

U. Warlord 951

Chapter 951: A Miraculous World

Zhang Lie and the others passed through a tunnel to enter a very special world, one so special that Zhang Lie had never before seen its like, that even the manifestation of natural law seemed different within compared to without.

Scarlet flames formed a sea. A skeleton from an ancient graveyard was stomping over the ground. Ten huge suns hung over their heads. A mysterious black fog spread through the air. A shower of rain fell continuously through the sky, and cold frost crept over the ground.

All sorts of unusual phenomena made themselves known—none physical, none reasonable, but all following some mysterious harmony.

"This is the world of the meeting," the envoy introduced with some glee. "Long ago, all nine superior kings—all but the death spirit king—opened a portal to this world, formed from their pooled strength. It lies separate from and superior to the three thousand worlds of the third realm, and it's the safest place to be found in the realm. If the death spirits were to take control of the three thousand worlds, this independent world will be a refuge and shelter for the last remaining aliens."

Li Zongming was shocked. "They created a world...?"

This was something that he, a superior king in his own right, had no idea how to go about doing.

The envoy sneered proudly. "This is something you won't be able to achieve, I'm sure. His majesties are entities akin to gods—no, entities beyond gods!"

Zhang Lie patted Li Zongming. "Don't think about it. If you want to create a world, you won't be able to do it alone. It'll require at least four superior kings, and they'll need sufficient world's energy as well. The kings will need to balance their power until they reach a state of perfect equilibrium."

In some sense, this was a piece of art made by the nine superior kings—only art, because it had little functionality of its own.

After swallowing up the three thousand worlds, the death spirit king's power would rise to such unimaginable heights that this world could never be kept from his eyes.

The world's laws were different from those of other worlds, but there was clearly something wrong or imbalanced about them. It was difficult for plants and biological lifeforms to thrive in this world, but it was an excellent place for the kings to meet.

After all, the superior kings all had their own worlds to tend to, and it would be inappropriate to choose a world that belonged to just one of their domains. A world that existed on its own, unattached to any king, would be a neutral zone convenient for them all.

The envoy's eyes glazed over with pride. "Be honored—you're the first people from beyond the nine superior worlds who have ever stepped foot onto this world! Only the nine superior kings can access this world. The access key is the combined essence of all nine kings."

The envoy brought them toward a massive edifice.

"The meeting grounds lie ahead."

Nine huge sculptures surrounded a magnificent castle, each sculpture at least ten thousand meters tall. One had a ferocious expression on his face, another was surrounded by ten suns, one more was made of a number of orbs grouped together, with a long staff in one hand and a robe covering its body.

Another was shrouded entirely by a dark fog, leaving its appearance obscured.

Zhang Lie recognized one of the sculptures, a gigantic centipede with pale-white arms growing out of every segment of its body. Its head was composed of a single large eyeball—Feitian.

The nine sculptures were evidently of the nine kings of the realm.

Zhang Lie's group stepped through the air and into the majestic castle, so large and ornate that even the front entrance was hundreds of meters tall. It was made for no one of human proportions, but rather for giants.

The envoy brought the group to the highest point of the castle, a furnished open-air meeting room much like a pavilion. The larger part of the space within was taken up by a huge round table. Nine pillars held the ceiling up, and the entire world could be seen from atop the castle.

Each pillar was marked with a different emblem. Zhang Lie could recognize one of them as being associated with Feitian of the xuluo world.

There were nine seats placed around the huge, black table.

"Is this where the meeting will be held?"

The world suddenly shifted. The glow of the suns turned blinding, as though the ten suns in the sky were all suddenly about to explode. A portal opened up in the sky, out of which came an outpouring of golden light. The sun's rays pierced everything in sight like sharp blades. A figure shrouded in scorching light stepped out of the portal.

Beneath his feet were scarlet flames, and to his back, ten bright suns. A parade of a hundred suns followed behind him. The ground far beneath him began to smoke and char, and the air turned arid. The temperature rose to a frightening extent.

Even the warlords, who had all maxed out their peak gene fragments and had some number of disaster gene fragments, found their throats growing parched. Sweat poured down their backs. Zhang Lie estimated that, if they were by a sea, it would have evaporated before their very eyes.

The envoy grew visibly excited as the figure approached. "They're coming!"

Li Zongming's gaze turned serious. The monster that had just walked out from the portal was far stronger, tens of thousands of times stronger, than he was.

The envoy introduced, "He's the solar king, from the world of blazing sun. The suns behind him are his warriors, and he's among the top three superior kings."

Because of the light and heat that surrounded him, none of the warlords or even Li Zongming himself were able to discover what he looked like.

While everyone was shocked by the appearance of the solar king, a second portal opened up. The black fog that had been spreading through the air suddenly turned concentrated, and it covered up even the solar king's radiance.

A mysterious figure emerged from the fog, so gigantic the entire world seemed to tremble as it made its way over.

The envoy introduced, "This is the king of black fog, from the world of the same name. No one has ever seen his appearance, and he's draped in fog and mystery—or perhaps anyone who has seen his appearance has perished. He's the most mysterious of the superior kings."

As if competing for attention with the black fog and golden light, a third portal appeared. The air turned cold, and the warlords finally stopped sweating.

A harsh chill emanated from the portal, and the ground far below them frosted over. A howling wind, as though snatched from a blizzard, flung itself out of the portal, along with a group of white, ghostly spirits.

Leisurely following behind them was a huge, white spirit, the queen of the white world. A blizzard was her dress, the chilling air her aura, the howling gale her breath.

Chapter 952: The Kings Emerge

Just then, the world changed once again. Half the world was covered in frosted ice; the other, burning with blazing heat. However, neither fire nor ice could combat the black fog.

The spirit of ice, holding a scepter of frost, floated toward the top of the castle as she exuded an aura of majesty.

"The ice queen of the white world..." This time, it was Zhang Lie, rather than the envoy, who had spoken. In his past life, Zhang Lie had witnessed one of the ice queen's attacks. With a careless wave of her hand, she had sealed a world in everlasting ice.

She floated by the entrance to the castle, locking gazes with the solar king, who had just walked up to its front. Their gazes met, one cool, one heated. A blizzard roared, and sunlight flared. Dark clouds made to cover up the suns, but the sunlight pierced the clouds and splashed golden light onto the land.

The two kings stood facing each other. Where their auras met, snow melted and refroze as they clashed for dominance.

Just then, a fourth portal opened. Dark clouds seeped out from within, covering up the sky. A shower of rain began to fall.

The frost and sun didn't seem to bother the rain one bit. The dark clouds dominated over the sky, pushing out sun and frost. The bones inlaid in the ground began to shake as an unidentifiable black mass slowly floated over. An aura of death permeated the air.

"The king of the world of death, the decaying king."

As the unidentifiable black mass squirmed out of the portal, a torrent of bleached white bones appeared behind it. They covered up the ground—just how many lifeforms had to be killed to produce so many bones?

Black worms squirmed out from crevices in the sea of bones, revolting the warlords.

The fifth portal opened up. The first thing that struck the onlookers was the fetid stench. A vile, grayish fluid, frightening and formless, spilled out from the portal. It quivered and swelled, as though it were the source of all filth and waste.

Small blobs of gray matter were expelled from the organism's main body, which scattered throughout the land. More and more mutated growths and abominations were visible within the main body's flesh, squelching as they tried to escape—before they were swallowed back into its interior and digested away.

It digested everything it touched: black fog, rain, frost, and sunlight.

The grayish vapor it produced spread through the air as the stench grew far, far stronger. Even those at the very top of the castle could smell it. The warlords began to vomit, their faces contorted with disgust. Li Zongming clutched at his nose with an ashen face.

The envoy introduced, "The king of evil, representative of the unclean world, the source of all filth and waste."

The sixth portal opened. The first thing that could be heard was the beating of drums.

Everything before the spectators was cloaked in darkness. After the drums, what seemed like a kaleidoscope unfolded before them. It then melted away, revealing a deep abyss filled with black worlds and suns.

A giant clam, pried half-open, slowly emerged from the portal. Cylindrical growths grew out of its interior, like appendages that helped it crawl forward. A face with no mouth and empty sockets for eyes looked out from within.

The clam's interior was filled with darkness and chaos. Even given Zhang Lie's strength, he couldn't peer into its interior.

He snuck a glance at the interior of the clam, only to suddenly feel a particularly arresting bout of discomfort. It seemed as though there were countless figures blowing flutes by his ear and whispering words of madness.

Zhang Lie blinked. He suddenly discovered that it was no illusion—surrounding the clam were many such servants, blowing on single-frequency flutes in a chilling, nauseating symphony that disoriented and discomfited the warlords.

The envoy clutched his ears as he warned, "The primordial chaos of myth and legend—within that source of chaos grew the king of chaos! Cover your ears—don't try to look at the king itself. You'll go crazy! Don't you see the monster howling interminably over there?"

By the side of the king of chaos were a large number of ugly, misshapen giants, whose faces had been replaced by tentacles. Their mouths grew out of their chests, and their five sensory organs were randomly distributed over their bodies.

Some of their eyes grew out of the tentacles, others within mouths, ears by waists, arms, or palms—and it was difficult to figure out where their noses were located. They either had an extra arm or an extra leg.

"Those lifeforms weak of will and possessing limited strength will be incapable of preserving their sanity and transform into these monstrosities upon hearing the sounds of those flutes. Those who dare to look directly at the king of chaos will suffer the same fate."

"Once they lose their mind, they'll become monsters controlled solely by the king of chaos. Even the kings of other superior worlds have a chance of suffering the same fate. Given your limited strength, you'd turn into such monsters the moment you try to sneak even the smallest glimpse. The king of chaos has been deemed strongest among the superior kings."

The king of chaos was surrounded by a large group of mindless, formless dancers, each playing a madness-inducing flute.

"In order to interact normally with the other kings, the king of chaos has sealed itself within the clam. Otherwise, even if the various kings themselves can tolerate the madness, their subordinates wouldn't be able to do so. Never, never try to glimpse within the clam."

The black worms that were slithering through the white bones that had spilled onto the ground began to screech madly. Tentacles grew out of their heads, limbs from the bodies, and a huge mouth from their abdomen. They had no eyes, no nose, and no ears.

As they screeched, they swarmed around the king of chaos, clearly so weak that they had been immediately corrupted by its aura.

"As expected of the strongest superior king..."

A bone-chilling darkness twisted heaven and earth, warping even natural law. Sun, darkness, fog, and rain swirled around an abyssal wind.

The four superior kings who had arrived before the king of chaos all bowed down. The king of chaos was so strong that even Zhang Lie glanced at it appraisingly.

The seventh portal opened. Countless orbs of light walked out from within, surrounded by a seemingly endless supply of the world's energy. The chaos seemed to quell, the disturbance caused by the king of chaos wiped clean.

This strange, unusual collection of orbs seemed to be formed of countless worlds, which grew and perished as the orbs expanded and shrank.

It was part of everything, and everything was part of it. It belonged to the liminal, the limitless—it might have been the source of life itself, so deeply connected as it was to the arcane.

Chapter 953: Frightening Strength

From Zhang Lie's perspective, the figure formed out of orbs represented the pinnacle of the mathematical sciences, an existence that surpassed time and space. The orbs continued to grow, vanish, and change, causing Zhang Lie's head to throb as he looked at them.

Li Zongming, despite being the king of a superior world, bled from both his eyes. The warlords clutched their heads in pain as they curled up on the ground.

The envoy, who had shut both his eyes, laughed. "To dare to look directly at the king of keys—you're lucky your heads didn't explode on sight."

Li Zongming groaned. "If you knew what would happen, why didn't you inform us?"

The envoy shrugged. "I'm not from your world, after all. Is there a need for me to respect a superior king like you?"

Zhang Lie frowned. "This king is... a collection of wills of the world?"

The envoy glanced at him in shock. "How did you know?"

"I looked."

The envoy glanced at him agape and retorted, "Ridiculous. Unless the king of keys erects an illusion around itself, perhaps half the kings present would be unable to look directly at it."

Did this ridiculous country bumpkin think himself stronger than half the superior kings present? The envoy snorted. "The king of keys is the oldest of the superior kings. Its body is formed from a chain of worlds, and it's simultaneously the king of a superior world and the world itself, allegedly formed from a mutation among the wills of the world. It has a sense of self much unlike a regular will of the world. The other superior kings postulated that the king of keys might contain a fragment of the most ancient will of the third realm."

Many suspected that the third realm had once been a cohesive whole, much like the first and second realms. However, some incident or another had caused it to fragment into the three thousand worlds.

"The king of keys must possess a fragment of the original will of the third realm, or it wouldn't have any capacity for independent thought."

The wills of the world were much like artificial intelligence, and they operated based on a rigid system of rules.

"Of course, some kings think differently. They suspect that the king of keys was formed from a king who merged his soul with the will of his world, linking the two inextricably. Many of the kings believe in this idea and think that the king of keys grows stronger by absorbing other worlds. Allegedly, the king has already absorbed hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions, such worlds."

Li Zongming frowned. "He sounds like the death spirit king..."

The envoy snorted. "Like that madman? Of course not!"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "The two paths are different. If the king of keys were behaving like the death spirit king, the other kings would have done something about it already."

Li Zongming nodded. "That's a good point, Zhang Lie."

If the other superior kings suspected the king of keys, it wouldn't have been invited to the meeting among the superior worlds.

In some sense, it was true that the king of keys was like the death spirit king—but whereas the death spirit king consumed the world's energy and devoured wills of the world, the king of keys chose to encapsulate them all instead. Their paths were similar, but their destinations entirely different.

"The death spirit king's goal is to destroy these worlds, but the king of keys' goal is to combine these worlds, along with their wills."

The king of keys almost seemed to be a focus through which the worlds could combine and collaborate.

The envoy snorted and folded his arms. "Good that you can understand the difference."

Wincing as he bore with the pain, Zhang Lie scrutinized the king of keys' body. As far as he could tell, those glowing bubbles were the true forms of the worlds of this realm.

The king of keys was an organism formed of myriad worlds. Each world was like a cell, simultaneously microscopic and macroscopic.

"One of the superior kings once commented that the king of keys' body is like a gateway, not the true form of the myriad worlds."

It was a gateway into a collection of myriad worlds which grew and shrank, which budded and decayed.

The envoy continued, "The worlds that comprise the king of keys' body are independent entities that no longer belong to this realm. The king of keys is simultaneously a gateway and the gate key."

Zhang Lie asked, "Why are these worlds continuously forming and dissolving?"

This behavior made Zhang Lie think of cellular reproduction.

"The king of keys can only absorb finitely many worlds. Unlike the death spirit king, the king of keys has a limit, a threshold—it would be impossible to combine too many wills of the world."

The wills of the world were formless entities that rejected each other only barely, but even the weakest rejection or interaction could grow to a shocking extent when there were millions of wills all lumped together.

Furthermore, the king of keys' unique biology, an almost abiological existence, would eventually run into problems.

As a result of the unusual circumstances surrounding the king of keys, the wills of the world that it encapsulated began to develop their own wills.

In the context of the Milky Way, the king of keys was like a massive supra-artificial intelligence, which consisted of millions of weaker artificial intelligence engines. Because all these engines were linked, however, the enormity of data that was processed at any given moment ultimately caused sparks of intelligence to form from the constituent engines.

Put simply, the king of keys began to develop split personalities, who competed to take over its main body.

The envoy continued, "The king of keys' consciousness weakened as a result. In order to protect its own ego, it converted all the worlds it absorbed into small worlds, which would continuously reform and unform."

The worlds that the king of keys had absorbed, which came in a variety of sizes, large and small, were all converted into small worlds which would each be destroyed after a fixed time interval. This was necessary to prevent the sort of budding intelligence that had almost wrecked the king of keys'

body. The wills of the world were like fetuses that would be allowed to grow for some time before being reverted into fetuses anew.

Via this approach, the king of keys was barely able to maintain its own consciousness.

Li Zongming frowned. "In the end, isn't it continuously destroying worlds just like the death spirit king?"

The envoy shrugged. "But unlike the death spirit king, it doesn't seek to expand limitlessly, and neither does it have the ambition to destroy the whole of the realm."

"That's hard to say, isn't it?"

Perhaps the king of keys simply hid its ambitions upon seeing what had happened to the death spirit king.

The envoy didn't dare to besmirch the name of a superior king. He immediately changed the topic. "The king of keys has particular authority even among the superior kings. After all, the core of this world was provided by the king of keys itself."

Li Zongming was shaken by the envoy's words.

The superior kings who had existed since antiquity were far stronger than he had expected. Most had grown past corporal bodies—they were all entities beyond natural law, or ones who represented natural law themselves. Each of them was unimaginably strong, but that was only to be expected. How else would they have survived the passage of time?

Chapter 954: The Gathered Kings

Li Zongming swallowed a gulp of saliva and looked toward Zhang Lie. He was hardly a strong superior king—the only reason he had survived his world's evolution was because of Zhang Lie's presence.

Upon witnessing the shock in the eyes of Li Zongming and the warlords, the envoy smiled with glee. He hadn't introduced all the kings out of the goodness of his heart, or because he had nothing better to do. He looked down on Li Zongming and these interlopers who belonged to lesser worlds.

Li Zongming might be a superior king, but he had no strength to his name. The only reason the envoy was making these introductions was because of a direct command from the king he served.

Just introducing the various kings was enough to shock and terrify Li Zongming and the warlords.

The envoy knew very well that, even without inflating the kings' capabilities or strength, their very presence, aura, and history would be more than sufficient to terrorize the aliens before him.

However, to his surprise, one of the aliens seemed wholly unperturbed: Zhang Lie.

"Is he shocked stiff?" That was what the envoy thought.

The superior kings made their way into the castle toward the meeting room at its top. The first to enter was the king of chaos, followed by the solar king and the ice queen.

The solar king and ice queen were antithetical to each other and clearly bore each other no small amount of resentment. They were swiftly followed by the king of black fog, the decaying king, and the king of evil.

The king of keys was a special existence. If it were to walk in directly, half the kings present would go crazy with pain. Instead, it cast a long shadow into the room, which it manipulated like a puppet.

The puppet took on the shape of a gold-haired, blue-eyed loli wearing a long black dress and with a small bonnet on her head. Bright bows were tied around her dress.

Xing Ying was stupefied by the sight of her. "A starbeast?"

Ren Kunjing remarked with surprise, "I'm seeing a member of the Jinghun clan!"

Zhang Lie understood what was going on immediately. The king of keys' puppet wasn't actually a cute young girl; she just looked that way.

"It's an illusion. The king of keys is making use of some artifice to make everyone present see the puppet as a member of their own race. For instance, I'm a human, so I see the puppet as a human. You're a starbeast, and you see the puppet as a starbeast—and so on."

The warlords sighed in relief.

They had initially thought that the king of keys was a member of the same race as they were, but a moment's thought revealed the impossibility behind that line of thinking. They were aliens of the Milky Way, and it was impossible for their race to be endemic to the third realm. Neither could they ever become kings of the world—and the envoy had clearly identified the king of keys as a king who originated from a will of the world.

The king of keys scrutinized Zhang Lie carefully, then smirked. "Interesting."

The solar king's gaze landed on Li Zongming, his eyes like concentrated beams of sunlight. Li Zongming felt his body burning up. Sweat beaded on his skin.

"You must be the new superior king, who took down Feitian. To be honest, you don't seem very strong," the solar king remarked.

The decaying king writhed. "If even someone like you were able to take down Feitian, he must truly be growing weak in his old age.

The ice queen's words were rimed with frost. "I'm curious as to how you succeeded."

The solar king nodded. "Feitian isn't the strongest among us, but his heaven's might is quite something. If you were able to destroy the xuluo world, you must have some special talent."

The king of keys' puppet said, "Feitian's destruction was written in fate."

The solar king turned to the puppet. "King of keys, will you clarify your words?"

The king of keys explained, "Those who claim the fruits of karma will be destroyed by karma. The destruction of the xuluo world was preordained—this new superior king is just the weapon of fate."

The decaying king disagreed. "Preordained? Hardly. All of us here got to where we were by defying fate."

The ice queen shrugged. "In that case, Feitian must have been conquered by fate."

The solar king noticed a glaring absence. "Where's the king of blood?"

The decaying king murmured, "He can't have forgotten about this meeting because he's busy bedding someone, could he? No—that does sound like something the king of blood is known to do."

The king of chaos spoke up in the meeting for the first time. "The king of blood has been destroyed."

Its voice was difficult to make out. Just hearing the voice gave the warlords a splitting headache. Their irises turned dark.

Li Zongming felt an uncomfortable chill, as though the madness-inducing flutes were being blown around him. Zhang Lie also frowned—he could sense that the king of chaos's voice possessed an unusual strength, as though there were countless black feelers trying to drag anyone listening to the king into the abyss.

The superior kings gathered around the table collectively sucked in deep breaths.

The solar king cried out, "How did the king of blood perish? Was it the death spirit king?"

The king of keys nodded in confirmation. "Not long ago, the death spirit army attacked the superior world of blood. The king of blood proved no match, and was destroyed by the death spirits."

The other kings' faces turned serious. For a superior king of the same caliber as they were to be destroyed—they grew even more wary of the death spirit king.

The king of keys continued, "It's been tens of thousands of years since we last convened such a meeting. I doubt I'll have to remind you all why we're gathered here."

The death spirits had broken through the barricade that they had maintained for countless years. All the superior kings here knew that.

The king of keys explained, "We gather here for two reasons. The first is to welcome our newest member, Li Zongming of the Zongming world, whom all of you have just met."

None of the superior kings particularly cared about the Zongming world, but Li Zongming and Zhang Lie knew that already.

"The second and main reason is to deal with the death spirits. None of us knew that the death spirit king had been planning for a war for years. He installed the black spirits among the three thousand worlds and has been secretly harvesting the world's energy since as he waited for an opportunity to strike."

The solar king added, "We need to work together to suppress his strength. If we allow the death spirits to grow stronger, he'll destroy our worlds next."

The king of keys instructed, "Each of our worlds will prepare a fighting force capable of stopping the death spirit king's plots."

The solar king turned toward Li Zongming. "Newbie, are you strong enough to field such a force?"

Chapter 955: Unknown Machinations

The decaying king told Li Zongming, "We're fighting no less than the death spirits, and you'll need a sufficiently strong force to be of any use."

The solar king mocked, "As a new superior king, you likely don't even know anything about the death spirits, do you?"

The decaying king jumped back in. "The death spirit king is an immensely strong existence who's trying to swallow up the entirety of the third realm. He, like us, was once a superior king, but he subsequently went mad for some reason or another. He consumed the will of his own world, then began furiously devouring the wills of the worlds around him."

The solar king nodded intently. "I don't want to admit it, but even though the rest of us managed to barricade the death spirits, we don't have the ability to destroy them all. The death spirit king is exceptionally strong, more so than most of the superior kings gathered here—of course, excluding me."

Zhang Lie sniggered to himself. The death spirit king might not be stronger than the strongest king present, the king of chaos, or the most ancient king, the king of keys—but he was far stronger than the solar king.

"I am aware, thank you," Li Zongming replied, glancing at Zhang Lie.

If Zhang Lie hadn't told him about the death spirits, he would likely have made a fool of himself during the meeting.

The solar king raised an eyebrow at the envoy, thinking that he had informed Li Zongming about the death spirits.

The decaying king continued, "To be frank, as the king of a newly evolved superior world, I find it very doubtful that you'd have access to a sufficiently strong force. War is no joke, and we don't want to bring someone who will just drag us down."

The solar king and the decaying king took turns speaking to Li Zongming, as though lining up to pummel him. "You don't have any strength amassed after the evolution of your world and the fight against the xuluo world, do you? Even if you won, it must have been a Pyrrhic victory. Can you really do anything against the death spirits?"

The decaying king emphasized, "The death spirits are extremely strong, and I don't want you to be the weak link in our offense."

The solar king took the same position. "We'll all need to bring out our trump cards to defeat the death spirits. Can you handle that?"

Li Zongming replied in the affirmative. "I do have sufficient forces for the offense, yes."

The decaying king sneered. "There's no need to put up false pretenses. Don't you think we're aware of your situation?"

The superior kings had clearly investigated the Zongming world. "If you're lacking forces, we could be convinced to loan you ours."

Zhang Lie swept his gaze over the gathered kings, who clearly hadn't given up on trying to pilfer the Zongming world's energy.

He smirked. These kings might have investigated the Zongming world, but they couldn't have expected that the larger part of Li Zongming's forces came not from the Zongming world, but instead from a peak large world whose name they didn't know.

Neither could they have expected that that peak large world would contain enough strength to destroy an ancient superior world—and perhaps even two or three of them.

The decaying king continued, "We kings have been in our positions since antiquity, and we've accumulated a number of forces of our own. We're happy to trade them to you for some world's energy."

Li Zongming shook his head. "Thank you, seniors, but it's not necessary. The Zongming world possesses enough strength to counter the death spirits' incursion, and it won't be the weak link in our combined offensive."

The decaying king sneered again. "You're still refusing to give up? You..."

The solar king asked, "Is this strength you're referring to the aliens standing behind you?"

The superior kings had to admit that Li Zongming had to have some unique talent of his own if he were able to destroy the xuluo world. If he didn't have enough strength, he could indeed enlist the aid of various alien species of the third realm.

"In that case, I'll test the strength of these aliens to see if they're worthy of participating in the offense."

The solar king snapped his fingers. A golden chain appeared behind him, engraved with runes. A hundred suns appeared in the air. As the links of the chain began to snap, fifty of the suns dropped down where he stood.

The solar king explained, "These are half my forces. I expect them to be a decent opponent for you, don't you think?"

"Let me join in too." The decaying king motioned. The sea of bones swelled, and countless bones joined together to form a monster tens of thousands of meters tall.

The king of evil didn't speak, but within its body of gray fluid grew hundreds of monstrosities, limbs without bodies, rolling heads, and struggling kidney-shaped objects with gills.

"I don't much like the solar king, but it is important to get a sense of the strength of your forces." The ice queen motioned for half her ghouls and spirits to step aside.

Of the seven other superior kings, four expressed a desire to test Li Zongming.

Li Zongming gritted his teeth, doing his best to quell his rage. These kings weren't trying to do anything as harmless as "test" Li Zongming—they wanted to slaughter his forces so that Li Zongming had no choice but to borrow troops from them.

If Li Zongming were to surrender, it would indicate that his forces would be insufficient to combat the death spirits, and he would have to borrow more with his world's energy.

Even if he were to win, he would likely lose the majority of his forces in the process, and he would still be forced to borrow more troops.

The superior kings forced Li Zongming into a corner, and there was nothing he could do about it. They turned a blind eye to his anger.

The king of keys suggested, "A bet, perhaps? To see whose forces can survive the longest."

"Of course!" The superior kings all agreed.

To their eyes, Li Zongming was no more than a plaything.

Even the usually calm Li Zongming couldn't hide his rage any longer. He raged at the treatment he was receiving at the hands of the superior kings, but more so at his own weakness, at his inability to counter the other kings. He wanted to stand up, but Zhang Lie pressed him down, a smile on his face. Li Zongming tried to struggle, but Zhang Lie wouldn't relent.

The king of keys turned toward Li Zongming. "Do you have something you wish to add, king of the Zongming world?"

Zhang Lie smiled. "His majesty would like to participate in the bet as well."

The other superior kings froze in surprise.

Li Zongming's anger was within their expectations, but for him to be participating in the bet as well...? Li Zongming was meant to be a pig dressed for slaughter, but no pig would be participating in the bet. It was as though the superior kings were getting ready to divide up the meal when the meal suddenly said, "I want a portion, too."

Chapter 956: Placing a Bet

The solar king was visibly perturbed. "Are you serious?"

Li Zongming didn't understand what Zhang Lie was going for either, but it was clear that the other superior kings treated him like nothing more than a plaything.

This "test" was simply a means by which the four kings could destroy Li Zongming's forces and force him to borrow troops from them. They had no intention of treating him like an equal, and he didn't understand why Zhang Lie suddenly wanted to participate in the bet. Nevertheless, he sucked in a deep breath and nodded.

He wasn't aware of Zhang Lie's plans, but Zhang Lie had never led him down the wrong path. Li Zongming could think of no better idea than to follow Zhang Lie's plan.

The solar king seemed disbelieving. "Are you serious?" he asked again.

The decaying king echoed his thoughts. "You intend to participate in our bet?"

"Of course." Zhang Lie nodded decisively.

"Hahaha!" The superior kings couldn't rein in their laughter.

"How interesting," the solar king remarked. "How very interesting."

The superior kings glanced at Zhang Lie and Li Zongming anew, as if seeing them for the first time.

The decaying king asked, "Do you realize what you're doing?"

Did Li Zongming really think he could survive the assault of four other superior kings?

Zhang Lie challenged, "Do I not have this right?"

The king of keys nodded. "You do not have this right."

The solar king frowned. He was just getting excited about the idea when the king of keys denied Zhang Lie outright. He whined, "King of keys, why not let him participate? It'll at least make things more interesting."

The king of keys clarified, "He doesn't have this right, but all superior kings participating in this meeting do."

The ice queen narrowed her eyes. "In other words, the king of the Zongming world, as a superior king, may participate in the bet."

"Very good!" The solar king beamed at the surprising turn of events.

The king of keys explained, "All participants will commit a group of forces to the challenge. The participant with the most troops remaining at the end shall be the winner."

Zhang Lie asked, "And if the Zongming world were to win?"

The other superior kings blinked. The Zongming world as the final victor...? None of the other superior kings had entertained that possibility. Against the combined assault of four other superior kings—could the forces of a new superior king survive and defeat them all?

Of course not! This "test" of the Zongming world's combat forces was solely intended to get the king of the Zongming world to give them his world's energy.

Was Zhang Lie crazy? Did he not understand the kings' plans? Or perhaps he was waiting for the superior kings to protest that this was no test, but rather just a ploy. If they were to admit it, the Zongming world's forces would no longer need to participate in this sham.

What an intelligent fellow—the solar king and the decaying king, having come to this conclusion, glanced at each other.

The Zongming world might not have forces on par with theirs, but the king of the Zongming world had at least demonstrated a flexible and creative mind.

If any of them were to admit that this test was no test at all, Li Zongming would be free to refuse the offer to participate. However, now that they had seen through Li Zongming's ploys, there was nothing to fear.

The king of keys explained, "The Zongming world's ultimate victory is highly unlikely, and such a bet would naturally confer a commensurate reward."

The solar king secretly gave the king of keys a thumbs up.

The decaying king commented, "After all, the Zongming world will have to face four superior kings, and has the lowest chance of survival."

The king of keys suggested, "How about ten-to-one odds on the final victory going to the king of the Zongming world?"

Li Zongming's eyes twitched.

The solar king smirked. "I don't think that's appropriate. After all, the chance that the Zongming king will win is infinitesimal—so low it might as well be negative. Even twenty-to-one odds would be reasonable."

The decaying king laughed. "Even thirty-to-one!"

The Zongming world as the final victor...? Of course not! Of course not! The four superior kings would surely win—if they couldn't do so despite attacking the Zongming troops simultaneously, they might as well give up against the death spirits.

The Zongming troops were hastily assembled and from a newly evolved superior world, whereas the four superior kings' troops had been honed and trained for millennia. How could they be comparable?

Upon hearing the three superior kings' words, Zhang Lie's eyes went wide.

The other superior kings were clearly mocking the Zongming world, and they thought that Zhang Lie was making such a face because of his rage.

In truth, Zhang Lie was just upset that he had left much of the world's energy he had taken from the black spirits in the draconian world to be used for feeding disaster-grade lifeforms. He only had about half a world's worth of world's energy on hand.

Zhang Lie shrugged. "We might as well make it fifty-to-one—it makes no difference to all of you, surely."

The king of keys replied, with some irritation, "Fifty-to-one it is."

At any rate, the Zongming world could hardly win—thirty-to-one or fifty-to-one, it made no difference.

Only Li Zongming felt differently. He was certain that the superior kings were about to be scammed, and very badly at that.

The decaying king complained, "Why are we still talking? Let's start the challenge, now! You wouldn't be able to win even with hundred-to-one odds—or do you really think your forces can beat the combination of our four kings' forces?"

This wasn't just a difference in quantity, but in quality. The resources that the four superior worlds had hoarded for so long were boggling—tens of thousands of years of hard work meant that the superior kings' forces were no easy foe.

All these forces had once fought off the death spirits and reinforced the barricade surrounding the death spirits' territory. To the superior kings, their forces could hardly be compared to those of a novice like Li Zongming.

The king of keys waved a hand in mid-air, forming five puppets representing each of the five kings participating in the challenge. "Place your bets now."

Chapter 957: An Outlandish Bet

Li Zongming was very shocked. The king of keys' puppet-making ability alone was something that he wouldn't be able to learn without ten years of hard work, at least.

Because he had used the world's energy to make these puppets, the resulting puppets looked almost exactly like the kings of the realm that were participating in the challenge—the sunlight emitted by the solar king and the frost and ice surrounding the ice queen were captured perfectly.

"I'll be betting on my bones, of course." The decaying king pulled out an orb glowing with rainbow-colored energy.

Zhang Lie sensed what it contained—high-quality world's energy, the likes of which could have come from a peak large world. It was kneaded into an orb and sent forward by the decaying king, rolling to a halt by his puppet.

Li Zongming drooled. As expected of a superior world that had existed since antiquity—the wealth of riches the superior kings possessed were things he could only dream of. The Zongming world desperately lacked the world's energy, but these kings were so rich they could afford to gamble with it.

Was this the world of the rich? No other king had such energy to spare—they would have used it for their worlds or desperately hoarded it in case of emergency.

If he were to win this bet, he would be able to obtain fifty times its value...

"I'll bet on my suns, of course." The solar king rolled an equally large orb toward his puppet's feet.

"And I, my frost spirits." The ice queen retrieved half a large world's worth of energy and placed it beneath her puppet.

The solar king grumbled, "Queen of ice, when have you become so destitute? Are you unable to wager even a full world's worth of energy? Shall I help add to your wager, then? Or perhaps you're lacking confidence in your own forces? Is that it?"

The ice queen sniffed in displeasure as the air turned cold. "Ridiculous. My forces are your equal in every respect. This is but a game, and it's best if we take that into account."

The solar king waved a hand. The rays of light emitting from his body grew more intense as the temperature of the room returned to normal. "If you're scared, admit it. No one will laugh at you if you lose," the solar king teased.

"Scared? Who?" A blizzard spun into existence around the ice queen.

None of the other superior kings made a move. They watched the altercation silently. Each produced a barrier that shielded themselves from the blizzard.

Zhang Lie stood still, exuding genetic energy that served to block the blizzard from entering within a five-meter radius of himself and protecting the warlords behind him.

"It's true, isn't it? You're anxious about losing!" the solar king taunted.

The ice queen curtailed the blizzard around her. She was as cold as a block of ice. "Do you think this sort of provocation will be effective? If you want to play, I'll play with you."

"Do you dare?"

The ice queen produced another half a large world's worth of energy and placed it beneath her puppet.

"Thank you for your present, queen of ice." The solar king bowed, then added the same amount to his bet.

"Wait and see who wins first," the ice queen sniffed.

The king of evil placed the equivalent of a large world's energy by its puppet. The king of keys nodded. "The king of evil is betting on its own forces."

Even the mysterious king of black fog decided to participate, placing a large world's worth of energy by the decaying king's puppet.

The king of chaos retrieved a radiant, multi-colored crystal of energy, so bright it dazzled everyone present.

"A superior world's energy...!"

Even the other superior kings were shocked by the king of chaos's bet. It was only a half-portion, but its quality counted for far more than its quantity.

The king of keys praised, "As expected of the king of chaos!"

The kings all watched with bated breath, wondering on whom the strongest superior king would bet.

The king of chaos's actions shocked everyone present. He said, "I won't be participating in this bet—but I offer this energy to the victor as a reward."

The four superior kings' eyes lit up with greed.

The ice queen whispered to her frost spirits, "No matter how, you have to secure victory at any cost."

The solar king commanded his suns by mental transmission, "Win, win, win! Regardless of the price—and if you can't, use your trump card. Do you understand?"

The superior kings had enough world's energy to gamble relatively freely, but the king of chaos's prize had been a huge shock.

It was relatively easy for the superior kings to obtain world's energy—they just had to destroy a world within their domain. Every world possessed world's energy, but only superior worlds had a superior world's energy. This was a question of quality, and it was why the superior kings had tried their best to extort the energy of the Zongming world from its namesake.

A superior world's energy was precious beyond belief, and the only kings present who were rich enough to use it as a bet were the strongest king, the king of chaos, and the most ancient king, the king of keys.

The decaying king smiled. "I shall be the eventual victor, and this my prize."

The solar king smirked. He linked to his fifty suns that would be participating in the challenge and channeled his own power into them. They began glowing with blinding light.

The ice queen did the same, installing a seed of crystalline ice within each of her frost spirits.

"And you?" the decaying king turned and asked Li Zongming.

The solar king watched on expectantly. "Who do you intend to bet on? Surely you don't intend on betting on another king and losing the bet yourself? That would be far too boring."

Li Zongming turned to Zhang Lie, as though pleading for help.

Zhang Lie retrieved half a large world's worth of energy. "I'll bet on myself."

Li Zongming asked, "What should I do?"

Zhang Lie replied, "If you believe me, bet on me. Don't worry—I won't lose!"

"I'm not worried about that, I'm just worried about the other superior kings!"

Li Zongming was rather doubtful as to whether the other kings would honor the bet when they lost. He had never entertained the possibility that Zhang Lie would lose. He was absolutely confident in Zhang Lie's strength. The combined forces of four superior kings might have been a headache, but Zhang Lie had taken on the main xuluo army himself—and come out victorious. The four superior worlds' forces amounted to little more than a scouting party in comparison.

If Zhang Lie were able to take down the main xuluo forces by himself, then winning this challenge would be a piece of cake.

All the superior kings present thought that the Zongming world had won because of the strength the world possessed, but in reality, that battle was won by Zhang Lie alone...

Chapter 958: Shocking the Kings

Li Zongming was very confident in Zhang Lie's abilities, but he was worried about what would happen after he won.

The bet was with fifty-to-one odds. Once Li Zongming won, the other superior kings would treat him not with contempt or disdain, but hatred. What would he do then?

The decaying king snorted. "Are you going to place a bet, or not? You're not going to back down now, are you?"

Upon thinking about how the other superior kings had treated him like nothing more than a plaything, Li Zongming calmed down. So what if he won? He would be doing it fair and square.

Invoking his authority as king, Li Zongming drew out the energy of his own world, kneaded it into a ball, and placed it by his own puppet.

His future son-in-law had never before disappointed him. If not for the fact that he was worried about the Zongming world collapsing, Li Zongming would have staked even more world's energy on this bet.

"Haha, hahaha!" The superior kings all stared at Li Zongming's bet with shock, then began to laugh uproariously. That laughter was tinged with mocking and ridicule; they looked toward Li Zongming as though he were a fool.

Li Zongming smirked. They would soon see who the true fool was for themselves. You think I'm a fool? You're all no more than clowns.

"Very interesting. Very interesting!"

The four superior kings who were 'challenging' Li Zongming all clapped, their eyes filled with greed. Half a superior world's worth of energy! It belonged not to a large world, but rather a superior world.

The four kings salivated. If they were to win, they'd be able to receive both Li Zongming's bet and the king of chaos's prize—the equivalent of a whole superior world's worth of energy. Their power would double.

Li Zongming grimaced at the world's energy he was giving up, but he didn't hesitate. In truth, this energy had all come from Zhang Lie—or rather, from the xuluo world that Zhang Lie had destroyed.

The decaying king laughed. "Haha, if you're going to give away some of your world's energy, we'll gladly accept!"

The king of chaos asked, "King of keys, won't you place a bet yourself?"

The king of keys shook his head. "As the banker, I had better not."

The four kings anticipated the start of the challenge greedily, each believing that their victory was secured.

The solar king cackled at Li Zongming. "If you don't want all your subordinates to die, I suggest you surrender as quickly as possible."

Zhang Lie stepped forward. "We'll have to see whose subordinates will die first, won't we?"

The king of keys instructed, "Challengers, prepare yourselves."

The five kings' forces were sent toward five different directions of the world. The kings observed the challenge from atop the castle.

The independent world that nine superior kings had created together wasn't particularly large—it was about the size of one-third of a medium-sized world, and all the kings could inspect the entire battlefield from their vantage point.

Zhang Lie stood at the very front, the warlords arrayed behind him.

Xing Ying asked, "How should we fight?"

Zhang Lie replied, "Follow my directions. Leave the rest to me."

"Begin!" The king of keys waved a hand, sending a pillar of light up toward the sky and exploding there. That was the signal to begin.

The fifty suns moved first. They whirled around each other, forming a solar wind that shook the skies and blinded the other troops. Their primary target, however, was the ice queen's forces, rather than Zhang Lie.

The ice queen gnashed her teeth. "You bastard—you're not following our plan!" Didn't he claim that they would work together to get rid of Li Zongming's forces first? What did the solar king think he was doing?

The solar king smiled with his teeth. "My hand slipped, my hand slipped. I apologize."

If not for the bet, the solar king had intended on squashing Li Zongming first, but upon seeing the superior world's energy that was at stake, the solar king's priorities changed. His new goal was to win the bet and obtain all that world's energy for himself. Squashing Li Zongming's forces was a secondary objective.

After all, he had never thought highly of this newly minted superior king.

However, the ice queen's forces were no pushover. They were an elite, trained force, and they reacted to the sudden assault immediately.

Ice and frost clashed against the suns' advance. The skies split in half, baking in a solar storm on one hand and chilling in a blizzard in the other.

Suddenly, a fish the size of a giant whale took to the sky, disrupting the ice and sunlight with waves of water-attuned genetic energy.

"You seem to be forgetting who your opponent is!" Zhang Lie clenched his fist tightly. Blue genetic energy gathered around him as space vibrated. The ripples spread out over his arm. He flicked his wrist.

"[Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar]!" 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. They broke apart the clash between sun and frost, arced through the air, over the horizon, and smashed into the giant skeleton across the other side of the world.

Zhang Lie could sense that, among the four kings' forces, the most threatening was this giant skeleton.

The ocean waves smashed apart the skeleton. Shockwaves surged forth from Zhang Lie, as though a twister were consuming everything in sight. The bones rattled. Zhang Lie's sea-blue genetic energy crushed an endless supply of bones into powder.

Atop the castle, the superior kings were all shocked by Zhang Lie's display of power. That was a fighter on par with a superior king—and he was just a subordinate of Li Zongming!

The bones clattered to the ground. [Fists of the Silent Sea: Soar] had destroyed the sea of bones with which the decaying king had swamped the battlefield.

The decaying king cried out, his eyes bulging, "My bones!"

The other superior kings hadn't yet recovered from the shock.

How could a newly minted superior world like the Zongming world possess such strength? How could there be another existence at the level of a superior king?

This was impossible! Even the superior worlds of antiquity possessed only one or two such fighters, so how did Li Zongming come to possess one such himself?

The king of chaos and the king of keys were the first to recover from the shock, as though they had expected this level of strength from the Zongming world. After all, they were both extremely

familiar with the xuluo world, and they knew very well that Li Zongming alone would be incapable of dealing with the xuluo race and killing Feitian...

Chapter 959: The Kings' Dismay

Feitian was a superior king of antiquity as well, and the fact that a newly evolved superior world could deal with him suggested that there was some backer behind its growth.

Now, that riddle had been unraveled. Within this new superior world were multiple existences with the level of a superior king.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!" 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 beam of sword energy shot across space and tore apart the forces that the king of evil had manifested from its body. The energy exploded into tens of thousands of tons of pressure, tearing apart the gruesome, malformed masses that were the king of evil's forces. They burst apart and morphed into gray fluid, which reconstituted into formless bodies.

Pale blue sharks swam over, opened their bloody maws, and chomped down on the king of evil's forces. Zhang Lie's genetic energy digested the gray fluid, leaving nothing behind.

None of the superior kings expected Zhang Lie to be so strong.

"[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.

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

He had no intention of approaching these malformed creatures himself.

The king of evil was the king of the unclean world. In his past life, while fighting against the death spirits, Zhang Lie had seen such disgusting creatures—but in far greater numbers than now. Interspersed among them were quite a few giant kidney-like organisms.

As the king of the unclean world, the king of evil's forces harbored viruses, poisons, and toxins. Once one of the kidney-like organisms died, all who were struck by its gray fluid or attacks would be afflicted by a lethal virus, which would cause them to die a horrible death. Their bodies would fill up with pustules and then slowly decompose, turning them into vile gray matter.

As a result, only a small number of forces were battling against the king of evil's troops.

Zhang Lie's strength was enough to confer him immunity to those viruses, but he was disgusted enough by them to not want to fight them close-up. After all, he would easily be able to deal with them with his constructs of genetic energy—there was no need for him to get his hands dirty.

By then, the ice queen and solar king had come to their senses. Their faces flashed with anger—they had underestimated Zhang Lie.

Neither the ice queen nor the solar king expected that Li Zongming would be so malicious as to hide a unit as strong as a superior king within his forces participating in the challenge. Nor could they have suspected that Li Zongming possessed such a strong subordinate as well.

The two kings frowned at Zhang Lie. Within a short period of time, he had dealt with the decaying king and the king of evil's forces, and it was no time for their forces to be clashing against each other. If they continued to look down on Zhang Lie and the warlords, they wouldn't be able to gain any world's energy—no, they'd even lose part of their large stockpile.

Upon thinking back to the specifics of the bet, the ice queen and solar king turned pale. Li Zongming's victory was at fifty-to-one odds. He had bet half a superior world's energy, and his claim would be 25 superior worlds' worth of energy.

The ice queen and frost king sucked in a deep breath. They had no way of acquiring that much world's energy... They glared at Zhang Lie, and then looked toward Li Zongming simultaneously.

The solar king gnashed his teeth. "You tricked us!"

Had Li Zongming been putting on a show to accentuate the other kings' disdain for him? The gathered kings felt as though their intelligence had all been insulted.

The solar king roared, "You dare trick us?!"

Li Zongming shrugged and spread his arms. "Solar king, I don't understand what you're saying. You were the ones who proposed this challenge, and you were the ones who proposed this bet. They were foisted on me."

The solar king gave him a thumbs up. "Very well. Very well! I suppose you must have some strength of your own if you managed to defeat Feitian, but don't think you'll be able to win so easily just because you snuck such a strong subordinate into your forces."

The decaying king shouted, "What nonsense are all of you spouting? Focus on the challenge—if we lose, we're all done for!"

None of the kings could afford to pay out fifty-to-one odds.

On the battlefield, the serpent swallowed up and dissolved the king of evil's forces within moments.

"You guys can't lose!" The king of evil's forces had been vanquished; all he could do now was support the other kings.

The ice queen shouted, "Ignore those balls of light! Go deal with the Zongming world's forces first!"

The solar king likewise shouted, "Get rid of those aliens before focusing on the spirits!"

Even without the bet, their reputations wouldn't allow them to lose to a superior king many times their junior.

The fifty suns of the solar king's forces shone with blinding light as they conjured a solar storm.

The ice spirits let out a shrill screech, simultaneously summoning a howling blizzard. Their cries struck at their enemies' very souls. As the solar storm and howling blizzard spread across the battlefield and clashed with each other... they canceled themselves out.

The solar king roared, "What are you doing? You're hindering my forces even now?"

The ice queen stood up in rage. "I should be asking you that. Are you in cahoots with the Zongming king? Are you?"

The solar king roared back, "Me? If anyone's the traitor, it's you!"

The two superior kings began arguing at this critical moment...

Li Zongming:...

The king of chaos:...

The king of black fog:...

The king of keys:...

The king of evil:...

In the end, it was the decaying king who clutched his head and yelled out, "Focus on your common enemy— or do you not care about losing?!"

The combination of solar storm and blizzard gave rise to huge quantities of fog and steam, which covered up half the world.

The kings could barely make out a human figure transforming into a wolfman behind layers of steam and fog. Bestial eyes emerged through the fog, and blood-red claws rent the fog apart.

Blood-red fur, four limbs covered in dragon's scales—Zhang Lie's aura strengthened once again. A blood whirlwind manifested around him, dispersing the fog. Zhang Lie had activated his soulshards and transformed into a russet dragonwolf.

The solar king's eyes widened. "This fellow—he can grow even stronger?"

Chapter 960: The Last Survivors

Even under ordinary circumstances, Zhang Lie was stronger than an ordinary superior king—and that difference was only accentuated under his dragonwolf transformation. At this stage, he was closer in power to the king of keys and the king of chaos than the other superior kings.

The ice queen and solar king finally realized that, if they were to keep arguing with each other, they would suffer losses from which they might never recover. They finally shut up.

The fifty suns again glowed with vested radiance. A solar storm formed with a golden tornado at its very center. It gave off intense light.

Golden waves of heat flooded the battlefield, as did bright orange flames.

The ice spirits let out a shrill screech, summoning a silvery-white blizzard. Their screeches rang out like cannon fire, striking at their enemies' very souls.

The warlords clutched their heads in pain.

Zhang Lie waved his claws in a flurry. The blood-red claws tore apart the sky and slashed open the void, bisecting the scorching solar storm and freezing blizzard of frost.

A serpent manifested behind Zhang Lie. Its scales turned a blood-red color and horns protruded from its forehead as it transformed into a bloody dragon.

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

The fifty suns glowed once more, forming another solar storm. The frost spirits simultaneously created a blizzard, hoping to freeze and shatter the blood dragon outright.

The blood dragon tore apart the glowing suns and flew past the blizzard, then opened its mouth wide and bit down on a sun.

The sun burst with golden light as it tried to struggle free. Within the sun was a golden bird that furiously flapped its wings, only to be caught tightly in the blood dragon's mouth.

The forty-nine other suns beside it each launched a golden beam at the blood dragon, piercing through its body. The ice queen and solar king were just about to smile triumphantly when a wave of annihilation exploded around the dragon. Pitch-black energy swallowed up everything in the battlefield.

The kings watching the challenge from above grew visibly alarmed. The king of keys had to step forward, shielding the entire palace with world's energy to prevent it from being affected by the explosion.

The pitch-black energy formed a black hole that sucked up everything in sight—the fifty suns, along with huge quantities of bone powder from the remnants of the sea of bones.

A layer of earth was stripped bare from the world, along with the orange flames that the suns had given off. Even the dark clouds in the sky were swirling as they were sucked into the explosion. The pitch-black energy continued to expand.

The fifty suns weren't immediately destroyed by the energy; instead, the black hole continuously siphoned away whatever solar energy they produced.

Some of the sunbirds, realizing that they wouldn't be able to escape from the attack, self-immolated. A sun's radiance burst forth from the center of the black hole, dispersing the energy of annihilation.

At that point, the black hole shrunk down to a pinhole and vanished.

It left a vacuum in the air, causing it to cavitate as a huge storm formed. The barrier of world's energy protecting the palace rippled. After the waves of energy passed by, what remained of the battlefield was a smoking hemispherical crater, the radius of which was no less than a thousand meters across.

The superior kings sucked in deep breaths upon witnessing Zhang Lie's strength.

This was ridiculous. The four kings who had challenged the Zongming world gulped. They couldn't be certain that they would survive such a blow directly.

Even the king of chaos and the king of keys had serious expressions on their faces. No wonder the Zongming world had been able to destroy the xuluo world. Feitian was no match for Zhang Lie's strength—and Zhang Lie had only revealed part of what he could do.

Li Zongming smiled with pride. Although he wasn't the one who had won the Zongming world its victory, Zhang Lie was his son-in-law. Li Zongming smugly requested, "King of keys, please announce the results of the challenge."

Zhang Lie had cast [Fists of the Silent Sea: Fade], and the energy of annihilation it produced had swallowed everything up.

If the superior kings themselves had been present on the battlefield, they might have been able to counter the attack together—but the only forces there were troops that the ice queen and solar king had dispatched.

Those forces, strong though they might be, were still far from the level of a superior king. They were completely unable to defend against the explosion—all the solar king and ice queen's forces were wiped out.

The only surviving forces on the battlefield were Zhang Lie and his warlords.

It was evident who had won the challenge. Shameless though the superior kings might be, they could not refute this fact.

"I've passed the challenge, haven't I?" Li Zongming asked, turning to the four challengers.

The kings gnashed their teeth. They had never expected that the Zongming world would be able to win against their troops.

Li Zongming continued, "None of you are surprised that I passed, surely?"

The solar king gave him a thumbs up. "Admirable strength, King Zongming."

The superior kings of antiquity had no choice but to pay more attention to Li Zongming after witnessing the results of the challenge. They were forced to treat him as equals on account of his victory, and they were forced to be wary of Zhang Lie, who had used his own strength to inform the superior kings not to look down on the Zongming world.

The Zongming world was no easy target; Li Zongming wasn't the only inhabitant of the world who was as strong as a superior king.

Zhang Lie had won respect for Li Zongming with his own fists.

Li Zongming smiled. "Given my troops' combat ability, I believe I have the right to participate in the offense against the death spirits. There is no need for me to borrow any of your forces."

The king of keys clapped. "Very interesting. I wouldn't have expected another fighter on the level of a superior king to have come from a newly evolved superior world. You've been biding your strength, it appears."

The king of keys generously applauded Li Zongming.

This challenge served two purposes.

The first was to whittle down Li Zongming's troops, forcing him to borrow the other superior worlds' forces using his world's energy. The other superior worlds would all but enslave the Zongming world given their disparity in strength, turning it into a means by which all of them could obtain a superior world's energy.

The second...