Limit!"

His reservoir of genetic energy allowed his voice to be carried far and wide throughout the realm. It felt as though Zhang Lie's words were ingrained in everyone's heads.

"Limit, the kingdom of Limit!"

"We've suffered through a terrible war, but in doing so, we've vanquished the sura and ended their tyranny over the second realm. From today onwards, I announce that the second realm shall be named the limit realm!"

His domineering voice shook the entire realm, along with the lifeforms and the will of the world within. The news that Zhang Lie had just founded a kingdom and renamed the entire realm quickly spread across the Milky Way, shocking everyone who heard it.

The hunters' forums were quickly peppered with posts suggesting that Zhang Lie didn't have the capacity or authority to do so.

"Not even a monarch has the right to change the name of the realm! Who gave you that authority?"

"If you want to be a king, so be it—but what makes you think you can change the name of the realm just like that? I'm not buying it!"

"Right? It's almost as though Zhang Lie's becoming a sura monarch himself!"

Of course, there were those who sided with him.

"Actually, isn't it reasonable? After all, we've all but hunted the sura to extinction. When the sura ruled the second realm, they called the realm the sura realm. Since Zhang Lie's now our de facto ruler, doesn't it make sense that he can rename it too?"

"Exactly! Don't you think it's ludicrous to continue calling the second realm the sura realm if there are no sura within it?"

"No, I disagree! The people who actually should get to decide the name of the realm should be the inhabitants of the second realm, not us inhabitants of the Milky Way! Only they have the right to name their realm—we're nothing more than passersby to whom the second realm is just a stop on our journey to the third realm. On the other hand, those who were born in the second realm are tied to that realm, and only they should have the opportunity to name their home."

"He's not wrong. Zhang Lie's not an inhabitant of the second realm, and he has no right to name it."

"Oh? Talk to Zhang Lie about it, then—or become as strong as he is, first!"

"Why should Zhang Lie listen to the likes of you?"

"That said, how did the second realm end up being called the sura realm in the first place?"

"Apparently, by the time the first hunters made it into the second realm, it was already dominated by the sura, who called it the sura realm. These inhabitants are now Zhang Lie's citizens, so Zhang Lie's choice of name does reflect the second realm's inhabitants' will!"

The decision caused quite a stir, but most people agreed that Zhang Lie had such a right.

While it would be a stretch to say that the entirety of the second realm belonged to Zhang Lie, he did control a significant majority of it. As the ruler of all that land, he had a say in the name of the realm.

Furthermore, as long as the original inhabitants of that land accepted the new name, there was no problem at all.

After the ceremony was over, Zhang Lie finally allowed himself to lounge lazily within the palace. Just as he sat down, however, Zhang Hanxiang came over to find him.

"I can't believe you didn't tell me before coming to the second realm," Zhang Lie groused.

"Don't be like that, Brother. I just wanted to give you a surprise—you didn't tell me you were going to be crowned king, either! I'm your only kin now, and of course I have to attend such an illustrious ceremony."

Zhang Lie scratched his head in embarrassment. "To be honest, I find these ceremonies quite annoying. I only did it on Yun Bing and the others' request to demonstrate the might of mankind. In fact, I don't plan to ever host such ceremonies again."

Zhang Hanxiang shook her head seriously. "No, Brother, you have to! You know how proud our parents would be to see you like this."

"Oh? If that's really the case... very well." Zhang Lie caressed Zhang Hanxiang's head, his voice gentle and endearing.

Zhang Hanxiang suddenly raised her head. "Wait, Brother, if you're a king, then am I a princess?"

Zhang Lie rubbed his sister's head again. "If you were a princess, then I'd be a prince, not a king."

"Oh, that's true. In that case, I'd be—"

"I suppose you'd still be a princess, though each planet has its own, unique designation. Princesses and princes are still quite standard on the whole, though."

Zhang Hanxiang smiled. "Very well, Brother, I'll be the princess of Limit!"