

U. Warlord 801

Chapter 801: Dream On

Upon hearing the mammoth elder's words, the golden mammoth couldn't help but look at Li Feng, who was lounging about in the distance.

"I understand, elder. Please bring the herd toward their new home. I still have some personal affairs to take care of, and I'll catch up as soon as I can."

The elder nodded and waved his trunk. "In that case, I'll see you soon, herdleader."

The golden mammoth headed to Li Feng's side. "Have you waited for a long time?"

"No, I'm fine. Are your affairs settled?"

The golden mammoth nodded. "The elder will take care of everything, after all."

Li Feng glanced at the lava that was quickly hardening into magma. Because of how cold the frozen world was, the lava solidified even more quickly than it otherwise would have, without causing as much damage as such eruptions did on Earth.

The golden mammoth asked, "Why did you save my kin? You could certainly have stood back and done nothing."

The mammoths had invaded the draconian world, and from that perspective, the mammoths were enemies of the humans.

Li Feng replied, "You told me that the condition for handing me the proof of kingship was to avoid harming the innocent. I simply helped out in times of need."

"You had no such responsibility."

The condition was for Li Feng to avoid harming the mammoths, not for the mammoths to avoid injury.

Li Feng smiled faintly. "Perhaps that wasn't the primary reason—I just didn't want to see you die."

If Li Feng hadn't made a move then and there, the golden mammoth might have chosen to die with the rest of his kin within the lava—though given his constitution, the lava might not even be able to kill him. "If you were to die, I wouldn't be able to obtain the proof of kingship, either."

"In that case, let's head out and claim it now." The golden mammoth revealed a rare smile and walked toward one of the volcanoes, which were still spewing out lava.

"Where is the proof of kingship located?"

The golden mammoth pointed to the largest volcano, the one in the center of all the others. "Inside there."

Li Feng and the golden mammoth were able to fly through the sky, ignoring the lava flowing beneath their feet.

The volcanic eruptions started and stopped abruptly. No longer did fresh lava flow out of the craters, but that didn't mean that the volcanoes were now safe. In truth, it was still very dangerous to get close to the volcanoes at all.

One reason was that the volcano might erupt again at any point, and another was the ash that continuously emitted from the crater. The ash from the active volcanoes was extremely hot, so much so that a peak-grade lifeform would become smoked meat if it were held over the crater's lip.

However, both Li Feng and the golden mammoth had gone beyond the realm of an ordinary peak-grade lifeform.

White light flared around Li Feng's body, surrounding him with light-attuned genetic energy. The golden mammoth needed no such technique; his physical constitution was strong enough to withstand the high heat.

Man and mammoth flew down to the interior of the volcano, where it was scorching hot.

Li Feng reminded the golden mammoth, "Make sure you avoid breathing in as much of the ash as possible. If you inhale too much, you'll collapse."

After passing through a thick layer of ash, they found boiling-hot lava underneath them, flowing sluggishly along the ground. Because of the recent eruption, the interior of the volcanoes were still somewhat unstable, and lava was still flowing up from deep underground.

The golden mammoth explained, "The proof of kingship is located within the lava."

Li Feng's eyes opened wide. "Within the lava?"

"It's an unexpected hiding spot, isn't it?"

Li Feng nodded, then took a deep breath and submerged himself within. With adequate preparation, and considering both parties were beyond peak-grade lifeforms, they were even able to venture into the lava.

Deep below the surface, following the golden mammoth's guidance, Li Feng found an ancient furnace surrounded by the world's aura. Li Feng headed over and pulled the furnace out of the lava.

"This is the proof of kingship?" Li Feng was startled by the appearance that the proof of kingship of this world took on.

What the proof of kingship looked like was determined solely by the king of the realm, but he hadn't expected that the former mammoth herdleader would have transformed it into a furnace of all things.

The golden mammoth explained, "We obtained some information about crafting and forging from the humans, but none of us had ever seen a furnace before, and we were all confused about what it looked like and how to make one of our own.

"The draconian world did have regular furnaces, but such furnaces were hardly sufficient for forging froststeel. Forging froststeel requires extreme temperatures, and we wouldn't have been able to achieve those temperatures with the draconian design.

"In order to allow us to get started with forging, the herdleader transformed the proof of kingship into a furnace, one whose resilience and thermal resistance made it a far superior furnace to anything we would be able to construct on our own."

The golden mammoth concluded proudly, "By making use of the volcanoes and the furnace made from the proof of kingship, many in our herd learned to forge! After that, even if we weren't able to make other furnaces resistant enough for froststeel, we were able to come up with other means for forging it."

A furnace was only used to lock in heat and raise the temperature within it to a high enough extent that impurities could be melted from the froststeel ore.

However, the mammoths didn't initially understand this point.

After the herdleader converted the proof of kingship into a furnace, the mammoths began to understand the principles behind blacksmithing, and they came up with the idea of using geothermal energy and the earth as a natural furnace.

As such, the furnace that the proof of kingship had become was not just a proof of kingship, but also an important artifact in the history of the mammoth herd.

Li Feng stored the furnace in his extra-dimensional storage without another word. He offered to the golden mammoth, "I'm going to leave now. Do you want to join me?"

The golden mammoth was very surprised. "I'm the new herdleader—I can't just leave my herd behind!"

Li Feng shook his head. "From my perspective, they're not treating you like part of the herd, but rather a tool they can make use of and then discard."

The golden mammoth frowned. "Perhaps so, but since they've chosen me, I won't betray their trust. They've already lost a herdleader, and I won't be the second."

Li Feng sighed.

The golden mammoth was a wuxia fanatic, one who would swing his blade in the snow day in, day out, for ten thousand swings a day. He wouldn't even stop in a blizzard—and it was precisely this persistence that allowed him to go from one of the weakest mammoths in the herd to its strongest warrior in just a few decades.

The golden mammoth was more stubborn than a rhinoceros.

"I know that you mammoths are going to be migrating to this so-called second home. The trip will be perilous; you'll have to pass through the habitats of many dangerous lifeforms. If you have to travel with a group of elderly, women, and children, to a destination you have no understanding and information about, you could very well perish along the way. Do you really intend on being the mammoth herdleader despite these challenges?"

"Yes. Absolutely," the golden mammoth affirmed. "I can't refuse now. The lives of the entire herd depend on me!"

Li Feng pursed his lips. "Well, if you've made up your mind, I don't suppose I'll be able to stop you. If you continue pursuing your dream, I'm sure you'll grow strong, but you'd better not try to invade the humans again. I'll be off with the proof of kingship, then."

Li Feng waved a hand, then flew out of the volcano. The golden mammoth really was an interesting fellow..

Chapter 802: The Wise Elder

By the time the golden mammoth returned to the herd, the elder had finished assigning every mammoth a task.

"Ah, the herdleader's back! Let's set off!" The mammoth herd began making its way toward their new destination.

The golden mammoth asked, "Elder, how far away are we headed?"

"It's not too far. A regular mammoth would be able to make the journey in three or four days, but for a large herd, we might take five or six days."

The golden mammoth relaxed. It wouldn't be a long trip, then.

The journey would be more dangerous the longer it was, especially for such a big herd. Many of the mammoths had packed enough food to eat for a week along the journey, so hunting wouldn't be a big issue.

The elder continued, "This is meant to be a shelter, so it certainly can't be too far from our original home. A shelter we would have to walk for two weeks to reach would simply be too far away."

"The herdleader truly was wise to have come up with such a plan," the golden mammoth sighed in relief.

However, the elder shook his head gravely. "We can't be too complacent."

"Are there still problems?"

The elder rolled his eyes. "You're still far too young. There are plenty of problems—not just the herd's lowered morale, but also crippling issues that could prove to be our downfall!"

"Crippling issues?"

"Our original territory was warm and cozy because of the presence of the eight volcanoes nearby, and the lifeforms and predators it attracted provided a steady source of food. While the herdleader and our warriors were still around, this was a significant positive—but now, with our herd on the move, and the need to protect the elderly, women, and children with us, the warriors shall have to exert themselves to defend us all."

"That's true," the golden mammoth replied seriously. The mammoth warriors had been able to hunt for food easily with all the lifeforms around, but those lifeforms would now serve to deter the mammoth herd from reaching their destination.

The lifeforms that had gathered around the volcanoes formed a ring around the region that blocked off easy access to the herd's shelter.

Now that the mammoth warriors were tied up because of their need to protect the rest of the herd, they were now juicy prey for such lifeforms. In particular, the elderly, women, and children, none of whom were able to fight well, were basically walking pieces of meat.

The mammoth swore, "Even if I have to give up my life, I'll protect the herd from harm."

The elder shook his head. "You're the herdleader, and you have to focus on yourself first. If the situation deteriorates too much, you may have to sacrifice the elderly mammoths."

The golden mammoth sucked in another deep breath. "In the end, I'm still too young. I'll have to rely on your expertise and experience, elder!"

"This isn't a test," the elder replied seriously. "For the sake of the future, you'll have to make hard decisions. For the good of the herd, you cannot afford to hesitate. Do you understand?"

The golden mammoth gritted his teeth.

The elder reached out with his trunk and stroked the mammoth's fur. He continued gently, "We elderly can't live for much longer, at any rate. We would be happy to give our lives for the young of the herd. After all, we'd just drag the rest of you down once we reach the shelter."

The golden mammoth's eyes brimmed with tears. "If such a situation really happens, I'll consider it..."

"No!" the elder shouted. "You can't just consider it. You have to be decisive!"

The golden mammoth didn't know how to respond.

The elder sighed. "I know you're a kind-hearted child, one who still needs training to become a better herdleader, but none of us—neither you nor I—have a choice."

The golden mammoth nodded.

The elder sighed and continued, "Kindness should be a good thing, but not in such dire times. Do you know why I believed you when you returned to our herd?"

The golden mammoth thought back to what had happened and suggested, "Elder, isn't it as you said? That if I had wanted to hurt the herd, I'd have done so already?"

The elder shook his head gravely. "No. I just made that up. The volcanoes were about to erupt, and I grabbed the simplest reason that came to mind that would convince the entire herd and stop them from arguing.

The herd was already vilifying you, but there was a crucial flaw in their thought process. I merely pointed out that if you truly were an enemy, you could have easily killed them all."

The elder rubbed at the fur on his face. "Naturally, the herd wouldn't be able to keep thinking of you as an enemy after that, not that they had time to do so—the volcanoes were really about to erupt by then."

The golden mammoth asked, "But elder, weren't you afraid that I really was in cahoots with the humans?"

The elder burst out in laughter. "I watched you grow up. Don't you think I know what kind of person you are?"

The golden mammoth lowered his head. "Thank you for your trust, Elder."

"The reason I said what I said was to convince the herd as quickly as possible and to get them moving, but what truly made them change their minds was your actions during the calamity. When the volcanoes erupted and a disaster struck, when the other mammoths all thought to run and flee, you were the one who stood at the very front and forged a new path for us all."

The mammoth elder caressed the golden mammoth's head. "Child, you have never disappointed me. Be more confident—you're our herdleader not just because we need you, but because we've recognized your strength and courage! Now, ignoring the problem of the lifeforms around us, we'll have to deal with the problem of food. Fortunately, many of the mammoths in the herd have brought some stockpiles of food with them, and the lifeforms around mean that we won't have to go too hungry."

The golden mammoth nodded.

The elder continued, "Did you hand over the proof of kingship, then?"

The golden mammoth's eyes bulged in shock. No one had seen him give away the proof of kingship, surely?

The elder smiled. "There surely had to be a reason that human was protecting our herd, and the only thing I could think of was the proof of kingship."

The golden mammoth lowered his head. "I apologize, elder. I selfishly gave away the proof of kingship. Please punish me!"

The elder shook his head. "It was a wise move. We couldn't have kept the proof given the calamity, and it was a good idea to give away the proof before it could stir up even more trouble for us. It's clear that he's a strong human. Far better to make reparations and curry goodwill," the elder concluded.

Chapter 803: Difficult to Fathom

The mammoth herd continued traipsing through wind and snow.

Suddenly, a mammoth shrieked, "Beasts! There are beasts incoming!"

The golden mammoth turned toward the direction of the voice and indeed saw a wolf-type lifeform approaching from afar.

"As expected," the mammoth elder murmured. The mammoth herd was approaching the ring of land in which other lifeforms lived.

Once the mammoths discovered the wolf, it immediately vanished from sight.

The golden mammoth shouted, "All warriors, be on the alert! Prepare for an ambush!"

The mammoth warriors immediately got into position.

The herd had traveled in an orderly procession. Following the elder's arrangements, the mammoth warriors were positioned along the outer boundary, while the elderly, children, and women were within.

Those warriors who still had their shields lifted them toward the outside of their defensive perimeter, while those without served as scouts on high alert for their enemies.

The lifeforms that had appeared in sight were nothing more than scouts; the main party of beasts would soon appear.

Fortunately, the herd consisted of many skilled warriors, who would be able to defend even against an ambush lying in wait for them.

The herd warily inched forward, their progress slowing to a crawl. Suddenly, as a wolf howled, packs of wolves appeared from all over. The golden mammoth unsheathed his froststeel blade from its back.

As he howled, he waved the plain, unadorned sword with his trunk with enough force to split a mountain, with a will honed by thousands of swings. A single swing flung up ice and snow all around the herd and killed an entire swathe of wolves.

The mammoth warriors charged forward, each an experienced fighter after years of hunting. They knew how to fight off packs of wild lifeforms, and it would be straightforward for them to each handle multiple enemies at once.

The golden mammoth's froststeel blade danced in the frosty air. The mammoth's long mane was stained red, and he advanced like a god of death.

Upon seeing how ferociously the mammoths were counter-attacking, the wolves were forced to retreat as a number of mammoth warriors began to cheer.

The golden mammoth, on the other hand, didn't seem at all happy.

The wolves that had just rushed over were nothing more than cannon fodder for the main army of lifeforms that were heading toward them. The true fighting force and the leader of the beasts were observing the mammoths fighting from a distance, far enough away that the mammoths couldn't detect them.

Over the next three days, the mammoths were harassed time and again by the beasts—in the morning, afternoon, and night. Some of the beasts they found while forging ahead toward their shelter, while others were clearly charging toward them. The moment the mammoths forced them back, they hurriedly ran off.

The mammoth warriors did fine even under such stress, understanding the nature of hunts. The harassment had only been ongoing for three days, and they were still able to hold out against their enemies.

However, the non-combatant mammoths found themselves being startled almost every hour, and they suffered under the mental and physical toll their exodus had brought. Immediately after losing their home and quite a few of their loved ones, they now also had to deal with incessant attacks from enemy lifeforms.

The wolves and other creatures continued harassing the mammoth herd, making a ruckus in the distance or revealing themselves to the mammoths. They did so for two reasons: in order to threaten the mammoths and make them feel as though their lives were constantly in danger, and to frighten the mammoths, particularly the non-combatant mammoths, and induce a state of panic among them.

Some of the warriors tried to chase off the lifeforms, but they clearly didn't intend on giving up on such promising prey as the mammoths. If the warriors had been by themselves, they would have laid an ambush for these arrogant upstarts, but with the rest of their kin with them, the warriors didn't dare to do anything that could put them in danger.

As time passed, the situation worsened. Even the warriors grew fatigued, and the non-combatant mammoths suffered most. Because of the constant strain and fear, all of them grew visibly weary and slowed down their pace.

A journey that would originally have taken five days was now projected to take eight. The mammoths still had three more days of travel to go.

This was undoubtedly a nightmare for most of the mammoths present.

The golden mammoth commanded that all mammoths who had to urinate or defecate had to do so in groups of three in case any of the weaker ones among them were picked off by the enterprising vultures. They had learned this lesson only after some of the older or younger mammoths were picked off in this fashion.

The warriors and golden mammoth sighed and gritted their teeth. Despite their family's begging, none of the warriors made a move. They understood that, at this point, the herd couldn't split up. The moment they did so, they would become a prime target for the predators.

As the number of deaths grew and grew, morale dropped to a breaking point.

The golden mammoth finally understood what Li Feng had told him: traveling with a group of non-combatants was truly a draining process.

"You're all warriors—you have to protect us!"

"Why aren't you going to rescue those mammoths that were taken away by the beasts?!"

"We can't fight! You have to fight on our account!"

"Where's my son?!"

"Be more serious! You're the only ones we can count on!"

The warriors had once considered protecting the herd their responsibility, and the non-combatants respected the warriors' sacrifice.

Given their circumstances, however, all the mammoths were starting to grow physically and mentally weary, and that respect and relationship between the two factions began to fray.

All the mammoths became irritable and prone to fits of emotion. It was easy for them to grouse and complain about each other, and their thinking became sluggish.

This was the first time the warriors realized just how small-minded and petty the rest of the herd was. Were they truly obligated to protect them at the cost of their lives? They were only warriors, not gods.

By the fourth day, some warriors, unable to bear the tension, had quietly left the herd. They were strong fighters, and easily able to brave whatever danger came their way. With their territory gone, what obligation did they have to protect the rest of the herd?

By the fifth day, more and more mammoths were breaking away from the main party.

The golden mammoth was, for the first time, sensing the stress of his position.

He turned to the elder and asked, "How can I resolve this problem?"

The elder only smiled sadly at him. "This is your first test as our herdleader, and you have to resolve it by yourself."

"But elder, I don't know what to do! If I don't do anything, the herd will surely fall to the lifeforms skulking around us!"

"This is hardly the only danger our herd has to face. You'll encounter many such situations in the future, and you need to start learning how to deal with them."

The golden mammoth sucked in a deep breath. "Elder, the lives of the herd are in danger! This is far too high-stakes for a simple test!"

"Look around you at the ice and snow. There's no one here to help us but ourselves. We have to rely on each other to stay warm, to stay healthy, to stay sane. Most of the mammoths in the herd are tied to others by blood or marriage, and there's no way for them to sever those relationships so easily. Those mammoths that have left are those with the fewest obligations and ties to the herd, and it's only natural that they would want to leave. Their departure will cause some consternation, but the herd isn't at its breaking point yet."

That was exactly why the situation was perfect for a trial for the golden mammoth.

Even if the golden mammoth were to fail and the herd began to crack apart, the elder would be around to save the day. Losing a thousand mammoths from the herd would hurt, but it was far less impactful than having a strong, insightful, and experienced herdleader.

Chapter 804: Pride and Prejudice

The elder told the golden mammoth, "In the future, you'll encounter countless trials. The most important thing is to remain calm. If you begin to panic, then everyone else will start to panic as well. I'm growing old, and I won't be able to remain by your side for much longer."

The golden mammoth hesitated. "I'm just afraid that I'll—"

The elder waved his trunk. "Don't worry about it and go try your best. I'll be watching."

The golden mammoth scratched his head in embarrassment. "Elder, I don't know where to get started..."

The elder sighed. Indeed, the golden mammoth had just become the herdleader, and it would be unreasonable to expect too much from him. "I'll give you another hint, then. The reason the mammoths are panicking is because they're unsettled. They don't know what they should be doing; the warriors are leaving because they've grown disillusioned with life within the herd. Do you understand?"

The golden mammoth's eyes brightened. He knew what he had to do. He stepped forward and shouted, "Everyone, our new home, our new shelter, is right before our eyes! We can't let our hard work go to waste now! The reason the warriors haven't been able to investigate the whereabouts of the missing mammoths is because we don't have many warriors left. We need the warriors to stay

with us, to protect all of us from the predators and lifeforms you've seen lurking around these last few days!"

Upon hearing the golden mammoth's words, the other mammoths all raised their heads.

The golden mammoth shouted, "Warriors, do you feel no pride in your station? No honor and glory? Surely you wouldn't succumb to just a few days of hard labor—our hunts are far more intensive than that! Stay strong!"

The warriors of the herd looked silently at the golden mammoth.

"Even if we've lost our home, we can build a new one. As long as we're still alive, we can build a home no matter where we are!"

Suddenly, a snowball smashed into the golden mammoth's face.

He thought that he would be able to raise the herd's morale, but the result didn't seem to be as he expected.

A mammoth rolled up another snowball and flung it at the golden mammoth. "It's all your fault! It's because you didn't manage to stop the human warrior that we're suffering now!"

"Why weren't you the one who died—why did it have to be the former herdleader?!"

Rage quickly spread through the herd.

"Right, why weren't you the one who perished? If the herdleader were still around, we wouldn't be in such dire straits!"

"Return the herdleader to us! Return our territory to us!"

"What a terrible herdleader—you can't even protect your kin!"

The mammoths were all very upset. Their territory, their home, had been consumed by the simultaneous eruption of eight volcanoes, and their herdleader had suddenly died out of nowhere. They had no choice but to leave their home, only to find themselves plagued and harassed by beasts along the way.

Those negative emotions had been stewing in their hearts and minds, and now, they had finally found an outlet.

"You keep talking about this second home, but we've already been walking for so long! I don't see anything but ice and snow!"

The golden mammoth's sudden speech had made him the other mammoths' target.

The elder clutched his face, unable to look at the scene. The golden mammoth was far too naive, and he had too simplistic a conception of the other mammoths' mental state. Otherwise, he wouldn't have tried to rouse the mammoths from their depressed stupor with nothing but a few sentences and a peppy speech. Given how gloomy the atmosphere was, this would be a far harder task.

Perhaps the former herdleader might have been able to accomplish such a feat, but the golden mammoth was still a beginner to his role, and he hardly had enough authority in the herd to inspire the sullen mammoths.

In some sense, the other mammoths had all grown too self-important under the leadership of the previous herdleader.

They had abundant resources, and the non-combatants in particular had a rather leisurely lifestyle. Given their comfortable state of life in the past, their indolence wasn't a problem. In times of crisis, however, that laziness and self-importance had to be stripped away.

The elder felt that he bore some responsibility of his own. He had helped the previous herdleader too much, causing him to gain too much success and hence an inflated sense of self-confidence.

The elder wouldn't make the same mistake with the golden mammoth. He would have the golden mammoth see the herd for whom they truly were—to understand their basest thoughts, as well as the problems that plagued the herd at its core.

He had to make sure that the golden mammoth didn't go the way of the previous herdleader.

The golden mammoth stood still and allowed the other mammoths to throw snowballs at him until they were tired. Even after they grew bored and too exhausted to make a move, the golden mammoth continued to stand silently.

The elder looked at the golden mammoth in surprise, then shook his head. It looked as though he did have more of a plan, after all. The elder had underestimated him!

The golden mammoth raised his head. "Are you all finished? No more snowballs to throw my way?"

The mammoths were silent.

"If you're all done, then, are you ready to listen to me calmly now? First, the home you lost was my home, too. I'm a mammoth, just like all of you! I know what it feels like to lose my home—I know what it feels like to lose my friends and family.

"I was more upset than any of you at the former herdleader's death! But we cannot, cannot allow these trials and tribulations to turn us against each other, to criticize and make life difficult for each other."

The mammoths couldn't help but agree with their new herdleader's heartfelt words.

"We all share each other's pain, but that pain shouldn't be used to hurt each other.

We're one herd, one race, one family. We need to stay strong, and we need to work together."

This time, the golden mammoth's heartfelt words succeeded in touching the other mammoths' hearts—in comparison to his previous speech, which consisted of soulless words only designed to raise morale."

The mammoths slowly began to nod along with the golden mammoth's words, but just then, the wolves' howls all around them rose into a crescendo. This time, unlike all previous times, huge packs of wolves began rushing toward the mammoths from all around them.

After five days of torture, the wolves must have thought the mammoths ready for the kill.

The golden mammoth shouted, "Warriors, protect our kin!"

The mammoth warriors immediately raised their shields and weapons, encircling the women, children, and elderly in a circular barrier and blocking the wolves that came at them from all directions.

As the golden mammoth howled, he struck using his plain, unadorned sword with enough force to split a mountain, a will honed by thousands of swings, and an indescribable sense of age and maturity.

A single swing flung up ice and snow, cracked the ground, and killed an entire swathe of wolves.

The golden mammoth rushed out of the defensive encirclement and began a one-man stand against the wolves that came at him every which way.

Blood and bone sprayed all around him as the golden mammoth cut a path out of the wolf packs, heading straight for the giant wolf that stood at the tallest peak of the battlefield and oversaw it all. That silvery-white wolf was clearly the leader of all the wolf packs. If he were able to kill that wolf, the remaining leaderless wolves would surely flee.

However, the wolf packs had chosen a perfect time to strike, while the warriors were all exhausted and fatigued. It would be trivial for any of them to make a mistake, and a mistake could be lethal in a battle for life and death.

One warrior made such a mistake. He lost focus for a moment, only to see a wolf successfully breach the defensive encirclement and snatch away a mammoth child with its teeth...

Chapter 805: A Brush with Danger

Mammoth children were very large, and even the smallest was over a meter tall.

However, the wolves weren't ordinary either. They were all very large, and most had the strength of mutated-grade lifeforms. There were even over a thousand superior-grade wolves. The mutated-grade ones were over two meters tall, and the superior-grade ones were taller.

Thanks to one mammoth warrior's momentary distraction, the wolves were able to snatch away a mammoth child. Instead of consuming that child immediately, several wolves gathered around the child and began to claw and bite at it.

They injured all four of its legs, leaving fresh blood running along the snow. Subsequently, they dragged the injured child, who was by then screaming and crying, in a large circle around the snow, leaving a trail of blood behind.

"My child!" The mammoth mother tried to rush out of the protective encirclement to save her son, but she was stopped by the warriors. "Please, save my son! Please!"

Instead of eating the mammoth child directly, the wolves tossed him on the ground and allowed him to moan and whine piteously while several wolves circled him to prevent his escape.

Subsequently, the wolves began to spread out, glancing mockingly at the mammoth herd to see what they would do.

These wolves had some amount of intelligence; they weren't simply hunting on bestial instinct. The wolves knew that they wouldn't be able to break through the mammoths' defensive perimeter, or that even if they could, they would suffer far too much in terms of casualties.

The wolves had never intended to destroy the mammoths' defensive parameter, but only to snatch away one of the weaker mammoths and have the mammoth herd break apart on its own.

"Please, save my son! You're all warriors from the herd, and you're the only ones who can do it! Please, don't let my son die right before my eyes!" the mammoth mother cried out, kneeling in front of one of the warriors.

The warriors looked at each other, unsure how to proceed. The wolves had clearly laid out a trap for them; the only reason the warriors were able to protect the herd was because of their defensive formation.

If any warrior were to break the formation now, the entire herd would suffer as a result.

The heart-wrenching sounds of mother and son simultaneously crying out for each other caused the entire herd to stir.

No one knew how to resolve the situation. Just as it looked as though all hope was lost, a voice shouted, "Let me through!"

The golden mammoth gave up on trying to kill the leader of the wolf packs and rushed back toward the mammoths with his heavy blade in hand, swinging it around and killing dozens of wolves in one go.

The wolves tried to stop the golden mammoth. Two of their strongest bit down on his hindlegs and clamped their jaws shut, two on his forelegs, and one on his shoulder.

Even so, the golden mammoth was far too strong for the likes of them. The wolves' teeth found no purchase; to them, the mammoth's skin was like impenetrable rubber.

The golden mammoth continued forging onward despite the wolves latched onto its body. He shook them off roughly, killing each with a single swing of his blade. He charged forward amidst a pool of blood, breaking through the wolves' encirclement and saving the battered child.

The mammoth consoled the child, "There's no need to fear. I'm right here!"

As an entire pack of wolves pounced on the golden mammoth together, he swung his froststeel blade in an arc, killing them all.

Fresh blood fell like rain as the wolves' severed limbs clattered to the ground. The golden mammoth raised his sword and shouted, "Come at me if you dare!"

The wolves were too frightened of this warrior to take the offensive. As the golden mammoth headed back to the mammoth herd, none of the wolves dared to bar his way.

The mammoth returned the child to his mother, who sobbed as she thanked him profusely.

Just as the golden mammoth relaxed, the leader of the wolf pack suddenly pounced toward the mammoth in a blur of white, fast as lightning.

The mammoth mother's eyes opened wide as she shouted, "Be careful!"

The golden mammoth, who was still focused on the herd, never noticed the attack from behind.

Just then, a beam of white light split the sky and landed straight on the leader of the wolf pack, causing his attack to miss the golden mammoth.

Realizing that he had been foiled, the wolf leader immediately pulled away, howled into the air, and scurried off with his pack.

Upon seeing the wolves leave for good, the golden mammoth breathed out in relief. He looked up at where the beam of light had come from, but there was no one in sight. Even so, he bowed deeply to express heartfelt gratitude.

After that incident, the mammoth herd finally united in strength once more.

After one final day's worth of walking, the mammoth herd finally reached the shelter that the former herdleader had set up.

The elder pointed at the valley in front of them. "It's right there."

Amidst wind and snow, the mammoths could see a thin, narrow path snaking down into the valley. Many of the mammoths began to cry and weep. After a hellish week, they had finally made it to their destination.

Just then, the howl of wolves caused the snow all around them to tremble. The wolf packs appeared once again. The golden mammoth shouted, "Defensive formation, now!"

It was only then that he realized how many other shadows had been hidden by the snow—not just the wolves, but also all sorts of other lifeforms.

"This is—" The golden mammoth turned pale. There were far more than wolves lying in wait for them. It was hard enough for the mammoths to defend against the wolves alone. If they had to defend against other predators simultaneously...

More and more shadows appeared from a distance. From above, it was clear that a massive group of lifeforms was converging on the mammoths' location.

The mammoth herd felt an overwhelming sense of weakness and despair, so much so that even the path to shelter, to their new home, had turned hazy. What covered and blinded their eyes wasn't snow, but tears. For what had they worked so hard?

The elder glared at the surrounding lifeforms. "It looks like they aren't going to forgive us!"

Genetic lifeforms were hardly devoid of intelligence. In truth, the strongest lifeforms, superior-grade and above, possessed intelligence on par with humans. Some peak-grade lifeforms even boasted human-surpassing intelligence, such as the leader of the wolf pack.

Knowing that he wouldn't be able to deal with the mammoth herd himself, he immediately sought out the other lifeforms around with an offer of collaboration.

There were already a large number of lifeforms paying attention to the mammoths' movements, and the strongest among them quickly accepted the wolf pack's offer.

By then, the golden mammoth had come to a conclusion. "All warriors, give up on defense! Carry the young and elderly on your backs and head straight for shelter!"

If they were to stay and defend against the overwhelming number of lifeforms that surrounded them, everyone would die. If they managed to make it into the valley, however, they might have a fighting chance.

There was only one path into the valley, and it was surrounded by tall, unscalable walls. As long as someone could defend this path, the mammoth tribe might yet survive. The golden mammoth was confident that he would be able to do so.

Chapter 806: Disaster-Grade Wolves

Upon receiving the golden mammoth's orders, the mammoth warriors hurriedly grabbed the elderly and children around them and rushed off toward the valley.

The golden mammoth also made his move. He picked up the mammoth elder and three children as he galloped toward that narrow path of salvation.

Before the lifeforms could surround them all, the mammoths ran away.

The elder shouted, "Remember what I told you before?"

"Do you have any suggestions, elder?"

"There's no time. Quick, sacrifice us elderly. We can delay the lifeforms for a few precious seconds!"

The golden mammoth ignored the elder and continued to run for his life.

The elder cried out, "Did you hear me? Toss us aside!"

The golden mammoth replied, "Elder, we're a step away from sanctuary! How could I bear to let you all down now?!"

The elder was simultaneously infuriated and touched. "You—"

Just then, a white wolf leapt past the mammoths and blocked the entrance to the valley, causing the mammoths to stumble back.

The wolf was none other than the leader of the wolf pack.

The golden mammoth allowed the elder and children to get off him as he unsheathed his sword in rage and roared, "Just how far are you going to go?!"

As the other genetic lifeforms approached, the elder despaired. "Is this the end of the mammoth herd...?"

Just then, a blinding flash of light came from the sky, illuminating the entire snowfield, as though a sun had suddenly appeared amidst the world of frost. This was an exceptional phenomenon: the skies of the mammoths' world was always clouded. It was eternal winter, and ice and snow were all the mammoths knew.

White dragons of light soared through the air like meteors, manifesting into reality. Their roars shook the entire snowfield as they descended to the ground.

The lifeforms that had been intending to attack the mammoths were all struck down by the dragons. Light flared from all around them, lighting up the path forward for the mammoths.

The golden mammoth smiled in relief and gratitude. This familiar attack—he knew who had come to their rescue.

The wolf pack, thinking victory was imminent, never expected this devastating blow. They were crushed in an instant.

The golden mammoth took the opportunity to send the leader of the wolf pack flying as he shouted, "Rush into the valley, now! I'll hold these lifeforms back!"

The mammoths rushed down the path toward the valley as though their lives depended on it. More lifeforms gave chase, but they had to face the golden mammoth, first.

The golden mammoth's plain, unadorned blade sent all the lifeforms flying. A pool of blood formed where he stood, and the limbs of fallen lifeforms were strewn all around him. The golden mammoth smiled as he glanced up at the sky again—in thanks for Li Feng's assistance.

"[Dance of the Incandescent Wyrms]!" Li Feng summoned dozens of serpents, flaring with blinding light. The dragons seemed to be burning with light; their bodies were covered with pale white flame. They swept through the hordes of lifeforms and held them back.

The pale white fire spread over the lifeforms that struck them and lit up the clouded world, which remained in a perennial half-darkness. The dragons, almost like messengers of heaven, vanquished all the mammoths' foes.

The golden mammoth stood guard at the entrance of the valley as Li Feng devastated the battlefield from above. Man and mammoth seized control of the battlefield, causing the errant lifeforms to quail despite their superior numbers.

These lifeforms weren't idiots. The mammoths were at the weakest they had been in decades, maybe centuries, and they were juicy prey indeed.

However, no lifeform wanted to die. It was evident that the mammoths would get away, and there was no need to keep fighting against the golden mammoth and Li Feng any longer. Some of the lifeforms began pulling back, angering the leader of the wolf pack. He had planned this ambush for an entire week, and he had sought out the help and cooperation of these other races—only to have his plan ruined at the last moment!

He harbored a grudge against the mammoths because his very father had been hunted down by mammoth warriors. He had waited for many years for a chance to seek revenge. How could he give up on this opportunity? As he howled, he shot forward in a flurry of ice.

Even the golden mammoth, who had lived in this frozen world for his entire life, found it difficult to deal with a barrage of snow.

The leader of the wolf pack pounced toward the golden mammoth and knocked him flying.

Li Feng was shocked by the strength that the wolf leader had displayed. He had been tailing the mammoths for quite some time, and he was also keeping half an eye on the wolf leader.

When the wolves first launched an assault against the mammoths, it was Li Feng who had helped the golden mammoth out. However, the wolf leader had only attacked a scant few times, and Li Feng had been unable to get a good sense of its true strength.

Given the speed and strength with which it pounced toward the golden mammoth, however, Li Feng now recognized that it was at least a pseudo-disaster-grade lifeform, if not one in full.

The wolf leader howled again, as though informing its pack that it would take care of the golden mammoth while the pack and other lifeforms rushed into the valley.

With their leader holding back the golden mammoth, the other wolves and lifeforms immediately grew bolder.

"[Arclight Dragon's Imprint]!" Li Feng, now clad in a suit of dragon armor, waved his left arm.

A seal of light materialized around him as a gigantic dragon's claw appeared in the air like a pillar of light. It swiped at the wolf pack, leaving large furrows in the ground and sending the wolves at the forefront careening into the air.

Meanwhile, the golden mammoth charged forward at the leader of the wolf pack like a mad bull, raising the froststeel sword in his hand up high and barreling toward him.

As he swung his sword down, the ground beneath him cracked and left a deep pit behind. Snow drifted into the air, hundreds of meters high.

However, the wolf leader was nowhere to be seen. With its extreme speed, it had easily dodged the golden mammoth's telegraphed blow.

As Li Feng's dragons cried out, a white dragon descended from the air and smashed the wolf leader into the ground.

Li Feng smirked as he relaxed his arm, motes of light gathering around him.

The golden mammoth struck again with his blade as the wolf leader roared. A blizzard formed around the wolf leader, and the mammoth was forced to defend with his blade.

A beam of light crashed down onto the wolf leader like a bolt of lightning, tearing the blizzard apart and illuminating the snowfield.

"[Light's Bulwark: Dragon's Teeth]!" Li Feng charged up for a stronger attack. Concentrated light-attuned genetic energy surrounded him, condensed, and fell from the heavens, piercing the head of the wolf leader.

The wolf leader, who was sizing up the golden mammoth, had no attention to spare for Li Feng.

The golden mammoth was himself a disaster-grade lifeform, while Li Feng's was even beyond that. As a result, the cooperation between Li Feng and the golden mammoth allowed them to easily take down the wolf leader together.

Even so, despite the fact that the back of his head had been pierced clean through, the wolf leader was still struggling. Li Feng frowned. "The core isn't in his head?"

The core tended to be located in a disaster-grade lifeform's head or chest, where the heart would have been. To kill a disaster-grade lifeform for good, they would have to remove its core from its body...

Chapter 807: A Second Home

The golden mammoth swung his heavy blade in an arc, trailed by wind and frost.

"Ah, I'm still here!" Li Feng leapt up high in a beam of light as the froststeel blade swung down, shattering the wolf leader's skull and freezing its body.

As the golden mammoth kicked that body in anger, it shattered like a block of ice, revealing a deep blue core within. The core was surrounded by snow and patterned with frost, revealing an unusual beauty.

Upon seeing their leader die, the remaining wolves and many of the lifeforms were too scared to continue fighting. They retreated immediately. Some lifeforms, however, refused to give up—and Li Feng and the golden mammoth were more than happy to teach them the error of their ways.

Li Feng shouted to the golden mammoth, "You take the left, and I'll take the right!"

Given the strength of the two combatants, they quickly dominated the battlefield. Fresh blood dyed the snow red.

Within moments, the snowfield was littered with the carcasses of genetic lifeforms. Li Feng and the golden mammoth slumped against each other, panting and releasing white huffs of air as they laughed.

The golden mammoth asked, "Didn't you say you didn't care about whether I lived or died?"

Li Feng snorted. "I don't want an alien I saved to die for meaningless reasons. Beautiful appearances all meld together after a while, but interesting souls—well, those are few and far between."

The golden mammoth asked, "Do you know what you humans call people like you?"

"A righteous hunter, loyal to my friends and handsome beyond compare?"

"No, arrogant and awkward—like a tsundere!"

Li Feng groused, "You're a mammoth! Stop trying to emulate human speech."

"Tell me honestly, are you interested in my body?"

"No—I don't like men!"

"Who said I was male?"

Li Feng: !?

It was true that he couldn't distinguish whether the golden mammoth was male or female from appearance alone, but given his tone and mannerisms...

"A female wuxia fanatic...?"

"What's the matter? Females can't like wuxia? This is gender inequality—do I need to give you a beating?!"

Li Feng dragged a carpet out of his extra-dimensional storage, wrapped it around himself, and curled up into a ball.

"Why aren't you speaking?"

"I'm cold!" After the heat of battle had dissipated, Li Feng was experiencing the bone-chilling cold of the world.

The golden mammoth couldn't help but laugh at Li Feng's expression.

"Ah, don't you laugh at me now!" Li Feng yelled, mock-punching the mammoth's thick hide with his fists as the golden mammoth continued laughing away.

"Thank you. Truly, thank you," the golden mammoth continued, completely sincerely.

As the mammoth herd walked out of the valley and found the snow littered with carcasses and dyed a lurid red, the mammoths all sucked in a deep breath.

All that destruction—at least ten thousand carcasses—had come from just a man and a mammoth.

As experienced hunters, they could see that many of the genetic lifeforms had begun to flee as the man and mammoth unleashed carnage and slaughter, only to be killed mid-escape.

Li Feng jumped up and patted his clothes down. "Your kin are here."

The mammoth warriors stood at attention, a respectful distance away from the two fighters.

"Herdleader!"

All the races of the three thousand worlds respected the strong; the mammoths were no exception.

The golden mammoth got up. "Good timing. Gather a few people and clean up the battlefield. Take away all these lifeforms—we won't have to worry about food for quite some time."

The warriors replied, "Yes, herdleader! The elder would like you to enter the valley. There are many tasks that he needs you to accomplish."

"Very well."

The golden mammoth turned to Li Feng. "Li Feng, would you like to come with me? Have a look around our second home."

Li Feng glanced at the golden mammoth for a moment before finally nodding. He was rather curious as to just what the mammoths' new home was like.

The warriors hesitated, but they didn't challenge the herdleader's decision. After all, if not for Li Feng's help, they might very well have died before reaching the valley.

The golden mammoth handed the wolf leader's core to Li Feng, who accepted it with thanks. There was little alien races could do with disaster-grade cores; it would be better for the golden mammoth to do Li Feng a favor instead. In addition, Li Feng was due at least half of the core given his contribution.

The path to the valley was hemmed in from either end with steep walls. It was wide enough to fit two or three mammoths walking side by side—akin to a three-lane road. The moment they walked down the path, they felt a sense of warmth.

The end of the road was a tall, unruly wall of stone.

Li Feng blinked. "There's no path forward?"

"This way, herdleader!"

One of the mammoth warriors beckoned to the herdleader and her guest from behind a boulder. Only then did Li Feng and the golden mammoth notice the hidden path leading beyond the rock wall.

As they entered the valley, Li Feng's eyes lit up. The interior and exterior of the valley were completely different.

Within the valley were all sorts of rare and precious trees and grasses, a miracle of nature in this frozen land. Li Feng couldn't remember the last time he had seen a fleck of green in this world. If not for the snow gathered at the top of the trees, Li Feng might very well have believed that he had been teleported to another world entirely.

The environment was once more warm and cozy—not as warm as the volcanic region by the mammoths' original home, but far more so than the frozen tundra outside.

Even the golden mammoth was astounded. "We haven't traveled to another world, have we?"

The mammoth elder walked over with a smile. "Herdleader, you've returned safe and sound! How do you feel about our new home?"

"I'm very pleased!" The difficult journey had drained the golden mammoth of her expectations for the new home. She had almost expected the second home to be just a large cave—but this, this was almost paradise.

The entire herd had been thrilled by what they had found.

The elder introduced, "Everything here is very safe, and we have a steady supply of ice and spring water, so water availability isn't a concern. The warriors just told me that you and your honored guest have cleaned up the lifeforms pursuing us. With their carcasses, we won't have to worry about food for a long time, either."

The golden mammoth replied, "I have a question, elder. Why is this valley so warm?"

The elder smiled mysteriously. "Follow me!"

Li Feng and the golden mammoth followed the elder down a certain path. Suddenly, the golden mammoth frowned. "What's this smell?"

Li Feng frowned. He had a guess, but...

The elder brought both of them to a small pond, boiling with frothing water, as Li Feng's eyes widened. This was a hot spring!

Chapter 808: The Trek Back

The mammoth elder explained, "A very long time ago, the former herdleader found this valley and a curious pond of frothing water nestled within. The walls of stone all around block the worst of the inclement weather, and the frothing water continuously gives off heat. The former herdleader was very taken by this location, so he improved it a little with his authority and told me about it."

Li Feng murmured, "No wonder the temperature within this valley is higher than that outside—there's a hot spring right here!"

"A hot spring?" the golden mammoth asked.

"The humans call the frothing water you describe a hot spring."

The elder seemed to suddenly understand something. "So this is a hot spring! I've learned about it before from my human friends, but I've never seen one in practice."

"There are two different mechanisms by which hot springs can be produced. First, lava deep underground, perhaps as a by-product of a volcanic eruption, can be exposed by shifting tectonic plates. Any uncooled lava deep underground will continuously release huge quantities of heat, forming natural hot springs in the vicinity and turning much of that water into steam," Li Feng explained. "Second, water that seeps into the ground as part of the water cycle can subsequently be heated up geothermally to form hot water, which bubbles back up to the surface."

The golden mammoth asked curiously, "How was this hot spring formed?"

Li Feng shrugged. "I don't know, either. We'd need to find a geologist to figure that out. Either possibility might be the case here."

After all, the hot spring was located in a valley, and simultaneously rather close to regions of volcanic activity.

"That said, I don't think it would be easy to find a geologist."

Most hunters who had managed to ascend to the third realm were hunters first and foremost, though perhaps a few had made geology their hobby.

"But I might be able to find some specialists from the world federation to ask for more information, if it's of any interest?"

The elder murmured to himself, "The former herdleader once said that, if there were ever a crisis that forced the herd to depart from its home, this valley would be a perfect shelter. I never expected the day when we were forced to use it would ever come..."

No one had expected the mammoths, at the height of power, to suddenly need to relocate so suddenly.

The golden mammoth wondered, "Isn't this an idyllic valley? It's even safer than our original territory. Why didn't the herdleader send some mammoths here first?"

The elder replied, "The valley might be large, but it's not limitless. The former herdleader was an ambitious mammoth, and he wanted to be able to keep expanding. Furthermore, this valley is too safe, and it would be easy for the mammoths situated here to grow complacent. At that point, no strong warriors would emerge from our tribe. Of course, those aren't the only reasons. The most important is froststeel."

"There aren't any froststeel veins here..." Li Feng began.

The elder nodded. "The former herdleader mentioned that this valley is extremely safe, but that safety also precludes opportunity."

The golden mammoth nodded without fully understanding what the elder meant.

Li Feng glanced at the hot spring and suggested, "Let's make a communal bath. I heard that hot springs have the ability to relieve stress and lethargy. All the mammoths must be tired from making their way here, and I'm very curious what hot springs are like myself."

"How?" the golden mammoth asked.

"The water here seems too hot for direct bathing. We simply have to divert some water from the hot spring and from the regular stream here."

Both Li Feng and the golden mammoth were fit adults, and they immediately began to enact their plan. They rapidly dug channels to divert the flow of water and quickly managed to develop a simple, crude bath.

As the golden mammoth and Li Feng submerged themselves in the warm water, feeling almost as though they were about to dissolve in it themselves, the golden mammoth sighed in relaxation.

Li Feng praised, "No wonder so many people enjoy soaking in hot springs."

The golden mammoth suddenly asked, "I know it's rather thick-skinned of me, but I'd like to ask if you can spare some land for us mammoths. It doesn't have to be too large, as long as it's large enough for us to live in."

Li Feng hmmed curiously. "Aren't you satisfied with this valley of yours?"

"It certainly is idyllic, but I want to make a contingency plan for the future. This frozen world is hazardous, and I need to be able to think of the good of my people."

Li Feng replied, "I'll help you ask around, but I can't make any promises."

"Thank you, my friend. I'll be happy to go to the draconian world with you and formally apologize to the leader of the humans for the former herdleader's transgressions."

Eventually, Li Feng and the golden mammoth were forced to drag themselves out of the hot spring bath. The golden mammoth steeled himself as the elder came back to report on the status of the herd, but she couldn't help letting out a sigh. Almost a thousand mammoths had been lost to the herd during the arduous trek.

Some had fallen behind during the journey and likely perished, while others had left the herd to become independent warriors. Fewer than five thousand mammoths had ended up at the valley—and to think that the mammoths had been ten thousand members strong before the volcanic explosions!

The hot spring was immensely popular with the mammoths, many of whom fell in love with such a novel bathing experience.

When the golden mammoth explained her plans to the elder, the elder immediately agreed to reforge connections with the humans. After all, the elder now understood that there was a huge gap between the mammoths and the humans, and the mammoths still had much to learn from them.

Thus, the golden mammoth and Li Feng set off back to the human world.

On another battlefield, tens of thousands of demons emerged in the draconian world through a spatial wormhole.

The demons were uniformly large, over three meters tall. Their skin was purple, and they gave off a horrendous stench. Large pustules covered their skin, and they each held a huge spiked mace.

Zhou Ying stood atop the city walls. An outburst of green light shielded Zhou Ying. Her hair grew long enough to reach her legs, turning into a green the color of sparkling jade. The vitality radiating from her was visible to the naked eye. She seemed to have become one with the land.

When the demons saw the beautiful goddess atop the walls, their eyes opened wide as they shouted, "A woman!"

"A woman!"

"A woman!"

They turned crazy at the sight of her.

"[Avatar of the Fae: Earthbound Prison]!" Zhou Ying released all her stored energy at once, causing the ground to quake as thousands of jade-green wood dragons rushed out of the earth. Each was at least thirty meters long, and they easily covered the skies with their combined bodies.

The dragons curled around the demons, who swung their maces and chipped away at the dragons' bark. When those slivers of bark landed on the ground at their feet, they transformed into trees that wrapped around the demons and prevented them from moving.

Some of the demons reacted quickly enough to avoid the sudden trap, but others weren't so fortunate. They began to turn to bark. What Zhou Ying didn't expect, however, was that the demons' bodies would contain such severe poison that the bark was dyed purple.

Fortunately, her trees were particularly resistant to poison, and they would be able to hold out for some time. In the absence of any external factors, the demons would poison the wood dragons to death, but the wood dragons would likewise turn the demons' hearts to wood.

However, the demons who had escaped the trap began to save their comrades, who were currently only partially turned to wood. The demons tore off parts of their comrades' bodies, only to have those torn-off parts regrow at a rate visible to the naked eye.

Zhou Ying frowned. "Superb regenerative abilities... it looks as though this will be a drawn-out fight."

Chapter 809: A Primordial Demon

The toxic poison within the demons' pustules significantly bolstered their own regenerative abilities and countered Zhou Ying's.

"If dealing with enemies of this caliber is difficult, it simply means that I'm not using enough of my strength. I just need to be even stronger!" Glowing green light shot out from Zhou Ying's body. Her hair glimmered with green threads. "[Avatar of the Fae: Worldbound Enclosure]!"

Thousands of wood dragons emerged from the ground, covering up the entire battlefield. Zhou Ying's dragons had increased in quality and quantity. The thick dragons were almost thrice as large as before, with black bark that shone with the luster of gold.

The demons continued swinging their maces, but to little effect. The gigantic dragons wrapped around the demons.

This time, the demons' poison was no longer effective. Rather than turn the demons to wood, the dragons crushed the demons directly. Blood splattered everywhere. The demons' blood was still poisonous, and the dragons avoided absorbing or coming into contact with them as much as they could.

Zhou Ying's lifeforce had been strengthened once and again from the disaster-grade lifeforms she had absorbed in the second realm, and her strength was incomparable to what it was before.

She believed that victory was all but guaranteed after summoning her ebony dragons, only to have a ferocious demon suddenly emerge from the demons' ranks. He was over four meters tall, his skin a nauseating purplish-black color, with large pustules all over his skin. He leaped out from among the demons and headed straight for Zhou Ying, still standing atop the city walls. In just two leaps, he had advanced by hundreds of meters.

The ebony dragons it jumped off of were immediately stricken with purplish-black sludge which gave off a noxious smell and emitted a purple vapor as it corroded the ebony dragons' barkskin.

Deliberately or otherwise, this demon had lain hidden among the demon troops, and no one had taken note of him. The demon ranks were unruly; even if they knew about tactics and strategy, they didn't apply them, or only did so haphazardly. In the chaos, it was easy for such a demon to go unnoticed.

Several ebony dragons reached out for the demon, trying to halt his progress. However, despite the demon's size, it was unusually agile, and it deftly avoided the dragons trying to chase it down. It continued leaping toward Zhou Ying.

The demon's lips curled up in a sneer. He was certain that such a petite, frail woman would be piteous in close combat; all she could do was summon some silly plant-based dragons.

The demon raised his spiked mace high into the air as the human and draconian guards stood protectively in front of Zhou Ying.

However, Zhou Ying seemed to be as calm as ever. As though she could understand the derision in the demon's eyes, she murmured, "Just what makes you think I'd be weak at close combat?"

With a wave of her arm, a ray of light pierced the demon's throat, scoring a line through the demon's neck. Purplish-black blood shot out from the demon's neck wound as his head slowly slid off his neck and fell down the wall, his eyes bulging all the while.

The demon's headless body fell with it, smashing into the ground. To his last breath, he couldn't believe how strong the petite human woman had been.

Even the human and draconian guards were shocked by Zhou Ying's strength. Their backs turned cold with sweat. They believed her to be physically weak, that her combat style was much like a summoner's: she would stay back and have her dragons harry enemies from afar.

However, they were completely mistaken.

They had all seen the gigantic demon, which even the hundreds of guards working together might not have been able to take down by themselves. One strike from the demon's mace would easily kill dozens of them—and yet Zhou Ying had taken the demon down with a simple wave of her hand.

Naturally, after the gigantic demon fell, the other demons didn't do much better.

They quickly realized that they were no match for Zhou Ying and ran off as soon as half their number was decimated. Before they could escape, however, the ebony dragons opened their maws wide and expelled a storm of leaves.

The leaves had such sharp edges that they might as well have been serrated daggers. The leafstorm struck the demons and slowed them down tremendously. It couldn't do much damage to the resilient demons, but preventing them from escaping was good enough.

Zhou Ying knew that it would be impossible to restrain all the demons with just her thousands of ebony dragons. Instead, as she knelt down and placed her palms on the ground, ring after ring of green light spread out from her. The guards on the wall felt a curiously refreshing sensation, as though they had just been immersed in a hot spring.

Their cells feasted on the vitality as the guards gaped at their bodies.

Zhou Ying shouted, "I've boosted everyone's strength! Go kill all the demons. Don't leave even a single one behind. Don't worry—as long as I'm around, no one will be injured!"

The human and draconian guards charged forward in a frenzy, leaping down from the walls and rushing toward the demons.

Beneath the wall, a series of great vines rapidly grew out of the earth and formed a throne. Zhou Ying stepped delicately onto the throne and followed behind the guards. As she moved, ebony dragons grew out of the earth right in front of the demon wormhole, preventing them from escaping.

Meanwhile, the guards, along with huge numbers of ebony dragons, slaughtered the demons that were trying to escape. The demons struck at the guards, but the guards were healed almost immediately by the light that Zhou Ying gave off.

The outcome of the battle was obvious. Bolstered by Zhou Ying's vitality, the guards were easily able to deal with all the demons on the battlefield.

Zhou Ying reined in her energy and began to replenish her supply of vitality.

One of the draconian guards walked over to her. "The draconian sage had me come over with information about the demons' homeworld. The sage mentioned that, if the members of Team Zenith were to kill the invading aliens, they would keep on going and pursue the invaders into their homeworlds. These worlds can be quite dangerous, and there are still a lot of unknowns within them. As such, the sage had me bring over a report containing whatever information we draconians know."

Zhou Ying asked, "Does the sage know that our captain has made this task into a trial?"

The draconian guard nodded. "Yes, but given the danger of the situation, he believes the champion of mankind won't mind."

Zhou Ying nodded thoughtfully. "Indeed, this information will help."

She certainly didn't plan to look a gift horse in the mouth.

The draconian began, "The demon homeworld is composed of a huge swampy forest, filled with poisonous herbs and grasses. Even the air is fetid and poisonous. The demons are a crazed race; all they care about is slaughter and women. They kill the men they defeat and rape the women."

As Zhou Ying thought back to the demons' horrifying appearance, their bodies covered with pustules, she shuddered.

The draconian guard spread his arms. "Apparently, they even quite like corpses. Not only can they rape them with abandon, they can even consume the corpses once they're done with them..."

Zhou Ying's eyes sparked with horror. "These bastards—I won't let them reproduce and spread their evil any longer! It's well past time someone took care of them!"

Chapter 810: Reforestation

The draconian guard smiled. "If you can truly extinguish the demonic threat, we would be very grateful. The demons have been particularly active in recent years. Led by their king of the realm, they invade our world through the wormhole annually, and we suffer significant losses in troops whenever that occurs."

Zhou Ying sighed. "The draconians truly are in a precarious state..."

It felt as though the draconians were surrounded by enemies.

The draconian guard shrugged. "All three thousand worlds are like this, to some extent. All linked worlds experience conflict from time to time. Anyway, back to the demons. The demons are omnivorous and eat basically anything in sight, poisonous or not. They enjoy raw meat and will settle for corpse flesh—we're basically no different from genetic lifeforms to them. "

Because the demons lived in such an inhospitable world, their digestive system, poison resistance, and regenerative ability had all been developed to frightening levels.

The draconian guard continued, "The demon king is the most frightening existence of all—a primordial great demon, the progenitor of all demonkind, and the largest tumor of all our neighboring worlds!"

Zhou Ying asked seriously, "What's so special about this great demon?"

He was surely her target, and she needed to learn as much about him as she could.

The draconian guard continued, "His very existence is an anomaly. From his titles alone, you can identify what makes him stand out: the primordial great demon, the tyrant of poison, the king of toxins!"

"He's particularly poisonous?"

"Calling the great demon 'poisonous' is like calling a sperm whale 'big'. I have to say, you were truly unlucky to be chosen to fight the great demon. In my opinion, even the most sinister neighboring world, that of the black spirits, pales in comparison to the demon world—and all because of the great demon. Do you know how the demon race was spawned?"

"How?"

"All the demons used to be other lifeforms, but when they came into contact with the demon king's skin, they slowly transformed into demons themselves!"

Zhou Ying frowned. "You mean that these demons are just poisoned lifeforms?"

The draconian nodded. "All who come into contact with the demon king's skin will slowly transform into demons."

"Thank you for the information. I'll keep it in mind when facing off against this demon king. Now that I've finished resting, it's time for me to bid you all farewell."

Even the unwelcome revelation wasn't enough to shock Zhou Ying. She got up and made her way toward the wormhole to the demon world.

With every step she took, she began to transform. Green motes of light trailed from her feet and covered her body. Her hair turned green, a shade the color of sparkling jade. She looked so beautiful the guards were immediately enraptured.

"Please, be careful!" the draconian guard murmured, as she stepped through the wormhole.

When Zhou Ying arrived in the demon world, the first thing she noticed was the grayish-purple smog in the air. The exit of the wormhole was a gnarly, twisted forest. The trees had drooping branches and oily black bark.

Thick miasma blocked any sunlight from reaching the ground, but even so, the trees seemed to be able to grow without any issue.

The universe was filled with all sorts of plants and trees, and Zhou Ying had grown used to seeing oddities along her travels. The forest floor was covered not with grass, but dark green and black lichen.

By the roots of the unusual trees that made up this forest were small flowers and grasses, but one look at them was all it took for Zhou Ying to realize that they were poisonous, highly so.

In addition to the greenery, there were curious bugs flying all over. Some had landed on the trees' bark, while others were zipping through the forest. According to the draconians' information, all the living creatures in the demon world were poisonous.

There was a swamp in the distance that gave off a persistent stench, and there were even a few unmelted bones floating above the brackish water.

Zhou Ying very much disliked this environment, as well as the thought of fighting on her enemies' turf. She certainly wasn't about to deal with a purported primordial demon under such conditions.

"It looks as though I'll have to reforest the land, then." With a snap of her fingers, a pulsing green ring of energy emanated from Zhou Ying.

Green motes of light spread throughout the forest. Thick, lush vines sprouted from the ground, growing toward the light. Branches and leaves appeared on the vines.

Some of the vines wrapped around the dark purplish-black wood and began emitting Zhou Ying's unique brand of vitality. The vines melded with the bark and turned the trees' leaves from a dark purple to a deep green.

All over the swamp, more and more vines emerged from the ground and turned into trees.

Zhou Ying planned to make the entire environment her own.

With Zhou Ying at its center, lush greenery continued to grow and proliferate throughout the demon world, which gradually turned more and more green as time passed. In less than half an hour, the land within a hundred kilometers of her had all been reforested. That greenery was completely at odds with the rest of the forest, which boasted a purplish-black palette.

However, the original inhabitants of the world didn't have any intention of letting Zhou Ying do as she pleased. Within the forest, thousands of black figures darted through the trees, heading toward the center of the verdant bloom: Zhou Ying.

The moment Zhou Ying appeared in the swamp, the primordial demon had detected her. It expected that Zhou Ying would immediately set off in search of him and die a fruitless death, only to be simultaneously threatened and disgusted by Zhou Ying's actions. The primordial demon immediately summoned reinforcements in the form of demons, who were shocked to find that the land itself seemed to have turned against them.

The leaves rustled. The trees, which shook as though they had come to life, began to work against the demons. The leaves shone with green light and shot toward the demons, each leaf as sharp as a blade.

The demons were quickly swallowed up by the forest, cut down by the leaves that came at them like a storm. Even if the demons were to break a tree down by the trunk, a new one would quickly regrow.

The demons, realizing that they wouldn't be able to keep forging forward through the forest, turned and tried to leave, only to hear a horrendous, frightening roar that was so loud they could feel the sound waves surging toward them like a storm. A huge figure appeared on the horizon.

Upon hearing that roar, the demons all jumped in shock. Subsequently, they turned back around and charged into the forest, as though their fear of death had been eclipsed by the source of that roar. They charged forward heedless of caution, paving the way to the heart of the forest with the bodies of their kin.

Within a few minutes, thousands of demons had died, many from running over each other, but none of them had any intention to give up. Finally, as blood dripped down their bodies, they stumbled past a final copse of trees and into the heart of the forest.

Zhou Ying was standing upright, vitality so thick it was palpable flowing out from her. The trees in the immediate vicinity were lush and strong. Even when they were destroyed by the demons, they regrew within seconds.

Against the thousand or so demons remaining, who had survived the wild scramble into the clearing at the heart of the forest, Zhou Ying said, "Demons, I praise your courage for entering this glade—but you won't be able to change a single thing."

The demons had entered some form of craze. They ignored their fallen comrades and ran on, deeper and deeper within the verdant forest, searching for the woman at its heart—and the moment they found Zhou Ying, they pounced...

...only to find their claws swiping at thin air.

Zhou Ying's body suddenly burst apart into a whirlwind of leaves, which melded into the forest.

The demons were all stupefied.