

## U. Warlord 871

Chapter 871: A Purported Alliance

Li Zongming frowned. "Zhang Lie, be more polite! This is an envoy from a superior world, who's made the long trek over here."

Zhang Lie sneered. "And so what? I've destroyed a superior world before—they're hardly anything special!"

Li Zongming dipped his head to the envoy. "Please don't mind Zhang Lie, envoy. We've just had to deal with a superior world that tried to invade us, the xuluo world, and everyone's emotions are still rather heated."

Zhang Lie and Li Zongming naturally fell into a good cop, bad cop routine.

The envoy waved a hand. "There's no problem at all. My arrival was terribly abrupt, and I understand it might be an inconvenience."

From beside Zhang Lie, Li Qianlin murmured, "This envoy is really polite! Did he really come from one of the superior worlds?"

Li Qianlin thought of the superior worlds as ancient, majestic existences, which looked down on the inhabitants of other worlds due to their wealth and power.

The envoy's hearing was apparently excellent, because he had overheard Li Qianlin's words. "This is..."

Li Zongming hastily introduced his daughter. "This is the princess of the Zongming world, and beside her, my son-in-law, our strongest warrior."

The envoy bowed in greeting.

"No need for such courtesies, please! We're very interested to know why you've come to our world so suddenly."

The envoy smiled. "I believe the conflict between the Zongming and xuluo worlds may have soured your perception of the other superior worlds. We're not devils, regardless of the rumors that have spread about us among the three thousand worlds."

Zhang Lie replied curtly, "We've never thought of you as devils. Compared to you, devils are far more kind and civil."

Despite Zhang Lie's provocation, the envoy didn't get mad. His head tilted slightly as he laughed. "Haha, you really overestimate us, warrior!"

"Am I mistaken?" Zhang Lie had no intention of lowering himself in front of such an envoy; no, the Zongming world couldn't afford to do so. The Zongming world had managed to win in a conflict against another superior world, and there was no reason it should defer to envoys from other superior worlds.

If the representatives of the Zongming world were to lower themselves in front of a superior envoy, that would suggest that the Zongming world had won because of a fluke, that it was still somehow

lower in status—but that wasn't the case. The Zongming world had the strength to take down any of the superior worlds of antiquity.

The envoy smiled again. "That's a terrible misunderstanding. Every superior world is different, just as every large world is different. We superior worlds largely fall into two different camps, those that welcome newly evolved superior worlds, and those that don't. The xuluo world is unusual among the superior worlds; the others are far more friendly toward newcomers to our rank."

Who would believe such nonsense?

"So that's how it is!" Li Zongming nodded as though in understanding— not because the envoy's words had suddenly convinced him of their truth, but rather because he now knew the envoy's motive. "Are you here in search of allies, then?"

If the envoy's world was going to attack the Zongming world, it wouldn't have needed to send an envoy. The fact that the envoy was being so polite and respectful meant that the superior world he represented wouldn't be sending troops—or rather, didn't dare to send troops.

The envoy nodded. "More or less. Going back to the question of the xuluo world: now that the xuluo has been taken down, they're leaving behind a huge swathe of territory."

The remaining nine superior worlds had all engaged in a heated debate in hopes of claiming all that land for themselves.

"After countless days and nights, we were unable to decide how to best split the territory. In the end, we finally agreed to give the rights to that territory to you, the Zongming world," the envoy explained.

Li Qianlin nodded in understanding. "In other words, since we were the ones who vanquished the xuluo world, we'll get control of their territory?"

"Exactly, princess," the envoy replied. "We of the superior worlds are excited to welcome the Zongming world to join our alliance—a great honor, I'm sure."

Zhang Lie questioned, "And what if we don't agree with the stance of the alliance?"

The envoy narrowed his eyes. "Haha! This is a rare opportunity, one that I would strongly urge the Zongming world not to miss out on. After all, the offer will only be extended once."

The envoy's eyes glinted with frost.

Zhang Lie snapped his fingers. "I understand. If we don't join your alliance, you'll target us with force."

The envoy nodded. "We don't need superior worlds that are uncooperative and unwilling to join our alliance. There's already one such world around, and it causes us enough of a headache already. After all, maintaining the stability of the three thousand worlds is an objective that we all share, isn't it?"

Li Zongming pointed out the crux of the issue. "If we join the alliance, we won't be enemies, and we won't be targeted by the other superior worlds. This is certainly a benefit, but there's no such thing as a free lunch. What do we have to pay to access that benefit? What's the cost of joining this alliance?"

"There's no huge cost," the envoy replied. "Are you aware of the demon king that resides in this realm, hoping to swallow it all up for himself?"

Zhang Lie nodded. "You speak of the king of the death spirits?"

The envoy's eyes widened fractionally. He had thought that the inhabitants of the Zongming world were nothing more than country bumpkins who had somehow managed to take down the xuluo world with some fluke of luck after their world evolved.

"You've heard of the king of the death spirits?"

Li Zongming frowned. He didn't know who that was, but as the king of the realm, he would lose face to profess ignorance here.

Li Qianlin, who had noticed the changes in her father's expression, took over. She had heard about the death spirits from Zhang Lie. With a smile, she began, "Of course we know of the king of the death spirits! The death spirits are host to one of the superior worlds, but they view this realm differently."

Chapter 872: Collateral

Zhang Lie took over. "The other superior worlds treat this realm like a farm, but the death spirits treat it like a quarry—with a one-time supply of resources to be harvested."

The envoy was quite surprised. "Very few large worlds know of the death spirits, and it seems like you all know quite a lot beyond that, too."

Zhang Lie shrugged. "We're a superior world now, after all. Isn't it natural that we would have more information?"

Li Qianlin motioned at Zhang Lie. "Zhang Lie, how about we explain everything we know about the death spirits so that the envoy can correct us on our understanding?"

From Li Qianlin's glance, Zhang Lie understood that this exercise was for the benefit of the stupefied Li Zongming instead.

Zhang Lie began, "It's not anything extraordinary. The death spirits have continuously invaded the three thousand worlds unlike the other superior worlds, which only target newly evolved superior worlds' cores."

Zhang Lie knew quite a bit of information about the king of the death spirits, but the knowledge was hardly unique to him.

The superior worlds surely knew more; they had had to fend off the death spirits' incursions countless times over the last few millennia.

"The death spirits are in so much need of power that they strike at every world they come across, small or medium-sized or large. They devour the will of whatever world they invade, and they're the largest tumor among the three thousand worlds. I'll add that the other eight tumors of the three thousand worlds are you all—the remaining superior worlds."

Li Qianlin began, "The king of the death spirits is very ambitious. He's hoping to devour all the worlds of this realm, take over the realm, swallow up the will of the world, then do the same for all realms below and above this one."

The envoy clapped. "Except for your misunderstanding about the rest of us superior worlds, everything is correct! I hadn't expected all of you to understand so much about the death spirits. This makes things much easier."

Li Zongming finally spoke up. "Are the conditions for joining related to the death spirits, then?"

The envoy nodded. "Precisely. Since all of you know about what the king of the death spirits is planning, it goes without saying that, if no one stops him, that horrifying existence will swallow up the entire realm. Protecting the three thousand worlds has been the mission and mandate of all the superior worlds."

"You want us to wage war against the death spirits?" Li Zongming seemed somewhat perplexed.

The envoy didn't answer him directly. "The war between the superior worlds and the death spirits had persisted for millennia. When we realized we didn't have the resources to annihilate the death spirits once and for all, we decided to lay siege to them instead."

Zhang Lie laughed coldly. "Do you not have the resources, or are you just unwilling to commit them?"

The envoy glanced at him. "I know you're a strong warrior, but don't look down on the king of the death spirits. You'll suffer tremendous losses that way. To be able to survive the combined bombardment of the other nine superior worlds—the king of the death spirits is truly a frightening foe."

Zhang Lie's mocking smile widened. He knew the truth behind the envoy's words, but he didn't expose the envoy outright.

"Because of the protracted nature of the battle, the superior kings decided that the superior worlds would lay siege to the death spirits on a rotating basis for a century each, preventing them from expanding."

"But you didn't succeed, did you?" Zhang Lie interjected again.

The envoy grew visibly displeased. "Warrior, I hope you'll respect the superior kings. If not for their hard work, this realm wouldn't be at peace! Your world might have fallen to the death spirits without even getting the opportunity to evolve."

The envoy didn't mind others talking poorly about the superior worlds themselves, but not the superior kings. After all, he served one such king himself.

Zhang Lie didn't know whether or not the envoy was truly ignorant—or pretending to be ignorant—of the superior worlds' attitude toward the death spirits. He didn't want to drag out this pointless argument, so he just ignored the envoy.

Li Zongming broke the silence. He clarified, "Do you intend for us to join this siege?"

"Protecting this realm is the responsibility of all superior worlds. Now that the Zongming world is a superior world, it bears this responsibility as well. After all, we can hardly let the death spirits get their hands on the far weaker large and medium-sized worlds."

"But this world has just evolved!" Li Zongming protested.

The envoy shrugged. "The xuluo world's slot in the rotation is in a hundred years. Now that it's been destroyed, another world has to take over."

Li Zongming argued, "It's not that we're unwilling to take on this responsibility, but there's no way we can do a good job given our lack of resources."

The envoy sighed. "This isn't a problem I can help you with, but don't worry—you'll have a century to prepare."

Li Zongming frowned. "You expect our world to develop enough to take on the death spirits in just a century?"

The death spirits were so strong that even the nine other superior worlds working together couldn't take them down!

The envoy smiled. "The superior kings are understanding of your plight, and they're willing to loan you resources and manpower."

"Really? That's great!"

Unlike Li Zongming, who seemed relieved, Zhang Lie's face immediately darkened.

As far as he knew, the superior kings were all tyrannical and malicious. There was simply no incentive for them to help out a world that would encroach on their finite resources like the Zongming world.

The envoy nodded. "The superior kings are indeed very generous. They don't want to see the siege against the death spirits fail, either."

The envoy clearly didn't think much of Li Zongming; there was a clear gulf between how he thought of the other superior kings and Li Zongming himself.

The envoy continued, "However, our forces don't simply come out of thin air. They needed a large reserve of resources and time to train, and they're our strongest elites. If they die to the death spirits, the kings will be quite upset."

Li Zongming immediately reassured him, "I'll make sure these forces don't die for nothing."

The envoy shook his head. "King of the Zongming world, I'm afraid you don't understand my point. These forces are valuable to us, so you'll have to rent them out—and pay a collateral in case of their demise!"

### Chapter 873: A Masterful Plan

Zhang Lie snorted as he heard the envoy's words.

The envoy continued, "Superior worlds don't need the ordinary resources that this world possesses—the only thing that can serve as collateral is the energy of the Zongming world itself."

That was the catch, then. All the superior worlds in the third realm were greedy, avaricious wolves, without exception.

Li Zongming slammed a palm down on his armrest, which splintered. "In the end, you simply want to claim this world for yourselves, too."

The envoy didn't seem perturbed by Li Zongming's outburst. "You'll have to give something to get something. Maintaining law and order among the three thousand worlds is the responsibility of us superior worlds. We're hardly doing charity, and we don't know anything about you, so why should we loan you troops for nothing?"

Li Zongming gritted his teeth. If not for his reluctance to wage war against the other eight superior worlds simultaneously, Li Zongming would kill this envoy right then and there.

The envoy spread his arms. "A new superior world doesn't have any resources to spare. Who knows how you defeated the xuluo? What if you lose us all our troops, too?"

Even as the envoy revealed his true colors, Zhang Lie remained calm.

"It's not as though we'll claim your world, is it? You're simply using it as mortgage. Of course, you can choose not to borrow our troops, but that would make us other worlds quite upset. If the line of defense against the death spirits breaks, though, we'll be sure to inquire as to why. We might even get rid of you useless folks before we deal with the death spirits in earnest."

The envoy's attitude wasn't one of equal cooperation; it was clear he viewed them as nothing more than bugs to be squashed underfoot.

"You'll be able to maintain law and order just by giving up some of your world's energy. Isn't that a good trade?"

Li Zongming wanted to snarl at the envoy to shove this 'good deal' up his ass, but Zhang Lie had flashed to Li Zongming's side and prevented his outburst.

Li Zongming glanced up at Zhang Lie, perplexed.

The envoy continued, "Maintaining law and order among the three thousand worlds is a sacred duty of the superior worlds. The other superior worlds are kind enough to offer this trade so that your world can have a few less deaths while defending against the death spirits. Only then will you have the ability to develop as a superior world. Isn't that so?"

Zhang Lie smiled. "Please convey my thanks to the various superior kings. We accept this deal."

"Can you make decisions on behalf of your king?" The envoy frowned at Zhang Lie as he looked toward Li Zongming.

Although Li Zongming didn't know what Zhang Lie was up to, he was certain he had a plan.

Without Zhang Lie's presence, the Zongming world would have been taken over by the xuluo; he was willing to trust Zhang Lie unconditionally. Li Zongming nodded. "We will accept this deal."

The envoy grinned, as though this was the only reasonable outcome. "A wise decision. However, even though we'll be loaning out our warriors, we have additional conditions that you must fulfill."

Li Zongming frowned. "Other conditions?"

The envoy nodded. "First, even though we're loaning these troops to you, they don't belong to you. We can still mobilize them at will, and you can't restrict their freedom."

"What do you mean?"

"If they think that you're forcing them to participate in battles where they have a high chance of dying, or they think your commands are unreasonable, they have the right to choose not to fight or to follow your commands."

"What?!"

The envoy continued, "Furthermore, if they get injured, you'll be responsible for their medical fees; if they die, you'll be responsible for reparations to their family. You'll be responsible for their food and lodgings, as well as weapons. Naturally, these have to be of high quality, or they won't be effective in combat. Furthermore, because of the high-pressure environment on the battlefield, the warriors can frequently get temperamental, so you need to provide them with women of sufficient beauty as well."

Li Zongming and Li Qianlin frowned. These 'requests' were far too demanding.

Li Zongming replied, "You call these warriors? More like lazy good-for-nothings!"

The envoy smiled and turned to Li Qianlin. "If the princess is willing to serve our warriors herself, they would surely fight at full strength."

In other words, despite all this preferential treatment, they wouldn't be fighting at full strength without even more benefits.

Li Zongming became truly incensed.

The entire Zongming world began to shake. Lightning flashed through the air, and the meeting room in which they were located began to creak and crack.

The envoy belatedly realized that he had gone too far. Weak though Li Zongming might be, he was still a superior king. The envoy gave Li Zongming a fake smile. "I was simply joking, your majesty. Please don't take it personally."

"And those ridiculous requests for your troops? Are those also jokes?"

Zhang Lie waved a hand, placating the weather and restoring the space around them—until all was right with the world again.

Li Zongming was stupefied. Was he the king of the realm, or was that Zhang Lie? Why could Zhang Lie access authority that could even countermand his own?

Zhang Lie said, "We agree to loaning your forces, but we'll need to negotiate more regarding the details. It's rather late out, envoy, so why don't you rest here tonight? We've already prepared the best of accommodations for you."

The envoy's smile widened. "Naturally."

If the Zongming world were willing to borrow the troops, then his mission was all but complete. This was only to be expected—who wouldn't succumb to the combined pressure of eight superior worlds? Anyone with even a shred of logic would understand what the right choice was.

After the envoy left, Li Zongming repaired his splintered armrest. Instead of asking Zhang Lie for the details of his plan for the envoy, Li Zongming posed another question.

"Zhang Lie, what do you think these superior kings are planning?"

"What else? They don't know how we managed to defeat the xuluo and don't dare to provoke us to find out, so they're just using the death spirits as a test subject."

No xuluo had escaped the destruction of the xuluo world, so they had no sense of the Zongming world's strength.

"If these superior kings strike at us and find that we're strong enough to annihilate their worlds—well, none of them will take that risk. Even if their worlds weren't destroyed, they would surely suffer huge losses from fighting against a strong foe, and then become easy pickings for the other superior worlds.

"However, they also don't want to see the Zongming world take over the territory that originally belonged to the xuluo and compete for more of the precious world's energy from this realm. They only have one choice left: to make use of the death spirits to whittle us both down, and to get a sense of our strength."

#### Chapter 874: In Openmouthed Anger

The superior kings were ancient existences that had ruled their respective worlds for millennia, and they were seasoned foes in the grand game of politics.

As Zhang Lie explained what the kings' intentions were, Li Zongming's face grew darker and darker.

"To sum it up, these fellows don't know if they can beat us, so they'll send us against their strongest opponent instead. At the same time, they'll drain us of our world's energy, reducing the rate at which it can grow.

"Unlike what they've claimed, although the Zongming world will have more time to develop in the future, that doesn't mean the inhabitants of the world can grow stronger. If we were to lose a huge quantity of the world's energy, our growth rate would drop precipitously."

And if they hadn't grown stronger by the next rotation, they would have to continue borrowing troops from the other superior worlds, enmeshing them in a vicious circle.

Zhang Lie nodded. "In other words, they're intending to treat our world like an endless source of energy. It's a good plan, I'll grant them that, and it probably works better than destroying every newly evolved superior world they come across."

Li Zongming asked, "If you know what they're trying to pull off, why would you accept?"

Zhang Lie countered, "What else do you think we can do? Survive against eight superior worlds' combined assault?"

Li Zongming fell silent.

Zhang Lie continued, "Don't worry, I don't intend to bring the Zongming world down. We'll see just who's begging whom by the end, won't we?"

Li Zongming's eyes grew wide. "Do you have more information I don't?"

As far as Zhang Lie knew, the death spirits would enact their plan to take over the realm imminently—and if they couldn't defeat this invasion, they wouldn't be alive for a hundred years regardless.

"I've spoken about this a little to Qianlin. The superior worlds haven't managed to confine the death spirits completely. The death spirits have long since evaded confinement by means of a subsidiary race, the black spirits."

Zhang Lie explained what was going on to Li Zongming.

"The death spirits will soon summon the black spirits, currently scattered all about the third realm, back to the death spirits' homeworld."

The black spirits had collected large quantities of world's energy from all over the realm, and once they were recalled and their collected energy given to the death spirits' king, the death spirits would break free of the encirclement.

In Zhang Lie's past life, the black spirits' plan had succeeded completely.

If the superior worlds hadn't dispatched an envoy offering to loan troops to Li Zongming, Zhang Lie had considered the possibility of informing them about the impending threat. After all, the death spirits' plan would imperil all three thousand worlds.

After his experience with the domineering envoy, however, Zhang Lie changed his mind. He very much wanted to watch those superior worlds squirm and panic.

Zhang Lie reminded him, "When we negotiate with the envoy again, you need to clarify that you're only willing to borrow these troops when it comes time for your turn in the defense rotation. Once the death spirits make their move, these superior worlds will have to fend off the death spirits with every power at their disposal, and they won't be able to look down on our help at that point."

The conflict between the Zongming world and the other superior worlds was finally resolved after a few days. Li Zongming entertained the envoy for a few more days, attempting to secure what benefits he could out of the negotiations, but it was largely a farce.

Li Zongming knew that the death spirits were about to launch an invasion, and the terms of the agreement would be nullified without ever being activated.

After the negotiations were concluded, Zhang Lie bade Li Zongming farewell. "I've stayed long enough here. There's a huge pile of work on my plate, and I have to get back to it."

Li Zongming suggested, "Son-in-law, why don't you move the humans over here? We're a superior world now, and the resources in this world are likely better than what you have access to at the moment."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "The Zongming world is too replete with resources at the moment, and a superior world isn't conducive to my plans. We humans need to grow in battle."

Superior worlds didn't tend to participate in inter-world conflict—any weaker foes would immediately surrender or flee at the thought of facing a superior world in battle.

"Furthermore, those other superior worlds won't want to see the Zongming world grow even larger. If that happens, they'll make the Zongming world their next target."

Li Zongming smiled in embarrassment. "Without your presence here, I won't feel at ease. After all, if the death spirits really are going to be approaching shortly—"

"When that day comes, I will stand by the Zongming world."

Li Zongming was still worried. "I'm afraid that an incident might occur here. The two worlds are far apart, so if something were to happen while you were traveling..."

"It won't be an issue for superior kings to hold the death spirits off for a few days. By then, I'll have made it over to the Zongming world."

Li Zongming sighed. "Better for Qianlin to go with you, I think. She would be safer there than anywhere else."

Li Zongming was exasperated: despite being her father, he wasn't confident that he would be able to protect his own daughter.

Zhang Lie patted his chest. "Please, rest assured that I'll take good care of her. As long as I'm still alive, she won't lose even a single strand of hair on her head."

After two days' rest, Zhang Lie and Li Qianlin headed back toward the draconian world. To Zhang Lie's surprise, Dong Mingxing came along with them.

"What're you doing? Do you intend to behave like Li Qianlin's personal maid, going so far as to accompany her throughout her marriage?"

Dong Mingxing frowned. "I simply can't bear to see Qianlin hurt—and I need to supervise your interactions with her to make sure that you don't do anything untoward!"

Zhang Lie snorted. "Absurd! Have you even asked Qianlin whether or not she wants me to make these untoward advances?"

Li Qianlin blushed. She lowered her head and didn't answer.

Dong Mingxing sighed. "What a pity, what a pity! A radish that I've grown for twenty years—and now it's going to be uprooted and pawed away by a pig!"

"What do you mean, that you've grown? Could it be that you're interested in Li Zongming? Dong Mingxing, how could you! Qianlin treats you like a friend, but you plan on becoming her mother?!"

"What?!" Dong Mingxing was stupefied by Zhang Lie's assertion.

#### Chapter 875: Living in Harmony

Zhang Lie continued to heckle Dong Mingxing playfully. "Dong Mingxing, aren't you ashamed? A young woman in your twenties, courting an old man in his hundreds! There are so many good men out there—you could have had your pick!

"I know that you might not have many options available to you, but it surely isn't hard to find a male of about equal age? How could you set your thoughts on your friend's father? Have you ever asked Qianlin how she feels about the thought?"

"You—I, Dong Mingxing, was once considered the top beauty of the worlds of east and west! The number of men who wanted to marry me are enough to encircle the Zongming world twice over. I've never needed to worry about a mate!"

"Who knows? You might have a complex for older fathers?"

Li Qianlin sat by the side of the room, laughing at her two friends' antics. After a long period of traveling together, Zhang Lie and Dong Mingxing had gotten to know each other, and they frequently bickered with each other.

Dong Mingxing's face flushed red. "No, I don't like men older than I am! Those who wish to court me have to be the strongest among the three thousand worlds, invincible in the realm, who can save the world from crisis with a simple flip of his hand!"

Zhang Lie stumbled back, clutching his chest with his arms as though he had been injured.

When Dong Mingxing saw Zhang Lie suddenly go quiet, she asked, "What's wrong?"

Zhang Lie coughed. "The person you described—it couldn't be me, could it?"

Dong Mingxing's face flushed like a ripe apple.

Zhang Lie laughed. "Ah, well, you are a beauty, but your personality—that is, you're a good person, I'm sorry!"

Dong Mingxing's flush crept up to her ears. She had been lauded as a genius and beauty since her youth, and countless men from east and west had chased after her. When had she ever faced such public rejection?

"When did I say I was talking about you? Say that to my face once you defeat all the superior kings in the realm!"

Dong Mingxing left the room and rushed into the palace located atop the disaster-grade dragon.

Zhang Lie waved at Li Zongming, grabbed Li Qianlin's hand, then leapt up toward the palace as well. Li Qianlin squirmed, but she allowed Zhang Lie to hold her hand, her face still flushed red.

The disaster-grade dragon flapped its wings and flew off in a burst of five-colored light, followed quickly behind by Red Comet.

While Zhang Lie was leisurely traveling through the third realm, a disaster was unfolding in the Milky Way, back on Mars. It was being invaded by a swarm of bugs, so densely packed together the skies were a frightening black mass. Dozens of clans participated in the defense against the swarm.

From the outside, it looked as though black clouds had covered Mars up. This was the largest invasion of alien bugs that any planet in the solar system had faced, and the current situation wasn't one that Mars alone could handle.

The inhabitants of Mars once again recalled the fear of these alien bugs that they had already repulsed once before. The innumerable bugs seemed as though they could swallow up the entire world; wherever they went, they left a trail of barren land behind them.

Countless warriors perished to their claws, and the clans who valiantly repelled the bugs began to have thoughts of fleeing.

Just then, a figure descended from the skies like a god from heaven, commanding the forces of fire and storm. His arrival alone cleared out a huge hole in the swarm of bugs, causing rays of sunlight to shine down on the surface of Mars once again.

This was the Marshal of Flame, Li Pu. When he appeared, the entire battlefield erupted in cheers. Li Pu was the keystone of the Martian offense, an emblem of victory. The Martian warriors felt their morale rise—until suddenly, a figure cloaked in stealth appeared behind Li Pu.

By the time Li Pu reacted, it was too late. A long, barbed tail had pierced clean through Li Pu's chest, spraying blood over the cheering soldiers.

The return trip to the draconian world only took three days, even after Zhang Lie secretly requested that the disaster-grade dragon fly more slowly.

The moment he returned, Zhang Lie headed straight for the draconian sage and inquired about the state of the wars.

The sage replied, "The other members of your team, Team Zenith, are unstoppable. No king of the realm has managed to resist their assault."

"We've managed to take over more worlds, then?"

"We're expanding at a very impressive rate. During the two weeks in which you were gone, the members of Team Zenith took down six new worlds, large, medium-sized, and small."

Zhang Lie relaxed. "It looks like I won't have to worry about the expansion of this world, then."

The draconian sage shook his head, surprising Zhang Lie. "Is there something you need me to handle?"

"The members of Team Zenith are doing just fine, but the problem is with the other four parties."

"You mean the warlords of the Milky Way?" Zhang Lie had split up his retinue of warlords into four parties, each led by a member of the four prime races. They were to wage war in four separate directions at once.

"The warlord party led by the starbeasts has suffered its first defeat."

Zhang Lie frowned. Each party of warlords had dozens of strong fighters. How could they have lost?

The draconian sage suggested, "To understand the specifics, I recommend you talk to them yourself."

The draconian sage led him to where the injured warlords were recuperating from their wounds. Xing Ying was lying in bed, and Ren Kunjing of the Zijing was peeling fruits for him.

When Xing Ying, wrapped up like a mummy, saw Zhang Lie approach, he tried to force himself to sit up, but Zhang Lie stopped him. "You're injured. Lie back down."

Xing Ying looked down, ashamed. "I was too inept, and unable to lead my comrades to success. When I recover, I'll surely—"

Zhang Lie interrupted him. "No, no, none of that. You don't owe me anything; we're companions. I simply want to know what happened to you, and how you came to be so severely injured."

Ren Kunjing asked, "Zhang Lie, do you mean to—"

Zhang Lie's face was a mask of frozen ice. "These aliens will pay for injuring my companions so severely."

Xing Ying was so touched that tears beaded by his eyes. "The world we attacked was at the peak of large worlds. The leading inhabitants of this world are gigantic beasts with the remarkable ability of being able to communicate with genetic lifeforms and live in harmony with them."

Zhang Lie frowned. "You mean, like the Jinghun clan?"

Ren Kunjing shrugged. "I came to speak with Xing Ying about this matter as well. After some questioning, I realized this wasn't the case. These beasts aren't controlling the lifeforms; they truly are living in harmony with them."

Zhang Lie shook his head. "In harmony? In what sense? Do they support each other, or do they simply stay out of each other's way?"

Chapter 876: Here for Your Life

Xing Ying thought for a moment. "The inhabitants of the world have a strong stench about them. Could this stench be some form of hypnosis that allows them to control the genetic lifeforms all around?"

Zhang Lie nodded. "At any rate, I'll be able to identify the truth by heading to that world and having a look for myself."

Zhang Lie was very curious about this race that was purported to be able to live in harmony with genetic lifeforms.

Zhang Lie continued, "It's true that the king of the realm of such a large world is very strong."

The eastern king Li Zongming had been one such king, and he was far stronger than kings of ordinary large worlds.

"However, there were dozens of warlords in your party, many of whom already have disaster gene fragments of their own. You might not be a match for the king one on one, but surely you had the numerical advantage?"

Xing Ying chuckled. "We did, but so did they."

"Manpower on the level of kings of the realm?" Even a large world at its peak shouldn't have had access to such potent strength.

Xing Ying shook his head. "Yes, but not in the manner you're thinking."

"What are they, then? Puppets?"

Xing Ying replied, "No—they're genetic lifeforms."

Zhang Lie instantly understood. "Disaster-grade lifeforms!" Only those lifeforms could fight on the level of a king of the realm.

Xing Ying nodded.

"How many of them?"

Xing Ying raised three fingers. "Thirty!"

Zhang Lie's eyes lit up. Thirty disaster-grade lifeforms? This world was a treasure vault!

Ren Kunjing said, "According to our investigations, the king of that world enjoys invading nearby worlds, capturing all the lifeforms there, and bringing them back to his own world."

Zhang Lie nodded. "In other words, these disaster-grade lifeforms came from a few, or even a few dozen, worlds."

This was a true fortune. Zhang Lie had been in search of disaster-grade lifeforms to spur Red Comet's evolution, but he hadn't expected to find such a large group so quickly.

"Now that I know who it was that injured you, I'll set off immediately." Zhang Lie rushed out of the room.

Xing Ying was very touched that Zhang Lie was willing to do so much for them—and with such urgency.

The fact that Zhang Lie was unwilling to wait even a single moment demonstrated just how much he valued them warlords. From then on, Xing Ying swore to himself that he would be a loyal follower to Zhang Lie.

With Ren Kunjing's help, Zhang Lie quickly found the world which Xing Ying and his party had headed towards. He split space and arrived in that world in the blink of an eye.

As Xing Ying had mentioned, the world was filled with lifeforms. Peak-grade ones were everywhere to be seen, and superior-grade ones were more numerous than dogs.

Zhang Lie startled the king of the realm with his space-tearing arrival, but the king of the realm relaxed upon noticing that Zhang Lie was alone. He dispatched a subordinate to figure out what Zhang Lie was doing.

Zhang Lie saw the subordinate from afar. If he weren't mistaken, this was a native inhabitant of this world. Xing Ying's description had been a little off; the inhabitants were like walking beasts, with fierce, inhuman faces, strong, muscular limbs, and a large, sturdy body.

"Who are you?" the alien asked.

Zhang Lie blinked in surprise. "I thought you would bark or yell, but you can speak!" Just like Xing Ying had mentioned, these aliens had a curious stench about them.

Zhang Lie frowned as rainbow light colored his eyes. In front of him, the alien's gaze grew unfocused. His eyes likewise took on a rainbow gleam.

"What race are you?"

The alien replied woodenly, "We're the Shouyin."

"Where's your king?"

Before the alien could reply, a spatial rift formed above him. Zhang Lie smiled as he glanced upward. "It looks like there's no need for me to search for him now, I suppose."

"Friend, don't you know it's quite rude to be controlling my kin?" The Shouyin king had made use of his authority to teleport right in front of Zhang Lie. The Shouyin king likewise seemed to be a bipedal beast, but if his subordinate were somewhere between superior- and peak-grade, he was disaster-grade.

A domineering aura emanated from his body. Pale white lightning forked over his body, and a gigantic pair of wings grew from his back. His limbs were thick and strong, his claws sharp, and his beard wild. His eyes flashed with red light, but he sounded calm and collected.

"Why have you come to this world, friend?"

It looked as though the king of the realm had been paying attention to the interaction between Zhang Lie and his subordinate, but this was only reasonable. After all, even the king of the realm had to be wary of an existence that could shatter space.

If not for the fact that Zhang Lie had displayed his power upon entry to the world, the king of the realm would have struck him the moment Zhang Lie attacked his subordinate. However, after that display of power, the king of the realm was wary of Zhang Lie's strength.

"I'm here for one thing," Zhang Lie replied.

"What's there in this world that you're interested in, friend?"

"Your life."

As Zhang Lie clenched his fists, blue genetic energy gathered and rippled around his arms. He flicked his wrists, spawning a frightening aura in the rapidly darkening skies.

Sweat dripped down the king's forehead as he sensed the magnitude of Zhang Lie's genetic energy. A large fish the size of a whale manifested in the air as the king's face turned ugly. "This is the first time we've met. Has there been a misunderstanding?"

Howling winds filled the air, and the genetic lifeforms in the world all began to shriek and shout as they sensed the frightening genetic energy that Zhang Lie was giving off.

Faced with Zhang Lie's pressure and the storm that his genetic energy had summoned, even the Shouyin king wanted to run away like the genetic lifeforms around him.

However, he was the king of this realm, and it would be terribly embarrassing to do so.

Howling winds swept at his face as lightning continued to fork around his body. More and more genetic energy gathered around Zhang Lie's arms. The genetic energy was so dense around Zhang Lie that the Shouyin king could see it with his own eyes.

As more and more layers of genetic energy gathered around Zhang Lie, the Shouyin king could keenly perceive how destructive the resulting attack would be if this unknown assailant were to release it all...

Chapter 877: Many Disaster-Grade Lifeforms

"Hold on! Surely there must be some misunderstanding—I don't even know your name!" the Shouyin king argued.

"My name?"

"I'm Diavus, and my kin call me Skyfather. Our race is known as the Shouyin, and we go by a few other names besides." Upon seeing that Zhang Lie was willing to engage in conversation, Diavus immediately grew excited.

"I'm Zhang Lie, and I'm here to kill you!" Zhang Lie struck the very next moment. He had accumulated quite a bit of pale-blue genetic energy, which he incorporated into his attack. Water flooded the battlefield.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!" 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 air.

Ripples of energy spread out from Zhang Lie, warping the space around him. The towering waves looked like enraged black dragons, and they swamped the nine-headed spider.

Lightning radiated from the Shouyin king, dyeing the entire sky a radiant white. White flashes of forked lightning gathered around Diavus's body to form a huge shield.

As the pale-blue waves and the white lightning clashed, explosions rang through the air. The waves continued clashing with the lightning over and over again. The seawater evaporated; the lightning flickered.

The clash of the two opposing forces shook heaven and earth. The ground began to crack, and huge clods of earth and boulders were sent flying. After the energy from both attacks had dissipated, the ground was a mess of rubble and devastation.

Diavus stood amidst the wreckage, one of his wings broken off, half his beard shaved away, and wounds marring his body.

Diavus shouted, "Who are you, and why do you seek my death?!"

A tidal wave of water-attuned genetic energy appeared behind Zhang Lie. A violent shark materialized around him and soared into the air as the energy circled his body and condensed by his index finger.

"Don't you remember the group of people you injured recently?"

Zhang Lie slowly raised his index finger up high as the pale-blue genetic energy rushed into the depths of space and formed a waterfall that cascaded down.

Diavus seemed to have come to a realization. "Those invaders?"

Zhang Lie responded with actions, not words. The waterfall struck like a blade, propelling the shark forward.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!" Zhang Lie swung downwards with a heavy blow, and the shark swam forth. It opened its bloody maw as Diavus shot a huge pillar of lightning straight into its mouth, piercing it through and shredding Zhang Lie's attack. By the time it got to Zhang Lie, only a small sliver of lightning remained.

Zhang Lie flicked at the lightning with a finger, causing an incredible explosion that dyed the world white. The lightning enveloped Zhang Lie in an instant. Diavus had condensed the bulk of the attack down to this sliver in an attempt to hoodwink Zhang Lie.

As the lightning dissipated, Zhang Lie's figure could be seen anew. A black serpent had wrapped protectively around its body, shielding him from the force of the lightning.

"[Ninecarp Transformation]!" The black serpent, which resembled the world-swallowing serpent Jormungandr, let out a threatening hiss as its scales clicked together.

Diavus nodded to himself. "So you're with those invaders—no wonder!"

"For injuring my people, you'll pay with your life." Zhang Lie clenched his fist tightly and cocked his arm. The serpent lowered its head so that it was aligned with Zhang Lie's fist.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!" Zhang Lie punched forward, and the black serpent behind him shot forth.

Diavus, his body wrapped entirely in lightning, radiated light even brighter than that of the sun. He smashed into the black serpent, and the skies responded in kind. Half of it was pure white, while the other half was pitch black. The black energy was dissolving the white lightning, but the white lightning was piercing through the black energy.

After the energy of the two attacks dissipated, Diavus found himself in an even more sorry state. His single good wing had been dissolved, as had much of the upper half of his body. If not for his shield of lightning, Diavus would likely have been nothing more than a pile of bones.

He roared in outrage, "Don't get too cocky—I'm not alone!"

Diavus made use of his authority to distort his surrounding space. The space around him began to ripple and warp.

Zhang Lie didn't stop him. Instead, he waited expectantly. Zhang Lie hadn't come to this world solely for revenge. His principal reason was the thirty disaster-grade lifeforms under Diavus' control.

The appearance of all thirty such lifeforms shook the battlefield once more. Diavus' authority wouldn't allow him to teleport disaster-grade lifeforms at will; they had to permit it.

Zhang Lie activated his disaster-grade mistmeld clam soulshard, and his eyes glowed in all the colors of the rainbow.

Diavus, realizing what Zhang Lie was doing, immediately waved an arm and shielded the disaster-grade lifeforms with the world's energy.

"Petty bastard!" Zhang Lie groused.

Diavus' forehead beaded with sweat. If Zhang Lie had succeeded and subverted the lifeforms, turning them from allies into enemies...

"If you're unwilling to give them to me, I'll simply have to take them by force!" As Zhang Lie activated his blood ant and dragonwolf soulshards, he transformed into a dragonwolf with russet fur and limbs covered with dragons' scales. His aura became magnified as a hurricane of blood spawned around him.

As soon as he killed Diavus, the world's energy would stop shielding those disaster-grade lifeforms, and Zhang Lie's mistmeld clam soulshard would take effect.

The next moment, Zhang Lie vanished from the spot. He appeared right behind Diavus—but Diavus was prepared. Streaks of white lightning flashed from his body. Zhang Lie tore apart the lightning with a claw, sending blood flying.

"Che, he still managed to escape." At the cost of an arm, Diavus had fled from Zhang Lie.

The disaster-grade lifeforms that Diavus controlled launched a simultaneous attack and pounced toward Zhang Lie.

Zhang Lie now faced a dilemma: how was he to kill Diavus while hurting these lifeforms as little as possible? It sounded like an unrealistic goal, but not for Zhang Lie. After all, Zhang Lie was now strong enough to crush a large world underfoot...

#### Chapter 878: A Walking Treasury

Zhang Lie unleashed his dragonturtle transformation. The image of a dragonturtle manifested behind him as his water-attuned genetic energy seemed to turn heavy and sluggish. Ripples of genetic energy emanated from him, sealing and solidifying the space all around him—and trapping the disaster-grade lifeforms within.

Entering this domain was like wading through a swamp. It cost tens or even hundreds of times more energy just to move forward, or even to wiggle a single finger.

Any victims would feel as though a mountain were pressing down on their bodies, one so heavy they could barely breathe, slowing down all their bodily processes. Even the air seemed to solidify and turn to syrup.

The disaster-grade lifeforms felt as though they were slowly turning to stone; only Zhang Lie was free to move. As though he were simply strolling through a garden, Zhang Lie avoided the disaster-grade lifeforms' telegraphed attacks and walked straight to Diavus.

Upon seeing Zhang Lie get closer and closer, Diavus unleashed lightning on a level stronger than ever before. He knew that, if he didn't fight for his life now, he wouldn't have a chance to do so later.

"[Rune: Control]!" Zhang Lie easily dealt with his attack by raising an arm into the air and sending the gravity and anti-gravity tablets crashing down. Black ripples emanated from the two gravity-altering tablets, forming a localized region of distorted gravity.

The lightning that Diavus unleashed grew out of control, and he spat a mouthful of fresh blood from his mouth.

Just then, the thirty disaster-grade lifeforms managed to break free of their binding and charged toward Zhang Lie.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Quake]!" With a smile, Zhang Lie launched a fist toward them, sending the thirty disaster-grade lifeforms flying. At the same time, the ground beneath Zhang Lie cracked. Huge cracks propagated through the ground, sending lava into the air and causing the skies to turn red.

Diavus, who had been struck by Zhang Lie's [Fists of the Silent Sea], was a terrible sight to behold. His skin had cracked as though he were a piece of pottery that had fallen to the ground.

His internal organs had been obliterated, his bones shattered. As lava seeped out of the ground, Diavus screamed shrilly. He had lost all mobility, and his body was being burned to a crisp by the lava.

Zhang Lie's two runic tablets began to resonate with his [Fists of the Silent Sea: Quake]. As ancient runes appeared on their surface, the two tablets began to toll like a bell. A pulse of energy struck all enemies on the battlefield, destroying Diavus' body.

A rain of blood fell from the heavens, accompanied by a mournful sigh.

The thirty disaster-grade lifeforms had been injured, but only incidentally. Zhang Lie hadn't put much force into his attack, certainly not enough to endanger their lives.

He controlled the thirty lifeforms one by one, then interrogated them as to the location of the proof of kingship.

Unlike the most annoying kings that Zhang Lie had faced, Diavus didn't have the inclination to hide his proof of kingship somewhere secret—but its location was still quite unexpected.

Diavus had had one of the disaster-grade lifeforms swallow the proof of kingship.

Even beyond the thirty disaster-grade lifeforms, the Shouyin world was rich and replete in resources. The Shouyin had gathered all the lifeforms from dozens of neighboring worlds here, and the number of lifeforms had increased exponentially after years of reproduction.

If not for the fact that this world was at the peak of large worlds, it wouldn't have been able to support so many lifeforms.

How could Zhang Lie give up on such an amazing resource?

The regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms were too numerous and common to claim, but Zhang Lie was certainly intending to bring all the superior- and peak-grade ones away.

After all, superior- and peak-grade lifeforms took a relatively long time to reproduce and grow. It would take at least two years for a superior-grade lifeform to mature, and he had even seen records of them taking two or three decades to do so.

Even artificially, Zhang Lie was only able to speed up this period to two or three months.

Since Zhang Lie had to investigate what lay beyond disaster-grade on his own, he would need large quantities of raw materials and lifeforms. This world was like a walking treasure chest to him.

After securing all the lifeforms he wanted, Zhang Lie left whistling a jaunty tune.

He didn't return to the draconian world by shattering space; because of the lifeforms he was bringing back with him, he had no choice but to make use of the wormhole system instead.

When he passed through those worlds that had been conquered by Xing Ying and the rest of his party, the indigenous aliens shuddered at the sight of the horde of genetic lifeforms coming their way.

If this batch of lifeforms had participated in the initial invasion against their worlds, many of the indigenous aliens would have become nothing more than food for them.

Zhang Lie took just three days to bring his herd back through the series of wormholes and into the draconian world.

When the draconian sage noticed the lifeforms flooding into the draconian world, he immediately teleported to the source of the disturbance.

"I thought the world was being invaded again—but it's just you!" the draconian sage grouched.

"I need a place to conduct research," Zhang Lie requested.

"That's fine, but how will you feed all these beasts?"

This was a headache-inducing question for Zhang Lie as well. It was easy to transport all these lifeforms over, but having to feed them would pose a problem—especially given the veritable sea of beasts behind Zhang Lie.

Invoking the authority of the realm, the draconian sage counted the number of lifeforms that Zhang Lie had brought back with them.

"A million superior-grade lifeforms, a hundred thousand peak-grade lifeforms... just how many worlds did you go through to obtain so many?"

"Just one—from an extremely large world."

"Hah." The draconian sage clearly didn't believe Zhang Lie's claims.

Zhang Lie clarified, "That world cultivated a lot of genetic lifeforms, so I brought some back with me."

The draconian sage rolled his eyes. "Don't speak of these superior-grade lifeforms as though they were some form of specialty produce! Do you know how many of your human comrades die or become hurt trying to hunt down just a single superior-grade lifeform?"

"There's quite a lot of land in this world, enough for all these lifeforms to roam around, but you'll have to deal with food yourself. Don't expect my help. I can't help you with anything more!" The draconian sage teleported away before Zhang Lie could request anything else from him.

Zhang Lie began to ponder how to deal with the problem of food. Surely it wouldn't be a good idea to have them feed on each other...

#### Chapter 879: Preparing to Ascend

These genetic lifeforms were all superior- and peak-grade. Genetic lifeforms would indeed be able to evolve more quickly by fighting or devouring each other, but surely not daily.

Zhang Lie didn't urgently need so many disaster-grade lifeforms at the moment, but they would play a more active role once he began his research in earnest. But what would he do during the downtime?

In the second realm, Zhu had resolved this problem with crustacean-type lifeforms that grew and reproduced rapidly.

The Shouyin had managed to rear so many superior-, peak-, and disaster-grade lifeforms by having peak-grade ones eat superior ones, superior ones eat mutated ones, and mutated ones eat regular ones. In doing so, they were roughly able to maintain a dynamic equilibrium.

Zhang Lie had two choices in front of him. The first was to find food suitable for these lifeforms, which he rejected almost offhand.

Zhang Lie had no clues as to where to start. He knew that the third realm had to possess something suitable, but not where—and he didn't want to devote any time to do so. He supposed he could return to the Shouyin world and bring back the regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms there, but if he were to do so, the draconian sage would surely fly into a rage.

The reason he had been willing to accept so many superior- and peak-grade lifeforms into the world was solely on account of Zhang Lie. If Zhang Lie were to bring back so many regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms as well, the draconian world wouldn't be able to support them all. The draconian world would have to be renamed the world of genetic lifeforms, then.

Supporting so many superior- and peak-grade lifeforms meant that the population of regular- and mutated-grade lifeforms was truly enormous; the total number of superior- and peak-grade lifeforms, relative to regular- and mutated-grade ones, was no more than 1%.

If there were a million superior-grade lifeforms and a hundred thousand peak-grade lifeforms, then there had to be at least ten million mutated-grade lifeforms and a hundred million regular-grade ones.

The draconian world didn't have the resources to accommodate so many lifeforms, not unless it merged with even more worlds. However, if it merged with too many, the draconian world would evolve into a superior world.

Zhang Lie didn't want the draconian world to evolve at this point—not because Zhang Lie was afraid of the older superior worlds, but rather because trouble would keep coming once the draconian world got onto the superior worlds' radar.

At this point, Zhang Lie wanted to quietly research the level of strength beyond disaster-grade.

The second option was, as he had considered, to allow the genetic lifeforms to fight among themselves and for the victor to devour the loser. However, this method would deplete the supply of genetic lifeforms very quickly.

A million superior-grade and a hundred thousand peak-grade lifeforms seemed like a lot, but this approach would deplete the supply of those lifeforms ridiculously quickly. They would be all gone within fifty days.

"I don't have a better option, so I guess I'll have to arrange that for now..."

Zhang Lie couldn't help but reminisce about his disaster-grade farm in the second realm.

After dealing with the genetic lifeforms, Zhang Lie began his research.

He summoned Red Comet, then retrieved the xuluo world's energy from his storage-type soulshard and imbued Red Comet with it.

Red Comet's exoskeleton was no longer blood-red. It now gleamed with light of five colors, representing the evolution in Red Comet's status as a lifeform—but the evolution stopped almost as quickly as it started, as though there were some bottleneck that had stalled Red Comet's progress.

Zhang Lie frowned. "A simple application of a superior world's energy isn't enough to lead to a breakthrough, then?"

It was only expected. Genetic lifeforms had to fight with each other and devour their opponents in order to evolve. A superior world's energy only served to lubricate the process and make it go more smoothly.

Xing Ying and Ren Kunjing flew over. Ren Kunjing called out with a smile, "I heard that someone brought a huge quantity of lifeforms through the wormhole, and I knew that it had to be you, champion of mankind!"

Xing Ying glanced at all the superior- and peak-grade lifeforms in the vicinity, touched by what Zhang Lie had done. It was evident that Zhang Lie had gone to the world where he had been defeated and killed the king of the realm there.

If not for the king's death, Zhang Lie could hardly have brought all these lifeforms with him.

Xing Ying knelt, one knee touching the ground. "Champion of mankind, I, Xing Ying, vow to go wherever I can be of use to you!"

With formless power, Zhang Lie prevented Xing Ying from kneeling fully down, then lifted him up. "I only did what I should. You fought for me, so of course I'd defend you."

Xing Ying nodded, touched by Zhang Lie's words.

Zhang Lie asked, "Are you largely recovered?"

Xing Ying rotated his arms. "Thanks to the special medicine provided by the members of Team Zenith, my injuries recovered in just a few days. I can fight on the battlefield for you again, my liege!"

"No, no, there's no need. Get a few more days of rest, and make sure you recover fully from your injuries."

Ren Kunjing glanced at the sea of genetic lifeforms behind Zhang Lie. "Zhang Lie, do you have any plans with those lifeforms behind you?"

Ren Kunjing really didn't know what to say.

Other hunters were desperately hunting down superior- and peak-grade lifeforms—Zhang Lie was feeding a million of them. Other hunters were trying their best to search for and kill disaster-grade lifeforms at great expense and risk—Zhang Lie had thirty docile ones right here. When had disaster-grade lifeforms become so commonplace?

Zhang Lei asked, "Ren Kunjing, there are more superior- and peak-grade lifeforms with the other groups of warlords that have been dispatched, aren't there?"

Ren Kunjing nodded. "The four warlord parties picked up quite a number of superior- and peak-grade lifeforms during their invasion."

The reason the Jinghun had been able to host so many superior- and peak-grade lifeforms was by waging war and allowing the lifeforms to eat their fill on the battlefield.

Zhang Lie instructed, "Summon all the superior- and peak-grade lifeforms back."

Ren Kunjing asked, "It looks like you're planning something big. Do you need my race's assistance?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "No, but I'll call on you when I do need it."

"Very well. I'll send a message immediately."

Back in the second realm, Zhang Hanxiang asked, "Yun Bing, do you really intend to ascend now?"

Yun Bing replied, "Together with you, yes."

"The kingdom of Limit will survive without a princess like me, but without a prime minister like you..."

"As Zhang Lie once said, the kingdom of Limit in the second realm should serve only as a springboard. We can't pin all our hopes to this kingdom; we should look farther. I've handled the kingdom for over a year, and everything has stabilized now. Once Hong Xiao and the third generation of disciples from the dojo ascend, they'll become the new pillars of the kingdom. Do you understand?"

Chapter 880: Stowaways

Zhang Hanxiang nodded, though she still seemed a little confused by the big picture.

Yun Bing asked, "Don't you think what your brother's doing in the third realm is quite familiar?"

"Is it?"

"He's gathering his strength now. He combined the strength of the human hunters there with the strongest warlords of the Milky Way, and he's starting to invade other neighboring worlds. It's precisely what he did in the second realm when founding the kingdom of Limit.

"I suspect that Zhang Lie is planning to construct a new kingdom of Limit in the third realm, and as prime minister of the second-realm kingdom, how could I not be present for the formation of the new third-realm kingdom?" Yun Bing asked passionately.

She continued, "I've already had a discussion with Chu Feng. He plans on ascending simultaneously. Thanks to your brother's disaster-grade farm, along with the authority of the kingdom of Limit, we've both maxed out our disaster gene fragments as well. Now is surely the best time to ascend."

Zhang Hanxiang smiled. "Very well. I do look forward to the surprise on Brother's face when he sees the two of us!"

"I've delegated all my responsibilities to Hong Xi—though it may be an inconvenience for her to have to stand guard here in the second realm for a while longer." Yun Bing patted Zhang Hanxiang on the head.

Zhang Hanxiang seemed reasonably optimistic. "It's not a problem. Hong Xiao and the others will arrive in the second realm and develop rapidly—I don't expect it'll take Hong Xi any longer than three or four months to ascend, and possibly even two."

Yun Bing asked, "Do you really intend to bring the aliens with you?"

Zhang Hanxiang nodded seriously. "Of course! They're loyal to my brother, and he might need their support. I'll be taking the disaster-grade dragonwhale soulshard as well."

"Let's hope there are no incidents in the meantime, then."

After seeing Xing Ying and Ren Kunjing off, over the next few days, Zhang Lie had the superior- and peak-grade lifeforms duel each other in hopes that more would ascend to disaster-grade.

The thirty disaster-grade lifeforms also began to spar with Red Comet. It was fortunate that they were doing all this in deserted land, because what they left behind after each battle was desolation.

After Red Comet killed ten disaster-grade lifeforms and devoured them all, it finally seemed to reach the threshold between disaster-grade and what lay beyond.

Chen Fan warped over to Zhang Lie's location with the help of the draconian sage, only to witness Red Comet fending off a large number of disaster-grade lifeforms by itself. The scene of the battlefield was shocking; it was as though there were twenty kings of the realm duking it out in the middle of nowhere.

Chen Fan couldn't help but tremble—if he were to even draw close to the battlefield, he would likely die within a matter of seconds.

Zhang Lie had been paying attention to the battlefield, and he knew who was approaching even though he didn't look in his direction.

"Warlord Chen Fan, what are you doing here?"

"Can't I come over just to have a chat?"

Zhang Lie turned and glanced at him, and Chen Fan understood his meaning wordlessly: What sort of relationship do we have that you would come over to find me for no reason?

Chen Fan shrugged. "A group of humans ascended from the second realm today."

Zhang Lie nodded. As he leaned back on a comfortable chair, he had a sip of tea.

Although it wasn't daily that hunters arrived from the second realm, ever since the founding of the kingdom of Limit, humans had been able to develop far more quickly in the second realm.

Ascension was expected and had become commonplace.

Things weren't the same in his past life. For a second-realm hunter to ascend to the third realm was an occasion worthy of celebration, and Zhang Lie had indeed received one such.

Before his regression, the situation in the second realm had been particularly harrowing because of the presence of the sura. Not only did the humans have to fend off the sura, they also had to be wary of other alien races—all the while killing genetic lifeforms in order to advance.

The second realm had been a crucible, but Zhang Lie had resolved the problems there neatly after taking care of the sura and founding the kingdom of Limit. A stable path to ascension had developed as a result.

Chen Fan replied, "You know these hunters, so I thought I'd come over to share the good news with you."

"I know these hunters?"

Zhang Lie knew quite a lot of the hunters in the second realm, so Chen Fan's words weren't as revealing as he might have hoped.

"One is Yun Bing, and the other is Chu Feng."

"Ah, those two!" Zhang Lie beamed.

Chen Fan mirrored his smile. "There's another hunter, one I think you'd very much like to see."

"That I'd very much like to see?"

When Chen Fan revealed the name of the third hunter, Zhang Lie was elated. He waved a hand to Chen Fan, shattered space, and teleported back to the human city in the draconian world.

Upon doing so and sensing a familiar aura, he shattered space once more, arriving right behind Yun Bing, Chu Feng, and the third hunter. Yun Bing and Chu Feng jumped up in fright, but upon seeing who had shown up, they sighed in relief.

"Hanxiang!" Zhang Lie shouted, drawing her in for a hug.

"Brother!" Zhang Hanxiang hugged her brother earnestly.

Naturally, the third hunter that Chen Fan had mentioned was Zhang Hanxiang.

Zhang Hanxiang grinned. "Well, Brother? Aren't you surprised to see me here?"

"It's a very pleasant surprise. Welcome to the third realm."

Zhang Hanxiang smiled. "Did you miss me, Brother?"

"Quite a bit," Zhang Lie replied honestly.

After all, Zhang Hanxiang was his only relative remaining in the world.

"How are Sun Mengmeng and the others?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "They're all away on conquest."

Zhang Hanxiang cocked her head. "As the rumors suggested, you really are building a kingdom of Limit in the third realm, aren't you, Brother?"

"More or less."

"In that case, what I brought up from the second realm will surely be able to help you."

Zhang Lie was curious as to just what sort of help his sister was referring to.

With a smile on her face, Zhang Hanxiang called out, "Brother, can you find a secluded region free from people?"

Zhang Lie grabbed her hand, shattered space, and appeared in the wilderness—in a patch of land that Zhang Lie was using to rear the superior- and peak-grade lifeforms he had brought back with him. It was land originally owned by the Mengtai.

"Just what did you bring back from the second realm?"

Zhang Hanxiang smirked. She turned around and was rapidly surrounded by water as a dragonwhale appeared by her side.

Spatial fluctuations rippled through the air as a number of aliens appeared in sight.

Zhang Lie was amazed. "Zhu, the Yeluo chieftain—you've all come to the third realm as well?"

Zhang Hanxiang had brought quite a number of aliens with her up to the third realm.

The moment Zhu saw Zhang Lie, she began to cry. Her eyes honed in on Zhang Lie, until Zhang Lie felt a pang of guilt—but surely there was nothing to feel guilty about?

Zhang Hanxiang called out, "Well, Brother? Aren't I amazing?"

Zhang Lie shook his head incredulously. "To have brought a number of aliens along with you..."

Zhang Lie realized what Zhang Hanxiang had done.

In general, an alien could only ascend to a higher realm by growing so strong that even the world couldn't tolerate its presence any longer. Such an alien would be able to enter a higher-dimensional world through the void. The asura of the second realm had done just that.

This was no easy feat. Any alien who ascended through the void would have to face heavenly trials, just like in xianxia novels.

These aliens would have to survive the energy of a higher-dimensional realm, but once they did so, their status would evolve. There were quite a few examples of aliens who hadn't been strong enough to breach this barrier and died during the ascension.

The fact that the ascension process was so similar to that described in xianxia novels had even sparked some research regarding a possible link between China and the dimensional realm. In the end, the researcher who had suggested such a ludicrous claim was laughed at by the entire galaxy.

Earth was a small, insignificant existence in the Milky Way galaxy, and China was little more than an atom at such large scales. How could an atom have anything to do with the dimensional realm?

It was as though the researcher were suggesting a connection between a pebble in a river and a vein of gold half the world away.

Aliens had a very hard time ascending to a higher realm, but the hunters of the Milky Way faced no such challenge. As soon as they maxed out their gene fragments, they were able to ascend, and would even be granted the world's energy during the ascension process to acclimatize themselves to a higher-dimensional realm.

It was almost as though the native inhabitants of the realm and the hunters of the Milky Way had their positions reversed. If not for the fact that only the native inhabitants of the third realm could become kings of the realm, the members of the Milky Way might have thought themselves completely superior.

The Yeluo chieftain and the Yeluo warriors didn't have the ability to ascend on their own; instead, Zhang Hanxiang had packed them up in her dragonwhale soulshard before ascending to the third realm, then releasing them in the third realm after she arrived.

Zhang Lie scolded her. "If the will of the world found out about this, what would you have done?"

Zhang Hanxiang lowered her head. "I just wanted to help you, Brother!"

The Yeluo chieftain smiled and strode forward. "Your majesty, if there's anyone to blame, it should be us. We suggested that the princess bring us along. There's nothing for us to do in the kingdom of Limit any longer. We've finished our research in the second realm after making use of Limit's resources to collect a large number of strange herbs and plants."

Zhang Lie glared at him. "Don't try to shoulder the blame for this!"

Zhang Hanxiang was Zhang Lie's only sister, only relative. How could he bear to see her hurt? His own affairs paled compared to his sister's safety.

Zhu's eyes filled with tears again. "Do you not welcome us here, then? You heartless man! Did you think I wouldn't catch up to you?"

Zhang Lie was speechless. "Zhu, your words seem to be implying something..."

Zhu hmped. "And should I not? You've done that with me, so you have to take responsibility!"

Zhang Hanxiang's eyes widened. She clutched her mouth in shock as she looked toward Zhang Lie.

"Brother, no wonder Zhu insisted on following you! I can't believe you're actually—I respected you so much, but you... I was wrong, Brother!"

The Yeluo chieftain sucked in a deep breath and slowly stepped back. Better not to meddle in his majesty's affairs...