

## U. Warlord 961

Chapter 961: Getting Off the Hook

The second purpose of the challenge was to identify what trump cards Li Zongming possessed.

The first purpose was obvious; Li Zongming would have caught on almost immediately if he weren't stupid. In trying to deal with the first purpose, he would end up revealing his trump cards.

The other superior kings looked down on Li Zongming, but they were still a little wary.

After all, Li Zongming had taken down the xuluo world. Although Feitian wasn't as strong as the king of keys or king of chaos, he was certainly on the stronger side of the superior kings—and yet the Zongming world had crushed the xuluo world.

Although both the king of keys and king of chaos suggested that Feitian had been destined to fall, the fact that Feitian had fallen to Li Zongming was still worthy of consideration. After all, before that point, the xuluo world had operated in a stable fashion for millennia.

The ancient superior kings believed that Li Zongming had some ace up his sleeve. One of their intentions was to use this challenge to get a sense of that ace—and they succeeded. The root cause of the downfall of the xuluo world had appeared before everyone's eyes: Zhang Lie.

The destruction of the xuluo world finally made sense to the superior kings.

One fundamental cause was the karmic backlash that the xuluo race had accrued, but the direct cause of the downfall of the xuluo was Zhang Lie. The combination of these two causes had led to the extinction of the xuluo.

This wasn't unacceptable—the superior kings just had to figure out what to do next.

Li Zongming requested, "King of keys, please announce the result of the challenge."

The king of keys nodded. "It was a very interesting challenge, and it's been a long time since I saw such an unexpected upset. Accepting a newcomer every so often isn't a bad thing. I declare that the Zongming king has passed our challenge."

Li Zongming rubbed his hands gleefully. "In that case, I've also won the bet."

The king of chaos sent half a superior world's worth of energy rolling toward Li Zongming with a wave of his hand, as though it were nothing more than a casual gift.

Li Zongming grinned as he accepted the world's energy, going into a state of euphoric bliss as he sensed how concentrated it was.

As a newly evolved superior world, the Zongming world desperately needed a world's energy for advancement, and the king of chaos had given him just what he needed.

"You have my gratitude, king of chaos."

The other superior kings gnashed their teeth, their faces filled with envy, jealousy, and anger. This was supposed to be their opportunity to obtain this prize—but Li Zongming had snatched it away from under their noses!

There were no rules against choosing an overwhelmingly strong unit for the challenge, but none of the other kings could have anticipated that Li Zongming had such a subordinate.

By now, there was nothing they could do to contest Li Zongming's victory.

Li Zongming collected all the orbs of world's energy on the table. These were all his spoils: half a superior world's worth of energy, which he had bet himself; half a large world's worth of energy, which Zhang Lie had bet; and three large worlds' worth of energy from the other kings combined.

The other kings who had participated in the challenge stared balefully at Li Zongming, who smiled happily as he inspected the orbs of energy.

This was an overwhelming prize that he had won.

He had been rather annoyed before the meeting that the other superior kings had forced him to attend, but he was now very glad that he had made such a decision. He couldn't have been more pleased by his son-in-law, Zhang Lie, who had brought him this fortune.

Li Zongming kept the world's energy and asked, "Kings, I trust you won't forget the odds that were promised to me at the start of the bet."

The decaying king, who had been intending to scam Li Zongming of his world's energy, glared at him.

"King of Zongming, I'm warning you—take what you're offered and no more."

The solar king nodded. "You've already amassed quite a fortune today. Shut your mouth and don't force us to become enemies."

Li Zongming ignored the decaying king and solar king's words as he continued, "If I remember correctly, you promised me fifty-to-one odds on my victory."

The decaying king squirmed. The black flesh that made up its body seemed to froth. "Enough, king of Zongming! Don't think that you're all that just because you have a subordinate as strong as a superior king. We all have such subordinates—you're not special."

"Surely you won't deny me my just rewards? It would damage your reputations as superior kings of antiquity. My son-in-law and I didn't bet much energy—just half a superior world's worth of energy, and half a large world's as well.

According to the deal we made at the start of the bet, you won't have to give me too much: just twenty-five superior and large worlds' worth of energy."

Twenty-five superior worlds' worth of energy?! None but the king of keys and king of chaos had so much energy on hand.

Li Zongming's face was calm, as though he hadn't heard any of the other kings' threats. "I'll even discount them and lump them together. Let's call it thirty superior worlds' worth of energy, shall we? Given your abundant resources, seniors, I'm sure you'll be able to give me that quantity easily."

Thirty superior worlds' worth of energy—when there were only ten superior worlds among the three thousand!

In the past, there had been more superior worlds that had failed to withstand the test of time, but except for the king of keys and king of chaos, no other king had such luxurious stockpiles of energy.

The superior kings represented in the challenge would each be able to pay their fair share, but none of them were going to do so. If they did, their worlds would surely regress and their powers diminish.

The solar king gritted his teeth. "You've passed the challenge. Don't try to ask for what you don't deserve. It might take us some time to destroy the Zongming world, but if we work together, we'd be able to manage it quite easily."

The decaying king added, "Let's try to maintain some semblance of civility, shall we?"

The solar king narrowed his eyes. "Or do you intend to make all of us your enemies?"

The superior kings' intentions were obvious: to back out of the bet and renege on the terms they had promised.

#### Chapter 962: Admit Defeat

The kings who had bet on the challenge simultaneously unleashed their auras. The solar king's body glowed with the radiance of a thousand suns. The ten suns that shone overhead suddenly seemed to bear down on the castle.

The decaying king began to froth as dark clouds gathered overhead. The ice queen surrounded herself with an aura of ice and frost. Ice crept from beneath her feet, and a snowstorm beset the castle.

The king of black fog sent a turbulent wave of fog overhead, threatening to engulf them all.

The king of evil writhed as gray matter in the form of malformed creatures split off from its body—limbs without bodies, rolling heads, struggling kidney-shaped objects with gills, and so on. Much of these creatures were absorbed back into the main body, leaving a vile stench in the air.

The kings' combined aura tried to repel Li Zongming, but he stood firm.

"Do you intend to renege on your promises? If you were incapable of fulfilling these terms, you shouldn't have started a bet at all!"

Golden wings unfolded from behind Li Zongming, releasing a dazzling golden radiance. A golden roc took to the sky.

The five kings' combined aura formed a whirlpool of energy, one that would have decimated any existence weaker than a superior king.

Try as he might, Li Zongming was no match for the kings. His golden roc was sent stumbling back from the force—Li Zongming hadn't had enough time to grow into his position as a superior king.

His face flushed red. He was about to be forced back when the doors to the meeting room suddenly blasted open. "If you couldn't handle losing the bet, you shouldn't have participated to begin with."

An unusual strength cut apart the five kings' combined aura, sending them all stumbling from the backlash.

The solar king, the decaying king, the ice queen, the king of black fog were forced to the ground, whereas the king of evil's body fluid exploded. The black fog of its eponymous king trembled violently.

Zhang Lie and his warlords rushed into the meeting room. Zhang Lie clasped both his hands behind his back and shouted, "You're all superior kings of antiquity, aren't you? Have you no shame, no reputation to uphold? Deal with the consequences of your actions! No one forced you to allow fifty-to-one odds."

The king of keys and the king of chaos considered Zhang Lie seriously.

He had broken through the five kings' combined aura. A foe of lesser strength would have been disintegrated by the attempt, but Zhang Lie had succeeded and transferred the backlash to the five superior kings instead.

That indicated that even the five superior kings combined might not be a match for Zhang Lie.

The king of black fog wasn't using his full strength, but Zhang Lie certainly was able to counter the solar king, the decaying king, the ice queen, and the king of evil. Was Zhang Lie stronger than they had given him credit for?

Zhang Lie marched behind Li Zongming, informing everyone present with his actions that he supported Li Zongming and no other. He would back Li Zongming up. The warlords followed behind Zhang Lie and stood behind him, lending him an impression of strength.

Upon seeing Zhang Lie return, Li Zongming immediately grew more confident. He snorted. "If I had lost, would any of you have shown me pity?"

No, of course not—you wouldn't have been satisfied without sucking me dry of my world's energy!"

Civility? He didn't need any civility—he didn't want to see the other superior kings at all!

If Li Zongming had lost the bet, these superior kings would surely have done their best to wring him dry. They would never relent; they were more than happy to see the Zongming world crushed. Li Zongming had no intention of going easy on them, because he knew they wouldn't do the same for him.

The solar king, decaying king, and ice queen, despite being superior kings of antiquity, found themselves knocked to the ground. They grew furious, their pride bruised.

The decaying king roared, "Don't think we'll be easy opponents just because you were able to handle our troops. We were superior kings before any of you were born!"

The solar king threatened, "The death spirits might be an enemy we have to face together—but it'd only take us a little more effort to get rid of all of you at the same time."

The ice queen shouted imperiously, "Get down on your knees and apologize!"

"Oh? You're all angry because of your pride, aren't you?"

Zhang Lie turned to the king of keys. "King of keys, you're responsible for overseeing this bet, aren't you? Do you intend on reining in these mongrels?"

The solar king gritted his teeth. "What did you say?!"

"Would you prefer that I step in myself?" Zhang Lie stared straight at the king of keys.

The king of keys met his gaze. Within its blue eyes were a myriad worlds, spinning and tossing and turning, cycling into and out of existence. Even so, Zhang Lie managed to keep control of his senses.

The king of keys inclined his head. "I am indeed responsible for the bet. All participants will uphold the terms of the bet."

Zhang Lie turned to the sullen kings. "Did you hear the king of keys? Pay up, or you'll be disappointing him."

Zhang Lie didn't have to deal with the kings on his own; he could simply invoke the authority of the king of keys, who had organized this bet to begin with.

The superior kings might dare to mess with Li Zongming, but certainly not the king of keys.

The king of keys continued, "It would be foolish for us to fight among ourselves while the death spirits wage war around us."

The king of keys had no choice but to step in and mediate the dispute.

If Zhang Lie and Li Zongming were weak, the king of keys would have done nothing or even helped the other kings to get rid of them, but the strength that Zhang Lie had demonstrated gave even the king of keys and the king of chaos some cause to be wary.

If they were to begin fighting, it would be easy for them to get rid of Li Zongming, but as for Zhang Lie... The king of keys knew that it couldn't remain silent any longer.

"Admit your defeat. There's no need for any rebuttal!" Zhang Lie crowed.

The solar king opened his mouth. "But—"

The king of keys waved a hand, cutting off the solar king's words. "Enough. As the banker, I'll shoulder half the burden of the bet. As the participants, you'll collectively handle the other half."

The five superior kings widened their mouths. None of them dared to speak, but they were cursing internally. Wasn't the banker supposed to be responsible for paying Li Zongming? Why would they, the participants, have to contribute as well?

That was unreasonable, but none of the kings dared to contest the king of keys.

Meanwhile, the bones of the decaying king, who had been the one to agree to fifty-to-one odds in the first place, were slowly turning an acid green...

#### Chapter 963: Filled Coffers

The decaying king had promised fifty-to-one odds because he expected the king of keys to pay up on the extremely slim chance that the Zongming world would win—he had no intention of coughing up the world's energy himself.

The solar king sighed.

As expected. After their unexpected loss, he knew that the king of keys wasn't about to pay thirty superior worlds' worth of energy on their behalf—and they were dragged into the mess involuntarily.

The solar king had been unwilling to admit to the terms of the bet not just because he disliked Li Zongming and envied his ultimate victory, but also because he knew he would end up taking responsibility for the bet.

The solar king, the decaying king, the ice queen, and the king of black fog were all annoyed with the outcome to varying extents, but what could they do?

The king of keys was the most ancient of the superior kings, and it was doubtful that even the four of them working together would be able to overcome the king of keys.

The king of keys suggested, "The Zongming world's bet is worth roughly thirty superior worlds' worth of energy. I'll pay fifteen, and the five of you will pay three each. What say you?"

The solar king sighed glumly as he looked at the king of keys.

"Your majesty—"

The solar king, the decaying king, and the ice queen barely stopped themselves from spitting blood. Three superior worlds' worth of energy—this would be a difficult burden to bear indeed.

Zhang Lie nodded with a smile. "I'll naturally accept your suggestion, king of keys."

The king of keys continued, "However, it'll be difficult for these kings to pay you the full amount immediately. If they do so, their worlds will be severely degraded, and their strength will fall. This won't serve us well for the upcoming battle."

The solar king, the decaying king, and the ice queen each nodded immediately.

The king of keys continued, "I propose that the superior energy they owe be taken from the death spirits."

Zhang Lie clarified, "You mean—"

The king of keys explained, "The spoils of war we claim from the death spirits after the end of the war, including our share of their superior world's energy, shall be used to defray this debt."

"And if it's insufficient?" Zhang Lie asked.

The king of keys smiled. "Do not underestimate the death spirits. The world of the blood king, which they've now captured, is a world that has existed since antiquity. It alone possesses six superior worlds' worth of energy, and the death spirits themselves have at least twelve superior worlds' worth of energy to their name. That's eighteen in all—and I'll handle whatever's still lacking."

The solar king, the decaying king, the ice queen, and the king of black fog might have been dissatisfied with this conclusion, but there was nothing they could do about it, and they were willing to defer to the king of keys.

"In that case, I'm satisfied."

Zhang Lie had never expected that the superior kings would be so generous as to hand over the superior world's energy immediately.

The king of keys continued, "Now that the Zongming world's challenge is over, it's time for us to discuss the main topic of the meeting.

"The death spirits have the ability to convert warriors that fall in battle to death spirits and black spirits. It would be far too devastating for our worlds alone to resist the death spirits' incursion. The death spirits intend to take over the third realm as a whole, and the entire realm should be responsible for defending against the death spirits."

The solar king nodded. "Quite so, your majesty! We superior worlds certainly shouldn't have to serve as vanguards alone while the large, medium-sized, and small worlds relax and do nothing."

The decaying king sneered. "These worlds might even stab us in the back while we're fighting against the death spirits."

The king of keys nodded. "As such, I intend to mobilize all large and medium-sized worlds in the third realm as well. Each world will prepare a fighting force commensurate with their status and participate in the offensive against the death spirits."

The solar king added seriously, "The death spirits are enemies to the whole of the third realm. Any worlds they invade are stripped of all life, and we're all responsible for stopping them."

Zhang Lie and Li Zongming did not comment on the matter. They had expected that the superior kings would try to do something of this nature.

The other superior kings all approved of the king of keys' plan. Li Zongming asked, "What if a world refuses the order?"

The solar king smiled with his teeth. "Then we'll make an example of that world."

With the meeting concluded, the various kings turned to leave. Before they did so, Li Zongming felt an acute pain in his back. He whirled around to see five superior kings standing before their exits from this world, each of whom were glaring daggers at Li Zongming.

The solar king's eyes were as blinding as rays of sunlight. Solar flares swirled into existence around him, and the ten suns of this world emitted a blinding glow. If not for the fact that they had to face the death spirits in the immediate future, the solar king might already have attacked him.

The ice queen's eyes were chilling and filled with frost. A blizzard gathered around her, and her eyes were so severe that it seemed as though she wanted to freeze Li Zongming solid with nothing but her gaze.

The decaying king's body writhed. The king of black fog was still surrounded by mysterious black fog, but it seemed as though there were a piercing gaze coming from within.

Eyes grew out of the gray fluid that formed the king of evil's body. As one, they all turned toward Li Zongming, causing the hairs on his body to rise. The king of evil squirmed as gray matter in the form of malformed creatures split off from its body before being devoured again. Limbs without bodies, rolling heads, struggling kidney-shaped objects with gills, and other such monstrosities shrieked in Li Zongming's direction.

Li Zongming walked off hastily as he handed over his winnings to Zhang Lie. "You won all this energy, whereas I did nothing. Take it all—once the war against the death spirits is over, we'll be rich."

Li Zongming could afford to be generous in light of his future fortune.

Zhang Lie smirked. "Do you really think we can obtain all that energy?"

Li Zongming frowned. "You think the king of keys will cheat us?"

Zhang Lie shook his head. "The king of keys would never stoop to such a level. His plans are never so vulgar."

Li Zongming frowned. "What do you mean?"

"If we do make it out of the offensive against the death spirits alive, we'll likely be able to claim all that superior world's energy—but there's a problem."

"What's that?" Li Zongming asked.

"You've seen how much the kings who lost the bet hate us, haven't you?"

Li Zongming recalled the gazes of those five kings as he walked out of the meeting room. It was evident they wanted to dismember his body, skin him, slice his flesh up into thin strips, add garlic, ginger, and onion, fry him over intense heat, and swallow him whole.

Zhang Lie smiled at Li Zongming. "Well?"

Li Zongming clarified, "You mean that the king of keys is trying to incite a fight between us and the other superior kings?"

Chapter 964: Another Advancement

Zhang Lie shrugged. "The king of keys is more refined than that. The other kings are just thinking about how to avoid paying you, but the king of keys is already scheming about what will happen after the war against the death spirits."

Li Zongming frowned. "You mean that the king of keys is thinking that far ahead already?"

"Indeed."

Li Zongming couldn't help but ask, "Just what is it trying to accomplish?"

"After this bet, the other superior kings must hate us. They'd have ambushed us already if not for the impending war against the death spirits and the presence of the king of keys and king of chaos nearby."

Li Zongming understood Zhang Lie's implication immediately.

"Once we resolve the threat of the death spirits, these kings will strike immediately—and the king of keys is masterminding all this indirectly. Winning this bet and obtaining thirty superior worlds' worth of energy is both a blessing and a curse," Zhang Lie surmised.

They would be able to obtain the overwhelming majority of the spoils from the death spirits, but the kings who would be forced to give up those spoils would get madder and madder until they launched an assault against the Zongming world themselves.

Li Zongming sighed. "Would it be better if we gave up on this debt?"

Even he quailed at the idea of going up against four superior worlds who had existed since antiquity.

"Not necessarily. We'd destroy the image that we worked so hard to build up in front of the superior kings—and they'd again try to treat you and the Zongming world like playthings, to manipulate you into becoming nothing more than a source of superior world's energy for them."

Li Zongming tugged on his hair in vexation. "Stuck between a rock and a hard place..."

"This was destined to happen the moment the Zongming world evolved into a superior world. There's no way the other superior kings would induct another member into their midst immediately.

Either you would have become their toy, or you would have been destroyed. Fortunately, the death spirits are a larger threat, and the superior worlds don't have time to worry about you at the moment."

Once the threat was resolved, however, they would strike.

Li Zongming sighed. "I'm starting to want to join the death spirits..."

Zhang Lie smiled wryly. "Ignoring the consequences to the third realm if you do so, the first step to joining the death spirits is to surrender the will of your world. Would you be willing to do so?"

Li Zongming shook his head.

Could a world without a will still be considered a world at all? A world that had lost its will would become a world of death, one devoid of life.

Zhang Lie suddenly began to laugh. "Actually, there's nothing much to worry about. Even if our enemies don't attack us, I'd think up a reason to attack them. The current superior worlds are all far too arrogant."

Li Zongming asked, "Do you have a plan in mind?"

"We've already destroyed one superior world—we could easily destroy more."

Zhang Lie had predicted that the other superior worlds would eventually become the Zongming world's enemy. That was why he had hidden the members of Team Zenith and restricted them from participating in the war.

Zhang Lie and Li Zongming passed through the tunnel and back into the Zongming world.

Li Zongming said, "I'll inform the worlds in the vicinity and start mobilizing our forces."

After the superior worlds' meeting, each superior world was responsible for mobilizing the worlds in their vicinity in preparation for the offensive against the death spirits.

What the Zongming world had to do now was take over the information network that the xuluo world had set up, and Li Zongming had a lot on his plate.

Zhang Lie replied, "I'll return to the draconian world and start preparing myself, then."

Li Zongming nodded. "Please take Qianlin with you."

Zhang Lie thought for a moment. Once war broke out against the death spirits, the safest location for Li Qianlin wouldn't be the Zongming world, itself a superior world and hence a target, but rather the draconian world, which was a peak large world and hence far safer.

Li Zongming wouldn't be heading to the battlefield; Zhang Lie and the warlords would go in his stead. Although the Zongming world would be protected by Li Zongming, there were stronger forces in the draconian world—the draconian sage, as well as Zhang Lie's elites, the members of Team Zenith.

Unlike the Zongming world, which had roused the attention of the other superior worlds and lesser worlds alike, the draconian world was largely unheard of. It would be a superior location with regards to safety, but Zhang Lie didn't immediately do so.

"I'll respect Qianlin's decision and ask about her intentions."

Li Zongming nodded. "A good decision."

Li Qianlin chose to remain in the Zongming world.

"This world might have changed, but it's still my homeworld. Don't worry—my father will keep me safe."

Zhang Lie respected Li Qianlin's opinion, and he didn't believe that she would be in danger in either world. The draconian world was safer, but as long as Zhang Lie and the other superior worlds' forces could prevent the death spirits' expansion, the Zongming world would be safe.

On the other hand, if Zhang Lie were to fail, then the draconian world would be equally dangerous for Li Qianlin.

Everything rested on being able to prevent the death spirits' expansion.

Zhang Lie rode the disaster-grade multicolored dragon back to the draconian world. He set off for the disaster-grade farm, where Zhu awaited him with good news.

"Thanks to the world's energy you provided, Zhang Lie, two disaster-grade lifeforms have evolved into monarch-grade."

Zhang Lie was elated. He had found the key to the evolution of disaster-grade lifeforms—a world's energy.

Zhu continued, "However, these disaster-grade lifeforms have to prepare by fighting and devouring strong foes before their evolution in order to maximize the world's energy they can absorb."

"That's an easy problem to solve. The third realm will be facing a massive war in the near future, and I'll have you lead these lifeforms onto the battlefield. It'll be an excellent opportunity for these lifeforms to fight and gain experience, and we'll have sufficient world's energy to feed them after the war."

The monarch-grade lifeforms were, to some extent, capable of resisting the effects of Zhang Lie's disaster-grade mistmeld-clam soulshard.

Because they had been reared artificially, neither monarch-grade lifeform was an opponent for Zhang Lie, and he easily killed them both in the blink of an eye. After consuming the monarch-grade lifeforms,

Zhang Lie reached an unprecedented 25 monarch gene fragments, with an accompanying monstrous boost to his strength. In the past, he had needed to activate a soulshard or technique to truly be at the level of a superior king—but now, he was naturally at that level without doing anything.

#### Chapter 965: A Call From Hong Tianqi

After slaughtering the two monarch-grade lifeforms in the farm on the draconian world, Zhang Lie returned to his residence just in time to see an envoy arrive from the Zongming world.

The envoy announced to the entire world, "The third realm has seen the appearance of a frightening demon who's trying to devour the three thousand worlds. To date, over five hundred have been implicated, and even a superior world has been invaded. Allowing this demon to continue growing in the third realm will only lead to doom and destruction. The superior worlds have convened a meeting and decided to combine the forces of all worlds to resist this demon!"

The draconian sage teleported right before the envoy. The envoy requested, "King of the draconian world, please respond to the superior worlds' summons and gather in the draconian world. These are the world's coordinates."

The draconian sage peered at the scroll that the envoy proffered him, on which the coordinates for the Zongming world were recorded. The draconian sage nodded and asked, "And if I don't respond to the summons?"

The envoy chuckled nervously. "Please don't make life more difficult for me, your highness. Our world has no choice, either—the superior worlds uniformly decided on this approach to counter the impending threat."

The draconian sage promised, "I'll respond to the summons. I'm simply curious."

The envoy grimaced. "Those who fail to respond to the summons will be dealt with using extreme methods."

The draconian sage more or less had an understanding of such 'extreme methods'. He nodded and said, "I'll gather my forces and set off after three days."

"Please assemble in the Zongming world as quickly as possible. The superior king whose jurisdiction we lie within is an impatient man. The other superior kings have already assembled their forces, and it would do us no good to be the slowest."

Although the envoy's words were polite, his tone brooked no argument. He turned to leave as the draconian sage sighed. "They came, after all. What do you think?"

Zhang Lie shattered space, appearing beside the draconian sage. He had seen the entire exchange. "Not long from now, there'll be more such unwelcome guests. You had better prepare."

The draconian sage nodded.

Zhang Lie returned to his residence to find Zhang Hanxiang waiting for him.

"I thought you'd be here, Brother!"

"What's the matter? Why have you been trying to find me?"

Zhang Hanxiang replied, "Uncle Hong Tianqi's looking for you."

"He's free enough to be looking for me personally?"

"He asked the hunters of the third realm to find me and Sun Mengmeng to have us pass the message to you."

Zhang Lie asked curiously, "What's the matter?"

Zhang Hanxiang shrugged. "He wants to know what's going on within the third realm of late."

"As the highest authority of the united world federation, how can he not know what's happening? I'll head back to Earth and talk to him personally." Zhang Lie returned to Earth and contacted Hong Tianqi, who picked up immediately as the call went through.

"I've been waiting for you to contact me. What's been happening in the third realm? Who are the death spirits, and what are these superior worlds up to?"

"You know what's been happening?"

"Of course I do! All worlds in the third realm have received summons from the superior worlds."

It looked as though the superior kings had all worked particularly quickly.

"Why do you think I'd know anything about what's happening?"

Hong Tianqi rolled his eyes. "You're a magnet for trouble. Nothing ever happens without your having dabbled in it."

Zhang Lie placed his palms over his heart. "You slander me! I wasn't the culprit this time—someone else was."

"So you do know important information about what's going on, don't you?"

Zhang Lie shrugged. "How much do you know about the death spirits and the superior worlds?"

Hong Tianqi had passed through the third realm himself, and he should have learned quite a bit during his time there.

"I know that a particularly strong race, known as the death spirits, have been barricaded and kept under heavy guard by the other superior worlds, but I've never interacted with them.

"These superior worlds are superior to even large worlds, and they're unassailable existences that have persisted since antiquity. No one dares to provoke them—or rather, those who do have all died. There are ten such worlds in the third realm."

Zhang Lie laughed. "Unassailable? I think not. That's just something the superior worlds made up. As far as I'm aware, two superior worlds have perished recently."

"At your hand?"

"Why do you think so?"

Hong Tianqi replied, "Because you're responsible for everything!"

Zhang Lie sighed theatrically. "Alright, alright, I'll admit it. I got rid of one of the superior worlds, and the death spirits got rid of another."

Hong Tianqi asked, "So just what are these death spirits, and why do the superior worlds need to work together to stop them?"

"The death spirits originally represented one of the ten superior worlds. Subsequently, the death spirit king tried to grow stronger by absorbing the wills of each world. He started by swallowing up the will of his own world, and then those of his surroundings.

"His ambition grew so wild that he tried to devour the whole of the third realm. The other superior worlds discovered his ploys and combined forces to stop him."

Hong Tianqi was visibly alarmed. "A demon, then."

"A demon indeed, but the other superior worlds aren't necessarily personifications of justice themselves."

Hong Tianqi asked, "What else is there that you're not telling me?"

"Nothing major. Don't worry—I won't let the events transpiring in the third realm affect us humans. Believe in me and let me handle this crisis.

"Ever since the other superior worlds stopped them, the death spirits have been laying the groundwork for a total conquest of the third realm. They've recently broken through the barricade, and the superior worlds are preparing to mobilize the whole of the third realm to wage a war the likes of which have never been seen."

Hong Tianqi wanted to spit out blood. "And you call that 'nothing major?!' This is a world war—no, a realm war!

If news of what's going on were to be released and disseminated, the entire Milky Way will be in an uproar. Only someone like you would consider this 'nothing major'—the rest of us would be shocked stiff!"

Zhang Lie mulled over Hong Tianqi's words. Indeed, this might be a big affair for others, but for Zhang Lie, who was aware of the outcome of the death spirits, it didn't seem like anything major.

Given what had happened in his past life, the death spirits were doomed to failure. If they were destined to be destroyed by the superior worlds, what was there to fear?

Zhang Lie spread his arms. "It's a matter for the third realm to deal with. It's not as if you can do anything about it, can you?"

Hong Tianqi reluctantly nodded. There was little he could do directly, and Zhang Lie was his best pawn indirectly.

"You're certain you can control the situation?" he reiterated.

"Not entirely, but I expect I'll be able to curtail it if it gets out of hand. What are you hoping to accomplish during this war?"

Hong Tianqi glanced at Zhang Lie thoughtfully. "Nothing, really—I just don't want the Milky Way to suffer huge casualties."

"I won't be able to promise anything with regards to other races, but it won't impact humans much. In fact, we can benefit from it." Witnessing a mythical war in the third realm would only serve to strengthen the human hunters there. "As for other races, well, there's not much I can do."

## Chapter 966: Forceful Means

Hong Tianqi sighed. "Alright, you're right. I won't be able to accomplish anything major with regards to this war. Can I share this news publicly?"

Hong Tianqi intended to share the information about the third realm at the next meeting of the united world federation.

That such a mythical war was unfolding within the third realm wasn't something Hong Tianqi alone could handle. The whole of the world federation had to discuss this event and react accordingly.

Zhang Lie smiled. "Of course it's not a problem."

He hung up, then asked Zhang Hong about the current situation on Mars.

By then, the members of the Zenith Dojo had already finished cleaning out the last of the bugs remaining on Mars, and they were helping out with the subsequent rebuilding. Most of the disciples had already returned, and the rest were remaining on Mars voluntarily.

The mass production of the superior-grade limit-breaking potion had begun, and many of those disciples who had exchanged for that potion with the points they had earned had already obtained them.

There was little in the Zenith Dojo that required his attention at the moment. Smiling, Zhang Lie returned to the third realm, by which time a day had passed. The draconian sage teleported to his side immediately.

"The neighboring worlds have all sent envoys to seek our protection."

The 'neighboring worlds' that the draconian sage referred to were those that had been invaded by the members of Team Zenith and the warlords.

Zhang Lie smirked. "They finally believe us now, do they?"

These worlds had dragged out the draconian sage's request initially, but now that the danger was nigh, they had no choice but to seek assistance from the draconian world.

Zhang Lie certainly didn't have any precognitive abilities—he was simply drawing from his experience from his past life.

The worlds that had been invaded had few forces to their name, and they would be incapable of meeting the superior worlds' request on their own. Most of their forces had been committed to fending off the warlords and members of Team Zenith.

However, neither could they refuse the superior worlds' request. Whatever aliens they could muster would be a weak force indeed, and there would be no hope for their survival against these death spirits from a superior world.

As a result, their only chance of survival was to form an alliance with the draconian world, which boasted exceptionally strong forces like the members of Team Zenith and the warlords of the Milky Way.

The draconian sage asked, "Do you want to meet them personally?"

Zhang Lie replied, "Let them wait. When I tried to reach out to them before, they did all they could to delay our meeting. If they want the protection of the draconian world, they should work for it."

The draconian sage nodded. "Indeed—they do need some sense knocked into them."

Zhang Lie continued, "Right, Sage, have you considered evolving the draconian world into a superior world?"

"Yes, but didn't you say that it wasn't the right time for it when I brought it up?"

"During the war between the death spirits and the other superior worlds would be rather good timing."

The draconian sage thought about Zhang Lie's suggestion. "Is there any danger to that plan?"

"Of course, but not during the war itself. The danger will come later, once the superior worlds have won."

The draconian sage seemed open to the idea. "Let me consider it in more detail first."

"I'll leave the proofs of kingship I obtained over this period of time with you. Once you make up your mind, you can choose whether or not to evolve the world yourself."

Zhang Lie tossed the proofs of kingship he had been keeping in his soul space to the ground. There were so many of them that they formed a small mountain before him.

Ever since Zhang Lie obtained monarch gene fragments and the members of Team Zenith their peak limit fragments, he had no reason to fear the kings of superior worlds any longer. In fact, Zhang Lie was eagerly anticipating potential fights with superior kings in the future.

The draconian sage jumped up in shock upon seeing all the proofs of kingship before him.

"Th-this many?" Just how many worlds had the members of Team Zenith and the warlords conquered in the meantime?

After handing all those proofs of kingship to the draconian sage, Zhang Lie returned to his house and rested. Given his current strength and gene fragments, Zhang Lie didn't need to rest at all, but he did so as a form of meditation and preparation before a huge battle.

After ten continuous hours of meditation, Zhang Lie's body reached peak performance. He opened his eyes to find the members of Team Zenith present with a group of aliens from other worlds. He headed to the entrance and opened the door. "What's going on?"

Sun Mengmeng sighed. "Captain, we were just about to find you."

Yang Ze cried out in exasperation, "Captain, deal with these fellows, please! They've been bugging us all day!"

Glancing at the disparate aliens who weren't native to the draconian world, Zhang Lie had a guess as to what they were doing here.

"They're seeking the protection of the draconian world in the upcoming war, aren't they?"

Sun Mengmeng nodded immediately. "Do you know why they've come to speak with you, Captain?"

"More or less."

They were unable to meet with the draconian sage, so they sought out the members of Team Zenith. The members of Team Zenith were unable to make such an important decision on their own, so they sought out Zhang Lie.

One alien representative called out, "You were the ones who destroyed our world's forces! That's why we're unable to field an army of sufficient strength for the upcoming war!"

Zhang Lie sneered. "Whoever said that can scram. I won't work with someone like that."

Fang Yi snorted. "You might not be able to deal with these superior worlds easily, but do you think it's much easier for us?"

A formless aura pressed down on the alien representatives, causing them to shut up. They barely dared to breathe.

Zhang Lie nodded. "I understand your struggles. The superior worlds sent out notices with very little warning, and it's difficult for all of you to face such an enemy without preparation."

A bold alien representative spoke up. "We had no choice but to come over and seek out the draconian world for help. As aliens, you might not understand how threatening the superior worlds might be. None of us can go against them."

The hunters of the Milky Way might not know much about the superior worlds, but the inhabitants of the third realm knew quite a bit about them.

The other aliens nodded. "Even the envoy wasn't someone any of us could dare to offend."

One alien exaggerated, "Allegedly, a large world in the past once offended a superior world. In no less than a day, the entire world was eradicated—leaving no trace of it behind."

"One of our neighbors was impolite to the envoy that showed up, and half the world was destroyed..."

The other aliens all looked at each other in fear.

It looked as though Li Zongming had used brute force to transmit the message to the worlds under his jurisdiction more quickly—but if it were a superior world of antiquity, the entire world might have been annihilated, not just half of it...

Chapter 967: Pep Assembly

Zhang Lie comforted the alien representatives. "I know that all of you are afraid of what might happen—and indeed, these death spirits the superior worlds are trying to combat are fearful.

"But isn't that natural? Even the superior worlds have to band together to take on this foe. The death spirits, which only the combined might of the three thousand worlds of the realm can take on, could hardly be anything but powerful.

"The death spirits can't be handled by any one superior world, nor even by all the superior worlds working together. I can't imagine just how strong they really are," one representative said.

The others nodded, thinking that his words were reasonable.

Zhang Lie chuckled to himself. Oh, really? The superior worlds were certainly sufficient to take on the threat—they simply didn't want to do so. They were on guard against each other, and they'd much rather send lower worlds onto the battlefield as cannon fodder.

"The death spirits aren't a foe our ruined worlds can take on. That's why we're all here today."

Zhang Lie nodded. "Since everyone's aware of how frightening the death spirits are, I won't waste my breath. Beforehand, I reached out to all of you because I had heard about the war, intending to form an alliance."

"How do you plan to deal with this war?" The alien representatives all drew closer.

Zhang Lie raised his voice. "The superior worlds, and the death spirits that even the superior worlds might not be handle—both are unassailable foes that we can't take on. This war will be larger than any other in the third realm, in the past or in the future. Compared to these two forces, we're nothing but cannon fodder. The only way we can survive is by banding together and forming an alliance."

The alien representatives all nodded, thinking that Zhang Lie's words were very reasonable.

"Our worlds can't hold a candle to those two monsters..."

"We need to work together. We're too weak to survive alone."

"No matter how weak we are, we might be able to prevent our combined destruction together."

Of course, the primary reason the alien representatives were so receptive to this idea was that they could simply follow behind the draconian world, which boasted strong fighters like the members of Team Zenith and the warlords. If Zhang Lie, who seemed like a martial god, was speaking of his own insignificance in the war, they would be nothing more than dust on the battlefield.

The only way they could survive would be by leeching off a stronger force—the draconian world.

The formation of the coalition proceeded as smoothly as expected. Zhang Lie and the alien representatives settled on gathering the bulk of their strength and collectively accepting the superior worlds' summons.

Subsequently, Zhang Lie spoke to the warlords about his plan. "Once the alien forces gather, you'll set off together."

The warlords didn't understand the benefit the alien forces would bring to them. Xing Ying asked, "Why are we bringing along a group of useless fighters? They'll slow us down."

The warlords were well aware of Zhang Lie's combat ability. Even if they were to accompany him, they'd be holding him back—let alone those weak alien races.

Zhang Lie shrugged. "I'll be working alone. These aliens are useless, which makes them perfect cannon fodder."

If Zhang Lie were leading the command, he certainly wouldn't agree to the presence of these weaklings, but Zhang Hanxiang would be in charge. Having more cannon fodder around wasn't necessarily a bad thing; they didn't need to do anything but block a blow and die.

Zhang Lie continued, "Furthermore, there's strength in numbers and perception, don't you think?"

None of the warlords disagreed with Zhang Lie, or rather, nothing would change even if they did.

Zhang Lie then informed Zhang Hanxiang and Hong Xi of the news.

The two women reacted differently. Hong Xi asked in surprise, "You're setting off so quickly?" She had just finished maxing her gene fragments, and she was familiarizing herself with the structure of the third realm.

Meanwhile, Zhang Hanxiang jumped up in excitement. "We're finally setting off! I've waited for this for quite some time."

"Prepare yourselves well. There'll be a pep assembly once the aliens gather."

In order to leech off the draconian world, the aliens gathered quickly before they could be left behind. They assembled in the draconian world, with the warlords standing guard around the stage.

Zhang Lie stood on stage as he surveyed all the aliens present, meeting their expectant gazes. They had all assembled quickly with their strongest forces, fearing that Zhang Lie would leave them behind. Zhang Lie winced upon glancing through the crowd—the worlds had been devastated by the members of Team Zenith and the warlords, and the Worldpact Coalition they had formed had subsequently been crushed. As a result, they barely had any fighters left.

Zhang Lie walked up on stage. The members of Team Zenith followed behind him.

"Everyone, we will soon be embroiled in a war of mythic proportions, the likes of which have never been seen in the third realm. You'll suffer through trial and trouble, but I believe that you can overcome it all. Unfortunately, I won't be able to lead you on the battlefield."

The aliens were confused, but they didn't make a ruckus. Even without Zhang Lie, there were still the members of Team Zenith.

"I will be leading the warlords to the frontlines with the superior worlds, and I regret that I won't be able to fight with you. Command of the battlefield will pass to my sister, Zhang Hanxiang."

Zhang Hanxiang marched onto stage and waved at the shocked aliens.

The aliens were skeptical of Zhang Hanxiang's strength, but they didn't dare to raise an objection.

Zhang Lie continued, "Everyone, please rest assured. I'm confident in my sister's strength."

After the members of Team Zenith consumed the peak limit-breaking potion and confirmed that there were no issues, Zhang Lie had Zhang Hanxiang consume the peak limit-breaking potion as well.

At this point, Zhang Hanxiang was only slightly weaker than the members of Team Zenith, and she would have no trouble asserting her strength over the all-but-crippled aliens.

"My sister will be assisted by my disciple, Hong Xi!"

Hong Xi walked up on stage and bowed to the crowd.

"Next, the main fighters of the draconian army!"

With a huge clamor, a group of armored mammoths appeared on stage, with a huge group of greenskins to their left and bear-men to the right. In the middle were the combined human and draconian forces.

The aliens were shocked by the intimidating stature of this formation. Many of the aliens turned pale—they had suffered under the rampage of the human and mammoth fighters.

Nevertheless, given the intimidating nature of the forces, they were all at ease with regards to their odds of surviving the upcoming war.

"It's time to set off." With a wave of Zhang Lie's hand, Zhu appeared with a huge mass of genetic lifeforms in tow, most of which were peak- and superior-grade.

The aliens glanced at each other fearfully and prepared to fight.

"Don't worry," Zhang Lie called out. "These will be your allies in war, as well as your mounts to the battlefield."

The aliens glanced at each other again, this time in shock. For so many strong genetic lifeforms to become nothing more than their mounts—they marveled at the might of Zhang Lie and the draconian world.

#### Chapter 968: Overwhelming Strength

The aliens believed that the members of Team Zenith and the warlords were the draconian world's trump cards, but it seemed to have access to far more than they had given it credit for.

Zhang Lie had performed mass hypnosis on the genetic lifeforms to allow them to convey the aliens and fight alongside them.

The aliens excitedly picked out their own mounts. Subsequently, Zhang Lie waved his hand and announced, "Set off."

The draconian world's forces set off toward the Zongming world.

Zhang Lie tugged on Zhang Hanxiang and whispered to her, "You're aware that the members of Team Zenith won't be participating in battle with you, right?"

Zhang Hanxiang nodded. "I understand. You told me beforehand."

"If the aliens ask what they're doing, tell them that they're on a secret mission."

Zhang Hanxiang nodded.

The aliens had chosen to ally with the draconian world because they thought the draconian world's forces would be strong and dependable. However, none of Zhang Lie, the warlords, or the members of Team Zenith would be present on the battlefield with them. If the aliens were aware of this, it would be far more difficult for Zhang Hanxiang and Hong Xi to command them all.

Neither woman had displayed their full strength to the aliens, and it would be difficult to get them to succumb to their command.

On the other hand, the excuse that Team Zenith was taking part in a secret mission was one that could be repeatedly used for quite some time before the aliens started to doubt Zhang Hanxiang and Hong Xi. As long as they showcased their strength in battle by then, the aliens would naturally accept their command.

"I'll present you and Hong Xi with a specialized mount." Zhang Lie beckoned the disaster-grade multicolored dragon over.

Zhang Hanxiang gulped. "Brother, isn't this your mount?"

"I'll lend it to you for the time being. Remember to return it."

After consuming a portion of world's energy, the disaster-grade dragon was barely weaker than Zhang Hanxiang herself, and it would be able to protect them both.

"Thank you, Brother!"

It would take some time for the aliens to reach the Zongming world. Before then, Zhang Lie and Gold Comet headed somewhere else—the scaleman world.

Gold Comet's speed meant that they reached the scaleman world in the blink of an eye.

There were large numbers of alien fighters gathered around the scaleman capital, suggesting that they too were preparing to respond to the superior worlds' summons.

There were quite a number of alien troops present. It was clear that the scaleman world had done what the draconian world did. It had gathered together the forces of those nearby worlds that had been invaded by the black spirits to form a coalition.

The king of the scaleman world stood on stage as he orated, "All of our worlds have been destroyed or invaded by the black spirits. Even after my master destroyed the black spirits, the mastermind behind this invasion remains—the death spirits."

The alien fighters' eyes shone with vengeance. The black spirits had destroyed their homeworlds and converted their friends and family into monsters.

The scaleman king explained that the black spirits had merely been a tool of the death spirits, who had yet to suffer any consequences for their actions.

"We won't allow the death spirits to do as they please. Those who destroyed our homeland and killed our people shall die for their actions!"

The fighters who had had no place to vent their hatred and anger after the invasion gathered in droves. As the nearby worlds learned of this information, huge swathes of warriors joined the scaleman coalition. Either the death spirits would be killed to the last, or they would be.

Suddenly, the king looked up at the sky, having sensed Zhang Lie's arrival.

Zhang Lie made no motion to hide his presence. He teleported over to the scaleman king's side, who asked him excitedly, "Master, are you here to fight with me?"

Zhang Lie would be superior to ten million ordinary fighters.

Zhang Lie shook his head. "I'm here to inform you that the war against the death spirits is on the horizon."

"Right now?" the scaleman king explained, shocked.

"No, not yet. Once the superior worlds enter a heated confrontation with the death spirits, once they're unable to extricate themselves—that's when you have to evolve your world. I won't be able to inform you of the best timing, since I'll be on the battlefield myself, but don't worry. With the right timing, they'll be far too busy to prevent your world's evolution."

The scaleman king nodded. "I'll seize this opportunity. Thank you, Master."

"You must. If you miss this opportunity, your world will never be able to evolve."

Before his meeting with Zhang Lie, the scaleman king only had a vague understanding of a superior world and what it entailed, but after the summons, he desperately sought to evolve his world.

Why did all the worlds have to respond to the superior worlds' summons? Because the superior worlds were the strongest of all. The scaleman king had never thought his world inferior to any other, but after meeting an envoy from a superior world, he realized that there were existences above even him.

Those who became kings of the realm wanted to rule, not to be ruled over.

They were able to convey their authority at least within their worlds—but now that the scaleman king had identified an authority that lay above his, he couldn't stand it. He immediately thought about what Zhang Lie had brought up once, evolving his world to a superior one.

"I have my own objectives to accomplish, so I'll be leaving now."

Gold Comet morphed into a dazzling beam of golden light, which shot out into the horizon. In the blink of an eye, they had returned to the Zongming world.

Many aliens had already gathered in the Zongming world. Zhang Lie headed up the mountain to the palace at its peak, where he found Li Zongming.

"It looks like you've mustered up most of the forces already."

Li Zongming shrugged. "I also terrorized quite a few recalcitrant worlds."

"I heard you destroyed half a world."

There was no choice, after all; if he failed to amass enough forces quickly, the other superior worlds would surely try to cast blame upon him.

Li Zongming said, "It's been a few days since Qianlin last saw you. Will you talk to her now?"

"I'm planning on doing so."

Zhang Lie zipped off toward Li Qianlin's rooms. He spread his arms wide and asked, "It's been a few years. Won't you give me a hug?"

Li Qianlin grumbled, "What do you mean, a few years? It's been just a few days!"

"A day without you is like a year lost to me."

Li Qianlin rolled her eyes. "Is the war about to start?"

"Almost. Once the stragglers arrive, we'll set off."

Li Qianlin began, "This war—"

Chapter 969: An Oration of War

Zhang Lie patted Li Qianlin. "Don't worry. I'm not so weak that I'd lose to these death spirits. We'll surely win this war—but let's not talk about the war for today."

After chatting with Li Qianlin for a while, Zhang Lie returned to the palace.

"How's the attendance so far?" he asked Li Zongming.

"Roughly 70% of all worlds have already sent their troops over. Have the draconian world's forces arrived yet?"

Zhang Lie looked toward the outskirts of the palace. "I think it's about time."

Li Zongming walked outside the palace. "It feels as though a massive army is making their way here."

A hubbub rang out from a nearby wormhole as a huge army arrived. Each warrior was mounted on a genetic lifeform, and the number of warriors present shocked all the other aliens who had gathered.

Zhang Lie's gaze landed on the disaster-grade multicolored dragon as he smiled. "Here they are."

Li Zongming glanced at them. "Very good. The main forces have a flair and panache that wouldn't lose out to a superior world's forces."

The draconian world's army proceeded to the staging area, guided by representatives from the Zongming world.

"Aren't you going to meet with them?" Li Zongming asked.

Zhang Lie shook his head. "The war's about to start. There's no need."

Even more troops arrived from another wormhole. Li Zongming remarked with surprise, "It looks like you're not the only world bringing so many troops."

A huge army poured out from that wormhole, each fighter's eyes burning with hatred. Zhang Lie recognized that that army came from the scaleman world.

A boggling number of fighters had gathered in the Zongming world. Even if each world only supplied a thousand fighters, Li Zongming's jurisdiction extended over three hundred worlds—giving rise to a massive army of 300,000.

Li Zongming hadn't established a quota for the number of fighters to be supplied by each world, but it looked as though the worlds had supplied an average of three thousand fighters each. In other words, Li Zongming had gathered an army almost a million strong.

When the flow of fighters into the world slowed to a trickle, Li Zongming stepped forward and ascended into the air. He hovered above the staging area, his voice echoing and resounding through the whole of the Zongming world.

"I believe all of you are familiar with the enemy we face in this war: demons who are attempting to take over the realm. One world's strength alone is insufficient to stop these demons, and we have to work together to prevent them from taking over and destroying our worlds. We have to fight together, to resist the incursion of the death spirits..."

Li Zongming had prepared a passionate speech that dramatically raised the fighters' morale.

"We cannot allow the death spirit king to realize his ambitions. The realm consists of three thousand worlds, of millions and billions of lifeforms—all of whom will perish if the death spirit king succeeds. He'll devour the wills of our worlds, converting all of us into black spirits, a fate worse than death. We have to prevent this tragedy from unfolding."

The most passionate among the fighters were undoubtedly those that had come from the scaleman world. Many of the fighters had been victims of the black spirits' invasion, and they had personally experienced the destruction the death spirit king planned to wreak.

"Destroy the death spirits! Kill the death spirit king!" the scaleman fighters shouted.

The other aliens, roused by the atmosphere, echoed, "Destroy the death spirits! Kill the death spirit king!"

"Destroy the death spirits! Kill the death spirit king!"

Their voices echoed through the sky.

Li Zongming clasped both hands behind his back. As the fighters' emotions soared, he waved a hand and invoked his authority as the king to establish a wide passage.

Zhang Lie appeared behind Li Zongming and shouted, "Warlords, gather!"

"Yes, Captain!" The warlords of the draconian world stepped forward.

Li Zongming nodded. "Forces of the Zongming world, gather!"

As Li Zongming's voice echoed through the air, tens of thousands of forces from the Zongming world gathered. Zhang Lie glanced at them. Although they had suffered greatly during the xuluo invasion, they had recovered and grown stronger in the two years since.

Li Zongming declared, "In the upcoming war, you'll listen to Zhang Lie's commands and fight alongside his warlords. If he commands you to die, you die without any hesitation. Do you understand?"

"Yes, your majesty!" the Zongming world's fighters chorused.

They had personally witnessed Zhang Lie defending the Zongming world, and many of the fighters treated him like an idol.

Li Zongming patted Zhang Lie's shoulder. "Be careful on the battlefield."

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "Don't worry, I'm stronger than you are. Nothing will happen to me."

Li Zongming was like a father watching his son go to war. "Be careful of the death spirits and death spirit king—but be even more careful of our supposed 'allies'. None of the other superior worlds are trustworthy. Betray them if you find an opportunity, but above all, make sure you come back safely."

"I understand," Zhang Lie replied. It was he who had emphasized to Li Zongming once and again that the death spirits' enemies weren't necessarily allies.

"In that case," Li Zongming replied, turning and shouting toward the gathered forces, "we set off immediately!"

With a wave of his hand, the forces began marching toward the wormhole.

"Warlords and troops of the Zongming world, follow me!" Zhang Lie was the first to step into the wormhole, followed swiftly by the warlords and Zongming forces. The aliens followed in a long trail behind them.

The huge wormhole that appeared before their eyes would lead them straight from the Zongming world to the frontlines of the battlefield.

The captain of the Zongming forces walked up to Zhang Lie. "Prince Consort, would you be willing to give me an autograph! I'm a fan of yours, and I'm very grateful you protected our world on our behalf. Without you, the Zongming world would have been destroyed."

Zhang Lie nodded. "Prince consort—who told you to call me that?"

The Zongming captain replied, "His majesty told us to. Do you dislike the term, Commander?"

"Ah—I suppose it's alright. Where do you want the autograph?"

The Zongming captain puffed up his chest. "On my armor, please!"

Zhang Lie extended a finger. With his genetic energy, he engraved his name on the armor.

"Us too, us too!" The other Zongming warriors, seeing that Zhang Lie was down to earth and perfectly willing to interact with lowly fighters like them, immediately badgered him for an autograph as well.

By the time Zhang Lie finished giving everyone an autograph, they were at the exit to the wormhole.

Zhang Lie was initially surprised that the exit of the wormhole led to another world. When he drew closer, he realized that it was instead the remnants of a shattered battlefield.

Huge chunks of rock and stone floated in the void like debris. Forests and rivers had been destroyed, and countless battered weapons were scattered through the space. There were clear signs that a battle had taken place, but no corpses to be found in sight.

The shattered battlefield before them couldn't have been formed by the annihilation of one or two worlds—there had to be at least three to five in the vicinity that had all been destroyed. This battlefield might even be the ruins of Blood Heaven, the world of the blood king, who had fallen to the death spirits...

Chapter 970: The Shattered Battlefield

Zhang Lie suddenly sensed a disturbance and frowned. "Who's there?"

The forces that accompanied Zhang Lie now gathered behind him, eyes alert, ready for a battle to break out at any moment.

Zhang Lie shouted, "Show yourself! Don't force me to act!"

Light glinted. A throwing knife imbued with frost shot toward Zhang Lie from behind a boulder.

Snow poured from the air. The temperature in the air suddenly dipped, as though it was suddenly the deep of winter. The throwing knife froze everything it passed through, leaving a thick layer of ice along its path.

"You must have a death wish!" Zhang Lie called out. Water-attuned genetic energy gathered by his fingertips as he swung his arm.

"[The Boundless Blade: Yawning Wave]!" Zhang Lie swung downwards with a heavy blow, and a shark swam forth. His technique sundered the ice and split apart any boulders along its trajectory. Subsequently, the pale blue shark opened its bloody maw wide.

"Hold on! We're allies!"

The shark stopped short. Its maw was still wide open, but it didn't chomp down.

Behind a boulder was an armored frost spirit, pale blue and with a half-ethereal body. He emitted an aura of frost as he floated in the air like a ghost. He raised both hands high, an apologetic expression on his face, and a troop of frost spirits followed behind him.

Zhang Lie chuckled. "Allies, you say?"

The frost spirit at the front laughed wryly. "It was just a joke—don't take it so seriously."

Zhang Lie snorted. "Do you think you'd still be alive if I were taking it seriously?"

The shark drew closer. As the frost spirit looked into row upon row of sharp teeth, it grimaced.

The shark formed from genetic energy was so large that, if it bit down, both he and the frost spirits cowering behind him would all be devoured in a single gulp. If he could sweat, his forehead would be dripping.

"I only wanted to see for myself how strong your forces were, and whether or not you qualify to work with us."

Zhang Lie sneered. "Is that so? More like you wanted to intimidate us or even kill us outright."

"No, no, I wouldn't dare!" the frost spirit cried, waving his hands frantically in disagreement.

He really did just want to test the humans' forces, not realizing that Zhang Lie was so strong or that his retaliation would be so swift.

Zhang Lie called out harshly, "And what do you think you should do after you've realized that you've made a mistake? Didn't anyone teach you that?"

The frost spirit immediately apologized. "I'm sorry, I've made a mistake! We've made a mistake!"

Zhang Lie grudgingly dispelled the shark, and the frost spirits gulped in a breath of relief. They felt as though they had somehow survived a calamity.

Zhang Lie snorted. "You guys really enjoy playing with fire, don't you? It's fortunate you met me rather than someone else—you'd be dead a hundred times over by now otherwise."

The frost spirits thought to themselves, You're not much better.

"If the frost spirits are here, are the other races here, too?"

The leader of the frost spirits replied, "The creatures from the unclean world are here as well, but I don't suppose you want to work with them."

Creatures from the unclean world— those monstrosities? Zhang Lie recalled the mutated growths and abominations that he had seen birthed from the king of evil's flesh: limbs without bodies, rolling heads, and struggling kidney-shaped objects with gills.

Indeed, Zhang Lie had no interest in seeing those monstrosities at all. If he did, he didn't think he would be able to eat anything for the next day.

"Why?" Zhang Hanxiang asked.

Zhang Lie rolled his eyes. "They indiscriminately devour any lifeform they see. Remember, during the war, don't ever get close to the unclean world's forces. They won't care if you're friend or foe—and be wary of the world of black fog as well."

This was precious experience that he had learned in his past life during the war against the death spirits. Zhang Lie had seen those monstrosities devour anything in their path with his own eyes.

The monstrosities from the unclean world were exceptionally dangerous, but they were also a strong tool against the death spirits.

One of the most problematic aspects of fighting the death spirits was that any corpses and captives would be converted into black spirits. Captives were guaranteed to transform, whereas corpses had a varying chance of transforming depending on their strength. Weaker corpses who failed to transform would instead become void spirits.

The monstrosities from the unclean world were vicious existences that countered the death spirits to a considerable extent. They could devour black spirits to augment their own strength, and even if they were to die, they wouldn't leave a corpse behind. They would turn into gray fluid, which the death spirits could do nothing about.

The black shadows of the world of black fog were much the same. After they died, they would vanish in a puff of black fog, so the death spirits were unable to augment their numbers.

Many of the superior worlds' forces had participated in the initial war to barricade the death spirits, and they had some experience working with the others.

The frost spirit remarked in surprise, "Ah, you're aware of the characteristics of the monstrosities of the unclean world and the black shadows from the world of black fog? How did you know?"

The frost spirits were very surprised. Given Zhang Lie's strength, they would have heard of him if he had been among the superior worlds in the past.

Zhang Lie smiled. "I fought off those monstrosities during the meeting convened by the superior kings."

Zhang Hanxiang gave off an aura of frost, one that attracted the frost spirits to her.

The leader of the frost spirits warned, "Is that so? I'll give you a warning, then. Be careful of the unclean world and the world of black fog. If you're ever consumed by those lifeforms, you're done for.

"Even if your superior king personally tries to reclaim you, all he'll get back is a monstrosity, or a figure wreathed in black shadow. There's nothing anyone can do at that point—the transformation is irreversible."

The frost spirits were clearly very familiar with what would happen. Likely, this was something that they had seen quite a few times.

In this war, everyone would have to be wary of not just the threat of the death spirits, but also of their allies. The frost spirits had drilled that lesson into everyone's heads the moments they stepped onto the shattered battlefield...