

## U. Warlord 911

### Chapter 911: The Power of Teamwork

The mutated bugs met the hunters' attacks with their fists. They threw out a flurry of punches, each with so much momentum they seemed like bullets.

"[Birth of the Holy Dragon]!"

Li Feng leapt high into the air and landed on the dragon's head, his sword gleaming brightly as though it had been dipped in liquid light. As he raised the sword to the skies, it glowed and expanded, morphing into a huge blade of light.

A blinding white glow illuminated the entire battlefield. The ground, stained with fresh blood, was completely hidden from sight.

A white dragon emerged from around Li Feng. The mutated bug defended with both hands as Li Feng leapt high into the air and sliced down with a swing of his sword.

The mutated-grade bug gave up on defense and turned to dodge—sacrificing an arm in the process.

Li Feng's huge blade sliced down and chopped off one of the mutated bug's arm.

The mutated bug had tried to dodge, but the sword of light fell too quickly for even that. With its other arm, the mutated bug punched forward, its fist glowing with ink-green genetic energy. It was trying to duplicate Li Feng's technique, but to do so in front of a master like Li Feng was pure hubris.

"[Birth of the Holy Dragon: the Stars Descend]!" Light gathered by Li Feng's blade. As he struck, dozens of dragons fell from the skies like meteors, each giving off starry light.

Each dragon looked like part of a galaxy, their hides patterned with the starry sky. Their void-like swipes drained the mutated bug's attack of its momentum even as the bug continued punching forward with its genetic energy, destroying dragon after dragon with its punches. The dragons exploded in a burst of starlight, scalding the mutated bugs and causing their dark yellow ichor to splash on the ground.

A group of starlight dragons surged toward the mutated bug, which was torn apart by their combined assault.

More mutated bugs, watching the battles unfold from the bug nest, had realized a significant problem with their assault. Why was it that the humanoid bugs were being steamrolled by the hunters of the Zenith Dojo?

One issue was the existence of a small group of elite forces. The humanoid bugs didn't have any units like the members of Team Zenith, but this was only a small part of the issue.

Not only had the mutated bugs identified the main problem, they had even come up with a solution: they had to kill Zhou Ying, who was single-handedly supporting the entire battlefield.

The humanoid bugs didn't have a healer like Zhou Ying. They relied on their innate ridiculous vitality and constitution, as well as their own regenerative ability. This would have been superior to

what the human hunters possessed—if not for the variable called Zhou Ying. The humanoid bugs' physical abilities didn't allow them to dominate as they had planned.

Zhou Ying's healing meant that any wounds they dealt would quickly recover. The hunters who were supported by Zhou Ying had an effective constitution no weaker than that of the bugs themselves.

Some of the mutated bugs tried to attack Zhou Ying, but she was hardly a weak combatant in her own right.

Huge vines wrapped around Zhou Ying, vines that resembled dragons of wood. They curled around the humanoid bugs who tried to launch attacks at her, but the humanoid bugs were so strong that they were able to rip up those vines with their bare hands.

Zhou Ying frowned. In order to deal with these bugs, she would have to temporarily stop supporting the disciples of the Zenith Dojo.

The bugs had incredible regenerative abilities, but the disciples of the Zenith Dojo did not. Her healing could lapse for a moment or two, but if this became a prolonged fight, the disciples of the Zenith Dojo would start to die.

"[Avatar of the Fae: Earthbound Prison]!" Zhou Ying released all her stored vitality at once, causing the ground to quake as thousands of jade-green wood dragons rushed out of the earth.

Thousands of vines emerged from the earth, surrounding the humanoid bugs in layer after layer of plant matter.

Before Zhou Ying could relax, however, the vines tore apart from the inside, and the humanoid bugs emerged from their midst.

Wood dragons flew into the air, but the humanoid bugs' wings whirred as they deftly avoided the attacks and shot toward Zhou Ying.

Zhou Ying snorted. "Do you really think I'm so helpless?" Her entire body began to glow with jade-green vitality. A surge of genetic energy filled the battlefield. "If a hundred vines aren't enough, if a thousand vines aren't enough, how about ten thousand?!"

The calm genetic energy surrounding Zhou Ying suddenly turned agitated. It spread all over the battlefield, which began to tremble and shake, as though resonating with Zhou Ying's anger.

"[Avatar of the Fae: Worldbound Enclosure]!"

Tens of thousands of wood dragons emerged from the ground, covering up the entire battlefield—but not only had their quantity increased, so had their quality.

These wood dragons were an order of magnitude more sturdy than the last, and their bark-like skin even shone like lustrous metal.

The emergence of these ten thousand dragons covered up at least a third of the battlefield. None of the humanoid bugs were able to avoid the attack; the wood dragons trapped them all.

So numerous were the layers of dragons surrounding each humanoid bug that even they couldn't break free in one fell swoop. They were trapped and slowly digested by the dragons until they turned into wooden sculptures.

In a matter of moments, Zhou Ying was surrounded by a verdant forest formed of wood dragons, and the humanoid bugs enclosed within them. Leaves began to grow out of the wood dragons' flesh.

The humanoid bugs targeted not only the members of Team Zenith, but also Hong Xi's four-hunter group that was coordinating the attack.

For the humanoid bugs to turn the tides, they would have to both deal with the humans' elite forces as well as the commanders of the battle.

It would take quite some effort to kill the members of Team Zenith, but Hong Xi and the others seemed like much easier targets.

Hong Xiao was sent flying with a single punch. In rage, Hong Xi tried to retaliate, but her telegraphed attack was easily blocked. If not for Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen, who had rushed over, Hong Xi would have sustained a serious injury—or even died on the spot.

With a feathered fan in her left hand and a longsword in her right, with white moonlight by her feet and black sunlight by her back, Hong Xi manifested [Syzygy].

Wind howled. The sword in her right hand gleamed like the radiant moon. As she waved her fan, she summoned a twister in the air. Her sword traced a brilliant arc, launching crescent blades at her foes.

#### Chapter 912: Killing the Mutated Bugs

Hong Xi's attack was snuffed out by a single punch from a humanoid bug, but Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen were there to take advantage of the opening.

"[Heaven-Splitting Blade]!" Wind and storm wrapped around Jun Jiuxiao, condensing on his blade. The silvery-white blade glowed resplendently. It tore apart the heavens, cutting apart even space itself and leaving a thin line of void behind.

The mutated bug leapt into the air and kicked toward Jun Jiuxiao, who was sent flying. He smashed into the ground, his face bloody.

"[Darkbane Claws]!" Black smoke surrounded Ye Xianchen. Nightmarish claws spawned from the smoke, but generated little more than sparks against the bugs' steel-like exterior.

The mutated bug punched the ground, cratering it and dispersing the smoke.

Hong Xiao rushed back. His sword traced an arc in the air as he slashed at the bug's back, leaving nothing but a faint wound.

"[Nightmarish Strike]!" Ye Xianchen gripped her daggers tightly. As though a demon were descending on the realm, black genetic energy poured from her and manifested in the form of a fierce demonic head.

Just as she was about to slash at the bug with her daggers, the mutated bug punched forward. A strong wind swept across the battlefield, dispersing the manifestation and forcing Ye Xianchen to stumble back.

Hong Xi took her place, attacking simultaneously with Hong Xiao. The two siblings linked their genetic energy and combined them in one devastating blow that caved in the mutated bug's head and sent ichor spraying out.

However, the bug seemed to shrug off the impact. It punched forward again, but Hong Xi and Hong Xiao had learned from its antics. Both dodged smoothly, giving Jun Jiuxiao and Ye Xianchen an opening to strike.

They raised their weapons simultaneously, one bright as daylight, the other dark like midnight. Their two slashes melded into one, bisecting the mutated bug vertically.

The four hunters stared at each other in the aftermath of the battle. It was a hard-won victory, and all four hunters were wounded to varying degrees after being struck by the bug.

A wave of vitality swept over them as their wounds healed. Zhou Ying had finished dealing with her assassins. She smiled and gave Hong Xi's four-hunter party a thumbs up as she healed them all.

Hong Xi and the others smiled at her, bowing in thanks.

Zhang Lie watched the battles play out from his vantage point atop the shuttle. He was pleased with what he had seen.

Even without the direct command of Hong Xi and the others, without the sustained healing from Zhou Ying, the disciples of the Zenith Dojo managed to hold their own even against the humanoid bugs. They had certainly worked hard to develop their strength.

"I can't disappoint everyone else's hard work, now, can I?" Zhang Lie turned to the bug nest with murderous intent. The space around Zhang Lie trembled as 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.

Zhang Lie shouted, "You've observed what's been happening for long enough, don't you think? It's time to make your appearance!"

A howling gale swept over the battlefield. As more and more genetic energy gathered around Zhang Lie's arms, it looked as though he were at the heart of a whirlpool.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!" 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 toward the bug nest.

Ripples of energy spread out from Zhang Lie, warping the space around him. The towering waves looked like enraged black dragons as they smashed into the bug nest in a flood. A huge rumble shook the heavens, and the entire battlefield quaked.

The bug nest exploded upon being struck by the torrent of energy, sending all sorts of bug parts flying into the air.

The air filled with ripple after ripple of genetic energy, which expanded until it covered the entire battlefield. Sea-blue genetic energy swept over the combatants like a storm, buffeting both the humanoid bugs and the disciples of the Zenith Dojo. All the combatants staggered, blown off their feet by the blue waves that shook heaven and earth.

"Is it finally coming?" Zhang Lie looked toward the ruin of the bug nest expectantly.

A figure dashed out of the explosion.

"I've been waiting! [The Boundless Blade: Expulsion]!" Zhang Lie extended his pointer finger like a sword, and water-attuned genetic energy gathered around it. As he waved his finger, sword energy erupted like a wave, accompanied by a giant shark.

The figure that had dashed out of the explosion waved a fist, broke the tide's advance, and dispelled the manifestation of the shark.

The figure was of another humanoid bug, but one even larger than the others that had been revealed to date. It was five meters tall, a veritable giant, and exuded strength from every pore. Feelers grew out of its head, like antlers or even a crown. Its black, steely skin gave off the luster of metal, and its aura caused all those around it to step back subconsciously.

"A bug king, then?"

This bug king had been spying on the battlefield from within the bug nest. Zhang Lie didn't know what it was planning.

Zhang Lie had been worried that it would suddenly launch a sneak attack, and had been keeping an eye on it throughout the heated battle.

Only after the members of Team Zenith and Hong Xi and the others had dealt with the mutated bugs and the Zenith Dojo had control of the battlefield did Zhang Lie finally expose the largest threat around.

"[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 hiss as its scales clicked together.

"It's well past time you joined those dead mutated bugs, don't you think?" Zhang Lie clenched his fist tightly. The serpent wrapped around his arm and hissed. "[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!"

Zhang Lie punched forward, and the black serpent behind him shot forth.

The bug king mirrored Zhang Lie's punch, dispelling the black serpent in an explosion of genetic energy. The energy sizzled as it touched the bug king's skin, dissolving even the black, steel-like material.

Zhang Lie's body glowed as he transformed into a russet dragonwolf. Red fur grew out of his skin, and dragon scales covered his limbs. Dragon horns emerged from his forehead, and his aura was immediately magnified.

The next moment, Zhang Lie morphed into a beam of red light. A howling gale swept past the entire battlefield as all the combatants felt the pressure he gave off.

The disciples of the Zenith Dojo craned their heads toward the sky, where this historic battle was taking place. Their eyes were filled with awe and respect as they tracked the blood-red figure's every move.

"The dojo leader will surely win!"

Zhang Lie's claws trailed sparks as they left faint wounds on the bug king's skin, who countered with a punch. Zhang Lie tilted his body and dodged; the punch boomed like thunder to his side.

Zhang Lie swiped his claws in a flurry, as though he had become a blood-colored twister. The bug king didn't dodge. Instead, it retaliated with an equally devastating flurry of punches...

### Chapter 913: Appearance of the Bug King

The blood cyclone and black storm clashed in mid-air, as though two armies were duking each other out for dominion of the battlefield. Neither combatant relented; the explosion that resulted from the clash turned the flat ground of the battlefield uneven.

The two combatants exchanged hundreds of blows in mere seconds, bolstered by the strength of their constitution.

The bug king's black punches were able to distort space with strength alone.

Yang Ze watched the fight play out seriously. If he were the one fighting the bug king, none of his tricks or techniques would have any noticeable impact. The bug king's strength had reached such an incredible level that he was able to distort space with brute force alone.

Even more astoundingly, despite the fact that the bug king was equipped with a monstrous physique, it was still on the losing end of this fight.

Even the members of Team Zenith didn't think that any human could best the humanoid bugs in terms of constitution, but Zhang Lie proved to be a counterexample. He demonstrated that humans could dwarf these mutated bugs in every respect.

Zhang Lie's opponent wasn't a "regular" humanoid bug, if these bugs could even be considered normal at all, but rather their king. The bug king's constitution had to be a dozen, a hundred times stronger than that of the bugs the hunters had faced themselves.

The members of Team Zenith didn't know which combatant was the more monstrous.

If not for the bug king's immensely strong regenerative ability, it would already have been killed by Zhang Lie.

A black serpent swooped toward the bug king, only to be crushed by the bug king's grip. An explosion of dark-red genetic energy swept over the bug king as the serpent exploded, but the bug king protected itself with its own ink-green genetic energy.

The bug king's genetic energy was such a dark green that it was all but black. If the humanoid bugs' genetic energy was a potpourri of those of the lifeforms that they had devoured, then the bug king's genetic energy was a potpourri of the humanoid bugs' genetic energy.

With its left hand, the bug king summoned lightning; with its right hand, a storm. Unusually, both phenomena were ink-green, the same color as its genetic energy. Fang Yi grew alarmed as he watched the battle unfold—the bug king was using his techniques!

On the other hand, Zhang Lie wasn't surprised. The bug king had been observing the entire fight from within the bug nest, but it was rather remarkable that it had managed to reproduce the techniques just by sight alone.

As the bug king made its move, Zhang Lie pulled back. A black serpent coiled around Zhang Lie. Its scales turned blood-red and horns protruded from its forehead as it morphed into a dragon of blood.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade]!" As Zhang Lie punched forward, the blood dragon roared in outrage and shot toward the bug king.

The moment he launched his attack, Zhang Lie retreated at his fastest speed.

The bug king's elemental energies clashed against the blood dragon, which exploded upon taking the brunt of the impact.

The explosion spawned a huge storm of energy. A wave of annihilation exploded around the dragon. Pitch-black energy swallowed everything in the vicinity like a storm at sea, covering up the sky.

"Dojo Leader, don't go too crazy! We're still down here!" The disciples of the Zenith Dojo hurriedly retreated as the pitch-black energy of annihilation sent shockwaves through the entire battlefield.

Zhang Lie's battles were spectacular, but they came with one drawback—a moment's carelessness might cost the disciples their lives.

The explosion of the energy of annihilation that made up the blood dragon's body was on the level of a weapon of mass destruction, one that seemed as though it could even destroy a large-sized world.

However, because he was cognizant of the presence of the disciples of the Zenith Dojo, Zhang Lie hadn't launched his attack at full strength. Otherwise, all of Mars might have been consumed by the impact—Zhang Lie would have destroyed Mars before the bugs themselves could.

The explosion was like a black hole that consumed everything in sight, but once it reached a threshold, the black hole shrunk down to a pinhole and vanished from sight, leaving a vacuum behind. A storm manifested as the air itself cavitating. A hemispherical hole was left behind on the battlefield, as though a bomb with a few megatons of energy had just been detonated.

Even more shockingly, the bug king had survived Zhang Lie's assault. Zhang Lie might not have released his attack at full strength, but the energy of annihilation that he had released was the real thing.

Zhang Lie had never met a being that could survive the devastating energy without having encountered it before. If he could, he wanted to capture the bug king and use it as a research subject.

Even though the bug king had survived the explosion, it was badly hurt as a result. Its black, steel-like exterior was cracked all over, and dark yellow ichor drained from its body. Even its regenerative ability was unable to keep up.

Ink-green genetic energy surged around the bug king like a boundless ocean. Ripples of genetic energy wrapped around the bug king's arms, spinning faster and faster...

Fang Yi frowned. His eyes suddenly grew wide.

A howling gale swept over the battlefield. The bug king stood at the heart of a whirlpool of genetic energy.

Yang Ze's face turned pale. "Is-Isn't this..."

The whirlpool of genetic energy compressed, kneading the surrounding space into a papier-mache ball. The members of Team Zenith finally realized why this sensation was so familiar. This wasn't the first time they had seen the attack, or even the fifth. They had felt it many times before.

Hong Xi's voice trembled. "It can't be..."

She had learned that technique as well, though she hadn't developed it to the extent that Yang Ze and Zhang Lie had. Even so, she had never imagined that she would ever see this technique, which might as well be Zhang Lie's signature technique, in enemy hands.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!" Ripples of energy spread out from the bug king, warping the space around him. The ink-green genetic energy formed a sickly tide that caused space itself to tremor. Like a raging dragon, the attack shot through the sky.

It was a corrupted version of Zhang Lie's own attack.

The disciples of the Zenith Dojo, particularly the senior ones, gasped in shock. Had the bug king managed to learn one of Zhang Lie's signature techniques?

Fang Yi goggled. For the bug king to be able to reproduce his wind and thunder combination attack was already no mean feat, but it had even managed to copy Zhang Lie's far more advanced techniques!

This sort of ability was absolutely shameless!

#### Chapter 914: A One-Sided Slaughter

Despite the revelation, Zhang Lie's face was calm. Black genetic energy erupted around him.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring]!" Zhang Lie cocked back his left arm, channeling his genetic energy into the attack, and sent its full force at the bug king.

Howling with the force of thunder, a horde of over a hundred black dragons flew toward the bug king, directed by Zhang Lie's punch. The dragons were fierce and domineering, and all hundred of them boasted the power of annihilation.

The black dragons clashed against the bug king's reproduction of Zhang Lie's boundless ocean, careening through it and destroying the bug king's technique.

Fang Yi hadn't lost to the inferior reproduction of his technique; Zhang Lie certainly wasn't about to lose to his own. Furthermore, [Fists of the Silent Sea: Hundred Dragons Soaring] was an evolved version of [Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]. The bug king was foolish to think that his inferior copy would be able to win out in such a confrontation.

In its left hand, the bug king evoked thunder; in its right, a howling gale. As the bug king clasped both hands together, the wind and storm combined into one entity. The storm crackled with lightning. A wind dragon and storm tiger manifested simultaneously, with an imposing aura that seemed to shake the skies. It erupted in an ink-green cyclone.

Compared to the first time the bug king cast the technique, the bug king had clearly intuited the fundamental concepts behind it. The bug king's use of the skill indicated that it had a deep understanding of the principles in play.

The ink-green cyclone swept up Zhang Lie's black dragons, which burst apart in another wave of annihilation. The skies shook.

That explosion triggered a chain reaction. The other black dragons in the vicinity likewise exploded, dying the sky black.

Upon witnessing the burst of energy heading straight for him, the bug king's gaze grew fearful. As it recalled what had happened to itself the first time it had been struck by the technique, it flinched and hastily stepped back.

A single blood dragon had been devastating to the bug king; this chain reaction of black dragons surely had to be worse. As more and more dragons exploded in the air, a haze of black covered up the heavens. The energy of annihilation that gathered in the air began to suck up its surroundings.

Fortunately, the disciples of the Zenith Dojo were now well aware of the enormity of Zhang Lie's attacks, and they had retreated far from the battlefield.

Hong Xi asked, "Are we far enough yet?"

Yang Ze replied, "We'd better head a little further out so that our captain can really let loose. I'm not frightened, of course—just worried that I might obstruct our captain!"

Fang Yi gave Yang Ze a thumbs up. "Exactly my thoughts, Yang Ze!"

Li Feng nodded. "Right, we'd best head further out. Who knows what sort of techniques our captain has up his sleeve?"

They did want to observe Zhang Lie's battle, but they had to make sure that their lives were safe first.

As Zhang Lie's opponent, the bug king was unable to retreat like the disciples of the Zenith Dojo.

A black wave of annihilation caught up to the bug king like a nightmare. Fearful of being sucked into the technique again, the bug king's body split into over a hundred clones, each simultaneously real and illusory.

Zhang Lie blinked. "Is this Sun Xiaowu's [Blinding Flash]?"

However, each clone was easily dispersed by the wave of annihilation.

The bug king continued to flee. A series of ink-green dragons manifested around him, shooting out toward the wave like raindrops in a storm.

Li Feng, observing the fight from afar, cried out, "That's my [Light Dragon's Remnants]!"

The light dragons were unable to resist the energy of annihilation, and they were instantly dispelled as the wave struck them.

The bug king used yet another technique. Hundreds of ink-green serpents, burning with incandescent flame, appeared in the air.

"Looks like your [Dance of the Incandescent Wyrms]," Fang Yi murmured to Li Feng.

Even these serpents were completely destroyed by the wave of annihilation.

Li Feng shook his head. "The bug king's attempts are fruitless. Even a hundred copies of me wouldn't be an opponent for our captain. What good could my techniques do against him? What's more, he hasn't grasped the essence of those techniques. The composition of genetic energy is all wrong!"

The bug king punched forward. Waves suddenly appeared in the sky, shimmering like a mirage. Spatial fluctuations rippled as an ink-green shark shot forth.

Yang Ze shook his head. "Is it time for my technique, then?"

It was equally useless against Zhang Lie's wave of annihilation. As the wave drew closer and closer, the bug king tried even harder to flee, but to no avail.

A patch of darkness had almost overwhelmed the bug king when a black serpent materialized behind itself, so large and so developed that it resembled the world-swallowing serpent Jormungandr. It let out a threatening hiss as its scales clicked together.

The bug king invoked Zhang Lie's [Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade], but to no avail. In light of Zhang Lie's absolute strength, the bug king seemed like nothing more than a small bug, whose fate was to be crushed between Zhang Lie's fingers.

The bug king was swallowed up by the wave of annihilation, which once again contracted into a pinhole, then vanished.

The bug king did not survive its second encounter with the void.

Deep in an unexplored sector of the universe, a certain lifeform rested on its throne. Suddenly, it tightened its grip around the food in its hand, causing sticky purple fluid to cover its hands. However, the lifeform paid no attention to the mass.

Its eyes were glowing with anger. "A larva with the potential to become a true bug king, slaughtered almost immediately after it was born...?"

If any disciple of the Zenith Dojo were present, they would have noticed an undeniable similarity between the lifeform seated on the throne and the bug king Zhang Lie had just killed.

Unlike the cockroach-like humanoid bugs of Mars, however, this lifeform was more like a scorpion. A scorpion's stinger grew out of its back, and its limbs were more like those of a locust than a human's.

"I don't know who or what you are, nor where in the universe you hail, but the moment I, Akama, identify your presence, you shall experience my wrath."

Akama strode up to a window, from which it could see the void of space. This "window" was part of a gigantic bug's compound eye, within which Akama was traveling.

The gigantic bug was currently flying through space, and it was so large that a single one of its claws could reduce a planet into rubble—and there were millions of such bugs in the swarm under Akama's control.

Chapter 915: A Bold Guess

After the end of the battle against the bug king, the Zenith Dojo began to clean up the battlefield.

The full-fledged battle between Zhang Lie and the bug king had shocked the rest of the humanoid bugs. The disciples of the Zenith Dojo, who had retreated from the battlefield, were too far away to be able to block the bugs from fleeing.

"The most important threat has been dealt with, and the danger on Mars is over."

Zhang Lie's sensory perception allowed him to identify that there were no large swarms of bugs remaining on Mars, only a few fleeing humanoid bugs.

"We've done enough, and Mars can handle the rest on its own. The revival of Mars will have to depend on the Martians' own strength."

Yang Ze bowed. "Thank you, Captain."

He knew very well that, if Zhang Lie hadn't come along with him, Mars could very well have been destroyed. If Yang Ze had shown up on Mars himself, he might not have been able to defeat the bug king that had appeared. Furthermore, if he were alone, the bugs would have swiftly devoured all the resources on Mars—and who knew what would happen then?

There might well have appeared seven- or eight-star bugs, which would have utterly decimated the remaining Martian population. No hunters would have been able to make it out alive, and Mars would be drained of life.

This was no exaggeration. Before the arrival of the Zenith Dojo, the space in the vicinity of Mars had been surrounded by bugs, and there was no way any human on Mars could have escaped. The Martians would have had no choice but to await death.

The Martians only had two options available to them: commit suicide, or die in battle against the bugs. Regardless of which option they chose, their death was unavoidable.

If Yang Ze had shown up on his own, he would either have failed to even make it into Mars, or he would perish fighting for his homeland. Neither option was appealing; Zhang Lie's arrival had prevented an impending tragedy.

As a result, Yang Ze was overwhelmingly grateful to Zhang Lie. Without Zhang Lie, there would be no Yang Ze; without Zhang Lie, even Yang Ze's hometown would be gone.

The members of Team Zenith and the disciples of the Zenith Dojo, seeing Yang Ze's grateful expression, were touched by the scene. Zhang Lie's actions had gained him the approval and respect of all the disciples who had participated in the rescue effort; actions spoke louder than words.

"Any problem with Mars is a problem that extends to the rest of the solar system. If these bugs were to gain a foothold on Mars, their next target would surely be Earth. Protecting your homeland is the same as protecting my homeland."

Even so, Yang Ze was still touched.

Zhang Lie continued, "Have the disciples of the Zenith Dojo help clean up the rest of the bugs. Hong Xi, I'll leave you in charge of supervising the clean-up efforts."

Hong Xi drummed up her courage. "Captain, I intend to advance to the third realm after we're finished with Mars. I've already finished accumulating my disaster gene fragments."

"Very well. I'll leave the ascension to you. Make sure to hand off your duties and responsibilities before you do so—don't leave a mess behind."

Hong Xi smiled in excitement. "Yes, Captain! I intend to delegate my responsibilities in the kingdom of Limit to my brother."

Zhang Lie clasped both hands behind his back. "A trial is in order, then—I'd like to confirm that Hong Xiao has the administrative ability to handle the affairs of an entire kingdom."

He turned to Hong Xiao. "In that case, I'll have you tabulate the point and reward distribution for killing bugs. No disciple should receive less rewards than they were promised, but they shouldn't get anything extra, either."

Hong Xiao had heard Hong Xi mention that she would be handing over her responsibilities to him, but he had expected that there would be some sort of adjustment period during which he could learn how to take on those tasks. He hadn't expected that his sister would be departing so quickly.

Hong Xiao didn't mind taking over the reins—or rather, he didn't realize just how heavy the burden he had to shoulder was. He had focused on his personal advancement in the second realm, leaving the duties of managing the kingdom to his sister. He had never undertaken his sister's role in any capacity.

Hong Xiao asked with some trepidation, "Will I be able to handle everything?"

Hong Xi nodded. "Don't worry. I'll help you adjust to my duties and get started with them before I leave."

"I'll leave the specifics to the two of you to handle, then."

Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith returned to the military encampment, at which point Yang Ze immediately made an announcement.

"Friends of Mars, Martians one and all, I have an important announcement to make! After the mess these last few days, I think this will be welcome news." Yang Ze's voice spread far and wide with an infusion of genetic energy, and he could be heard all over the encampment.

"What's going on?"

The civilians and hunters of the encampment gathered quickly.

"Have the bugs in the vicinity been dealt with?"

"Did the reinforcements from the Zenith Dojo hold off the bug invasion?"

"Were you able to establish communications with those from other settlements? Have you found more sources of food?"

The civilians and hunters each began to guess as to what the good news could be.

Yang Ze shook his head. "No, you're all mistaken."

The mood instantly fell. "I suppose not. If the bugs were so easy to deal with, Mars wouldn't be in such a sorry state."

"I thought the Zenith Dojo was supposed to be impressive, but it looks like it's still no match for the bugs..."

"There's no need to be so disappointed, disciples of the Zenith Dojo. We appreciate that you've come, at least."

"...be more positive," Yang Ze urged.

"Are there more reinforcements?"

"Has Earth sent more aid?"

"Or perhaps other races from the Milky Way?"

The civilians' eyes lit up.

"More reinforcements is always a good sign. We'll be able to handle the bugs together!"

"Right, the more people there are, the more hope we have of defeating the bug invasion."

"As long as the rest of the galaxy is willing to help, we'll surely make it through this crisis!"

Yang Ze shook his head. "There are no reinforcements."

"No reinforcements? What could the good news be, then?"

"I knew it! Who would send reinforcements so easily? The reason the Zenith Dojo was willing to come has to be because of Mr. Yang. The other races of the Milky Way hardly care about us!"

"Mr. Yang, won't you tell us the news?"

"Right, we don't want to get our hopes up for nothing!"

Yang Ze, overjoyed with relief that the crisis on Mars was finally over, called out, "Guess more boldly! You might just get the right answer that way."

"You couldn't have exterminated all the bugs, could you?"

Another hunter suggested, "You've destroyed the main bug nest and sent the bugs scattering. The disciples of the Zenith Dojo are chasing them down right now!"

Everyone else in the settlement began to laugh at the joke—not maliciously, but rather with delight at the possibility that such a thing could be true, even if it were just a daydream...

#### Chapter 916: The End of the Invasion

There was little anyone in the encampment could do but dream. The bugs had snatched away their homeland, their livelihood, and even their family. The only things they still possessed were their lives, their language, and the power to dream.

Yang Ze snapped his fingers. "You've got it right."

The chuckles ground to a halt before the civilians burst into uproarious laughter. As the laughter echoed through the encampment, more and more people gathered.

"Haha, to think Mr. Yang's such a funny man!"

"I thought he would be difficult to get along with, but he's more interesting than I thought."

"It's been quite some time since I was able to laugh so freely and forget about the troubles I'm facing..."

Yang Ze's expression was earnest and serious, a far cry from those others around him. "I'm not kidding. The Zenith Dojo has taken down the bugs, once and for all."

Upon seeing Yang Ze's expression, the civilians' laughter slowly died away. They simply couldn't believe what he had said.

"Mr. Yang, you're not joking, are you?"

Yang Ze nodded. "I'm not joking. The Zenith Dojo has succeeded."

The civilians gaped in shock.

"Impossible. How could it be? We Martians worked so hard and sacrificed so many lives—our entire planet was working together, and even then, we couldn't do anything about the bugs! They continued to eat away at our planet and destroy our homeland, burrowing underground and devouring our family—but you claim you've dealt with them all?!"

Zhang Lie frowned.

The civilians in the encampment made way, exposing the person who was criticizing the Zenith Dojo in direct line of sight.

They certainly weren't going to take collective responsibility for what a single civilian had said. The Zenith Dojo had sent reinforcements when no one else did, and they had done so at no cost, without any expectation of payment. They had distributed food and helped them quell the bug invasion. While the bug invasion had disrupted all their lives and brought disaster to their home, the Zenith Dojo had ensured that those of them who remained needed for nothing.

How could someone level such horrible criticism at the disciples of the Zenith Dojo?

Furthermore, the Zenith Dojo both had a titan-class shuttle and the strength to sweep aside all bugs in their way. They had no obligation to help Mars, and could leave at any time. If Zhang Lie was upset by the criticism and decided to leave, what would the rest of them in the encampment do?

What would the civilians on Mars do?

Zhang Lie alone had come to help them in their time of need, and the Martians certainly didn't want to see their saviors leave. The civilians weren't fools; they knew what Zhang Lie had done for them.

They made way and revealed the speaker who had criticized the Zenith Dojo so harshly: the dispirited Yang clan head.

The Yang clan head no longer had the poise and propriety expected of a clan head—indeed, he looked like nothing more than a beggar, with tattered clothing and dirt stains on his face. His hair was clumped and oily, and he was clearly in a drunken stupor.

After failing to bring Yang Ze back to the Yang clan, he had been harshly criticized by the Yang elders. They blamed him for not recognizing Yang Ze's genius, for forcing Yang Ze away from the clan.

If Yang Ze were still part of the Yang clan, then the Yang clan wouldn't have been the brunt of everyone's jokes after Team Zenith's success during the Void Cup, and Yang Ze wouldn't have refused to escort the Yang clan away from Mars, far from the bug invasion.

In that case, the Yang clan wouldn't have to clean up after a bunch of disgusting bugs after days of turtling up within the encampment.

The Yang elders' vicious, vitriolic remarks continued to echo in his head, as though he were surrounded by a few flies that he couldn't get rid of no matter how hard he tried. Not only had he been subject to a verbal lashing, the Yang clan had deposed him of his title and expelled him from the clan.

In times of peace, the Yang clan wouldn't have dared to deal with the Yang clan head in this fashion. After all, the clan head boasted authority in his own right, and he held control over the majority of the Yang clan's businesses on Mars.

Even when Yang Ze grew famous for the first time after his victory in the Void Cup and the Yang clan became the butt of all jokes, no one was able to shake the Yang clan head from his position—but now, times were changing.

The bug invasion had changed far too much.

The Yang clan head had proved ineffective at leading the Yang clan, and he was naturally spurned and discarded by the rest of the clan.

"Ridiculous. A disaster that the whole planet working together couldn't deal with, and you claim the Zenith Dojo has handled it within a few weeks? I certainly won't believe it..." The Yang clan head continued his drunken slurs. "You're just a single dojo! What can you do against a disaster that's threatening the whole planet?"

"I'll admit that you do have some strength. I saw you take down these five- and six-star bugs, but don't presume that we're fools."

Several guards strode forward and arrested the Yang clan head. "He mixed pure alcohol from our medical supplies with plain water—that's how he managed to get drunk!" they announced.

The Yang clan head screamed in madness. "Leave me! Without the Zenith Dojo, without Yang Ze, without Zhang Lie, I would still be the Yang clan head. My fall is all your fault! How will you compensate me for this?!"

The guards dragged the struggling Yang clan head away, ignoring his nonsensical words.

"Let me go! You guards from the encampment are all in cahoots with the Zenith Dojo! What right do you have to arrest me?!"

The civilians in the encampment laughed apologetically. "Please don't mind the words of a drunkard. None of us here mind—we all know how difficult this disaster will be to resolve, and it's only natural that you weren't able to do so."

"No matter what, we're very grateful that you've shown up to assist us during this time of crisis. Dealing with the bug invasion isn't something that can be handled in a few weeks, but we can take it slowly!"

"Let's forget about what just happened, shall we? We'll treat it as though it were a joke, nothing more."

Rather than explain with words, Zhou Ying stepped forward and brought out a projector, which played footage from the battle that the shuttle had been recording. "Everyone, please have a look!"

Zhang Lie had expected some level of disbelief from the civilians, and had told the members of Team Zenith to prepare some footage as evidence beforehand. The moment the footage was released, the encampment fell silent.

The video showed Team Zenith fighting against the bugs. Zhang Lie had destroyed the bug nest and slain the bug king, and the bugs were forced to flee.

The civilians' jaws dropped as they processed the footage.

One person cried out hoarsely, "Is this true? Is this footage real?"

"Have you really managed to destroy the bug nests on Mars?"

"All that you promised—it was true all along?"

Yang Ze clasped both his hands behind his back and puffed out his chest. "There's no reason for the Zenith Dojo to try to fool you with fake footage. Feel free to walk around the encampment and confirm with your own eyes that the bugs have truly been defeated."

#### Chapter 917: Trouble in the Third Realm

The civilians in the settlement began to whoop and cheer. Some walked out to bask in the brisk wind and sunlight, confirming that they didn't see even a single bug in the vicinity.

In the past, the bugs had been so prevalent that they extended as far as the eye could see. Now, however, all that remained was the familiar landscape of Mars.

Some of the civilians were so agitated that they began to bawl, while others ran around madly outside the settlement like crazed fools. All around them were smiles of relief and joy that they had survived this nightmarish ordeal, that they would no longer have to live in fear of the bugs that threatened to encroach upon them at every corner. The news that Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith brought back was an incredible boon.

Many sobbing civilians thanked Zhang Lie, the members of Team Zenith, and the disciples of the Zenith Dojo, leaving them simultaneously embarrassed and relieved.

"Don't wander out too far—there might still be a few bugs we haven't dealt with!" Yang Ze shouted, but no one listened to him. It was as though they had collectively gone mad—they had been waiting for this moment for far too long.

Zhang Lie stepped away from the throngs of celebrating people and went to find Marshal Li.

After a period of rest and recuperation, Marshal Li had recovered fully from his injuries. He was in the middle of perusing a bundle of documents when Zhang Lie found him.

Zhang Lie smiled. "It looks like you're in much better health."

Li Pu mirrored Zhang Lie's smile. "You're all here."

Zhang Lie sat down by the side of the bed. "I'm glad you're doing well."

"Thanks to the healing potion you brought me, my body's in far better shape."

"I come bearing good news," Zhang Lie said.

"I can hear the cheers outside already. A huge success in battle, is it?"

Zhang Lie shook his head.

Li Pu frowned. "What, could you have killed all the bugs already? Haha!"

"More or less. We've destroyed the main nest and killed all the bugs on the battlefield at the time. There might still be a few isolated groups of bugs on Mars, but they'll be gone soon enough.

Li Pu had been making a joke, and he was gobsmacked to hear Zhang Lie's serious response.

"Really?"

"Would you like to observe some footage of the battle?"

Li Pu tilted his head toward the ceiling and began to laugh. "Haha, excellent, excellent news indeed! For a moment, I thought I might not see Mars be freed from the bugs in my lifetime.

The Zenith Dojo was responsible for changing the fate of Mars. I truly don't know how to thank you."

Li Pu had laughed so hard that he almost tore open a wound that had just healed. He clutched his chest in pain, but his cheerful laughter still filled the room.

Zhang Lie shook his head. "Don't be too excited yet, Marshal. The worst isn't yet over. Half of Mars is in ruins, and much will have to be reconstructed. There are still pockets of bugs that have to be dealt with as well."

Li Pu smiled. "No matter what, all of you are heroes. Please, accept my gratitude. If not for the timely arrival of the Zenith Dojo, I wouldn't be here right now—and neither would Mars. I'm so excited that I can barely speak."

"We only did what was right."

"If you need any of the soldiers in the encampment, they're yours to command."

"Marshal, shall we talk about the future of Mars? Between Mars and the Zenith Dojo, in particular."

Li Pu nodded. "We should. You've dealt with the immediate problem, and it's time to think about what happens next."

"According to my agreement with Yang Ze and Hong Tianqi, the Zenith Dojo was only responsible for sending aid during the bug invasion. Now that the danger is over, there's no further reason for us to stay behind."

"Can Mars continue to hire the Zenith Dojo?" Li Pu hurriedly asked. "Not just to deal with the remaining bugs, but also to guard and defend Mars."

There were those who had been eyeing Mars. They provided no aid during its time of need, but now that the crisis was resolved, they would swarm around it like flies drawing close to a pile of feces—then divide a weakened Mars among themselves.

Li Pu explained sincerely, "The reason Mars was able to survive was because of the cooperation of the Martians and the aid of the Zenith Dojo. We Martians and your disciples traded blood and lives to resolve this conflict, and I don't want those with ulterior motives to take advantage instead."

Zhang Lie and Li Pu discussed plans for future collaboration. Zhang Lie was willing to provide martial support. Some disciples of the Zenith Dojo would stay behind on Mars to assist in cleaning up the remaining bugs and to guard Mars's safety.

"Although I'm only a Marshal of Mars, and I might not be able to promise enough benefits to tempt all of you to stay behind, I'll discuss the terms of our negotiation with the other marshals immediately. I believe they won't resist such stellar guardians as the members of your dojo."

After a lengthy discussion, the terms of the contract were finally settled.

The Zenith Dojo would protect Mars from danger for three years, and it would receive many lavish privileges as a result. Not only would the Zenith Dojo be able to construct branches on Mars, they would be permanently tax-exempt, and they would obtain a third of Mars's gross domestic product for the next three years.

Zhang Lie was very satisfied with these conditions. He returned outside to a celebratory atmosphere and convivial mood.

No one disturbed the members of Team Zenith, who were still hard at work.

Hong Xi and Hong Xiao had finished tabulating the number of wounded and dead that they had, as well as the number of ants that each disciple had killed.

Most of the casualties from the Zenith Dojo were simply injured, and only a scant few had perished. For those who had died in combat, Zhang Lie would send a lavish gift of gold to their family as reparations.

The disciples of the Zenith Dojo beamed as they thought of the rewards they would be able to obtain from having participated in the defense. They grouped together, comparing their spoils.

Zhang Lie grinned as he observed the disciples of the Zenith Dojo.

He used to be one such hunter, working hard and competing with others for such prizes. Now, after his rebirth, however, he was the one giving out the prizes. He had emerged from the forefront of all hunters to stand at the peak—but fortunately, he wasn't alone. He had the members of Team Zenith alongside him.

Just then, Hong Xi walked over. "Captain, there are quite a lot of disciples who managed to exchange for the top rewards. We have enough disaster-grade cores stockpiled, since only a rare few were able to get enough points to exchange for it, but far more people than expected are asking for the superior-grade limit-breaking potion."

Neither Zhang Lie nor the members of Team Zenith had anticipated the appearance of so many six-star bugs.

Fortunately, the disciples of the Zenith Dojo had survived the ordeal—though that also meant that Zhang Lie would have to give out far more prizes than anticipated, as well.

"Have them speed up the production in the second realm. Everyone worked hard for these rewards, and we won't renege on them."

Just then, Zhang Lie's transceiver beeped. There was a transmission from Zhang Hanxiang.

Zhang Lie accepted the call and smiled, "Do you miss me? It's only been a month."

Zhang Hanxiang sighed in exasperation. "A month? I've been in the third realm for a year! Where have you been, Brother?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I led a rescue mission to Mars."

"Why didn't you bring me along with you?"

"You're too weak."

"You—well, we can speak about that later. Something's gone wrong in the third realm!"

Zhang Lie frowned. "What happened? From your tone of voice—"

"If you don't come back immediately, the draconian world's going to be destroyed!"

Chapter 918: Cut Down to Size

Zhang Lie raised his eyebrows.

What was going on that would threaten the draconian world? Only superior worlds would have the strength to do so. Could the draconian world have somehow aroused the attention of a superior world, or had the death spirits made their move early?

Following the original timeline, they shouldn't have enacted their plan just yet...

Regardless of what the problem was, it was clear that the forces remaining in the third realm were unable to handle the threat themselves.

In the third realm were the fruits of Zhang Lie's research on lord-class lifeforms...

Zhang Lie turned to Hong Xi. "Something's wrong in the third realm, and I have to return at once."

Hong Xi nodded immediately.

Zhang Lie summoned the members of Team Zenith, then headed back to Li Pu's room.

Li Pu was surprised. "You just left, Dojo Leader Zhang. Was there something you needed?"

"I need to borrow the use of Mars's teleportation apparatus to enter the dimensional realm, immediately!"

Li Pu nodded. "It's not a problem. I'll have my guards lead you there personally."

Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith returned to Mars that very moment.

When Zhang Lie saw the familiar landscape of the third realm, he sighed in relief. Nothing seemed to have changed—for now. He headed straight to where the draconian sage was located.

Just then, the draconian sage was meeting with the Yeluo chieftain, Zhang Hanxiang, Yun Bing, Chu Feng, and a few warlords.

They were all familiar with each other, and Zhang Lie greeted each of them in turn. Zhang Hanxiang stepped forward with a scowl on her face. "You're finally here, Brother!"

Xing Ying lowered his head. "It's our fault—we were unable to hold back the enemies."

Zhang Lie frowned. "And who are these enemies?"

Yang Ze laughed coldly. "Who dares attack the draconian world? They're asking to die!"

Sun Xiaowu shook his head. "There are always idiots seeking death..."

The draconian sage replied, "Our enemy is the Worldpact Coalition."

"The Worldpact Coalition?" This name wasn't familiar to Zhang Lie. Either this coalition operated in the shadows, or his actions had resulted, via the butterfly effect, in the creation of this hitherto unknown organization.

The draconian sage reported, "This coalition was formed in light of our actions."

The draconian sage explained that the members of this coalition belonged to the worlds around the draconian world, which had banded together in order to resist the draconian world's assault on their territory. While Zhang Lie and Team Zenith were around, they were so afraid of the draconian forces' strength that they hadn't dared to do anything.

Subsequently, Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith had headed to Mars, and the warlords began to stop their expansion and consolidate their growth. Following Yun Bing's suggestions, they had begun to digest the resources of the worlds they had conquered. For half a year, everything seemed to be going exactly as planned.

"The problem started in the Chiyan world."

"The Chiyan world!" Yang Ze cried out.

Everyone turned to him. Yang Ze explained, "Captain, do you remember the world in which I got injured?"

"The Chiyan world, you mean?"

Yang Ze nodded.

The draconian sage continued, "We believe that, after the king of the Chiyan world recovered from his wounds, he began to organize an army to resist our continued growth. He denounced us as an evil power that was trying to corrupt the entirety of the third realm, and the hunters of the Milky Way as tumors that couldn't grow unchecked."

Zhang Lie scoffed. "Is that so?"

"At first, no one dared to respond to his call."

With the lack of news from Zhang Lie and the members of Team Zenith, however, those worlds gradually grew bolder. They began planning to revolt. No problems arose during the first six months of Team Zenith's departure, but after ten months, the worlds had set their plan in action.

They seemed to have realized that Zhang Lie and Team Zenith, the strongest representatives of the humans, had left the third realm.

Zhang Lie chuckled coldly. "So these worlds decided to revolt, is that it?"

Xing Ying replied, "Led by the king of the Chiyan world, the coalition grew to include over thirty medium-sized and ten large-sized worlds in the vicinity. Calling us tumors and viruses that were slowly infecting the third realm, they waged war against us, claiming that we would pose a grave danger to the realm if allowed to grow unchecked."

The draconian sage nodded.

Xing Ying sneered. "The coalition garnered considerable support even from faraway worlds. I suspect that we were growing large enough to contest their own claims to power and the resources they currently possessed, and that they're taking advantage of this opportunity to get rid of a competitor."

Zhang Lie mulled things over for a moment. "We've deepened the rift between the native inhabitants of the realm and the hunters of the Milky Way, then."

This rift had existed from the very beginning, but the superior worlds had always been the main threat.

Furthermore, only the natives of the three thousand worlds could become kings of the realm, which conferred the indigenous races with absolute strength. The hunters of the Milky Way weren't threatening in light of that power.

They were only visitors and travelers who didn't intend to stay in the third realm for long; they simply wanted to acquire their gene fragments and move on. As a result, there wasn't much conflict between the kings of the three thousand worlds and the hunters of the Milky Way.

The discovery of disaster gene fragments and appearance of limit-breaking potions caused a sharp spurt in the strength of the Milky Way hunters, making them a potent threat.

This allowed the warlords of the third realm to have the strength to take down kings of the realm if they worked together. After slaughtering many such kings, the remaining indigenous kings quickly banded together to combat the burgeoning threat.

This was a very natural series of affairs. The kings of the realm were willing to cooperate with the hunters while they were in a position of power, but now that the hunters had grown strong enough to threaten them, the kings of the realm had to make their move.

As the hunters of the Milky Way took over one world after another, the Worldpact Coalition was born—but its story would undoubtedly end in a tragedy.

Sun Mengmeng asked, "How are the worlds under our control?"

Xing Ying replied, "The coalition has been attacking all the worlds that we've taken over, and they've reclaimed over half of them by now."

Zhang Hanxiang clenched her fists tightly. "The inhabitants of those worlds that were recaptured were enslaved, their resources irrevocably pillaged, and the planets swallowed up by the leading members of the coalition—and they claim that we're the demons, the viruses, the tumors!"

Zhang Lie clicked his tongue. "What a mess. But I'm surprised you warlords working together weren't able to handle this coalition...?"

Chapter 919: A Divine Plan

Xing Ying sighed in exasperation. "They aren't weak, and they have a large number of troops at their disposal, but they didn't attack us via a direct confrontation. Instead, once they reclaim a world, they immediately retreat the moment they notice our presence. They keep fleeing when we advance and make use of the indigenous people to mask their tracks. It's very frustrating to deal with!"

Zhang Lie thought for a moment. "In that case, we'll switch tactics too. Split the members of Team Zenith into two groups. We'll make our way deep into the heart of their worlds. Regardless of what obstacles we encounter along the way, we'll just slaughter them all. If we encounter an army led by a king of the realm, we'll retreat immediately. Does that sound like a workable plan?"

"Leave it to us!" the members of Team Zenith cried out.

The draconian sage understood what Zhang Lie was planning. "Ah, I see. You'll skirmish with the enemy in order to draw their forces away?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "More than that, sage—you're still looking at things too superficially."

Sun Mengmeng, who was standing beside Zhang Lie, jumped in. "Actually, our captain's plan involves a second, deeper layer. The opponent is a coalition that formed just a few months ago, and there are likely disagreements or conflicts among its members that we can capitalize on. The moment their worlds are threatened, they might very well leave the coalition forces in order to defend it."

The draconian sage's eyes gleamed. "Indeed, indeed! They're not an organized force, so you just need to create incentives to scatter the soldiers... What an intricate plan! Once a few soldiers leave the coalition, a chain reaction will follow, and the coalition will quickly collapse."

Yang Ze continued, "There's even a third layer to the plan."

The draconian sage was gobsmacked. "A third layer?"

"Well, more precisely, half a layer. The coalition was founded on the premise that Team Zenith had vanished from the third realm. Our return and direct assault at the heart of our opponents' worlds will herald our return—as well as the threat and power we possess."

The draconian sage had only the highest of praises for Zhang Lie. "In matters of strategy, I truly can't compare..."

"The moment we destroy one of our opponents' worlds, the coalition will collapse, and the plot of the Chiyan king will fail."

Sun Mengmeng grinned. Her lips quirked up. "No, there really is a third layer—or perhaps a fourth layer, let's say."

"What?!" Did Zhang Lie's spur-of-the-moment suggestion really harbor such depths?

Yang Ze thought about what Sun Mengmeng had said for a moment. "Yes, you're right. Our captain's depths are truly as expansive and deep as the ocean—but you're as intelligent for being able to read his plans to such an extent, Sun Mengmeng."

Sun Xiaowu and Zhang Hanxiang looked at each other in confusion. They were having a hard time following the conversation themselves.

Sun Mengmeng explained, "Our captain's main objective isn't simply to make these kings retreat, but to defeat them all."

Yang Ze followed up with a chuckle, "If these kings of the realm end up banding together under the threat and continue to resist, then our captain will be able to take them down in one fell swoop thanks to his overwhelming strength."

Sun Mengmeng cried out excitedly, "This is the true heart of our captain's plan. Regardless of whether our opponents end up banding together or disbanding under the threat of our presence, they'll all be playing into his palms!"

Zhang Lie himself was listening to the conversation with no less amazement than the draconian sage had shown. Two and a half layers, three layers, four layers? He hadn't been thinking as deeply about his innocuous suggestion as Sun Mengmeng and Yang Ze apparently were, but when he saw his sister looking at him with a face full of awe and respect, he smoothly clasped his arms behind his back and smiled as though he had been seen through.

When everyone else saw the smile on Zhang Lie's face, they were stupefied.

Such was the intelligence of the champion of mankind, Zhang Lie! A conundrum that had left the gathered hunters present scratching their heads—Zhang Lie had solved in a manner of seconds, in a cunning four-layer plan.

How intelligent did Zhang Lie have to be to devise such a plan? He was no less intelligent for his strength—brute strength was far less threatening than brute strength combined with overwhelming intelligence.

It was little wonder that Zhang Lie had succeeded in founding the kingdom of Limit—his natural talents lent themselves well to the task.

The members of Team Zenith puffed up with pride. This was their captain, the man they were pledging their careers as hunters to!

Being able to follow in the footsteps of such a genius was the best luck they could have ever hoped to receive. Not only was Zhang Lie immensely strong, he even had a once-in-a-lifetime genius. It would be difficult for him not to make a name for himself.

The draconian sage was wholly impressed by Zhang Lie's talents.

As Zhang Lie noticed all the respectful gazes shooting his way, he couldn't help but blush.

Really, his greatest advantage was boasting an elite force like Team Zenith. The crux of his suggestion was to stymie and harass his foes with absolute, crushing strength—the reason the draconian sage and the warlords hadn't been able to find such a solution was because they didn't possess such strength.

Zhang Lie coughed. "Warlords, continue to defend the contested draconian territory. Can you pinpoint the areas where the coalition forces have been sighted? I'll head there immediately, control their forces, and see if I can do some counterintelligence to make your work easier."

Zhang Lie turned to Zhang Hanxiang. "Hanxiang, you'll join the warlords in defending the draconian world."

Compared to allowing Zhang Hanxiang to wander around the third realm by herself, Zhang Lie was a lot more comfortable with the idea of placing her under supervision by the warlords in the area. That would be a much safer option.

The members of Team Zenith set off immediately. Zhang Lie headed to the most recent location in which coalition forces had been spotted, shattering space and activating his disaster-grade mistmeld clam soulshard to control a number of soldiers.

Of course, he wasn't able to control high-ranking commanders and attendants to the kings of the realm. Those people were all protected by the kings' energy, and Zhang Lie's mistmeld clam soulshard would be useless against them. However, he could easily control their foot soldiers, who weren't protected.

Weak though they might be, they at least possessed the numerical advantage.

Zhang Lie controlled roughly ten thousand soldiers in one fell swoop, representing half a dozen worlds, before returning to the draconian world. He had planted the seeds; now, he just had to wait for them to sprout.

With nothing else pressing, Zhang Lie headed to his new genetic lifeform farm in the third realm. Right as he walked closer, he sensed a strong aura manifesting in the air. A huge bolt of lightning struck the center of the farm...

#### Chapter 920: Post-Disaster-Grade

Zhang Lie rushed over, only to find natural law visibly manifesting around the point of impact of the lightning. Even the will of the third realm itself had shown up. Something seemed to be developing in the heart of the pillar of lightning.

Zhang Lie quickly found Zhu, who had appeared around the source of the disturbance, and asked, "What's going on?"

Zhu cried out in surprise, "Zhang Lie, you're back!"

Shortly after, the draconian sage also appeared beside Zhang Lie, as though he too had sensed something. "I felt the will of the world's energy being sucked up by something. Has a lifeform evolved?"

Zhang Lie asked, "Just what's going on? What's within that pillar of lightning?"

Zhu replied, "Following your instructions, Zhang Lie, I've been allowing the disaster-grade lifeforms to fight among and devour each other. After half a year, Red Comet formed a cocoon."

Zhang Lie's eyes lit up in excitement. "You mean, Red Comet's the one that's within that pillar of lightning right now?"

Zhu nodded.

"Has it succeeded in its evolution?"

Zhu shook her head. "I can't be certain. Fortunately, you returned in time to witness it yourself."

Zhang Lie looked into the heart of the pillar with growing excitement. This very day, he might be able to observe the evolution of the first post-disaster-grade lifeform in the third realm.

Zhang Lie was tremendously excited.

As the cocoon wrapped in lightning absorbed more and more of the will of the world's energy, an unparalleled existence seemed to be on the cusp of being birthed. The aura it was giving off made Zhu have to huff for breath, and even the draconian sage was sweating.

A crack appeared in the cocoon. A golden scythe, tinted scarlet, speared out from within. It tore the rest of the cocoon apart, releasing a burst of golden light, so intense it tore the thunderclouds—and the rest of the sky—apart.

The fragments of natural law that had condensed in the vicinity of the lifeform were crushed to a fine powder. The entire world quaked as a mantis of tremendous size appeared in Zhang Lie's view. Its red-gold body appeared to be metallic. Its wings whirred, and the rainbow-colored energy of the world reflected off its gleaming scythes.

Zhang Lie clenched his fists tightly. "It looks like my theories are right. Even disaster-grade lifeforms can keep evolving!"

The red-gold mantis gave off an aura that didn't belong to a disaster-grade lifeform. It was over a hundred times stronger—no, over ten thousand times stronger!

Zhang Lie watched the evolution with rapt attention. Too much of his future advancement revolved around the existence of such lifeforms. The existence of such lifeforms meant that there were corresponding genes for such lifeforms, and he and the members of Team Zenith could continue growing stronger and stronger.

The red-gold mantis noticed Zhang Lie and shot toward him in a beam of light, causing Zhu to become nervous. Zhang Lie was able to control the disaster-grade Red Comet, but could he still do the same after Red Comet evolved? What if Red Comet's first thought was to get rid of its erstwhile owner?

Zhu couldn't help but be wary, but Zhang Lie motioned for her to relax.

The red-gold mantis flew straight toward Zhang Lie, bowling him over with its momentum. Zhang Lie chuckled as he rubbed the mantis's sleek, metallic exterior. He slapped Red Comet's exterior a few times, trying to nudge it off its body, but Red Comet continued to nuzzle up to Zhang Lie.

The mistmeld clam soulshard was all but ineffective against Red Comet at this point, but Red Comet vividly remembered the memories it had shared with Zhang Lie.

Its evolution had come with a corresponding increase in intelligence, and it knew very well that all that it had could be attributed to Zhang Lie. Zhang Lie could have killed it in one strike while it was weak, but he had decided to bring it along as a companion, giving it all that it possessed now along the way.

Red Comet would hardly do anything so foolish as to betray its benefactor.

"Is this a sixth-level lifeform, then?" The draconian sage scrutinized Red Comet carefully. "Its aura alone compares favorably to mine—I might be weaker than it is."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. It would be rather rude to reveal the truth—that Red Comet was now far superior in strength to the draconian sage. Its constitution and strength was on the level of kings of the peak of large worlds, such as the draconian sage himself, but its speed was several times faster than the draconian sage.

Furthermore, its facility with space meant that it could compete on even terms with kings of superior worlds. Its scythes were so sharp that they could cut natural law itself—and break any physical defense any of its foes possessed. In principle, with good enough timing, it might even be able to kill a superior king in combat.

Of course, this was only theoretical. The nine extant superior kings were all ancient existences with their own trump cards and reservoirs of power. The only one Red Comet might be able to compete with was Li Zongming, newest and youngest of the superior kings.

Zhang Lie hummed. "You shouldn't be called Red Comet any longer. Now that your exoskeleton has turned a shade of gold, let's call you Gold Comet instead."

Once Gold Comet grew familiar with its strength and the increased capabilities of its body, it would become a far stronger combatant—perhaps one that could truly compete with superior kings.

After all, it was the first post-disaster-grade existence in the third realm, as far as anyone knew.

After Gold Comet finished nuzzling Zhang Lie, it turned to Zhu. Clearly, it had developed quite some rapport with Zhu after spending half a year together with her.

The draconian sage sighed as he contemplated Zhang Lie. "Why is it that you're able to cause such disturbances no matter where you go?"

It seemed that, so long as Zhang Lie remained in the third realm, there was always a surprise or another waiting for him.

If he hadn't witnessed it for himself, the draconian sage would hardly believe that there could be a sixth-level lifeform in the third realm.

Zhu suggested, "Now that Gold Comet has evolved into a post-disaster-grade lifeform, is there a name for its current classification?"

Zhang Lie nodded. "We'll have to come up with something."

Just as disaster-grade lifeforms were stronger than peak-grade lifeforms, there needed to be a name for post-disaster-grade lifeforms that reflected their superiority over disaster-grade ones.

Zhang Lie considered, "Only gods can quell disasters, but a god-class lifeform sounds rather..."

In Zhang Lie's eyes, strong though a post-disaster-grade lifeform was, it could hardly consider itself a god. Superior kings of the realm weren't at that level, either, regardless of what they personally thought.

Certainly, even the ancient superior kings referred to themselves as kings, not gods—so calling Gold Comet a god-class lifeform would hardly be appropriate.