

## U. Warlord 601

Chapter 601: Meritorious Evaluation

"Shall we call you Princess Lingxiang, then?" Zhang Lie asked his sister.

"I do like that name, Brother—yes, I'll be Princess Lingxiang!"

Zhang Lie laughed. "Very well. There are quite a few peak-grade lifeforms in the city, so pick one you'd like. Furthermore, I'll have a few peak-grade lifeforms serve as your bodyguards and escort."

Zhang Lie controlled a large number of peak-grade lifeforms through his mistmeld clam soulshard, which could serve as troops for Renhuang as necessary, or as gene fragments for Zhang Hanxiang and the like.

He continued, "I'll pick out a few good hunters from Renhuang's forces to join your guard as well. I don't need any guards, but you do."

Zhang Hanxiang shook her head and raised a tiny fist. "I don't need any—I'm not weak!"

Zhang Lie smiled as he gripped his sister's fist. "I know you're not weak, but as a princess, you'll need your own set of guards. Otherwise, how could you be a princess?"

"Is that so?"

"Under ordinary circumstances, yes."

"Can I have Mengmeng, then? Please? We're good friends!"

Zhang Lie chuckled wearily. "Unfortunately, Sun Mengmeng has a lot of work on her plate. She's the first female general of our kingdom, and she doesn't have time to serve as your bodyguard."

The six members of Team Zenith were all going to be playing important roles in the kingdom.

Zhang Hanxiang nodded obediently.

"Don't worry—I'll choose the best hunters to be your guards," Zhang Lie promised.

"Will you take a stroll with me through the city?" Zhang Hanxiang suddenly asked.

Zhang Lie thought about it for a moment before agreeing.

The Baimei were still in awe of the ceremony they had witnessed. "Priest, wasn't the man who was just crowned king... the god we devoted ourselves to?"

The priest nodded sagely. "That is indeed the case."

"How did he become the king of Limit?"

The priest replied, "Clearly, this is the kingdom of god. He arrived from the heavens in order to kill our false deity and lead us all to sanctuary."

"So that's how it is!" The Baimei all nodded happily.

A Baimei youth said, "Since we've found our god again, priest, when will we be able to meet him?"

"It's not yet time."

The Baimei seemed to be taken aback. "After all that effort? Didn't we come here so we could witness the god again?"

The priest shook his head. "It won't be as easy to meet our god as we'd like, and he won't make himself available just because we want an audience with him. It's clear that he has a lot on his mind at the moment considering the ceremony, so we should start by establishing ourselves here first."

"How?"

"We need to establish a church for our god and spread our religion."

"Yes, Priest!"

What the Baimei didn't know was that, at that moment, their supposed deity wasn't busy at all. He was being pulled from place to place amidst the bustling kingdom by his earnest sister.

Zhang Lie's eyes glimmered with rainbow mist, shrouding himself in an illusion so that he wasn't recognizable.

The day after Zhang Lie's crowning ceremony, politics began in earnest.

The four prime races would each form subordinate kingdoms on the four sides of Renhuang, protecting and guarding it from external threats.

As planned, Hong Xi became the captain of the imperial guards and was tasked to set up a garrison. She was being groomed to become the commander of Renhuang's forces once Sun Mengmeng and the other members of Team Zenith ascended to the third realm, but Hong Xi herself didn't want such a responsibility. Instead, she wanted to ascend with everyone else.

The Yeluo chieftain, who was once the rector of Renhuang's academy, now became the much more impressive-sounding rector of the imperial academy.

The shaman of the wood spirits became the minister of agriculture, and the race of wood spirits were in charge of the forests, woodland, and farmland all throughout the kingdom. They were very grateful to Zhang Lie. As the head of one of the first clans who had joined Renhuang, they weren't disappointed by the choice they made. Even now, they could hardly believe that the humans who had approached them would one day be able to take down the sura and take over the entire realm.

The rock spirits obtained the rights to huge quarries filled with rare and precious veins. They would be responsible for developing mineral supplies for the kingdom, for which they would receive a tithe of what they managed to produce.

The newly established kingdom would need all these resources for infrastructure, and Zhang Lie could no longer allow the rock spirits to consume all the rocks they found.

Even so, given how large the kingdom of Limit was, the rock spirits wouldn't have to worry about food for centuries at least—and if they were to run out of food, Zhang Lie would declare war on his surroundings until the rock spirits had enough to eat.

The second realm was extremely large, far more so than the kingdom of Limit. Limit only took up a third of the original sura territory, and the alien races who had worked together with Zhang Lie retained the other two-thirds.

Zhang Lie had no intention in ruling the entire realm, but playing a game of conquest every now and then wasn't too bad. After all, at the moment, there was no force in the second realm comparable to the kingdom of Limit.

Yun Bing became the grand chancellor of Limit, and Chu Feng the chief architect and minister of land. He would be responsible for resolving territorial disputes between alien races.

Su Hong worked in tandem with Hong Xi as the captain of Renhuang's guard. Over ten times as many troops were under his control than in his previous position.

As a crowd watched on, Zhang Lie put a crown on his sister's head, titling her the Princess Lingxiang. Except for Zhang Lie, she would be the only member of royalty in the kingdom of Limit.

Once Zhang Lie had delegated his work to a team of hunters he trusted and crowned Zhang Hanxiang a princess, the ceremony concluded. Everyone left the palace except for Zhang Lie and Yun Bing.

"Congratulations on becoming the first grand chancellor of Limit, as well as the first female grand chancellor."

It was evident that Yun Bing was the best fit for the role; she had taken on a similar responsibility back in Renhuang, after all.

Yun Bing clutched her forehead. "Oh, don't joke with me! I'm going to become even busier than before. You should help me out if you have the free time."

There was more to accomplish with every passing minute, and Yun Bing felt as though she was falling behind already. She was in the middle of securing new assistants, but the rate at which she did so was overwhelmed by the rate at which more work arrived.

Zhang Lie shrugged. "As you know, I'm terrible with all this."

"At least sound more upset about it!" Yun Bing complained.

Zhang Lie snapped his fingers. "Ah, how about this? I'll make you the prime minister as well."

Yun Bing's jaws dropped. "You're giving me more responsibility?! Doesn't that mean I have to work harder?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Now that you have more authority, you can delegate responsibilities to the various committee members too. That should increase your efficiency."

Yun Bing clutched her face. "Don't forget that we're a monarchy, not a republic."

"Well, when I ascend to the third realm, who do you think is going to be responsible for this kingdom?"

Yun Bing blinked.

"You have to consider this question. I can't remain in the second realm for life, and I'll have to ascend sooner or later. Who would take my position?"

"How about Hanxiang?"

Zhang Lie frowned. "My sister isn't suited for the role. She's a princess, and she'll remain a princess—never queen."

Zhang Lie knew very well how demanding the role of a monarch was.

Chapter 602: Don't Get Complacent

It was easy for someone like Zhang Lie, who boasted a great deal of power and strength and had two lifetimes' worth of experience, to be a good monarch.

He was easily able to command his populace, and he had the strength to back up those commands. On the other hand, Zhang Hanxiang was different. She had grown up under Zhang Lie's protection, and he knew far more about commanding others than she did.

Furthermore, because she was so sheltered, she could be rather naive and knew quite little about some parts of the world, which would make it easy for others to take advantage of her. She was also a fair bit weaker than Zhang Lie.

Even if Zhang Lie were to raise Zhang Hanxiang's gene fragments to the peak of the second realm, allowed her to imbibe Potions #1, #2, and #3, and fed her some disaster gene fragments, Zhang Lie would still worry that she could become the puppet of some mastermind behind the scenes who wielded true power over his kingdom.

"Hanxiang grew up under my wing, and she doesn't know much about the world. She wouldn't be able to last long against those wily old foxes all around. Even if she had the ability to do so, I'd be worried for her to grow too attached to her authority. Authority's a drug, and countless people ruin their lives because of their addiction to it. Just look at the former presiding authority of the world federation—he's been sent to a mental institute!"

He was a brother and essentially a father figure to Zhang Hanxiang, and he couldn't bear for her to suffer any pain. How, then, could he push her into this trap?

Yun Bing frowned. "Aren't you being too much of a worrywart, Zhang Lie? Hanxiang's very smart, and she knows enough to take care of herself!"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Regardless, my hope is for Hanxiang to focus on her cultivation, to go out wandering the kingdom with her friends. Wouldn't it be both tiring and boring for her to become a monarch?"

Yun Bing muttered in a small voice, "Well, I don't see you being very tired at all!"

"What did you say?"

"Ah, nothing—just that with Sun Mengmeng and the others around, nothing will happen to Hanxiang."

"But Sun Mengmeng can't stay in the second realm for the rest of her life. She'll advance sooner or later, as will Zhang Hanxiang. I refuse to let the kingdom of Limit hinder our advancement. The second realm is only a stop along our journey of cultivation, nothing more."

Yun Bing rolled her eyes. "And how about my cultivation?"

Zhang Lie chuckled. "You're always welcome to quit your position, but I hope I've given you adequate compensation for your troubles to date."

"Perhaps so," Yun Bing acknowledged. To be honest, she felt as though she were being handsomely—perhaps even too handsomely—rewarded for her position.

Given her strength and skills, she was unlikely to have been able to finish maxing out her peak gene fragments even after two decades in the second realm. Since following Zhang Lie, however, she had done the impossible in just one year.

Indeed, before Zhang Lie's ascension to the second realm, even veterans wouldn't have been able to max out their peak gene fragments without two decades of hard work, let alone a novice like Yun Bing. The death toll that these hunters faced was also immense.

On the other hand, Zhang Lie had managed to supply all his followers with peak gene fragments in just one short year. The day he was crowned king, Zhang Lie even gifted Yun Bing a vial of Potion #3.

Yun Bing alone could never have reached such strength, not in this life, and not ever.

She was greatly relieved to have chosen to traipse all this way through the second realm to find Zhang Lie, along with Chu Feng. If she hadn't made that decision that seemed so crazy at the time, she wouldn't have accomplished so much today. Despite the perilous journey, despite all the dangers she had barely skirted by, the outcome was all worth it.

Most importantly, Yun Bing herself boasted strong administrative abilities and had shown dedicated interest in learning to do more. Naturally, Zhang Lie had made use of her well.

She patted herself on the chest. "Very well. I'm confident I can take on anything you want to accomplish."

Zhang Lie nodded. "I want to establish a parliament to guarantee proper functioning of Limit even after I ascend to the third realm—even when Hanxiang does so as well."

Limit was composed of a dizzying number of alien races. With Zhang Lie around to maintain centralized power, there would be few conflicts to resolve. As time passed, however, and as Zhang Lie left for the third realm, problems would naturally arise. When Zhang Hanxiang herself departed, the kingdom would begin to splinter.

As a result, he had to develop a contingency plan beforehand.

He continued, "Divide the parliament into two levels. The upper level shall consist of eighteen seats: three humans, one wood spirit, one Yeluo, one crag eagle, and one rock spirit. These four other races were present in Renhuang since the very beginning, and they deserve a seat of their own. Give one seat each to the four prime races, and let the other seven be contested by all the remaining alien races."

By giving the humans three of the eighteen seats, he would guarantee that they always had a say, but didn't necessarily monopolize all decision-making.

"How will these parliament seats be assigned? Election via the lower level of parliament?"

Zhang Lie pursed his lips. "With me around, there's nothing for something so complicated. We'll settle the matter with brute force—let the eleven strongest leaders of the various alien races take the seats."

Yun Bing's eyes widened. "Is that really alright?"

She wasn't sure that personal power and governing ability was correlated.

"We'll have the eleven seats be decided in such a fashion for now. Every year, the lower level of parliament can vote whether or not to expand the upper level by one seat—but only one seat at most."

Yun Bing frowned. "If we leave this decision to the lower level of parliament, what if another race starts to dominate parliament at that level?"

"The humans will have to fend for themselves, of course. We're not their nannies—there's no reason we should have to take care of them to such an extent."

"You'll allow the kingdom of Limit to fall to another race's hands?"

Zhang Lie frowned and glanced into the distance. "Of course not. Don't you know how many disciples are in training at the Zenith Dojo, and how many Chinese hunters are rapidly ascending through the realms? Furthermore, I think you might be forgetting or misinterpreting something."

The reason Zhang Lie had founded Limit was to reduce human casualties in the second realm and provide an opportunity for stable growth for human hunters, but that didn't mean that he would excise all conflict.

In the past, human hunters had grown stronger and stronger by repeatedly clashing against the sura. Now that Limit had been founded and the humans were in power, they had lost that natural impetus and incentive to grow, evolve, and thrive. It would be short-sighted of Zhang Lie to remove all modes of competition entirely.

"I'll repeat once more: the kingdom of Limit is nothing more than a stop along the grand path of cultivation. No matter how comfortable, spacious, or opulent this stop is, it's not the end of humanity's evolution—a far longer chapter of our lives lies ahead. Yun Bing, you won't remain in the second realm all your life, either. We have to keep looking forward, and we have to keep moving forward."

### Chapter 603: An Absent King

It took Yun Bing quite a while to process Zhang Lie's words. As she ruminated over them, she couldn't help but grow more impressed by him.

She was dedicating all her resources and time to managing this kingdom with Zhang Lie, and she boasted great power within Limit as a result. If not for Zhang Lie's words that resounded like a bell in her head, she might have been satisfied at making this her endpoint.

What was wrong with having Limit be the end of her journey? Indeed, Yun Bing might even have thought this a grand accomplishment, one worthy of her clan.

Zhang Lie, however, had no such intention. He intended to keep moving forward no matter what, despite being an emperor who boasted immense power, who could dominate the entirety of the second realm if he wanted to.

And yet he continued progressing ever onward, inexorably.

To be honest, if Zhang Lie hadn't ascended to the third realm in his past life and gained important perspective about cultivation, he might feel the same way about Limit as well—but what his reincarnation had taught him was that power and authority were far less important as they seemed.

The kingdom of Limit would be just one of many accomplishments in his life; perhaps a larger one among thousands, but nothing more. No matter how grand the accomplishment, it wasn't something worth sacrificing the rest of his future for.

He had helped free humanity from the perils of the second realm and defeated the sura once and for all, toppling their hegemony over the realm. He had built up a new force, a new kingdom, one that would allow new hunters to progress and ascend in a stable fashion. That was all.

The past would remain the past; he would have to move ever onward. Grander sights and a more glorious future awaited him.

Yun Bing lowered her head. "I had almost lost myself. Thank you for your pointers, Zhang Lie."

Zhang Lie smiled. "Don't be. You've done very well for yourself. I hope you'll be able to keep up with us—the third realm is far more exciting than this one."

Yun Bing nodded, then asked, "Right, how will we select the members of the lower level of parliament? Surely not by the same test of strength?"

"We'll prepare thirty seats in the lower level for now, to be elected by members of the higher level of parliament and accepted or rejected based on a simple majority vote. In the future, members will be elected to the higher level of parliament by the votes of the lower level, again by a simple majority vote."

Yun Bing nodded. There was always the possibility of corruption among their ranks due to the influence that the upper level had in selecting the lower level, but that was true no matter the system. This was a method that would be worth testing for the moment and later adapted or modified depending on its performance. Luckily, Zhang Lie was around, and he would be able to resolve any disputes or loopholes immediately.

Yun Bing continued, "How would you like to apportion authority between you and the highest level of parliament?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I don't see a need to do that. Preserve the authority of the monarchy—but Hanxiang and I won't participate in the daily operation of the parliament."

This wasn't a democracy, but Zhang Lie didn't see a problem with it. He would quickly ascend to the third realm, as would Zhang Hanxiang.

Once they had both departed, the monarchy that Zhang Lie had set up would be a vestigial organ, nothing more. Even if Zhang Lie and Zhang Hanxiang were to have children, that would be a matter for generations in the future.

That Zhang Lie had been crowned king was more a symbolic gesture than anything else; if the monarchy didn't participate in simple affairs of parliament, then it might as well not be present.

Zhang Lie retained power over the entire kingdom, but he wouldn't exercise it. Instead, he delegated that responsibility to the parliament that he would set up—a standard technique that he had now grown very accustomed to.

"Who will be prime minister?"

Zhang Lie blinked. "You?"

"Didn't you say that you wanted me to follow in your footsteps?" Yun Bing retorted. "We need to be training a successor immediately."

"Very well," Zhang Lie sighed.

The parliament would rule over day-to-day affairs. The monarch could choose the prime minister and had veto power over parliament, but with Zhang Lie's laissez-faire attitude, the prime minister had de facto authority over the entire kingdom.

"Have the monarchy choose the prime minister. If all members of the monarchy are in absentia, the choice shall be made by the upper level of parliament. Let that be the standard law for all such decisions."

"I'll leave you to polish the flaws in this system—just let me know what you end up changing," Zhang Lie said, waving Yun Bing off.

"My goodness—you're going to throw all this at me, too? It's your system!"

"I very much admire your efficiency and administrative abilities, Yun Bing—they're far better than mine!"

"Watch out—one day, I might sell this entire kingdom away!" she gritted.

Zhang Lie smiled again. "Try it. Would anyone be as daring as to buy it?"

Indeed, no one in the second realm would now dare to countermand Zhang Lie's authority.

Yun Bing clutched her head; her workload had just increased once again. Suddenly, she thought of an interesting nugget of information. "There's something unusual happening in Renhuang."

"What is it?"

"A new race arrived in Renhuang recently, apparently called the Baimei. They're promoting a new religion in the city."

The Baimei? That name sounded familiar. Zhang Lie frowned. "Let them go as they please, as long as their religion doesn't promote discrimination."

Everyone had their own beliefs, even the alien races, and Zhang Lie felt it wholly inappropriate to strip that away.

"As long as they're not cultists, let them be."

"Nothing untoward has happened yet, no."

"Do you know anything about their background?" Even so, Zhang Lie had to be concerned—if he didn't handle it well, it might spread like a pandemic across the entire kingdom.

"No, just that they come from far, far away. There haven't been any problems yet, but I thought this to be an issue worth raising."

Zhang Lie frowned again. "Aren't you being rather incautious? You don't seem to have done much research about them despite their unusual background."

Yun Bing grinned. "It's because of their god, you see."

Had Yun Bing become a convert, too? "Tell me more." Zhang Lie didn't believe in deities; any lifeform that promoted itself as one and tried to start a cult surely had to be evil.

"I was given a portrait of their god. Please, have a look." Yun Bing's smile grew even wider.

With a flick of Zhang Lie's hand, the portrait flew over.

The martial god stood towering above the skies, an aura of strength and force billowing around him. He stood atop eight gigantic dragons, a honed blade lifted high above his head.

All depictions of deities boasted something similar; no cult wanted to disparage their deity on the basis of appearance.

"This deity... seems rather familiar somehow?"

"Take a closer look," Yun Bing suggested, snickering.

#### Chapter 604: Illusory Training

"Isn't this... me?!" Zhang Lie finally recognized that he was the one being depicted on the portrait, but that the artist had taken certain liberties with his appearance.

The Baimei... Zhang Lie finally remembered who they were now! While trying to hunt down disaster-grade lifeforms, he had slaughtered a post-peak-grade lifeform following the list collated by the monarch of stars.

Unexpectedly, the alien race living at the foot of the mountain which this beast made its home treated the beast like a deity. The fact that Zhang Lie had slaughtered it was naturally a source of tension.

Zhang Lie had just killed the lifeform when the alien priest and his followers had come up to the top of the mountain for a sacred ritual, and they caught Zhang Lie red-handed. Fortunately for the Baimei, their priest was intelligent enough to venerate Zhang Lie as their new god instead.

Zhang Lie had left them a map and a command to find him in Renhuang—and the Baimei had indeed made that thousand-mile journey.

Zhang Lie found their dedication remarkable and unfortunately rather risible, but he didn't know what to think about the fact that they had begun trying to spread their religion.

Yun Bing continued, "Many of the citizens of Renhuang saw your fight against the asura, and they also witnessed your strength for themselves. They already revere you, so the religion is spreading at an amazing rate."

Was Zhang Lie supposed to stop them? He felt as though he would just make matters worse. With his current strength, he really was quite indistinguishable from a god. In the end, his desire to avoid trouble won out. "Very well—let them be."

Once he had finished his business, he would immediately ascend to the third realm; he could afford to let his successor deal with the issue, couldn't he?

Yun Bing was basically able to manage the entire kingdom on her own, and she would only come to Zhang Lie with matters too important for her to deal with. After making a few other reports, she turned to leave.

Meanwhile, Zhang Hanxiang had already finished choosing her new mount. Zhang Lie marveled at how smoothly things were going for her—it had taken him far too long to try to finish maxing out his peak gene fragments himself.

Subsequently, Zhang Lie began to train the members of Team Zenith, Zhang Hanxiang, and others in resisting illusion-based techniques by constructing nightmares for them.

At that very moment, their eyes were all gleaming with a rainbow sheen. Zhang Lie had them experience an illusion, then wake up after a set amount of time. He would repeat that process over and over again, until they were able to develop some resistance to it—just like how you could develop resistance to poisons by exposing yourself to small quantities of poison at a time.

Zhang Lie's training intensified in a similar manner. He started by constructing small nightmares for them, ones that weren't completely realistic and would allow them to identify the differences between dream and reality. Ideally, they would be able to jolt themselves awake.

Subsequently, he would inflict more detailed and more complicated nightmares on them, until they were almost unable to distinguish between dream and reality, their senses dulled and muddled.

Zhang Lie felt as though it was almost time to stop. Short bouts of illusion were acceptable, but if they were to experience these illusions for too long, they could easily develop mental problems.

He was rather satisfied with Team Zenith's ability to resist these illusions, which had started out strong and was growing even stronger with his training. More surprisingly, however, was Hong Xi—her original resistance was even higher than those of the members of Team Zenith.

Although she still couldn't compare to Zhang Lie, who had reincarnated, she was still miles beyond the others in terms of mental resilience.

This was largely an artifact of her upbringing and childhood—she had had to grow strong in a clan besieged by what seemed to be an unassailable foe in order to take care of her brother. It was a credit to her resilience that she had even survived so long.

Zhang Lie was also shocked that Zhang Hanxiang's mental resilience was on par with those of Team Zenith's. His sister was far less a greenhouse flower than he had given her credit for.

He caressed his sister's head lovingly. "Very good. Keep working hard."

Although Zhang Lie had deliberately softened the impact of her nightmares, it was impressive enough that she had gotten to the third stage in his training already.

Zhang Hanxiang glanced at him with visible unease and dissatisfaction. "Are we still continuing, Brother?"

Li Feng gasped as he lay on the floor drawing breath. "Captain, this is the most horrifying, most disgusting training I've ever experienced!"

Perhaps a hundred years might have passed in an illusion, and even if you knew your world were fake, you didn't know how to break out. Everyone within seemed as though they were real, and you could easily develop some feelings for them.

Worse still, Zhang Lie liked to layer these illusions one within the next like a matryoshka doll. Upon breaking out of the first set of illusions, you would find yourself in a second set, rather than reality. And when you discovered something wrong with the second set of illusions and broke through that as well, you might find yourself in a third set.

Yang Ze's forehead beaded with sweat. "I killed myself in the illusion—only to find myself in another one!"

If not for the fact that Zhang Lie would break them out of their illusions after a set period of time, Yang Ze wouldn't have been able to distinguish reality from illusion. Each layer of illusion was more realistic than the last, and it was almost impossible to distinguish them all.

The first layer was obviously a dream. The second layer seemed real, but contained events that would never happen in reality. The third layer, on the other hand, was almost a perfect copy of the real world.

In general, the first layer was a pleasant dream, the second a nightmare situated in the real world, and the third a dream that seemed infinitely close to being real, just like the one in which Amurong had found himself.

At times, Zhang Lie would switch the order up, turning the first layer into a nightmare, the second a pleasant dream, and the third a near-reality nightmare. Unless you were able to distinguish illusion from reality, you could very well be trapped deep within your mind.

Fang Yi rolled his eyes at Yang Ze. "You're complaining about three layers? I'm already on the fourth—there's still a long way to go."

Yang Ze was repulsed. "Four layers?! Captain, just how many layers of illusions did you prepare?"

Zhang Lie replied calmly, "It doesn't matter how many layers there are. An illusion is just that, nothing more—as long as you're able to cleanly distinguish between illusion and reality, as long as you have that willpower, you can break through even 99 layers of illusions."

"99 layers! No, there's no way!" Yang Ze pretended to slump down and froth from his mouth.

Beside him, Hong Xi really did begin to vomit. Her face was pale, almost stark white. Sun Mengmeng patted her back as she sat by her side. It took Hong Xi a long while to recover, and her face remained pallid all throughout.

"Just what did you see to make you so uncomfortable?"

Hong Xi shuddered with her entire body, as though she didn't want to relive her experience ever again.

Chapter 605: To the Farm

Fang Yi suggested, "Perhaps you might want to speak about what you experienced? It could help you figure out how to better overcome the same scenario again."

Hong Xi continued to shiver like a wounded mouse. She raised her head to Zhang Lie and pleaded, "Master, do I have to continue experiencing this?"

Zhang Lie steeled his expression. "What do you think? When your brother ascends to the second realm, he'll face the same training."

Fang Yi began describing his own experiences. "In the fourth layer, I led a wonderful life. I forgot all my old memories and lived in a time of peace.

The races of the world federation all got along in harmony. The dimensional realm never appeared, and there was no such thing as genetic evolution. I was a regular human, who went to university, got married, and had a family and children."

Hong Xi sighed weakly, "At the beginning, sure. I've experienced both pleasant dreams and nightmares in the fourth layer multiple times. I once became a weapon used for international warfare, forced to slaughter countless enemies. When the war finally ended, by the time I returned home, my parents and brother had all been killed by an opposing force, and their corpses were mailed back to me decomposing and rotten."

Everyone present shivered. Hong Xi gestured before her. "Can you imagine how it feels to receive such a large package, filled with the only remnants of your family you'd ever have again?"

This—this was too cruel. For hunters who hovered at the edge of life and death, however, this wasn't something that would necessarily cause their mental state to crumble. They consumed genetic lifeforms daily and killed for a living; the boundaries of life and death had already begun to blur.

Hong Xi continued, trembling, "That isn't it. Subsequently, when I lost in a war, I was enslaved by the opposing forces, then reared like a dog. Worst of all, the one who enslaved me looked exactly like my former nemesis from the Musi clan. Now that I'm back in the real world, I can't help but vomit when I recount how I wagged my tail and licked his feet in the illusion."

The members of Team Zenith let out simultaneous expressions of revulsion.

Zhang Hanxiang frowned. "Brother, don't you think you're overdoing it?!"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "You need to learn to overcome these traumas—that's the goal of this training. I can't control the contents of these illusions. All of you are the ones who do so. The more you fear something, the more the illusion will try to replicate it.

"I know this is hard, and I know this is challenging, but in case you ever face a foe skilled in such techniques, I can't have you all landing up in a mental institute like Amurong. Do you understand?"

Everyone shivered. They had all witnessed what had happened to Amurong, and how the former presiding authority of the world federation had been sent to a mental institute, his reputation and name tarnished for good.

They had believed that Zhang Lie had done something to him, but they only understood now that it had all been Zhang Lie's illusions, so strong that even Amurong couldn't resist them.

Zhang Hanxiang rushed up to her brother. "I have to train, I have to train! I don't want to end up naked and dancing in front of strangers!"

Indeed, having witnessed the adverse effects of succumbing to an illusion, the hunters steeled their hearts and forced themselves to undergo the grueling training.

Sun Mengmeng requested seriously, "Let's start a new round of training immediately. I'm prepared."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "You've all just left the illusions behind. If I send you back in now, your mental state will start to deteriorate—and I want to train you all, not ruin you. We have plenty of time remaining, so let's go on an excursion."

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Is it really alright to pause this training halfway?"

"Don't worry. There's plenty of training ahead for all of you—a continuous cycle of combat practice, mental resilience training, and a break. We'll be setting off immediately."

Zhang Hanxiang was more concerned about something else.

"Brother, where are we going next?"

"I'll show you all the farm that I've set up. Once I ascend to the third realm, all of you will be responsible for taking care of it."

With his hands, Zhang Lie split the air around him, causing them all to appear by the seaside.

The sea was a crystal-clear blue, its surface unusually calm and placid. Brief gusts of wind rippled the water, causing it to break into a myriad fragments. The sunlight gave the surface of the water a golden gleam. The sky was an unbroken blue, with nothing more than a few wisps of white cloud in sight.

Glancing all around her, Zhang Hanxiang shouted, "It's the sea!"

Zhang Lie restored the cracked space behind him.

The blue of the sky seemed to meld perfectly with the blue of the sea, forming a scenery where the horizon couldn't be seen.

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Zhang Lie, why have you brought us to the sea?"

Zhang Hanxiang had already removed her shoes and was running barefoot over the beach, the waves lapping over her feet. She shouted back, "Why else? To have fun, of course!"

Her face glowed with joy, as though she were a flower blooming. Her dress was uplifted by the wind. Her bright eyes glittered in the sun brighter than any jewel.

Zhang Hanxiang felt as though she had returned to an idyllic past, while Zhang Lie watched her quietly from afar, his smile fatherly. He was the only one who remembered acutely that this was the first time that Zhang Hanxiang was walking along the beach with her own two feet.

As Zhang Hanxiang felt the icy bite of the water, she shivered and chuckled.

Zhang Lie said, "Relaxing was one objective, but another is—"

Before he could continue, a bout of howling interrupted him. Where the sea and sky met, a line of black appeared. A horde of genetic lifeforms rushed toward Zhang Lie, stirring up the entire ocean. Waves charged forward, lapping the shore, sounding like peals of thunder, like stampeding hooves.

The idyllic ocean suddenly began to rampage. The members of Team Zenith gathered together and frowned—none of the lifeforms present were weak; they were uniformly peak-grade.

They had instinctively all gathered around Zhang Hanxiang, hemming her in from four sides. None of the members of Team Zenith panicked. They knew that they had the ability to defend themselves, and Zhang Lie was there for them too.

Sun Mengmeng frowned. "Why have these lifeforms appeared here, and in such large numbers?"

Peak-grade lifeforms tended to be leaders of a pack, and it was rare to see two or more in close proximity—but here was a group of peak-grade lifeforms all gathered together! Just what was leading them, a disaster-grade lifeform?

Chapter 606: Kingdom of the Sea

Zhang Lie clasped his palms behind his back and calmly watched the horde of peak-grade lifeforms moving toward him. The swarm of lifeforms was so large that it blanketed the ocean in the blink of an eye, but Zhang Lie still had no intention of stepping forward. He continued watching the sight calmly.

And since Zhang Lie didn't attack the horde, neither did the members of Team Zenith. They huddled around Zhang Hanxiang and waited for Zhang Lie to make a move.

Right before the peak-grade lifeforms were about to overwhelm the members of Team Zenith, a crisp, clear female voice called out, "Halt!"

The voice didn't sound demanding at all, but the entire horde of lifeforms stopped short. The voice was pleasant and melodious, so much so that it almost sounded synthetic or electronic.

A gigantic lifeform emerged from among the pack, one hundreds, possibly thousands, of meters tall. It was so large it took up about five or six soccer fields' worth of space.

The lifeform seemed to be an enlarged form of a whale, and standing atop the whale's head was a young girl. Compared to the whale, she was minute, but her existence was unmissable.

"Mister!" The girl leapt off the gigantic lifeform toward Zhang Lie, spreading her arms wide open as she fell atop him.

The sunlight reflected her pale skin and rainbow-colored hair and eyes. She looked resplendent.

Waves smashed against the shore and retreated back toward the sea. Zhang Lie stretched out his hands and caught the girl in mid-air, who curled up in his arms.

Zhang Hanxiang seemed a little jealous. "Brother, just who is this girl?"

Zhang Lie gently let the girl down. "She's my general of the seas, Zhu."

Sun Mengmeng walked up to them. "Captain, I didn't know that the kingdom of Limit had any naval forces!"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I constructed it in secret. In theory, it's just in case we ever need to fend off naval forces in the future, but in practice, they just help feed livestock in my farm."

"They're... food?" What was Zhang Lie talking about? Was this a joke?

Zhang Lie pointed at the pack of peak-grade lifeforms. "As you can all see, I'm raising a flock of fish."

The crowd stared at the horde of peak-grade lifeforms, then at Zhang Lie. He called these peak-grade lifeforms fish?

Sun Mengmeng clutched her face. "I knew that this couldn't be a natural phenomenon—so you were behind it, Captain!"

Zhang Lie saw the shock on Team Zenith's faces, but no understanding. He still hadn't explained himself clearly enough.

"Follow me." With a wave of his hand, he pulled everyone into the extra-dimensional space of his whirlpool tyrant soulshard.

Upon seeing the frightening post-peak-grade lifeforms within the miniature ocean, the members of Team Zenith were astonished. Sun Mengmeng asked, "Just where are we?"

"My farm, of course."

"What?!"

"Didn't I tell you that we were going to visit my farm?"

"Yes, but this—"

This was entirely beyond their expectations. They didn't expect that this "farm" would be keeping a bunch of peak- or higher-grade lifeforms in an extradimensional space! Such lifeforms were very difficult to find in general, but almost all the lifeforms in Zhang Lie's personal space were post-peak-grade or higher.

More aggravatingly, to Zhang Lie, these lifeforms were all "fish".

If word of this farm ever spread, the entire world federation would be shaken; this news was far more shocking than Zhang Lie establishing a kingdom of his own.

The members of Team Zenith acutely felt that they were falling behind him; they had no idea when he had done what he did.

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Captain, just what are you planning to do with this farm of yours?"

Li Feng added, "Surely you don't intend on ruling over the seas as well?"

Zhu giggled. "Mister's already done that!"

"What?!"

This was the first time they had ever heard of the like. They had carefully been managing the kingdom of Limit, thinking that it would be their grandest accomplishment in their career as hunters.

For this achievement, their names would spread throughout the second realm, as would Zhang Lie's—but they had just discovered that founding the kingdom was the tip of the iceberg for Zhang Lie. The kingdom of Limit dominated the land.

For millennia, no one had been able to overcome the sura's hegemony; Zhang Lie had done it.

There was once a time when humans constantly had to live in fear of the sura; Zhang Lie had changed it all.

No one had ever been able to construct a whole kingdom of humans; Zhang Lie had done it.

Perhaps in a thousand, ten thousand years from now, all of humanity would still praise his name. No one could eclipse Zhang Lie's accomplishments—he would become a star of history, a champion of mankind, a hero of legend. But now, Zhang Lie was showing them that he had accomplished even more than that.

Li Feng was almost trembling as he asked, "Captain, did you found a kingdom in the sea at the same time you founded one on land?"

No ordinary person could found a kingdom, but Zhang Lie had founded two.

"More or less," Zhang Lie replied breezily.

#### Chapter 607: A Disaster-Grade Farm

The members of Team Zenith had already guessed the answer, but they couldn't help but be shocked when Zhang Lie confirmed it regardless.

Just what had Zhang Lie done while he was gone?

"All I wanted to do was start a farm, but it became larger and larger just like that..." he murmured in exasperation.

The members of Team Zenith didn't know what to say. His small farm had grown to encapsulate the entire ocean—who else but Zhang Lie could say such a thing, and just what was his exasperated expression supposed to mean? Didn't he know how many people wanted to do the same but never succeeded?

It was as though Zhang Lie had been searching for a guard dog, only to bring back the wolf of legends Fenrir.

Zhang Lie turned his head to Zhu. "Have we really formed a kingdom of the sea?"

Zhang Lie wasn't sure whether his farm had met the criteria to form a kingdom of the sea; he had delegated all that work to Zhu.

Zhu shook her head.

The members of Team Zenith sighed in relief; Zhang Lie hadn't accomplished as impossible a feat as they expected. A kingdom of the sea couldn't be constructed out of nowhere; their skills would still be of use.

That was why they were so shaken by Zhu's subsequent remarks. "We could easily found such a kingdom, of course, but since our goal is to take over the entire ocean, there's no need to settle for something so trivial."

"Indeed."

Team Zenith's eyes bulged. Just how ambitious was Zhang Lie?! Was he really trying to rule over the entire ocean as well? His ambition was far too large to be contained within the second realm.

And what did he mean by the fact that founding a kingdom of the sea was meaningless—in that case, why had they worked so hard on the kingdom of Limit?

They had dedicated all their effort over the last few years to construct the kingdom, to free humanity from the oppression of the sura, to topple the sura for good, and to become the premier force of the realm—and to Zhang Lie, this was almost meaningless.

Zhang Lie asked Zhu, "How's the progress?"

"We're doing quite well."

Zhang Lie had handed Zhu control of several post-peak-grade lifeforms and tasked her with conquering the south. She absorbed all defeated forces into her own and formed a truly magnificent army, one that caused the alien races of sea and shore to submit to her.

With those alien races, she launched attacks on the strongest races of the sea. Zhu's forces and authority began to snowball; only when she couldn't handle things on her own did she ask Zhang Lie to step in.

Out of nowhere, Zhu had earned a title of her own—the queen of the seven seas. Only Zhu herself knew that all her power came from Zhang Lie, and all she was doing was helping him grow his farm.

Li Feng asked, "Captain, are you going to expand to the sky as well?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "No, there's no point. I formed a naval force in order to get easy access to peak and disaster gene fragments."

There was simply no reason to form an aerial kingdom as well, even if he could. Once he ascended to the third realm, all this would be for naught, anyway. What he did want to do was lay the groundwork for humanity to be able to succeed on its own merits.

Being monarch over the entirety of the second realm was easily within his power, but there really was no point.

Zhang Lie always set his sights higher and farther, never satisfied with what he had achieved. The second realm had once been challenging for him, but now, all he wanted to do was to cement humanity's role in the second realm.

"I built my farm for myself, but I'm passing it down to all of you."

The members of Team Zenith and Zhang Hanxiang were stunned.

"There are plenty of post-peak-grade lifeforms in the farm, and if you make use of them properly, you can give birth to disaster-grade lifeforms."

Disaster-grade lifeforms!

Hong Tianqi hadn't yet announced the existence of these lifeforms to the world. He was planning to do so in order to establish himself as the presiding authority of the world federation once he took on that role.

He had intended on setting up specialized hunting teams for such lifeforms, but they didn't exist in the first realm.

Zhang Lie's encounter was an accident, nothing more.

There were a rare few natural disaster-grade lifeforms in the second realm, but the second realm all but belonged to Zhang Lie by now. Setting up a hunting team would require his approval.

If he were to do so forcefully, appealing to his position as the presiding authority of the world federation and his own reputation, he would be overstepping his limits, even if Zhang Lie didn't mind.

Zhang Lie explained what he knew of disaster-grade lifeforms to everyone present. The members of Team Zenith knew a little because of their previous interactions with Zhang Lie, but this was the first time that Zhang Hanxiang and Hong Xi were hearing of the affair.

"So that's the next level of strength beyond peak-grade! Was a disaster-grade lifeform what destroyed the Blacksteel settlement?"

"In that case, do disaster gene fragments exist?"

"If they're genetic lifeforms, then surely they have gene fragments!"

Zhang Lie listened to their conversation quietly without interrupting them.

Finally, Li Feng couldn't satiate his curiosity any longer. "Captain, just how large is the difference in strength between peak- and disaster-grade?"

Yang Ze scoffed. "Do you need to ask? It's proportional to the difference between mutated- and peak-grade, of course!"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "More accurately, it's proportional to the difference between regular- and peak-grade."

Everyone's eyes bulged—disaster-grade lifeforms were far stronger than they had expected.

Zhang Lie continued, "Disaster-grade lifeforms are particularly troublesome to deal with, but not because of their raw strength. That said, even all of you working together might not be able to take one down—you're all lacking in strength as well."

The members of Team Zenith nodded. They understood that they were lacking; perhaps they seemed exceptionally strong to the average hunter, but they were nothing compared to Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie continued, "The reason that disaster-grade lifeforms are hard to kill is because their bodies have crystallized. Unless you damage their core, physical attacks are all but useless. They also have immense regenerative abilities."

The members of Team Zenith nodded.

"Worst, though, is their rarity. I estimate there are a thousand post-peak-grade lifeforms for every disaster-grade one, and you certainly won't be able to find a thousand post-peak-grade lifeforms grouped together. Trying to find a disaster-grade lifeform without any information is akin to trying to find a needle in a haystack, and you could very well traipse through the entire second realm without finding one."

Zhang Hanxiang understood at once. "That's why you wanted to make your farm, Brother!"

"Exactly right. In the future, you won't have to go hunting down these lifeforms like me—just make sure to feed the fish in this farm. Of course, before that, you'll have to overcome my training first. With your current strength, it's almost impossible for you to take down a disaster-grade lifeform. You might not need to fight one in the wild, but I have my reputation to consider."

"Yes, Captain!" the members of Team Zenith shouted.

So all that Zhang Lie had done was for them! Paying him back with dedicated training was the least they could do.

#### Chapter 608: Committee of Authorities

While Zhang Lie was training the members of Team Zenith, Hong Tianqi had finished assembling a new committee for the world federation.

He messaged Zhang Lie and said that he had something important to tell him, so Zhang Lie had to return to Earth. When he met with Hong Tianqi, he learned that plans for the committee of authorities had been finalized ahead of schedule and would happen in two days.

The reason Hong Tianqi had called him back was to ask his opinion about being an authority himself. "Have you decided?"

Zhang Lie replied that he would be willing to take on such a position, but that he wouldn't frequently attend committee meetings.

If anyone else had said it, Hong Tianqi would have slapped them on the face. The presiding authority himself was personally asking Zhang Lie to take on the role, and Zhang Lie replied that he would shirk his responsibilities!

"If you insist." Against Zhang Lie, however, Hong Tianqi couldn't seem to muster up any anger at all. He accepted easily.

"In that case, I'm happy to accept."

Hong Tianqi continued, "Make sure you find a good substitute for yourself if you're not attending in person."

"No problem. I'll certainly be there when the committee is established."

By this point, Zhang Lie was the most popular hunter on the hunters' forums bar none. His name was always on-screen; he simply did too much and caused too many incidents. Every two days or so, there would be a new news article about him.

Two months in the second realm were just six days on Earth, after all.

The kingdom of Limit had been formed quite some time ago, but it was still a fashionable and popular topic of conversation on the forums. By this time, far more hunters were in support of it rather than against it.

With his own strength, Zhang Lie had claimed the sura territory as his own and founded a kingdom that was the largest force in the second realm. The days of sura tyranny were over; the humans were free to grow and prosper.

In the light of this information, an even larger piece of news emerged: the world federation was reforming.

This piece of information naturally caught the hunters' attention.

The day the committee was set to reform, everyone famous or important in the galaxy was present at the headquarters of the world federation.

The headquarters of the world federation had been deserted for the last few months after the schism, but with Hong Tianqi reconstructing the committee, it became the center of attention once again.

The representatives of various clans flocked into the headquarters of the world federation.

This was the first time Zhang Lie was present. There was a round table filled with twenty seats in the center of a large auditorium that was filled to the brim.

Those seated in the stands were only there to listen in and report on the meeting; the authorities would all be seated in the center.

Zhang Lie noticed several allies of his seated around the table, including representatives from the four prime races. They smiled at each other.

Zhang Lie was the youngest of the committee members present; perhaps he was even the youngest in recorded history. However, none of the senior members dared to underestimate him. They paid careful attention to news coming out of the galaxy, and they knew how instrumental a role he played in recent events.

In some respect, much of the news had been directly caused by the young man seated in front of them—and most prominent of all was what had happened to Amurong.

Amurong had gone crazy after paying a visit to the Zenith Dojo.

Even though Hong Tianqi had claimed that Amurong had gone crazy long ago, that he had simply been triggered that day in the Zenith Dojo, none present at the round table believed his words.

Although they didn't know just what had happened within, they were certain that Zhang Lie was responsible for Amurong's madness. Who could underestimate someone able to topple the sura and construct a kingdom of their own in the second realm?

Humans were at the bottom of the totem pole when Zhang Lie arrived in the second realm, and quite a few other races, including the sura, had reared humans like livestock. And now? The sura were killed almost to the last, all thanks to the human in front of them.

Underestimating someone like Zhang Lie would be a death sentence, they were sure. To the other committee members seated around the table, Zhang Lie was a demon draped in human skin.

When Hong Tianqi arrived at the scene, Zhang Lie smiled at him, and Hong Tianqi smiled politely back. He glanced around the table and saw that all the seats were filled.

He stood up and announced, "We've overcome the darkness. It's finally time to put an end to an old era and welcome the new."

Those seated around the table clapped politely.

"The only reason I can stand here today is thanks to everyone's support. I hereby announce that the world federation will begin functioning once more." Hong Tianqi's gaze swept over everyone present. He had hand-picked the committee members himself; they were those that had stood by him when the schism occurred. "First, an important piece of news."

Everyone glanced at Hong Tianqi, who was scrolling through a report. "The leader of the limit fragment research laboratory and of the Zenith Dojo, Zhang Lie, has discovered a class of lifeforms beyond even peak-grade."

What? Weren't peak-grade lifeforms the highest class of lifeforms that existed? Otherwise, why would they be known as peak-grade?

Hong Tianqi continued, "Because these lifeforms are disasters that walk the realm, they will be called disaster-grade lifeforms."

With a clap of his hands, his aides distributed a copy of the reports to each committee member.

"These lifeforms boast a hundred times the strength of a regular peak-grade lifeform, and they are to peak-grade lifeforms what peak-grade lifeforms are to regular-grade ones. Their bodies have crystallized, and they're largely resistant to any forms of physical damage. Their core is their only weakness," Hong Tianqi introduced.

Zhang Lie peered at the report. The first few pages were useless; they were simply the notes that he had shared with Hong Tianqi.

The remainder of the report was a list of incidents expected to have been caused by disaster-grade lifeforms, including the destruction of the Blacksteel settlement. It was clear that, in the last few years, the world federation had been collating information about these incidents and the lifeforms behind them. They were clearly stronger than usual peak-grade lifeforms, but the world federation had yet to settle on a standard classification for them.

The other committee members, recalling their own experiences with what could plausibly have been such lifeforms, were initially surprised but quickly grew to accept this information.

One member proposed, "If there are disaster-grade lifeforms, are there disaster gene fragments?"

"Of course," Zhang Lie responded.

"Have you obtained any?" the committee member pressed, prompting the attention of everyone around the round table.

Zhang Lie nodded. It was something that would have been revealed sooner or later; hiding the truth was meaningless.

The members were somewhat shocked, but it did explain the abnormal strength that Zhang Lie displayed while fighting against the asura. Zhang Lie had likely already known about such gene fragments very early on, and he had already begun acquiring them...

"How are their effects compared to peak gene fragments?"

"They're incomparable," Zhang Lie replied. "Just one disaster gene fragment is stronger than a hundred peak ones."

Chapter 609: The Disaster-Grade Revelation

Everyone was silent. One disaster gene fragment was the equivalent of a hundred peak gene fragments?!

The information rapidly filtered throughout the Milky Way, prompting a massive communal search for these supposed disaster-grade lifeforms.

Unfortunately, such lifeforms were so rare as to be almost non-existent, particularly in the first realm, which was far too weak for disaster-grade lifeforms. Zhang Lie's encounter was a pure accident, nothing more.

In the second realm, however, the hunters' efforts were more fruitful. Working together, they had identified quite a few such lifeforms, causing even Zhang Lie to be impressed.

The moment the meeting finished, Zhang Lie returned to the Zenith Dojo.

At this point, from experience, he knew that it was easy to mistake post-peak-grade and disaster-grade lifeforms.

"Ah, look—someone issued a bounty for information on such lifeforms! Wait, Hong Tianqi's doing it too! And I'm sure they'll be trying to hunt down such lifeforms sooner or later..."

...but how many would die as a result?

When the existence of such lifeforms had been revealed in his past life, a lot of overeager hunters who didn't know their limits had died. Despite the fact that limit-breaking potions could now be obtained, disaster-grade lifeforms were still far too strong for the average hunter.

Only those who had encountered them would understand their might.

Zhang Hong sent a cup of coffee into Zhang Lie's office. "How did the meeting go yesterday?"

Zhang Lie put both hands behind his head and leaned back in his chair. "It was very boring."

After the initial revelation of disaster-grade lifeforms, the rest of the meeting revolved around various problems in other solar systems.

"The committee members even voted to give me an award."

"An award?"

"For making an overwhelming contribution in the second realm by constructing a kingdom and giving the hunters of the Milky Way a stable foundation for their development. However, I rejected the award."

Zhang Hong seemed surprised. "Why? Isn't the award a good thing?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "It comes with the expectation that I would do something similar in the future. If I accept, I'll be saddled with responsibilities I'd rather avoid."

Zhang Lie preferred his freedom, thank you very much.

Zhang Hong nodded, then asked, "Should we build a hunting team for these disaster-grade lifeforms ourselves?"

"Are there hunters in the dojo who are interested?"

"All sorts of factions have been sending us inquiries about cooperation, and there are many willing to provide us with manpower and resources. Their terms are very generous. A lot of hunters in the first realm have now joined our settlement, and hunting teams preferentially accept those from the Zenith Dojo.

Zhang Lie couldn't help but smile. "They don't want our hunters—just our information."

To date, only Zhang Lie was known to have any experience hunting down disaster-grade lifeforms, and those forces believed that he might have revealed something to the members of the dojo that he didn't in public.

However, Zhang Lie had basically shared all the information he had with Hong Tianqi; there was no information for him to squirrel away. The only important piece of information he had neglected, which only Zhang Hanxiang and the members of Team Zenith knew about, was the artificial farm he had constructed in the second realm.

Zhang Lie rubbed his jaw. "Accept the requests to form hunting teams. We have no reason to refuse such generous terms."

"In that case, is there special information or experience that you'd like to share with these factions?"

"In theory, I've told everyone everything..."

Zhang Lie mulled things over for a moment. His success had been predicated on his overwhelming strength, which wouldn't be useful for the general public.

"The most important thing to understand is that different disaster-grade lifeforms have different attributes. By figuring out what those attributes are and determining their weaknesses, hunting down such lifeforms will be much safer."

Zhang Hong nodded. "We'll be sharing this information with any hunters we cooperate with, then?"

"The second point is to make sure that they raise their strength to the utmost before attempting to take down such lifeforms."

Zhang Hong nodded again. "I'll make sure to inform our collaborators of these two points."

"Good. Alright, we're done here, and I have to head back to the second realm." Zhang Lie drained his cup of coffee and walked over to the teleportation array.

When he returned to the second realm, he found the members of Team Zenith hard at work training. Time passed like a dream.

Yelling, Fang Yi dashed forward with his spear in hand. Hurling forward by wind and storm, the spear shot forward with incredible force. Fang Yi's spear sent wind howling and lightning flashing through the skies. It left a dozen afterimages in its wake, surrounding Zhang Lie's body.

"Not bad, not bad!" Zhang Lie praised, but he hadn't taken a single step.

The clash of metal filled the room. Fang Yi waved his spear with lethal speed and precision, but Zhang Lie seemed to be able to block all his attacks with careless sweeps of his arm. No matter what he did, the tip of his spear would stop inches from Zhang Lie. Fang Yi knew that Zhang Lie surely had made a move, but his movements were so rapid that Fang Yi didn't detect them at all.

But Fang Yi never gave up. As Fang Yi attacked, Zhang Lie's body was buffeted by billowing winds and a gathering storm.

"[Heaven's Judgment]! [Tiger's Howl, Dragon's Bellow]!" Fang Yi's spear took on the aspect of a dragon of the winds and a storm tiger as he charged forward. Wind and storm combined and crackled at the tip of Fang Yi's spear, and a dragon's howl echoed resoundingly in the air.

The combination of wind and storm generated a frightening force that seemed to be able to penetrate space.

"Very good—you've improved much more than before. You understand the interplay between strength and flexibility now, so let me show you something new."

This was the first time Fang Yi had seen Zhang Lie move in this match with him. He leisurely stretched out a hand, his motions as slow as those of a snail, but his technique seemed to be faster than even Fang Yi's own [Heaven's Judgment].

Fang Yi's forehead beaded with sweat. Among the members of Team Zenith, Fang Yi had the fastest technique, but he was unable to keep up with Zhang Lie even in the domain of his expertise.

With a casual flick, Zhang Lie dissipated the wind and lightning surrounding the spear, sending it flying through the air before its tip speared the ground. Fang Yi himself had been sent flying. By the time he regained his senses, he was lying beside his spear.

Everything had moved too quickly, so quickly he couldn't believe it.

"Did you intuit something?"

Fang Yi wasn't hurt. He leapt up from the ground and bowed to Zhang Lie. "Thank you for the pointers, Captain. It's something to deal with time, isn't it?"

"Indeed." Zhang Lie smiled and nodded. He had since gained a deeper understanding of the twelve stelae of the monarch of stars, and he was able to disrupt the passage of time in the realm owing to his personal strength. No law of space nor time could constrain Zhang Lie any longer.

Fang Yi leveled his spear at Zhang Lie. "Here's my finishing blow. Captain, I'm coming for you!"

Chapter 610: Zhang Lie's Advice

Zhang Lie waved a hand. "Launch your attack!"

"[Shadow and Light]!" Fang Yi's appearance blurred into a hundred clones. The spear thrusts and strikes came toward Zhang Lie from every direction.

"You're even faster than before!" Zhang Lie praised, though he still didn't move.

The spear thrusts pierced Zhang Lie, revealing him to be an illusion, but that illusion continued to talk. "You've made very good progress on the technique you intuited from the twelve stelae."

Fang Yi's forehead beaded with sweat. Sweat drenched his clothing and beaded down his back. He had tried his hardest to maintain the technique for as long as he could, but to no avail. He couldn't even touch the hem of Zhang Lie's clothing.

Fang Yi's spear thrust through space and time, but Zhang Lie's body remained stubbornly immaterial.

"[Born of Lightning, Swallowed by the Wind]!" As Fang Yi shouted, his spear traced a half-moon in the air, surrounded by an aura of time. Light and shadow flashed by its tip, just like the wind and lightning that made up the core of Fang Yi's techniques.

The spear pierced space abruptly, spawning a rift that turned its surroundings gray. All movement was locked in time. The only color in the space, the only movement, came from Fang Yi's spear. Even so, the spear was only able to move inches at a time, no faster than a snail's crawl, as it headed toward Zhang Lie.

Just as the spear was about to touch Zhang Lie's head, Zhang Lie snorted, smashing the dim, gray field of stasis apart.

The spear flew through the air and landed on the ground, just like Fang Yi. By the time he regained his senses, he was lying beside his spear. What had just happened?

Zhang Lie clasped both hands behind his back and asked again, "Did you understand?"

Fang Yi sat upright. "I did! You were ahead of me this entire time, Captain—we weren't in the same timeline! As a result, no matter how fast I was, no matter how rapidly I attacked, all I would be doing damage to was your afterimage."

Zhang Lie turned back. "And what do all of you think?"

Yang Ze clasped both palms over his mouth as he tried to rein in his laughter.

Meanwhile, Zhang Hanxiang replied earnestly, "So that's what happened! If you've passed to another timeline, then you might as well be objects in two different dimensions, unable to intersect or touch each other."

Yang Ze clutched his stomach. "I can't hold it in anymore—no, no, all this nonsense about time is just a red herring!"

"Really? What was wrong?" Zhang Hanxiang asked.

Yang Ze smiled. "All Zhang Lie did was to use his water-attuned genetic energy to create an illusion of himself, and all of Fang Yi's attacks struck at that illusion. They naturally didn't hurt Zhang Lie."

"Really?" Fang Yi and Zhang Hanxiang both seemed astounded.

Zhang Lie nodded as he smiled as well.

Yang Ze had seen through Zhang Lie not because Yang Ze was stronger than Fang Yi or Zhang Hanxiang, but because he likewise had a water attunement. Though Zhang Lie's illusion was deftly crafted, Yang Ze had noticed its signs.

Zhang Lie continued, "What I want to impart upon you is that you need to pay attention to detail, even if you have access to what might seem to be a superior power. You could have noticed that I was using an illusion from almost the very beginning, but you were all caught up in my tempo. As a result, Fang Yi, no matter how quickly you attacked, no matter how strong your attacks were, you could never have hurt me."

"When was this?!" Fang Yi asked in shock.

He simply couldn't believe that he had been fighting an illusion all this time, that he had lost not to temporal power beyond his ken, but rather a small trick.

"From the very start, I said. My illusion was just an inch or two off from the very beginning, and you wouldn't have noticed it in an intense battle. As the fight continued, I increased the distance between myself and my illusion. By the second bout, I was already a meter away."

"Y-You're crazy!" Fang Yi shouted.

They had exchanged a flurry of blows from the very beginning; the fact that Zhang Lie was able to defend himself while simultaneously constructing a detailed illusion beggared belief.

Zhang Lie shrugged. "Sometimes, a little trick can be all you need to secure victory. Make sure you're not being controlled or directed by your opponent. You believed that I would only use superior techniques against you, but small tricks are sometimes all you need."

Fang Yi grumbled, "You call that a small trick?"

No one else would be able to replicate what Zhang Lie had done in such high-intensity combat.

Zhang Lie asked, "Would you like me to show you more?"

Fang Yi reared back and shook his head warily. "No, no, Captain, you're too strong for the likes of me!"

"What, you can't keep up? Don't you have any more stamina?"

It was past time for Zhang Lie to check how the members of Team Zenith were doing.

"Don't, don't! Captain, I admit defeat, I surrender! Don't just look at me—how about the others?"

Fang Yi scampered behind Yang Ze and the other members of Team Zenith.

Zhang Lie sighed. "Your [Heaven's Judgment] is about as strong as you can get it within this realm, but your attacks are still more rigid than I'd like. I recommend that you try to develop its speed instead—you can try to augment it with the power of time that you intuited, advancing it to another level entirely."

"Thank you, Captain!" Fang Yi bowed earnestly.

Zhang Lie's gaze turned to Yang Ze. "Since you laughed so loudly just now, let's see how you perform next."

"Looks like I won't be able to avoid a thrashing, either," Yang Ze murmured, unwillingly stepping forward. He had grown leaner under Zhang Lie's hellish training, but his eyes were sharper and steelier than ever before, as though he were a deepsea shark hunting for prey...