

U. Warlord 821

Chapter 821: Transformation and Resurrection

"Who are these death spirits?" the four hunters of Team Zenith asked.

Li Qianlin replied, "Among the three thousand worlds that make up the third realm, there are ten superior ones. The most mysterious and frightening among the ten is governed by the death spirits."

Yang Ze seemed very surprised. "Even bigger than large worlds like the one you're from?"

Li Qianlin nodded, her face uneasy. "The ten superior worlds have existed for tens of thousands of years, and they're basically permanent fixtures in the realm. No other world can come close to eclipsing their strength.

In the history of the realm, all sorts of worlds, large and small alike, rise and fall in time. Only the ten superior worlds have survived the relentless passage of time."

Zhang Lie explained, "The black spirits Fang Yi had to deal with are subordinate to the death spirits."

Li Qianlin asked, "Just how did all of you end up provoking the death spirits, anyway?"

"Are they troublesome foes?" Sun Mengmeng questioned.

Li Qianlin clutched her head. "It's not a matter of trouble—the death spirits simply aren't an enemy you want to make!"

Dong Mingxing sighed. "Zhang Lie, I know you're very strong, but there are some enemies that even you can't afford to make."

Although she had witnessed Zhang Lie killing the king of the west for himself, the death spirits were the most frightening among the ten races in charge of the superior worlds. Having such a race as an enemy was akin to shooting yourself in the foot.

When she saw only confused faces around her, Li Qianlin continued explaining, "The death spirits are the most mysterious among the ten races. All the worlds that have ever gone against the death spirits have been extinguished, and not even a single living lifeform has made it out alive."

Dong Mingxing continued, "All the worlds around the death spirits' world, be they large or small or medium-sized, have been annihilated by the death spirits—to the last."

The death spirits brokered no treaties and forged no alliances. All they had were enemies.

Li Qianlin took over. "Not only will the death spirits kill all the life on the worlds they take over, they even consume the will of the world—permanently crippling the world from sustaining life, and turning it into a pitch-black desert."

Fang Yi added, "The black spirits' world was such a desert. I didn't see any plants during my incursion there, nor any other native life."

Yang Ze's focus was different. "Even the will of the world can be consumed?"

Li Qianlin shook her head. "I'm not clear on the specifics, but allegedly, the will of the world can't be sensed in any of the worlds that the death spirits have conquered.

"This is the proof of kingship from the black spirits' world." Fang Yi revealed the cracked mask that he had retrieved at significant cost.

Yang Ze exclaimed, "It's cracked!"

Sun Xiaowu asked, "Just how intense was the battle for you to be able to crack the proof of kingship?"

Zhang Lie pointed at the axe that Sun Xiaowu had brought back. "Isn't your proof of kingship chipped as well?"

Sun Xiaowu smiled in embarrassment. "Ah, I suppose that's true... but surely not as badly as Fang Yi's."

The mask that Fang Yi had brought back had clear cracks running through it; it looked as though it would break in half if just a little force were applied.

Li Qianlin and Dong Mingxing looked over all the hunters of Team Zenith again. They thought that Zhang Lie was the only notable hunter among the humans, but even his subordinates were no joke. They had never heard of anyone being able to crack or chip a proof of kingship before.

After all, the proof of kingship was supposed to represent the world itself; it could hardly be damaged or destroyed.

Zhang Lie replied calmly, "Though there is a connection between the black spirits and the death spirits, they aren't one and the same. From the glow coming from the proof of kingship, it's clear that the will of the world isn't completely extinguished—just very weakened.

"Well, I suppose it makes sense. The black spirits are akin to a band of scouts for the death spirits, and they're the precursor to the death spirits' invasion. If they drain the will of the world completely, they wouldn't be able to maintain a wormhole into that world."

"The black spirits are a precursor to invasion?" The members of Team Zenith were shocked—as well as Li Qianlin and Dong Mingxing, who had yet to make that connection.

Zhang Lie explained, "The death spirits annihilate every world close to them, and not a single world has escaped that fate. Because of the death spirits' overexpansion, the other nine superior worlds banded together against them. As an attempt to fly under the radar, as it were, the death spirits began to employ the help of the black spirits."

Li Qianlin seemed to understand. "To avoid the other nine worlds' detection while continuing their plan of conquest by means of the black spirits... I see."

Fang Yi frowned. "But the void spirits that populate the world are only as strong as mutated-grade lifeforms, and the black spirits themselves don't seem particularly strong. The only troublesome foe I encountered in the black spirits' world was the king of the black spirits. If the black spirits are just a disguise for the death spirits, rulers of a superior-grade world, shouldn't they be stronger?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "It's very likely that the only true death spirit you encountered was that king of the realm—the other black spirits might well be derivative existences, like clones, in a sense. The death spirits themselves are an unusual form of life, and they defy common logic."

Li Qianlin hummed. "I've never heard of these black spirits or void spirits under the death spirits' control. All I've heard about are the death spirits' soldiers."

"What's that?" the four hunters of Team Zenith asked simultaneously.

"Something like cannon fodder for the death spirits," Li Qianlin responded.

Zhang Lie clarified, "We'll have to discuss the relationship between the void spirits and black spirits in more detail, then. First, the black pyramid that Fang Yi saw isn't a building, but rather an artifact that the death spirits possess: a battleship of sorts. It has some defensive capabilities, but its main purpose is to serve as an altar."

Sun Mengmeng didn't understand. "A sacrificial altar for religious rituals?"

"No—for creating derivative spirits." Zhang Lie continued, "The black and void spirits are produced from that altar. As for what they're made of—have all of you considered what happened to the original inhabitants of these worlds?"

Li Qianlin and the others gasped. "You mean—"

Zhang Lie nodded. "The void spirits are made out of the corpses and souls of the dead, and the black spirits the elite counterparts made from mutated- and higher-grade souls. Of course, there's some opportunity for void spirits to evolve into black spirits during this process as well."

Fang Yi frowned. "You mean that the spirits I had to kill were the original inhabitants of the world?"

They didn't seem to have any feelings or conscious will, and Fang Yi would have hesitated to call them life. They were artificial creatures who shouldn't have existed in the universe.

"Not just those inhabitants, but also the souls and bodies of any warriors from other races who perished in battle against the death spirits. If I'm not mistaken, there's about a thirty percent chance regular-grade lifeforms can morph into black spirits, and about a fifty percent chance for mutated-grade lifeforms."

Yang Ze asked, "What happens to the failures?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "They turn into void spirits who patrol the endless deserts, attacking any living lifeforms they encounter."

Chapter 822: The Quaking Golden Mammoth

Fang Yi sucked in a deep breath. "The black and void spirits are both artificially created monsters, then..."

Sun Mengmeng shook her head. "How cruel. Not only do the death spirits destroy the worlds they invade, they even turn their original inhabitants into these monstrosities."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "There are plenty of cruel races among the three thousand worlds. Genocide is part of that harsh reality."

Fang Yi focused on something different. "In that case, just what are the death spirits?"

If the void and dark spirits were both monsters that came from living lifeforms' souls and bodies, what was the true nature of the death spirits?"

Zhang Lie hummed. "As far as I know, all the death spirits are like clones of the death spirit king but with individual, independent minds.

As for the origin of the death spirit king, there are a few hypotheses I know of. Some suggest that the death spirit king was a biological experiment gone awry, or a collective consciousness formed from large quantities of souls of the malignant dead. However, as far as I know, all these are legends or unfounded rumors."

Li Qianlin asked curiously, "As an alien from the Milky Way, how do you know so much about these death spirits? You even know more than Dong Mingxing and I, and we're native to this realm!"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I traveled widely in the past."

Sun Mengmeng asked worriedly, "Since we killed the black spirits, will the death spirits seek us out for revenge?"

Zhang Lie replied, "They'll come for us eventually, but it's no easy feat for them. The other nine races from the superior worlds are keeping a close eye on them because of their rapid expansion.

"Those races have divided into three major factions. One faction acts allegedly to preserve the peace among the three thousand worlds, but really to maintain the rule of the ten superior worlds.

"Four superior worlds are represented in this faction. Of the remaining five, three are in a long, drawn-out war against the death spirits, and the remaining two don't want to be dragged into this mess."

Fang Yi remarked, "For the death spirits to be able to survive the combined assault of three superior worlds for all this time—they really have to be quite skilled."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "After all, they can repurpose their dead and turn them into void spirits, and any warriors they capture can be treated similarly. In other words, they grow stronger the longer the war drags on, whereas it's the opposite for the three races fighting against them."

The hunters of Team Zenith still seemed rather worried to have provoked such a powerful existence, but Zhang Lie didn't pay it much mind.

"We'll have to deal with them sooner or later, so it isn't a problem. Furthermore, the other superior races do have methods that would be effective against the death spirits—they're just too costly to be worth using. None of the superior races can justify using those methods, so they've simply been curbing the death spirits' development rather than striking them down directly."

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Why are the death spirits so bent on expansion, anyway? Do they simply want to amass more black and void spirits?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "That's simply a secondary advantage. Their primary goal is to absorb as many wills of the world as they can, in order to strengthen the death spirit king. It's attempting to absorb the wills of the world in order to augment its own strength and, eventually, devour all three thousand worlds of the realm."

"The death spirits are that ambitious?" Li Qianlin's face grew pale—she was a native inhabitant of these lands, and the person present who would be most affected by the death spirits' goals.

"Too ambitious, perhaps," Dong Mingxing commented with a wry smile. From her perspective, the three thousand worlds were so immense that the death spirit king's ambition was just a ludicrous dream.

Zhang Lie replied seriously, "That's only the start of the death spirit king's objectives. Its next step is to absorb the collective will of the third realm, and then that of the fourth and fifth realms—and finally to escape from this dimension altogether and devour the Milky Way, the universe at large!"

"Aren't you being a little dramatic?" Dong Mingxing laughed to counter her swelling anxiety. Devouring the three thousand worlds was enough of a nightmare—and that was only the beginning?! She shook her head. "No, it's impossible."

The death spirit king's ambitions were so lofty that no ordinary person could take them seriously. Someone who expressed the intention to rob a bank had to be dealt with, but someone who claimed that they would storm the World Trade Organization's headquarters was just a fool.

However, what Zhang Lie spoke of had really happened—in his past life. The death spirits' ambitious plan had almost succeeded in its entirety, all thanks to the mouthpiece known as the black spirits.

As the black spirits slowly expanded and transferred the power of their captured worlds to the death spirit king, the king grew stronger and stronger, until it finally unleashed its true might.

The nine other superior worlds, in conjunction with the whole of the realm, barely managed to stop the death spirit king, but the third realm paid a heavy price for quelling that threat. Only a thousand of the three thousand worlds remained; the other two thousand had been absorbed and stripped clean of lifeforce by the death spirits.

When the black spirits attacked their neighboring worlds, the humans and draconians were dragged into this conflict.

Zhang Lie had been one of the hunters participating in the war against the death spirits, and he would never be able to forget the massive army of black spirits that he encountered on the battlefield.

Zhang Lie didn't intend to let such a tragedy happen again.

With the superior worlds holding the death spirits back, the death spirits wouldn't dare to take action against them yet—at least, not with a frontal attack.

Sun Mengmeng frowned. "Neither Li Feng nor Zhou Ying have returned yet. Could something have gone wrong?"

Fang Yi asked, "Captain, Li Feng and Zhou Ying aren't as unlucky as I am, are they?"

Zhang Lie smiled. "Don't worry—the kings they have to deal with are relatively tame. The king that Li Feng has to face isn't particularly strong, and I expect he'll return shortly. The king that Zhou Ying's dealing with... well, that demon's a little disgusting, but it won't be a problem."

Yang Ze patted Sun Mengmeng's shoulder. "We all know how strong Zhou Ying is. She'd be able to survive an attack that would kill the rest of us. Ignoring combat strength for the moment, Zhou Ying's vitality and regenerative abilities exceed all of ours combined. Unless the aliens have someone like Zhang Lie who can suppress her with brute force, no one will be able to harm Zhou Ying at all."

Sun Xiaowu added, "Li Feng's also made a lot of progress on his end, and his cultivation is proceeding along a different path from all of ours. A king of a medium-sized world won't be a challenge for him."

After a few days, Li Feng returned alongside a golden mammoth.

Zhang Lie laughed. "Li Feng, you're finally back! But you didn't have to go to the trouble of bringing back a specialty from your world for us—it's not like we're lacking food."

Upon seeing Zhang Lie, the golden mammoth immediately reared back, sensitive to the disparity between her power and his own. She immediately shrunk back behind Li Feng and asked, "Li Feng, are all your companions so frightening?"

Li Feng shook his head. "Captain, this isn't food or prey. She's a friend from an alien race, and I brought her back because she wanted to speak with you."

Chapter 823: A Cruel Conclusion

Sun Mengmeng sidled up to Li Feng. "If I remember correctly, your target was the mammoths, wasn't it? How did you end up bringing one back with you? Tell us all about what happened!"

As Yang Ze ate a skewer of meat, his eyes suddenly widened as he thought of a possibility. "This has to be the princess of the mammoths!"

"I was reading a novel recently—the male protagonist, venturing into enemy territory, had a chance encounter with the enemy's princess. The princess had an ideological conflict with the rest of her race, and she voluntarily helped the male protagonist. Not only did she help him retrieve the riches from the royal treasury, she even eloped with him. It has to be something like this, I'm sure of it!"

Li Qianlin sighed. "Eloping with a foreign princess—how romantic!"

Dong Mingxing glanced at her good friend, then up at the ceiling as she sighed. Li Qianlin essentially was that foreign princess...

Sun Mengmeng smirked. "Li Feng, I did underestimate you. Who would have known you were such a romantic? How did you meet this princess?"

Yang Ze cried out, "It must have been a struggle for you to make it out with the enemy princess!"

Li Feng's face turned dark.

The golden mammoth called out, "W-We're brothers!"

Yang Ze clapped. "Oh? He's a prince, then? Li Feng, you really are quite something!"

Sun Xiaowu took a few steps back and announced in mock horror, "Li Feng, I didn't know you had such divergent tastes! We'd better pretend not to know each other in front of outsiders just in case they develop any misunderstandings..."

Zhang Lie was likewise smiling. "Not bad, Li Feng—you're even targeting princes now?"

Li Feng scowled. "Yang Ze, stop making things weird! My companion is female, and there's no such relationship between us. This is the current herdleader of the mammoths. A lot has happened between us, and the reason I brought her here today is because she has something to say to Zhang Lie."

Yang Ze's eyes brightened. He asked in a gossipy tone, "A lot happened between the two of you? Is it something you'd feel embarrassed discussing in public?"

Li Feng turned so that his back was to Yang Ze. "Actually, what happened was as follows..."

Li Feng explained what had happened in the mammoths' frozen world. "Although the mammoths made it to sanctuary safely, the golden mammoth would like to request a plot of land to make a new home."

Everyone turned to Zhang Lie, who had final say over all such decisions.

Zhang Lie nodded. "I understand the situation now. What can the mammoths provide to us?"

The golden mammoth replied, "There are only about five thousand of us left, and we won't need a big plot of land."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "As Li Feng mentioned, the reason you want this land is to develop as a species. Won't your numbers grow as a result?"

Li Qianlin nodded. "That's right. If the five thousand of you were to reside in harmony for, say, a hundred years, your population should easily double. Within five hundred years, there might well be a hundred thousand mammoths. By then, you wouldn't be a small tribe any longer, and you might start conflict with the humans and draconians again."

Zhang Lie continued with his main point. "The mammoths have betrayed their allies once before. How can I trust your kind?"

Sun Mengmeng nodded. "We know Li Feng very well, but we of Team Zenith need to be responsible for the fate of mankind and the draconians. How will you ensure that your kind will not betray us again?"

The golden mammoth replied sincerely, "We mammoths have suffered greatly for that betrayal, and we wouldn't dare do so again. As long as I remain the herdleader of the mammoths, we shall be the most loyal of allies to mankind."

Li Feng tried to defend his companion. "The golden mammoth can be trusted."

"Li Feng, you must be tired. Quick, I'll have a bath drawn for you. It's been a long time since I last saw you, so let's have a good chat."

Yang Ze dragged Li Feng out before he could say anything more.

"But they're all ganging up against the golden mammoth!" Li Feng cried out.

Yang Ze rolled his eyes. "Have you gone dumb from fighting too much? Don't make things hard for our captain! You're a member of Team Zenith, and it'll be very hard for Zhang Lie to speak for the good of mankind when you're here defending your companion."

"But I'm responsible for the golden mammoth—I was the one who brought her back!" Even so, Li Feng obediently followed behind Yang Ze.

"Don't worry. Don't you know what kind of person Zhang Lie is?"

Yang Ze rolled his eyes. "If Zhang Lie weren't open to negotiations, he would have ignored the mammoth. Why do you think they're having an extended conversation now?"

"To scam the mammoths?" Li Feng answered without having to think about it.

Yang Ze patted Li Feng on the chest, causing him to smile embarrassedly. Indeed, Li Feng should have excused himself earlier—he couldn't both side with his team and with his companion.

Li Feng called back, "Keep on talking! I'm going to take a bath first!"

Zhang Lie was unimpressed by the mammoth's promise. "You claim that you'll remain a loyal ally to mankind as long as you remain the mammoth herdsleader. What if you die or are otherwise removed from your position?"

Sun Mengmeng glared. "You aren't trying to take advantage of Li Feng to plead your case to us, are you?"

Zhang Lie sighed. "I'm only having this conversation with you now because of Li Feng. If he hadn't brought you back, I'd have told you to leave immediately—you're promising nothing but still asking for land in return. Aren't you being a little thick-skinned?"

Sun Xiaowu snorted. "If the mammoths were still allies to the humans and draconians, it might not be an unreasonable request, but the mammoths have betrayed the humans and draconians. Why should we now cede you some land?"

Zhang Lie's gaze was cold and sharp as he proclaimed, "One betrayal paves the way for more. Be grateful that I haven't dealt with you mammoths any more strongly instead."

Fang Yi took a deep breath. "You mammoths betrayed us humans when we were in need. Why should we help you out now that the tides have turned? Do you take us for fools? Are we humans and draconians somehow responsible for your wellbeing?"

The golden mammoth blushed.

Zhang Lie continued, "To be frank, a plot of land isn't much to us, and I'm not opposed to giving it to the mammoths, but you need to give me a reason, a reason that can convince me and bring profit to us humans."

The golden mammoth raised her head. "What do you want?"

"Good. I like someone who's willing to negotiate. If necessary, the mammoths will fight alongside us humans, and the humans shall have mining rights for the froststeel ore located in your world."

The golden mammoth's eyes widened. "That—you want us to fight for you, and you want to steal our valuable resource away from us?"

Zhang Lie countered, "You have to understand something: the froststeel veins don't belong to you, but to the world you inhabit. That world no longer belongs to you, but to me!"

The golden mammoth hesitated. "But—"

Zhang Lie interrupted her and held out a second finger. "In addition, we humans defeated you mammoths in battle. I have the right to demand compensation from you, and if you want to establish a working relationship with us again, you need to pay a price. Third, the moment you betrayed us, you lost all hope at forging an alliance on equal terms. You'll be subordinate to us, nothing more."

The golden mammoth knew that forging an alliance wouldn't be easy, but for the reality to be so cruel...

Chapter 824: In Search for the Proof

Indeed, the mammoths had lost in battle, and they had hardly any bargaining chips to their name.

The golden mammoth sighed. "As the herdleader, I can provisionally agree to your terms, but the ramifications of this agreement are extensive. I'll have to discuss this more with the entire herd before I can accept them in full."

Zhang Lie nodded. "That's acceptable. You must be tired—Sun Xiaowu, will you arrange some accommodations for our guest?"

Sun Xiaowu led the golden mammoth off. Sun Mengmeng stayed behind and asked, "Giving the mammoths a plot of land—"

Zhang Lie nodded. "It's not a problem. Once the eight worlds are merged into one, the draconians' medium-size world will become a large one, and there'll be plenty of space for the mammoths. One plot of land isn't much—the bear-men have a forest by their territory that we can have the mammoths move into."

The mammoths' phalanx formation boasted incredible defense. In Zhang Lie's past life, that defense had yielded astonishing results against the death spirits. Trading a largely worthless plot of land for the cooperation of the mammoths only had upsides, no downsides.

By the time Li Feng finished his bath, the golden mammoth and Zhang Lie had finished their negotiations.

"I apologize for troubling you, Captain."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "None of that. If you hadn't brought a representative with you, I would likely have sent one there myself. After all, the mammoths are strong and sturdy, and their prized froststeel ore is a very valuable commodity. For the moment, their thick hides and hearty constitution make them the best possible race for mining it."

Once the worlds merged, however, their frozen lands would become less cold, and other species would be able to mine the ore as well.

"Right, I also have this." Li Feng brought out the furnace in his extra-dimensional storage—the mammoths' proof of kingship. Everyone seemed surprised.

"This has to be the most unique proof of kingship I've seen..." Yang Ze murmured.

Zhang Lie asked, "How did you feel about this trial?"

Li Feng contemplated the question. "It was interesting. The king of the realm was surprisingly strong, and I did manage to improve my own abilities in battle."

"Good, very good."

Fang Yi clutched his face. "In the end, I was the only unlucky one..."

Yang Ze patted him on the shoulder. "Don't give up yet, Fang Yi. Zhou Ying still isn't back yet!"

Just as Zhou Ying's name was brought back, she finally returned.

Sun Mengmeng strode up to her and welcomed her. "You're back!"

Zhou Ying nodded. "I'm back. I killed the king of the realm, but I haven't been able to find the proof of kingship."

Yang Ze exclaimed, "So that's what took you so long! But our captain mentioned that killing the king of the realm was the primary objective, and it wasn't necessary to bring back the proof of kingship, didn't he?"

Zhou Ying smiled wryly. "I wanted to accomplish the trial as perfectly as possible—it's not every day we get a mission from our captain, after all. How did you all do?"

Yang Ze shrugged. "We killed the kings and brought back the proofs of kingship."

Zhou Ying glanced at everyone in the room. "All of you?"

The members of Team Zenith nodded.

Zhou Ying immediately got up. "In that case, I had better go have another look. I'm sure I can find the proof of kingship!"

Sun Mengmeng hurriedly held her back with a chuckle. "There's no need, no need! We simply got lucky, that's all."

Zhang Lie nodded. "There's no need to head back now. I'll assign some people to search for that proof of kingship later."

"Very well." Zhou Ying sighed and sat down.

"What did you think of the trial?"

Zhou Ying scrunched up her face. "It was disgusting, vile and disgusting from every perspective! That primordial demon was harder to kill than a cockroach and far more disgusting besides."

This was an unusual remark, especially for someone as composed as Zhou Ying tended to be. The members of Team Zenith looked on with interest. "Just what sort of king of the realm did you encounter?"

Zhou Ying described her experience, causing all the members of Team Zenith to gasp and frown.

Li Feng commented, "A viral king of the realm sounds absolutely horrible."

Sun Xiaowu nodded. "Even after its death, it'll spread to other hosts and continue living on—truly disgusting."

Yang Ze added, "And it can even self-destruct!"

Sun Mengmeng folded her arms. "Captain, how could you let someone like Zhou Ying deal with something so vile?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "You chose the enemies you were going to face by lottery. I'm hardly responsible!"

With all the members of Team Zenith gathered, everyone began to chat and joke with each other.

Fang Yi led the conversation. "Zhou Ying, did you know that Li Feng came back with the enemy prince?"

Zhou Ying's eyes widened. "Oh, has Li Feng finally found a male companion? I thought that might be likely!"

Li Feng gaped. "Hold it, hold it! I brought back the new herdleader of the mammoths. She's not a prince, and I'm not interested in the same sex!"

Zhou Ying twisted her head. "Isn't it just a matter of time?"

Sun Xiaowu changed the topic. "Zhou Ying, Li Feng, do you know what happened to Fang Yi during his trial?"

The members of Team Zenith had all successfully finished their trials, and the two teams of warlords who had been dispatched to take down the other two kings of the realm had likewise returned.

The warlords were all elites among the races of the Milky way, and while it would still be difficult for one or two of them to deal with the king of the realm of a medium-sized world, dozens of them working together would easily be able to succeed. Not only that, they even retrieved the proofs of kingship as well.

Zhang Lie brought a number of warlords with him toward the giant demons' world, only to be stupefied when he found a verdant forest waiting for him at the other end of the wormhole.

He was very surprised by what had happened, but before he could ask, Zhou Ying hastily explained, "I reforested the entire world during my quest to subjugate the primordial demon."

"Even so, were you still unable to find the proof of kingship?"

Although he didn't know how precisely Zhou Ying could view the world through her greenery, she had transformed the entire world into a forest, and even searched through the world for quite some time. He couldn't imagine that she would be unable to find the proof of kingship after such a thorough search.

Could the king have transported it out of the world? Surely there was no king of the realm so foolish...

"Did you ever see the primordial demon use the authority of the king?"

Zhou Ying nodded. "I saw the primordial demon try to teleport away before I killed it."

"If it were able to make use of the world's authority, then the proof of kingship has to be in the world..."

The proof of kingship could be removed from the world, but that would strip the kings of the realm of their powers. In other words, the fact that this king could still use those powers meant that the proof of kingship hadn't been removed.

Zhang Lie asked, "Where have you looked?"

Zhou Ying replied, "Everywhere I could think of. The surface of the world, certainly, and even the poisonous sea that the king created and hid in..."

"If there are any places you've missed, that's where the proof of kingship is most likely to be hidden." Suddenly, Zhang Lie had a flash of inspiration. "Did you search in the world's core?"

Chapter 825: Back to the Milky Way

"No," Zhou Ying replied. "My vines can't reach the world's core."

"In other words, it's very likely that the proof of kingship is hidden there," Zhang Lie surmised. "Everyone, we'll dig deep toward the world's core until we find that proof of kingship!"

"Yes, Zhang Lie!" the warlords shouted, beginning to dig straight away.

Meanwhile, Zhang Lie walked toward the poisonous sea and rubbed his jaw. He believed that the most likely place the proof of kingship could be was deep below the sea.

As he clenched his fists, blue genetic energy gathered and rippled around his arms. He flicked his wrists, causing a frightening aura to descend on the world. The skies began to darken, and a fish the size of a whale materialized in the air.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!" Ripples of energy spread out from Zhang Lie, warping the space around him and roared through the skies like galloping steeds, like a rampaging sea.

A huge wave soared into the air. As Zhang Lie punched forward, the fish slammed its huge tail on the ground and sent a torrent of water surging into the poisonous sea.

The poison splashed all over. Spatial fluctuations caused the poison to break down in the air, and it fell to the ground like heavy rain.

None of those currently present on the world were weak, and they all activated their own defenses before the poison reached them. Zhou Ying stood still, thick vines erupting from underneath her legs and wrapping around her body tightly.

After the rain of poison stopped, the forest around them had melted. All the leaves had dissolved and fallen to the ground, leaving only pitch-black bark behind, along with muddy ground that was starting to give off a fetid stench.

Everyone present had been able to deal with the poison in their own way. Zhou Ying walked forward, only to see that the sea of poison had become a huge pit, the mud within having been excavated by Zhang Lie's punch.

A green barrier of energy enclosed her as she transformed. Her hair turned the color of jade, floating in the windless air. She was so beautiful no one could take their eyes away, and she seemed to have become one with nature. Motes of vitality sprung into existence around her like fireflies.

"[Avatar of the Fae: Worldbound Enclosure]!" Natural energy poured out of her, causing a mass of green dots to emerge from the ground, like sprouting seeds. The ground quaked. Moments later, burgeoning roots emerged from the soil and transformed into huge dragons of wood, which dove deep into the pit.

Zhang Lie asked, "Do you think you'll be able to find the proof of kingship?"

Zhou Ying shook her head. "I can't be certain."

No one present knew precisely where the king of the realm had hidden the proof of kingship, nor how deep it was.

Zhou Ying frowned. "The primordial demon truly is disgusting. Not only was he difficult to kill, he's even leaving us with this mess after his death."

Zhang Lie nodded.

Other worlds still had inhabitants who could be interrogated for information after the king of the realm was killed, but the primordial demon king was the last remaining inhabitant of its world—all the other inhabitants had to be killed before it could die, and there were no clues to go off of.

Trying to find the proof of kingship under such conditions was akin to searching for a needle in a haystack. The only solution was brute force, with as much manpower as they could bring to bear.

Zhang Lie finally understood why Zhou Ying had had so much difficulty trying to find the proof of kingship. The hidden proof wasn't something a single person alone could find.

Zhou Ying began, "While hunting for the proof, I wondered whether there might have been some other inhabitants besides the demons. The primordial demon might have arisen from a mutation that subsequently infected all the other inhabitants of the world."

"It's possible," Zhang Lie replied, "but we won't be able to find anyone to confirm or deny that hypothesis anymore."

Even though Zhou Ying's root dragons dug deep into the ground and searched systematically for the proof of kingship, they were unable to find anything.

"As expected of that disgusting, vile virus—it won't let us succeed so easily!"

Since it wasn't buried deep within the sea of poison, the primordial demon had to have been prepared for such an event and hidden the proof of kingship long in advance, in a location near-impossible for anyone else to discover.

Zhang Lie sighed. "The primordial demon was prepared to waste our time from the very beginning."

As Zhou Ying unleashed her energy, waves of vitality poured out from her and into the forest, rippling through the trees. All the leaves began to rustle as the trees uprooted themselves from the ground, their thick branches twisting into gigantic arms. The trees emerged as treemen, all of whom began to dig into the ground in search for the proof of kingship.

In the end, thanks to the many treemen that Zhou Ying animated, along with the warlords who had skilled perception abilities, the proof of kingship was finally uncovered after a long, exhausting struggle.

It was hidden nowhere special, buried in a plot of unmarked, perfectly ordinary land. Not only that, the primordial demon had made the proof of kingship a tiny grain smaller than a pea. If not for the aura it gave off, as well as the warlords' sharp senses, they would easily have overlooked it.

Finally, they returned to the draconian world, where Zhang Lie assembled all eight proofs of kingship in front of the draconian sage.

The draconian sage peered at the items. "You've really managed to obtain all eight proofs of kingship—but why place them in front of me?"

Calm though the sage looked, he was unbelievably shocked. Although he knew that Zhang Lie and the others were very strong, he hadn't expected that they would be able to acquire all eight proofs of kingship at all—and hardly so quickly. Kings of the realm could be defeated with great difficulty, but killing them was exponentially harder. It required absolute, overwhelming power.

The draconian sage even knew that the hunters who had accomplished this task wasn't the man in front of him, but rather his subordinates. For the humans to have become so strong all of a sudden was something that the draconian sage was still unaccustomed to.

Zhang Lie explained, "I hope that you'll combine all these worlds with yours."

"Very well!"

Zhang Lie seemed rather taken aback by the draconian sage's easy acceptance. "Aren't you going to ask why?"

The draconian sage replied calmly, "I'm sure you have your own reasons. It only matters to me whether or not your requests are beneficial to the draconians."

"Thank you, then."

The moment Zhang Lie walked out of the draconian sage's residence, Sun Mengmeng ran up to him. "Right, Captain, when are you going to head back to Earth? Hanxiang's very worried about you."

Zhang Lie's eyes widened. "Ah, I've forgotten entirely!"

He had asked the Jinghun to relay news about him back to his friends and family on Earth a long while ago, but he had forgotten to follow up after that because of the whole string of events that ensued afterwards.

Zhang Lie hurriedly ran to the teleportation apparatus and back to Earth.

At the same time, Li Qianlin suddenly received a message from the king of the east.

Li Qianlin was still able to maintain communication with the king of the east through special means, and she gasped upon reading the contents of the message. "The worlds of east and west are going to combine..."

Over a year had passed in the third realm, but only two months back on Earth. When Zhang Lie returned to the Zenith Dojo, he found it largely unchanged.

Upon seeing Zhang Lie's return, Zhang Hong sighed in relief. "Dojo leader, you're finally back! When you vanished after ascending to the third realm, we were all shocked to death. If not for the fact that this had already happened once before when you ascended to the second realm, we would all be on a manhunt for you!"

Zhang Lie winced. "Did anything happen to the dojo during the two months in which I was gone?"

Chapter 826: More Disaster Gene Fragments

Zhang Hong rolled her eyes at him. "Who would dare attack the Zenith Dojo now? Hong Xi and the others have all developed into skilled hunters. Even without you around, they're strong enough to deal with any challengers. However, scientists from the limit fragment research laboratory have asked to speak with you for advice and guidance."

"I'm not interested in that at the moment. How's Hanxiang?"

"She's in the second realm. I'll call her back immediately."

"If she's busy, there's no need."

Zhang Hong smiled. "Hanxiang insisted that we let her know the moment you returned."

"Very well, then." Zhang Lie returned to his house, had a shower, changed his clothes, and went on the Internet.

It had been far too long since he had been without access the online forums, and he was very curious about the events that had transpired in the meantime. He searched for relevant news about the Milky Way—only to find himself looking at articles about him.

No matter how he searched, his name was always in the top ten articles, and he was even more trendy than the stars and idols of the day. The news of him conquering the eight worlds neighboring the draconian world in the third realm was currently spreading across the forums.

"Team Zenith has done it again—they've destroyed multiple medium-sized worlds since ascending to the third realm!"

"We're all hunters from the Milky Way, aren't we? How could the members of Team Zenith be so exceptional?"

"The champion of mankind, Zhang Lie, has to be hiding his secrets. I'm telling you, there has to be something he's not sharing with the rest of us, something on the level of disaster-grade lifeforms and limit-breaking potions! Who knows—he might have limit-breaking potions of an even higher grade."

"What? Zhang Lie has even more advanced limit-breaking potions? He has to share them with us!"

Zhang Lie did have such limit-breaking potions in his possession. It was likely because of such rumors that representatives from various research laboratories were reaching out to him for more information.

"Forget about it! Don't you remember how recently these potions were released? It's likely that even Zhang Lie, their inventor, hasn't managed to uncover their true potential yet. I bet it's because the

members of Team Zenith all had maxed disaster gene fragments by the time they ascended—Zhang Lie must have revealed that secret to them beforehand!"

"Disaster gene fragments are that strong? Argh! Why didn't I learn about them sooner?"

"Even if you did, would you be able to kill the disaster-grade lifeforms needed to obtain them?"

"Disaster gene fragments are astonishing, but who among us can really kill one? Haven't you seen how many corporations were recruiting teams to kill disaster-grade lifeforms? How many of them succeeded? A numerical advantage is simply a joke in light of their strength. As far as I know, no corporation or organization has managed to consistently kill disaster-grade lifeforms yet."

For one, disaster-grade lifeforms were very difficult to find. Zhang Lie had gone out hunting for them for three whole years in the second realm and still didn't manage to cap his disaster gene fragments that way.

Meanwhile, the galaxy at large had only learned about disaster-grade lifeforms for less than a year. Even if all the hunters mobilized, they wouldn't be able to find very many such lifeforms—let alone divide them among all the hunters. Whether or not they could kill any of the lifeforms they encountered was also a problem.

"It's very possible that the kingdom of Limit has managed to secure a steady source of disaster gene fragments."

"Why do you say that?"

"Many organizations and corporations are trying to enlist the help of the kingdom of Limit, aren't they? As you know, the kingdom of Limit is the largest organization in the second realm."

"They were able to take over the second realm rapidly, and they have countless hunters on the level of sura kings. Furthermore, the members of Team Zenith were able to overwhelm all opposition while they were in the second realm."

"And then?"

"Only China has been able to get a reliable source of information about these disaster-grade lifeforms. Everyone else is having trouble finding accurate, timely information."

"And what's wrong with that?"

"What? Isn't that a huge issue?" another poster replied. "Everyone's searching for disaster-grade lifeforms now. Don't you think those hunters from the kingdom of Limit are interested too?"

"The kingdom of Limit's the greatest power in the second realm! They have their own information network, and they don't have to rely on others."

"But why wouldn't they? Who would complain about having too many disaster gene fragments?"

Everyone seemed to be discussing the kingdom of Limit: whether they had found a stable supply of disaster gene fragments, whether they were highly interested in acquiring them, and...

"The outstanding performance the members of Team Zenith have displayed in the third realm is likely to be due to their having maxed out their disaster gene fragments. But how many disaster-grade lifeforms would they have to kill to do so?"

"They would need sixty in all, sixty! I don't think the hunters of the Milky Way have even found and killed sixty among them all."

"Is it possible that they haven't maxed out their disaster gene fragments?"

"If they haven't, how could they be able to kill kings of the realm after immediately having ascended to the third realm? Many of the warlords in the third realm have already acquired limit gene fragments!"

"So what if they have access to a secret wealth of disaster gene fragments? Not like we could force them to give it up..."

"There aren't any organizations that would dare to oppose the kingdom of Limit in the second realm now, unless a second Zhang Lie appears!"

Zhang Lie closed the browser—there wasn't any interesting information available.

Zhang Hanxiang rushed back within moments. She bulldozed into the room and hugged Zhang Lie tightly. "Brother, you've returned!"

Zhang Lie laughed as he patted Zhang Hanxiang on the back. "You've grown taller since we last saw each other! How have you been in the second realm?"

Zhang Hanxiang replied with a smile, "Everyone is treating me well. Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen have both ascended as well, and Yun Bing's been very thoughtful to me. The kingdom of Limit is developing at a steady but rapid pace.

"Have you been neglecting your training?"

"No, of course not! I've almost maxed out my disaster gene fragments now, and I'll be able to advance to the third realm and fight with you in no time at all, brother!"

"Don't rush. Make sure to consolidate your strength in the second realm, first."

The third realm would quickly be mired in conflict, a battle the likes of which had never been seen before in history. Zhang Lie didn't want his sister to be trapped in this mess.

Zhang Hanxiang nodded obediently.

"Has the recent release of information about disaster gene fragments caused you any trouble?"

"No, brother," Zhang Hanxiang replied. "After all, I'm your sister, and no one would be as foolish as to try to hurt me."

Anyone who dared to harm even a single hair on Zhang Hanxiang's head would be inviting disaster-grade retaliation on themselves.

Zhang Lie had left a number of strong hunters behind in the second realm to guard the kingdom from any who might try to subvert his rule. The kingdom of Limit was also supported by the four prime races, along with many other indigenous clans of the second realm. Their strength was unparalleled, and anyone who dared to hurt Zhang Hanxiang wouldn't be able to survive in the second realm any longer.

Zhang Hanxiang smiled. "Yun Bing has dealt with anything annoying that has come my way. There are quite a few spies in the kingdom of Limit hoping to glean more information about disaster gene fragments, but no one has dared to make an overt move."

"As long as they're not affecting the kingdom unduly, it's not a problem," Zhang Lie replied. "It's been too long since we had a meal together. Would you like to have dinner with me?"

Chapter 827: Merging of the Worlds

Just as Zhang Lie and Zhang Hanxiang finished up a pleasant meal between the two of them, Hong Tianqi called Zhang Lie up. As expected, he too was asking about a reliable source of disaster gene fragments.

"Zhang Lie, to think I treated you like a brother! Aren't you going to tell me about this stable source of disaster gene fragments I heard you have?"

Unfortunately for Hong Tianqi, Zhang Lie had no plans to reveal the existence of his disaster-grade farm at the moment.

"No, no, it's all a misunderstanding! How could I have a stable source of disaster gene fragments? I simply prepared enough for the members of Team Zenith beforehand, but all my stock has been consumed by now."

Hong Tianqi could hardly press Zhang Lie for more information given his stance, so he had no choice but to leave unsatisfied.

Before Zhang Hanxiang and the others had ascended with maxed disaster gene fragments, Zhang Lie had no plans to open the farm to his allies.

Zhang Lie continued, "In the near future, we'll likely be approached by all sorts of troublesome figures wanting to learn about our secrets. I won't be able to stay in the dojo all this time—there are still many affairs I'll have to handle in the third realm. I'm going to be heading back now, and you should return to the second realm as well. After all, it's safer there for you than it is here."

The second realm was now largely under Zhang Lie's control, and there would be many hunters looking out for her there. There were also many such people in China, but there was no analogue of Yun Bing to help her head off unwelcome guests and issues.

Zhang Hanxiang pouted. "Again? When's the next time I'm going to see you, brother?"

Zhang Lie caressed Zhang Hanxiang's head. "You're the princess of Limit, aren't you? You need to learn to be independent, and to focus on your own affairs."

After dinner, Zhang Lie returned to the third realm.

By then, a week had passed, and the draconian sage had finalized plans for merging the draconian world with its eight neighbors together. The synthesis of the nine worlds would happen the day after.

Li Qianlin found Zhang Lie almost immediately after his return.

"What's the matter?"

"The worlds of east and west are going to merge. Father is inviting us both to attend."

Zhang Lie did want to see what the merger of two large worlds was like for himself before he managed such a feat. He nodded. "Once the draconian world and the others start to merge, I'll have to spend some time planning for our next target. After that, we can return and have a look at my father-in-law."

Li Qianlin clicked her tongue. "I haven't promised to marry you, have I?"

"Hah! Would anyone else dare to take you as their wife now?"

Li Qianlin stuck out her chin proudly. "I'm as beautiful as a fairy, and the princess of the east besides."

Zhang Lie raised an eyebrow. "I'll destroy anyone who dares to talk to you."

Li Qianlin stomped on his foot.

"Alright, then. If you're unwilling to be with me, I have no choice. Your happiness should be prioritized above all else, after all. Very well. Do you think I would be a better fit for Sun Mengmeng or for Zhou Ying? I heard there were a lot of draconian women who were interested in me, too, and many races of the Milky Way have shown interest in me as well. Who should I choose? One, two, perhaps all...?"

Li Qianlin's face turned dark. "You dare!"

"Alright, alright, don't get angry now. Do you want to take a walk?"

Zhang Lie reached out and grasped Li Qianlin's slender, soft hand.

Li Qianlin didn't object. She nodded slightly.

The next day, all the humans and draconians gathered at the altar as the draconian sage attempted to merge the nine worlds. The dragon's scale that was the draconians' proof of kingship glowed with light. A pillar of light emerged from the proof and illuminated the world.

The will of the world descended, and the eight proofs of neighboring worlds floated into the air, surrounding the draconian proof and merging into it one by one. Eight shadows circled the world, translucent and illusory: a world of black sand, of bear-men, of frozen ice, of desert, of charred earth, of forest, and of Chinese parasol trees.

The eight different worlds were slowly combining into the draconian world, like eight different landmasses merging into one.

In a shaking forest, the bear-men watched in shock as their world merged with the draconians. The mammoths in the valley found the land shaking violently, and the air getting warmer. In the desert, the greenskins were at a loss for words.

Simultaneously, the eight proofs of kingship morphed into glowing balls that melded into the dragon's scale. With a loud roar from the draconian sage, the scale grew wild.

The will of the world was starting to merge with the other eight worlds, devouring their will and their power.

The draconian sage unleashed his aura. His strength had grown dramatically in an instant as the worlds combined. The dragon's scale had turned nine-colored after the merger, and visions of all

nine worlds could be seen reflected on its surface: a world of draconians, of black sand, of bearmen, of frozen ice, of desert, of charred earth, of forest, and of Chinese parasol trees...

Zhang Lie remarked, "It looks like this is a large world now."

"Only a large world, after combining nine medium-sized ones?" Sun Mengmeng asked.

"It's not easy to become a world power, after all. Furthermore, the world of black sand was almost nearing collapse: the will of the world's strength had been almost entirely sapped even before Fang Yi severely damaged its foundations. It's lucky enough that it survived the merger. I expect the draconian sage will have his hands full for quite some time. The greenskins' proof is likewise cracked, and some energy has to be expended to fix it."

Fang Yi and Sun Xiaowu both lowered their heads, but Zhang Lie continued, "There wouldn't have been enough energy for the draconian world to become a superior one without twenty or so medium-sized worlds, or one or two large ones."

Sun Mengmeng sucked in a deep breath. "Are superior worlds so large?"

One medium-sized world was about the size of an Earth continent, and the draconian world was now about twice as large. Twenty continents would correspond to about five Earth volumes.

Zhang Lie commanded, "Next up, I'll be dividing the warlords into five groups. Each of you will be commanding a group of warlords and expanding in five different directions simultaneously."

Sun Mengmeng asked, "Captain, could you be..."

Yang Ze murmured, "Captain, you're not intending on founding a new kingdom of Limit in the third realm as well, are you?"

Zhang Lie smiled meaningfully.

Dong Mingxing was rather surprised by Zhang Lie's decision. "Isn't it a little foolhardy to be dividing your forces five ways?"

Although the members of Team Zenith individually had the ability to take on the king of the realm of a medium-sized world, they wouldn't simply be facing five worlds.

The kings of the other worlds weren't stupid; the worlds communicated, and if they realized that the humans were overextending themselves in an attempt to expand, they would surely band together, just like how the worlds neighboring the draconian world formed an alliance against the humans and draconians.

To others not familiar with Zhang Lie, such a reckless plan was doomed to failure, but no hunter of Team Zenith raised a complaint. They believed that, as long as Zhang Lie were commanding them, they could do anything.

Zhang Lie smiled. "Don't worry. I still have some tricks up my sleeve."

The merging of multiple worlds shocked many of the hunters of the Milky Way. Very few of them knew that the three thousand worlds could even be merged together, and even fewer had seen such an occurrence for themselves. Even the authorities of the world federation had mostly only heard rumors of such an event.

When the humans spread word of what was going on, the entire Milky Way was shocked.

"This is the first time I've ever heard of that..."

"The humans in the draconian world merged nine worlds together at once. Just what is the champion of mankind thinking?"

"Is the kingdom of Limit going to be reborn in the third realm...?"

"I feel like something big's going to happen!"

All the aliens of the Milky Way, particularly those who were situated in the third realm, were interested in what was going on. "If the humans are merging worlds together, there's no reason we can't do it too..."

"Perhaps we can give it a try."

"With what? Don't you all know?"

"Know what?"

"Essentially all the warlords on the warlord ranking have gathered in the draconian world. Only warlords have the strength to resist kings of the realm, and if you can't even defeat a king of the realm, how do you plan on obtaining proofs of kingship? Without these proofs of kingship, how will you merge multiple worlds together?"

Some of the more perspicacious hunters wondered, "Just what are the warlords doing, all gathered there?"

"I'm going to head to the draconian world too—see you! Given what happened initially when the kingdom of Limit was founded, we'll surely benefit if we head to where all the action is happening."

"Haha, as a third-realm hunter, I wasn't able to participate in defeating the sura kingdom in the second realm and constructing the kingdom of Limit. This time, I'm surely going to join in!"

After the merger of the nine worlds, the draconian sage's increase in strength and authority caused him to be surrounded by a mist—a manifestation of the strength possessed by the will of the world. It would take the sage some time to absorb and acclimatize himself to this newfound strength.

Zhang Lie had gone to find the sage for a discussion.

"How's absorbing the energy from the merger going?"

The sage blinked at him. "If there's anything I can do for you, please tell me. Without your help, the draconian world would have been destroyed. We wouldn't have been able to acquire eight proofs of kingship and strengthened our world, either."

Zhang Lie brought out a few tattered scraps of the map he had been collecting. "Have you seen these before?"

The draconian sage peered at them closely. "I feel as though I have, but it's so long ago that I can't remember any details."

Even the draconian sage didn't know about the secret lying within these scraps—it looked as though he would have a hard time obtaining all the fragments without merging all three thousand worlds together.

Zhang Lie continued, "How many disaster-grade lifeforms are there in the other eight worlds?"

The draconian sage easily accepted the new term 'disaster-grade lifeform' for what he knew as 'fifth-level beasts'. "There are five of them in all, two in the bearman world, one in the frozen world, one in the greenskins' world, and one in the Chinese parasol world.

"Excellent!" Zhang Lie was lacking exactly fifty disaster gene fragments to reach maximum capacity. "Sage, would you be able to send me to where those lifeforms are located?"

"Of course. The first disaster-grade lifeform is the guardian deity of the bearman, revered as their deity and located directly in the middle of their largest settlement."

With a wave of the sage's hand, Zhang Lie's vision blurred. The next moment, he found himself in the bearman settlement...

Chapter 828: A Direct Route

Before him was a quiet, idyllic thicket, within which were many caves and log cabins.

Bearman originally didn't live in packs, but ever since a king of the realm emerged among the bearman, things had been different. The new king had assembled all his people to form a settlement of bearman.

Those who had wealth and luxury could afford log cabins for themselves; those that didn't dug holes beneath large, shady trees.

At the center of the settlement was a gigantic tree, one that had been around for centuries, with thick bark and dark green leaves. Its crown was so massive that it covered up a third of the settlement by itself.

Suddenly, a roar came from underneath the hollow in the massive tree. The entire forest seemed to quake, and frightening gusts of wind radiated out from that hollow in all directions, bending the trees and sending leaves rustling through the air. The nearby log cabins creaked and began to fall apart.

Zhang Lie stood at the epicenter of the wind, his robes fluttering but his body perfectly still.

A pair of pale blue eyes lit up within the tree hollow, rousing fear in anyone whom it saw. Fear bubbled up from the bearman's hearts, an instinctive fear that seemed to arise with no rhyme or reason.

A wild beast's aura emerged from the hollow. Sharp claws extended out from within, and a golden figure emerged from its depths. This was a golden-yellow bearman, over a hundred meters tall. Its fur was perfectly golden, with so many scars over its body it looked like a carved totem. As the bearman walked out of the hollow, the entire bearman settlement was abuzz.

"Why has the deity climbed out of the hollow? What's going on?"

"Has something startled our deity?"

"It's been hundreds of years since the deity last walked the earth—but he's been awakened thrice now in a matter of days!"

The bearman deity could hibernate for decades or even centuries on end, but it had woken up three times in recent memory.

The first time was when the king of the realm was killed and the will of the world mourned his passing. The second time was when the nine worlds merged together. Only a few days later, the bearman deity awakened for the third time, causing a panic to descend on the bearmen.

After losing their king, the only reason the bearmen had been able to preserve their authority in the world was because of the bearman deity. If something were to go wrong with him, they would all lose their place in the world's hierarchy.

The bearman deity walked out of the hollow and stared straight at Zhang Lie. It had awakened upon sensing Zhang Lie's arrival.

Zhang Lie's eyes glimmered with rainbow light, freezing the bearman deity in place. Zhang Lie didn't waste his time. Clenching his fists tightly, he gathered blue genetic energy around him. Ripples of genetic energy emanated from his arms. He flicked his wrists, causing a frightening aura to descend on the world. The skies began to darken, and a fish the size of a whale materialized in the air.

It was so sudden and so ominous that all the bearmen were in shock. An immense pressure weighed down on their bodies, as though they were trapped under a mountain.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!" Ripples of energy spread out from Zhang Lie, warping the space around him, and launching shockwaves toward the bearmen. The shockwaves sounded like peals of thunder, like stampeding hooves. They resonated until they reached a crescendo.

Before the bearmen could figure out just what was happening, a huge wave soared into the air. As Zhang Lie punched forward, the fish slammed its huge tail on the ground and sent a torrent of water surging into the settlement.

The shockwaves and water-attuned genetic energy exploded, releasing a huge burst of energy that swallowed up the dazed bears like a rampaging beast.

Struck directly by Zhang Lie's attack, the bearman deity was slammed against the bark of the gigantic tree, leaving a deep impression in its trunk as its leaves fluttered madly.

The next moment, the shockwaves and water-attuned genetic energy exploded, releasing a huge burst of energy that swallowed up the nearby lifeforms like a rampaging beast.

The log cabins were sent flying in an instant, along with trees and branches that had been uprooted or knocked off their base.

The bearmen settlement looked as though it had been struck by a Category 5 hurricane. Everything in the vicinity had been reduced to rubble; one punch from Zhang Lie was sufficient to clear a battlefield.

"Oh, you survived," Zhang Lie remarked with some surprise.

The bearman deity hadn't been annihilated in one blow. Diamond-like wounds appeared beneath its golden fur.

The bearman deity's eyes flashed. After being struck by Zhang Lie's attack, the incident pain allowed him to regain some semblance of rationality. He stuck a claw into the bark, sending chips of wood flying as he pulled out a humongous axe from within the tree, over fifty meters tall and engraved with ancient runes, perhaps designed specifically for the deity himself.

Zhang Lie sneered. "A disaster-grade lifeform that uses weapons? Interesting."

As he suppressed Zhang Lie's control with his incredible willpower, the bearman deity's body flared with golden light, dyeing the entire forest golden. The leaves gave off a lustrous gleam, and the grass on the ground shivered and stood at attention. Even the fur on the bearman deity's body pricked like golden needles.

The environment itself became a weapon against the unwelcome intruder Zhang Lie. The most pronounced change was in the axe that the bearman deity held, which gave off a sharpness that felt as though it could penetrate anything.

"A domain of penetration..."

The bearman deity swung his axe in a wide arc.

Zhang Lie was shocked by the attack. The bearman deity had transferred the potency of his domain entirely to his attack, to the swing of his golden axe that had captured, condensed, and concentrated all that sharpness into a single lethal blow.

Zhang Lie felt as though a wave of sword energy was about to overwhelm him—a piercing sensation composed of all the matter, all the vital life, in the environment around him. Zhang Lie faced not the swing of an axe, but a sharpness with the weight of the entire forest behind it.

The bearman deity's attack was nothing less than masterful, and it was clear he was a grandmaster of the blade. In exercising his aura, the bearman deity far exceeded any opponent Zhang Lie had ever faced.

"Very interesting—but unfortunately, I'm your opponent!"

Zhang Lie stretched out two fingers. Water-attuned genetic energy exploded around him, swamping the forest with tidal waves that filled the sky. The energy gathered around Zhang Lie like a whirlpool and condensed around his fingertips.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!" As Zhang Lie thrust forward, he launched a beam of sword energy at the bearman deity, dull and colorless, far less resplendent than the bearman deity's attack. It looked wholly unthreatening, but the bearman deity felt lethal pressure from the attack...

Chapter 829: A Lost Cause

Zhang Lie's sword clashed against the bearman deity's axe without any special effects whatsoever, as though a leaf was lightly touching down on the surface of a still pond, as though it were perfectly natural. It met the axe's swing head-on and sliced through it with no resistance.

The bearman deity's eyes opened wide. It simply couldn't believe that its powerful swing had been so easily dispelled. His powerful swing brushed by either side of Zhang Lie, leaving countless stumps in its wake and creating a road in the forest.

The bearman deity's golden fur glowed even more brightly, until a radiant golden light condensed and concentrated on the head of his axe. He had transferred all the strength of his domain into the

axe for a supercharged blow in hopes that it would block Zhang Lie's finger-sword. However, his efforts were in vain. Zhang Lie's attack, which seemed to bypass physical and natural law, completely ignored the bearman's defense.

The fundamental idea behind Zhang Lie's attack was to concentrate a sea of energy into so narrow a beam that it could cut through everything, the same way a steel sword could easily cut through a wooden axe.

The beam of sword energy broke through the axe and struck the bearman deity's body. Cracks and splinters propagated over its surface.

The next moment, water-attuned genetic energy gushed out of those cracks in a flood, obliterating the bearman.

The will of the world's voice rang out in Zhang Lie's head. [You successfully killed a disaster-grade goldsword bearman. By consuming the core of the disaster-grade goldsword bearman, you may receive one to ten disaster gene fragments.]

The water-attuned genetic energy transformed into a twister that tore apart the trees in the area. Thick bark and branches were reduced into nothing but splinters and leaves.

Where the bearman settlement had once been, where an ancient, weathered tree reached toward the sky, there were now nothing but destruction and desolation. The tree had been uprooted whole, and even a layer of dirt, grass, and leaves was scraped off the ground.

In the epicenter of the devastation was a glowing golden orb in the ground, surrounded by an aura of sharpness like a miniature gale. A mountain of swords seemed to be reflected in the center of the orb.

After picking up the orb, just as Zhang Lie was about to be teleported away, he noticed something unusual by the bearman deity's axe.

"Hold on!" Zhang Lie disrupted the impending teleportation with his own spatial manipulation, then walked up to the axe. There was a box located within the blade; if not for the fact that [The Boundless Blade] had pierced through it, he wouldn't have discovered the secret lying within.

After retrieving the box and opening it, he found another box nestled within, then another, then another...

Zhang Lie's face turned dark. After opening a dozen boxes in succession, until there was only a palm-sized box left, Zhang Lie found a few scraps of the map he had been trying to assemble.

Zhang Lie was stunned. He frowned and glanced around him, then vanished from sight moments later. He reappeared by one of the bearmen who had survived the assault, then woke him from his daze with a sharp slap.

When the bearman saw the destruction before him, as well as Zhang Lie standing malevolently above him, he opened his mouth and tried to scream, only to be shut up immediately by the rainbow gleam in Zhang Lie's eyes.

Zhang Lie asked, "Where did the bearman deity's axe come from?"

Zhang Lie wanted to know whether the axe was of bearman make, and why the axe contained a few scraps of the map within it.

The bearman was silent for a moment, then responded, "I don't know."

Zhang Lie frowned.

"It's the first time that those of our generation have seen the bearman deity strike, but I heard my father mention that, in the past, there were frequent incursions into our territory by demonic wolves. Back then, he and the elder had fought alongside the bearman deity, and the bearman deity had already possessed his axe by then."

"Are there others in your tribe who know where the axe might have come from?"

"The chieftain and the elder!"

"Where are they?"

The bearman didn't answer immediately. He turned to the ruins of the bearman settlement and hedged, "I suppose they're dead."

Zhang Lie's brows furrowed.

"A few days ago, the chieftain was killed while heading toward the draconian world, and even the proof of kingship was taken from us. And in his old age, the elder likely didn't survive the destruction of the settlement."

If not for the fact that this bearman was well and truly under his control, Zhang Lie could very well believe that the bearman was taking him for a fool. Yang Ze had clearly finished off the bearman chieftain, while Zhang Lie himself had killed the elder in the aftermath of his attack...

"Is there anyone else who might know?"

"I suspect they're all dead, too."

Zhang Lie sighed and raised his head. "Sage, please teleport me back!"

The draconian sage had been paying his full attention to Zhang Lie. On Zhang Lie's shout, he teleported Zhang Lie back to his residence.

"Sage, do you know about the history behind the axe of the bearman deity?"

Zhang Lie was grasping at straws, but surprisingly, the sage did know. "I'm not sure about the specifics, but I know that the bearmen found it in an ancient ruin."

"A ruin?" Zhang Lie's eyes brightened. "Sage, where's this ruin?"

"It was too long ago. The ruin has long since vanished from the annals of history."

Zhang Lie sighed again. "Well, I didn't expect it would be so easy. I need to absorb this core, so please send me to somewhere deserted."

The draconian sage nodded, teleporting Zhang Lie to the world of black sand—or rather, the region of black sand, now that it had already merged with the draconian world. There were no living

lifeforms in the region, and no matter how large a disturbance Zhang Lie caused, there would be no issue.

With the destruction of the black pyramid in the region, the souls that had been trapped in the desert were finally released. The void spirits had likewise disappeared.

This was the ideal place for Zhang Lie to absorb disaster gene fragments.

After a long, exhausting process, Zhang Lie finally acquired ten more disaster gene fragments, and his data reached even more ridiculous heights.

Zhang Lie: a disaster-grade lifeform

Framework: Foundation, Lv. MAX; Ninecarp Transformation, Sixth Form: River Dragon
Techniques: Rippling Walk (pinnacle), Three-Wave Crescendo (pinnacle), Calm Waters (pinnacle), Fists of the Silent Sea (pinnacle), The Boundless Blade (pinnacle), Eclipse (pinnacle), Syzygy (pinnacle), Ninesoul Dragonblade (advanced), Blade of the Heavens (pinnacle)

Genes: Basic, 160; Mutated, 150; Superior, 150; Peak, 150; Disaster, 60

Soulshards: White Grub (superior), Blood Ant (superior), Potbellied Toad (mutated), Eternalspring Cocoon (superior), Dragonwolf (superior), Moonlight Wyrms (peak), Golden Roc (peak), Mismeld Clam (disaster)

Chapter 830: Killing the Demonwolf

As space shifted once more, Zhang Lie was teleported back to the sage.

"Now for the second disaster-grade lifeform!"

"The second disaster-grade lifeform is also in the bearman region. If the bearman deity is considered the guardian deity of the bearman, then the second disaster-grade lifeform is his nemesis, his counterpart and bitter rival, with whom he frequently fights: a demonwolf."

With a wave of the draconian sage's hand, Zhang Lie was surrounded by ripples in space. The next moment, he found himself before a gigantic cave, one so dark he couldn't identify what was inside. However, Zhang Lie could feel a strong presence emanating from the depths of the cave.

As Zhang Lie released a breath, something began to happen from within the cave. Glowing green dots lit up—glowing pairs of eyes, from black figures who leapt out of its depths. These were huge, fierce black wolves, their fur standing straight up. Wind blew around them like black smoke. They opened their mouths and revealed sharp teeth.

Most of the wolves in the pack were superior-grade lifeforms. A small fraction was peak-grade, and there were even a few post-peak-grade ones.

However, whether or not these wolves were strong was immaterial to Zhang Lie.

He activated his mismeld clam soulshard, his eyes gleaming in all colors of the rainbow. The moment the wolves glanced into his eyes, they rolled on the floor and revealed their furry bellies, then obediently led the way deeper into the cave for him.

"It looks like I'll be able to make use of these wolves for the upcoming invasion, too..."

Suddenly, a disaster-grade aura emerged from deep within the cave as a pair of glowing green eyes radiated light. Black smoke drifted forward like the tide, surrounding Zhang Lie.

"A disaster-grade domain that inhibits vision? No, it can't be—it's far too simple and straightforward an effect for disaster-grade lifeforms! There has to be more to it, I'm sure." Zhang Lie found that the genetic energy around him was slowly dissipating away—this was something he was innately familiar with. "It looks like the occluded vision is just a side effect—it's an aura of corrosion or assimilation."

A slash suddenly came out of nowhere, but Zhang Lie easily countered it with a fist of his own. As the energy from the explosion dissipated, Zhang Lie smiled. "It's useless. You might be able to sense my scent, but I can sense your breath, too."

As he clenched his fists, blue genetic energy gathered and rippled around his arms. He flicked his wrists, spawning a frightening aura as a fish the size of a whale materialized in the air.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!" Zhang Lie's technique possessed such strength it made the very air warp. The water-attuned genetic energy shook the cave and launched shockwaves toward the disaster-grade wolf. The waves sounded like peals of thunder, like stampeding hooves.

A huge wave soared into the air. As Zhang Lie punched forward, the fish slammed its huge tail on the ground and sent a torrent of water surging into the cave. The combination of spatial manipulation and water-attuned genetic energy caused the water to spread out around Zhang Lie like a hurricane of water.

The water-attuned genetic energy weakened the power of the black mist, clearing out a patch of air surrounding Zhang Lie and sending the disaster-grade demonwolf flying into the distance.

The other wolves in the pack fled in fear as a cold gaze fixed itself on Zhang Lie. Black mist came pouring back into the cave from all directions, trapping Zhang Lie within.

Just as the mist was about to envelop Zhang Lie, the disaster-grade demonwolf struck from all directions. Zhang Lie didn't move; he surrounded himself with water-attuned genetic energy. When the wolf's attack struck that energy, it caused the air to vibrate, but that was it.

"[Rune: Gravity]!" With a thought, the image of a dragonturtle manifested behind Zhang Lie, and the runic tablet of gravity crashed into the ground.

The tablet shook, and the runic script inlaid within it began to glow almost at random. A crushing force of gravity enclosed the space— but right before it could trap the demonwolf, it leapt high up and escaped the domain. Zhang Lie smiled. "I'll grant that you act fast, at least. [Ninecarp Transformation]!"

A black serpent materialized behind Zhang Lie, by now so large and so developed that it resembled the world-swallowing serpent Jormungandr. It let out a threatening rustle as its scales creaked.

The black serpent began devouring the mist around itself, thinning it and revealing the disaster-grade demonwolf, who attacked in a burst of speed. When its claws landed on the serpent's scales, however, all that energy was sucked dry in an instant.

The mist had thinned to the point that the demonwolf, understanding that it was no opponent for Zhang Lie, chose to flee.

Zhang Lie pointed toward the direction in which the wolf was heading. The wolf might have fast reflexes and even faster speed, but the serpent outshone it in even those areas. When it caught up, it didn't give the wolf any opportunity to run away. It immediately wrapped around the wolf, which exuded black mist in an attempt to force the serpent to back off.

However, the serpent absorbed all that mist entirely, nullifying the attack that was the demonwolf's pride and joy. The demonwolf's signature black mist, high movement speed, and rapid flurry of strikes allowed him to dominate the entire forest, countered only by the bearman chieftain and deity.

If not for their working together, he wouldn't have to hide in this cave at all—but even combined, they were hardly able to kill him. His speed was far superior to theirs; they couldn't prevent him from running away.

However, Zhang Lie, who had suddenly appeared before him, was able to counter him easily and completely.

When all the mist finally thinned, Zhang Lie was able to see the disaster-grade wolf's true form for the first time. Its green eyes were bloodshot, revealing its anger and rage. Its body was about half the size of the bearman deity, and its glossy fur had turned black from long-term exposure to the black mist it gave off.

With a snap of his fingers, Zhang Lie commanded the serpent to kill the wolf.

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

The demonwolf left behind a pitch-black orb trailing black smoke. As spatial fluctuations enveloped him, Zhang Lie found himself teleported back to the black desert, where he absorbed the core, obtained another ten disaster gene fragments, and returned to the sage's residence...