

The Witch 961

Chapter 961: Upheaval in Silverscale City

Silverscale City, Spirit Observation Department

"Chief Kroksi, we have finished compiling the information. Would you like me to read it?"

"Read it."

"Understood, Chief."

After receiving Chief Kroksi's confirmation, the Nautican data analyst began reading the compiled report.

"According to the data, Seventh-class Land Investigator, Hurgas Grendar, was patrolling land region – DSE, GMSC-012M, when he made contact with the unknown threat and got killed."

"Before he died, he used a divine art in hopes of attracting nearby Land Investigators to aid him. This shows that Hurgas Grendar already knew he was outmatched. Unfortunately, his act led to the deaths of three higher-ranked Land Investigators."

"The remnant memories we extracted from their Spirit Tablets only showed the three higher-ranked Land Investigators arriving at the scene of Hurgas's corpse along with several Demigod-rank carcasses of the Black Serpent Clan. They did not get the chance to identify the threat before they were killed."

"As for Hurgas's Spirit Tablet, most of his remnant memories had already faded by the time the watchman noticed its light had gone out."

After listening to the report up until this point, Chief Kroksi's face immediately fell.

The death of a Land Investigator should have been reported immediately. However, the Spirit Altar watchman didn't report the incident until another three Land Investigators were killed.

Such slack reflected poorly on his department and ultimately implicated him.

"Who was the Spirit Altar watchman on duty?" Chief Kroksi uttered gloomily and said, "His lack of discipline has cost us the loss of critical information on a powerful enemy. He is to be demoted three ranks, effective immediately."

"Have someone take him to the Repentance Hall to receive a hundred spirit lashings as punishment. Afterward, he must head to Blacksea Pass to serve 100,000 hours before he can return to receive a new position," Chief Kroksi instructed.

"Understood, Chief!" the Nautican militants answered obediently. However, they all felt a chill in their heart.

Chief Kroksi's punishment was truly harsh.

The hundred spirit lashings, while it was painful, akin to having a layer of one's soul ripped out, it was not bad compared to the 100,000-hour service at Blacksea Pass.

After all, the Outer Sea was a dangerous and unforgiving sea, which even the Celestial Kingdom had no control over in the absence of the Ocean Master's Conqueror's Aura.

If one was unlucky during their service at Blacksea Pass, they could lose their life in a sea monster tide.

Everyone in the Spirit Observation Department immediately pitied the unfortunate watchman who had to suffer for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

After all, it was normal for watchmen to be lax, considering the Spirit Altar had never had such an incident since the start of its establishment.

Who could have anticipated such a situation after several hundred thousand years?

"Should I continue reading, Chief?" the Nautican data analyst asked.

"Continue."

"Yes, Chief."

"From the Celestial Kingdom's shared network, it is said that a group of Land Investigators from other cities have also been dispatched to inspect the land recently due to the sudden rise in spirit energy levels in the exosphere."

"According to their reports, the land-dweller countries have begun to explore the secrets of the universe and mass-produce spirit energy. Blackshell City, Razorfin City, and Tidalson City have already classified this incident as a disaster-class emergency and entered martial law."

"They are preparing a joint movement to destroy the Black Rose Empire's Heavenreacher and outer space bases."

"I see. But what does that have to do with the four deaths on our side?" Chief Kroksi asked.

"Based on our cross-referencing and analysis, we have determined that only one person could have killed the four Land Investigators from our city – the Great Devil Slayer, Vaan Raphna, who is also prophesized overlord and leader of the UN."

"Although we have yet to gain an accurate understanding of Vaan Raphna's strength, it is currently estimated to be at least the First-stage Divine Knight level."

"First-stage Divine Knight..." Chief Kroksi's lips twitched.

With his Ninth-stage Divine Star realm cultivation, he would have lost his life if he had rashly sought revenge for the fallen Land Investigators.

Nevertheless, it was unbelievable that the land-dwellers could produce such a powerful existence so quickly and suddenly after all this time.

Bang!

The thick metallic door of the spirit observation room suddenly shook under a loud impact from the outside. The aftershock stirred up the seawater inside and shifted everyone's attention.

Shortly after, the metallic overhead door opened, revealing a group of imposing Nauticans in celestial noble attire as they entered.

"What the hell do you think you are doing? You aren't authorized to be here, Sir Ethar!" Chief Kroksi immediately criticized the trespassing noble group.

Although he had anticipated trouble would come to him, he didn't expect it to be so soon. Silverscale City's nobles were in such a rush to kick him down.

"Aren't authorized? That's where you are wrong," the leading Nautican in a flashy green skin-tight suit called Sir Ethar coolly refuted before stating, "We are here on the Silverscale Lord's orders to take over the commands of this department."

"You have already been relieved of your duty, Chief Kroksi. So, if anything, you are the one who isn't authorized to be here. After all, you don't even have an official position anymore."

"If I were you, I would be more worried about how you should answer for your crimes," Sir Ethar said.

"Bullshit!" Chief Kroksi spat angrily and said, "This a military building of the Celestial Kingdom! The Silverscale Lord has no authority to interfere in military matters here! Even if it is the Silverscale Lord's order, it's invalid!"

"Only my immediate superior can dismiss me from my position! The Silverscale Lord isn't above the Celestial Kingdom's law!" Chief Kroksi barked.

"The Celestial Kingdom's law?" Sir Ethar smiled with contempt before saying, "Here in Silverscale City, the Silverscale Lord is the law! Chief Kroksi is under arrest on suspicions of treason. Capture him. If he resists, you are free to use lethal force."

"Yes, sir!" the First-stage Divine Knight-level Nauticans behind him answered.

Shortly after giving the knights the order, Sir Ethar looked back at Chief Kroksi amusingly and said, "I suggest you surrender yourself quietly, Chief Kroksi."

"You are making a grave mistake, Sir Ethar," Chief Kroksi said gloomily with a hint of threat.

"I don't know about making any mistake yet. However, I do know that you have, Chief Kroksi. Give up quietly. You do not want to make your crimes any worse. My knights have already been authorized to execute you if you resist," Sir Ethar stated.

Veins protruded on Chief Kroksi's temples as he experienced Sir Ethar's disregard for the military. He was completely infuriated.

"Exactly what crimes have I committed?!"

Chapter 962: Upheaval in Silverscale City (2)

"You have sent a Seventh-class Land Investigator to his death. You have also placed an incompetent watchman in charge of the Spirit Altar, which resulted in a serious loss of critical intel."

"Furthermore, you caused the indirect death of another three Land Investigators of higher classes due to such negligence. If you resist arrest, that would be another charge."

"Need I say more?" Sir Ethar smirked.

"You are spinning lies to suit your selfish agenda!"

Chief Kroksi's eyes turned bloodshot with rage but he didn't resist the Divine Knights' capture.

After all, he couldn't beat them, and dying here would be pointless. He could surrender quietly and wait for rescue from the military.

Nevertheless, he couldn't believe how blatantly ridiculous the nobleman was.

"Yeah, so what?" Sir Ethar uttered nonchalantly before saying, "Your incompetence has caused the death of four precious Divine Origin realm experts and weakened Silverscale City."

"The people have also learned about this matter and are very dissatisfied with you. So, whether you are guilty or not, someone has to answer to the angry citizens."

"What do you think of this, Chief Kroksi?" Sir Ethar smiled.

"Is that true?" Chief Kroksi frowned.

"Obviously," Sir Ethar confirmed.

"HAHAHAHAHA!"

After a brief moment, Chief Kroksi suddenly laughed madly and raucously, so much so that it was grating to everyone's ears.

The matter was so ridiculous and infuriating to the point that he no longer cared what would happen to Silverscale City after the nobleman took over the Spirit Observation Department.

Such an ungrateful city and department did not deserve his loyalty.

After all, how could the news reach the Silverscale Lord and Silverscale City so quickly when even he had barely found out about it?

There was obviously a rat or two within his department that decided to go with the Silverscale Lord's dirty scheme to remove military authority from the city. Maybe even everyone was in on it!

As far as Chief Kroksi was concerned, everyone could go to hell!

"Heh!"

Sir Ethar snickered after seeing Chief Kroksi's unconcerned and dispirited look. After the latter was taken away, he immediately focused on the facial expression of the remaining members of the Spirit Observation Department.

"Give me the latest report!"

"Yes, Sir Ethar!"

"Wrong! It should be Chief Ethar to you now!"

"Yes, Sir—I mean, Chief Ethar!"

After getting reprimanded, the Nautican data analyst quietly fixed his attitude and handed the report over subserviently. Sir Ethar smiled satisfyingly with the respect and fear he received.

The noble district had become rather boring after staying there for thousands of years. As such, he needed to flex his power and authority elsewhere to relieve his boredom.

Fortunately, he had a good relationship with the Silverscale Lord.

After Sir Ethar finished reading the report, he quickly grasped the situation and began taking charge of the department.

"Contact the sea patrols and have their men pay a visit to the Black Serpent Clan for an inquiry," Sir Ethar instructed the Nautican communicator before mentioning, "Since the Black Serpent Clan's members were also killed, they may have some useful information."

"I don't believe this Vaan Raphna will ignore the spirit knowledge of region DSE after coming into contact with it. If we can lure him to us and finish him off here, we might even earn some merit."

In Sir Ethar's eyes, a First-stage Divine Knight-level threat was trivial to a Fifth-stage Divine Star realm expert such as himself.

Since a trifling land-dweller challenged the Celestial Kingdom's authority, why couldn't he become everyone's hero in reclaiming the Celestial's honor?

"Do you have any specifications I should convey to the sea patrols, Chief? Should I ask them to send a Divine Origin realm expert?" the Nautican communicator asked.

"Nonsense," Sir Ethar immediately denied before saying, "Just tell them to send some Heaven Ascension realm experts."

Silverscale City had already lost four good Divine Origin realm experts. If it lost another one due to him, wouldn't the previous faults and the new one all get pinned on him instead?

Heaven Ascension realm experts were incomparable to Divine Origin realm experts. So, no one would care much if some of them died.

"Understood, Chief," the Nautican communicator complied.

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Silverscale City, Border Garrison

"Captain, we got a new request from the Spirit Observation Department; it wants our men to visit the Black Serpent Clan for an inquiry," a Nautican soldier informed.

"Oh?" the Nautican captain casually stretched as he asked, "Did Chief Kroksi mention the reason why?"

"Er... It wasn't Chief Kroksi's request. The Spirit Observation Department seems to have a new chief. It's Sir Ethar from the noble district," the Nautican soldier said hesitantly.

Bang!

The Nautican captain abruptly stomped the ground with outrage.

"What! I wasn't informed about this! Someone from the noble district replaced Chief Kroksi? That must be a colossal joke! Those clean freaks have no place in the military; they simply have no discipline at all!"

"Something must have happened to Chief Kroksi!" the Nautican captain frowned.

"Then... should we refuse the request, Captain?" the Nautican soldier asked nervously.

"What? No. Of course, we have to accept. It's a request from that department, after all," the Nautican stated before adding, "However, I have to inform the higher-ups of the situation in this city."

"I'm afraid the Silverscale Lord has begun to take action," the Nautican captain sighed.

The friction between the noble faction and the military had been an ongoing problem since the earliest stages of the Celestial Kingdom's founding on Pangea.

The implementation of martial law during the great immigration deprived the civil government of its authority. The military government had taken over control of all matters to ensure the survival of their civilization.

Even though their civilization eventually settled down in Pangea, central authority was never returned to the civil government.

Instead, the birth of the first-generation Ocean Master only facilitated the shift of the democratic Celestial Federation to the current dictatorial Celestial Kingdom.

Although members of the civil government were granted titles to honor their old services, they held no decision-making power over their civilization. To add salt to their wound, they weren't permitted to join the military or raise private forces.

Their feudal ranks were just empty titles.

Nevertheless, time had allowed the noble faction to grow while the military faction declined.

The military simply couldn't maintain its iron grip on the Celestial Kingdom when they had to tackle worldly problems while guarding against the secret machinations of the noble faction in the dark.

Many Celestials anticipated an age of chaos would eventually descend on their civilization when the noble faction and military faction decided to bond through marriage to maintain peace in their society.

The result of that decision back then led them to their current-generation Ocean Master, who has blood ties to both the noble faction and the military faction.

Chapter 963: Southwestern Sea

After leaving the Western Sea, Vaan made a quick stop at the Red Dragon Clan to drop off more samples of Golden Dragon Blood.

At the same time, he also made arrangements for the UN to strengthen its border defenses, especially the Great Ratholos Empire. Due to its special relationship with the Sea Serpent Clan, it did not take him much time and effort to subjugate it.

In fact, the sea serpent leader took the initiative to swear allegiance upon seeing him. It was as if it had been expecting his visit. Moreover, the sea serpent leader's determination was even reinforced after seeing him in person.

No doubt, it had sensed his Boundless Sea and Sky Aura—or Conqueror's Aura, according to the marine clans.

Nevertheless, the Sea Serpent Clan was among the weaker marine clans and wasn't even the actual ruler of the whole Eastern Sea. It only occupied the Eastern Sea's westernmost sea region and was a subordinate clan to the Razorfang Serpent Clan.

However, due to its serpentine relationship with the Razorfang Serpent Clan, the Sea Serpent Clan enjoyed a better position in the Eastern Sea than most marine clans under its rule.

Unfortunately, its knowledge was quite limited to the Eastern Sea. It also rarely contacted the Razorfang Serpent Clan.

The Razorfang Serpent Clan just let it be.

As such, Vaan tasked the Sea Serpent Clan to initiate contact in his stead to see if it could locate the Razorfang Serpent Clan's main den or collect information on the other inner sea regions.

In the meantime, Vaan traveled to the Southwestern Sea to meet the Fighting Dolphin Clan. It was a strategic location for gauging and understanding the situation of the Southern Sea.

Vaan wasn't too worried about the Celestial Kingdom launching a sudden attack from the Northwestern Sea or Northern Sea.

After all, he still had the three Dreamcatchers to hold the fort.

Furthermore, the northernmost region of the continent was also cut off by the ever-growing Dimensional Crack.

With his spiritual connection to Valefor, it was a simple task to summon the Great Devils or their armies to defend the northern and eastern directions in a short time.

Vaan was aware of the concept that the tallest trees that stuck out of the forest would weather the most winds. As such, he didn't quite approve of Valefor becoming the Heavenly Devil of Gehenna.

However, ignoring the risks to his safety, he had to admit that the position also saved him a lot of time and offered many conveniences and benefits.

As such, he could afford to prioritize the Southwestern Sea's trips over the other Inner Seas.

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In the Southwestern Sea, Vaan found the shallow waters to be much clearer and brighter. The sunlight penetrated more deeply into the seawater than the Western Sea.

The quartz sand and crystal corals also illuminated the sea floor with pretty colors.

Simple marine life, which was usually at the bottom of the food chain, thrived in incredible numbers. Swarms of shrimp openly cleaned the sea floors while schools of fish swam above freely.

They didn't seem to have any natural predators in this local sea region.

The danger level of the Southwestern Sea was surprisingly low. To humans, it was like a fisherman's paradise.

Of course, this would be completely true if one were to ignore the existence of the Fighting Dolphin Clan.

When Vaan spotted his Fighting Dolphin, he was completely dumbfounded by what he saw despite his mental preparation.

The Fighting Dolphin was relaxing in a bed of soft coral, enjoying the purifying therapy of several cleaner shrimp. The cleaner shrimp didn't just clean and massage its body; they also fed it with protein-rich seaweed.

Nevertheless, it wasn't surprising to see the Fighting Dolphin displaying its intelligence through leisure indulgence.

What was truly shocking was its overwhelmingly muscular appearance with several human traits. It was like the product of a fusion between a bottlenose dolphin and a body-building gym freak of a human: a dolphin body with human limbs attached.

If someone told him the Fighting Dolphin didn't have any human bloodline, Vaan definitely wouldn't believe it.

A desperate person must have fucked a dolphin in history to give birth to the Fighting Dolphin Clan's existence.

Although Vaan didn't know if the male human's testosterone was so strong that it overcame the barrier of crossbreeding, he certainly knew he wasn't keen on looking deeper into the matter.

Nevertheless, it could have even been the other way around.

After all, dolphins were also known to be sexual predators of the sea. They had records of displaying sexual violence across species.

Ding!

<The target's information has been collected>

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[Target's information]

Name: Andaman Weit

Race: Fighting Dolphin

Age: 253 Pangean Years

Position: Senior Member in the Fighting Dolphin Clan

Existence Level: Early-stage Demigod

Abilities: [Combat Expert] [Water Control] [Fast Swimmer] [Physical Enhancement]
[Communication] [Echolocation] [Turtle Breath] [Do You Even Lift?]

Status: [Stressed], [Exhausted], [Fitness Anxiety], [Protein Deficient Disorder], [Sexually Frustrated], [Lonely], [Heartbroken]

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After looking at the Fighting Dolphin's information, Vaan felt more speechless regarding the Fighting Dolphin Clan.

The Fighting Dolphins seemed like bigger fitness freaks than the Body Refiners of the Great Ratholos Empire.

Nevertheless, while Vaan was studying the Fighting Dolphin called Andaman Weit, the latter soon noticed his presence as well.

At first, it was just a casual glance over.

However, Andaman's gaze immediately became fixated on Vaan the moment he locked onto him. He couldn't look away. His eyes soon glimmered like he was looking at a perfectly sculpted piece of art.

Vaan felt a slight chill as he received its feverish admiration as it rushed over for a closer inspection.

If he didn't have the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura to make the Fighting Dolphin respectful, it would have likely touched him all over as it admired his muscles.

"Wow! You are incredible, Bro! How are these densely-packed myofibril fibers even formed? How is such density even possible? Are you really human? What's your workout secret, Bro? Can you teach me?"

Andaman harped around Vaan excitedly.

He didn't seem to mind that Vaan was a human in the slightest and acted like they had been best friends for many years.

Nevertheless, Andaman suddenly snapped out of his excited state when he saw Vaan's frown. He became self-aware of the unsurpassable chasm between their strengths and couldn't help but feel nervous for acting too casual with such a strong person when they weren't familiar.

In fact, he was shocked he could act with such boldness. It was like he had been possessed.

"Err... Is there something I can help you with, Your Excellency?"

"Can you take me your clan?"

"Gladly!"

Chapter 964: Sea Child

Unlike the Black Serpent Clan's den, the Fighting Dolphin Clan's home was centered around a very large network of overgrown kelp found near the edge of the Southwestern Sea's continental slope.

These overgrown kelps growing on the sea floor could extend all the way to the water surface, where the Fighting Dolphin generally slumber.

After all, Fighting Dolphins could not stay underwater for long periods like the Black Serpents. They did not have the same ability to absorb oxygen through their skin. As such, they had to surface periodically to inhale oxygen from the air.

However, despite being shallow-water mammals, the Fighting Dolphin Clan actually chose the deepest area of the shallow sea floor as its permanent habitat.

After a quick tour around the outer perimeters of the overgrown kelp region, Vaan quickly understood why.

The sustenance of the overgrown kelp was just one of the reasons for the Fighting Dolphin Clan's choice of habitat. The steep drop of the continental slope on the edge of the kelp region was where the Fighting Dolphins practiced their deep diving to improve their lung capacity.

That said, deep diving was just the entry-level practice of the Fighting Dolphin Clan's Turtle Breath.

The main purpose of practicing Turtle Breath was to allow the Fighting Dolphins to reach and stay on the abyssal plain at the bottom of the continental slope, where they began to train and forge their powerful physiques.

The abyssal plain contained a type of special mineral called Abyssal Stones, which were denser and heavier than most common metals, even some rarer metals.

Vaan could see that these Abyssal Stones were not naturally formed but created by the impure mana and energy spewing out of the seemingly bottomless trench beyond the abyssal plain.

He didn't expect the outer edges of the Southwestern Sea would possess such concentrated mana.

However, when he extended his sense further to the Outer Sea, he discovered the mana was even richer and boundless over there. The abundant existence of mana in the region seemed to suggest the Outer Sea had a connection to Chaos or Gehenna.

Although Vaan was interested in looking deeper into it, he had to meet with the Fighting Dolphin Clan first. Moreover, he could get information from it.

His arrival had long since attracted countless attention from the Fighting Dolphins. After all, no human had ever visited their core habitat.

As such, Vaan easily stood out.

However, since a senior member of their clan brought Vaan here, the other Fighting Dolphins did not carelessly approach him. Instead, they silently observed from a distance and speculated the reason for his arrival themselves.

When they sensed his Conqueror's Aura, their curiosity became respect and awe despite their shock and confusion.

"Your Excellency, may I ask why you have visited our humble clan today?" the Fighting Dolphin Clan Leader hurriedly approached with a careful attitude after Vaan turned his attention to his clan.

"If I want your clan's allegiance, will you submit?" Vaan cut straight to the point.

Andaman, who brought him to the clan, was immediately dumbfounded. Vaan's first question almost made his heart jump out of his chest.

Did he just bring trouble to his clan?

While Andaman's mind was in turmoil, the Fighting Dolphin Clan Leader stared at Vaan more deeply and thoughtfully.

At the same time, Vaan also studied him.

Ding!

<The target's information has been collected>

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[Target's information]

Name: Jamal Squatz

Race: Fighting Dolphin

Age: 299 Pangean Years

Position: Clan Leader of the Fighting Dolphin Clan

Existence Level: Peak-stage Demigod

Abilities: [Combat Expert], [Water Control], [Fast Swimmer], [Physical Enhancement], [Communication], [Echolocation], [Greater Turtle Breath], [Do You Even Lift?] [Heavy Weight], [Sonic Disruption], [Intimidation], [Braveheart], [Charisma], [Leadership], [Innovator], [High Perception], [Sea Child].

Status: [Curious], [Conflicted], [Confused], [Doubtful], [Pondering], [Healthy], [Super Fit].

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Looking at Jamal's information, Vaan felt both surprised and speechless – Surprised because the Fighting Dolphin Clan seemed quite young compared to the Black Serpent Clan. In fact, it seemed to exist after the emergence of Gehenna.

In other words, the Fighting Dolphin Clan was born after the existence of mana.

As such, it wasn't surprising for the Fighting Dolphin Clan to be weaker than the Black Serpent Clan due to its younger history.

However, for the Fighting Dolphin Clan to become the ruling marine clan of the Southwestern Sea, its overall strength couldn't be underestimated.

While the Fighting Dolphin Clan didn't have a single Divine-rank life form, it had countless more Demigod-level life forms than the Black Serpent Clan, at least several thousand more.

Each Demigod-level Fighting Dolphin had undergone extreme physical training and built themselves impressive physiques.

Even Vaan felt slightly intimidated by their group, though for a different reason.

On the other hand, he was speechless because Jamal's information showed some questionable abilities.

He couldn't help but take a closer look at them.

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[Greater Turtle Breath]: Able to hold breath underwater for more than twelve hours.

[Do You Even Lift?]: When performing physical training in an exhausted state under the scrutiny of a fellow clansman, physical improvements are doubled, and physical limit breakthroughs become easier.

[Heavy Weight]: Able to exert up to 20% extra force against lighter opponents.

[Sonic Disruption]: Can stun or confuse foes with sound attacks.

[Intimidation]: Can cause smaller framed foes to cower and reconsider inciting aggression or hostility.

[Braveheart]: Unable to be paralyzed by fear.

[Charisma]: Able to attract the attention and admiration of other Fighting Dolphins. The effect is doubled on the opposite gender.

[Leadership]: More likely to make the right decision when leading the clan. Other Fighting Dolphins are more likely to agree and follow.

[Innovator]: When observing the natural forces of the world, become more easily inspired to create new training techniques and combat skills.

[High Perception]: Able to perceive and understand the laws of the world more easily.

[Sea Child]: Able to receive the blessings of the sea, increasing good luck, fortuitous encounters, bumper harvests, and perfect weather while decreasing the chance of encountering dangerous situations, predators, and natural disasters.

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'What the actual fuck?' Vaan thought.

If he had only felt speechless before, he was now completely dumbfounded.

While the heavens were trying to kill him, they were also trying to keep this one alive. It was the first time he had come across such a blessed and envious existence.

Was this one of those so-called Heaven's Chosen?

Chapter 965: Ancestral Talent

Although Vaan was envious of Jamal's status, he was even more pleasantly surprised by it. With such a lucky charm under his command, he would be able to rub off some of its luck, too.

"Your Excellency, may I ask what you plan to do with our allegiance?" Jamal Squatz inquired carefully.

"I will be unifying the land and sea, but the Celestial Kingdom and I don't see eye to eye. A clash between us is inevitable," Vaan calmly mentioned before saying, "However, I don't need your clan to fight my war."

"I only require your clan's information and surveillance; I need eyes and ears to monitor the Celestial Kingdom's movement. It will be even better if you know any of the Celestial Kingdom's bases or anything about the Southern Sea."

"Is this too much to ask?"

"Not at all, Your Excellency," Jamal shook his head before decisively stating, "From henceforth, the Fighting Dolphin Clan will follow the new bearer of the Conqueror's Aura."

"The Fighting Dolphin Clan is yours to command, my Lord," Jamal stated.

Without consulting any of his elders, he had arbitrarily tied the Fighting Dolphin Clan's fate to Vaan's wagon.

However, not a single Fighting Dolphin felt there was anything wrong with this choice.

To them, Vaan wasn't just the new bearer of the Conqueror's Aura; he was also the god of body refining. They had never seen such terrifying physical power contained within a small frame like his.

Each adult Fighting Dolphin was at least over ten meters big and weighting over several tons. Yet, none of them could compare to Vaan; he was smaller than them, but his strength was superior, and even his weight was far less.

It was as if his body wasn't made of fleshly materials but the core essence of stars.

"The Fighting Dolphin Clan is willing to follow you into battle, my Lord. The Ocean Master's Conqueror's Aura does not have as much of an effect on us as it does on other marine clans," Jamal added solemnly.

Hearing that, Vaan nodded.

Since the Fighting Dolphin Clan possessed human origins, it wasn't fully marine life. As such, it wouldn't be surprising for the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura to have a weaker effect.

Moreover, many Fighting Dolphins had the [Braveheart] aspect. Thus, they weren't afraid of the Celestial Kingdom's superior strength.

Unfortunately, they were too weak. Vaan didn't want them to throw away their lives, especially the clan leader.

That would be a waste of heaven's resources.

"I appreciate the thought. However, your battle power isn't up to standard. If you can at least become a Fifth-stage Divine Warrior, I might reconsider it," Vaan casually said.

"That said, there is no need to be disheartened by this. It's customary for me to gift my followers benefits for their loyalty. Perhaps you may achieve some unexpected results from this."

Although Jamal had no idea what Vaan was talking about, he still followed his instructions and offered up his blood.

Vaan intended to perform a bloodline awakening for the Fighting Dolphin Clan as well.

However, he wasn't certain how much of an effect it would have on the Fighting Dolphin Clan. After all, the Fighting Dolphin Clan didn't harvest Golden Dragon Blood; it didn't seem to have an impressive ancestral heritage either.

Furthermore, its human aspect might obstruct the bloodline awakening from happening.

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Half an hour after Vaan refined Jamal's blood essence into origin blood and stimulated his bloodline awakening with life energy, a miraculous event occurred.

Beasts with ancient bloodlines relied on bloodline awakening to rise to the same strength as their peak ancestors. They could also tap into ancestral knowledge and memories hidden within their bloodline.

This was something unique to beasts as it helped their descendants find their origins. Humans didn't have such an ability.

But in that case, what would happen if a human-beast bloodline was awakened?

There result was the situation before everyone.

After Jamal's Fighting Dolphin Bloodline was stimulated, he felt like fire coursed through his large body.

Others could visibly see the network of blood vessels within him. They saw how a violent force was rushing through blood vessels erratically like it was looking for something but didn't know what it was looking for.

Once it did find something, the violent force immediately assaulted it.

Violent energy poured into the acupoint-like location until it was filled up, causing it to light up like a tiny star. For a moment, six other dim stars in the body were also briefly revealed before disappearing.

After all the light from the energy faded from Jamal's body, nothing particular stood out.

Jamal's strength didn't improve, nor did his physique undergo any visible change, nothing spectacular like the usual bloodline awakening of beasts.

However, something had certainly changed in the Fighting Dolphin Clan Leader.

Jamal seemed to know something, but he didn't look too confident. It seemed he needed to test something before he could confirm it.

Ding!

<The target's information has been collected>

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[Target's information]

Name: Jamal Squatz

Race: Fighting Dolphin

Age: 299 Pangean Years

Position: Clan Leader of the Fighting Dolphin Clan

Existence Level: Peak-stage Demigod

Abilities: [Combat Expert], [Water Control], [Fast Swimmer], [Physical Enhancement], [Communication], [Echolocation], [Greater Turtle Breath], [Do You Even Lift?] [Heavy Weight], [Sonic Disruption], [Intimidation], [Braveheart], [Charisma], [Leadership], [Innovator], [High Perception], [Sea Child], [Poison Eater (New)]

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[Poison Eater] (Ancestral Talent) (Divine Rank)

Ability: Immune to poisons below Early-stage Divine rank and below. When consuming poison, energy can be extracted to strengthen the body. Energy from new poisons has stronger strengthening effects.

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After Vaan glanced at Jamal's new ability, his lips twitched.

The Fighting Dolphin Clan Leader truly had some dog-shit good luck. With the [Poison Eater] ancestral talent, he could train in the toxic Outer Sea to become powerful. Even he couldn't estimate how much he could grow with such a great talent.

That said, Vaan, more or less, figured out the nature of human-beast bloodline awakenings.

Beast bloodline awakenings drew out ancestral power, while human-beast bloodline awakenings drew out ancestral talents if the human bloodline was more dominant.

The [Poison Eater] ancestral talent appeared to belong to a human ancestor who possessed one of the very rare poison physiques needed to become a poison cultivator.

"You're very lucky, Jamal."

"Thank you for your blessing, my Lord!"

The Fighting Dolphin Clan Leader was ecstatic after figuring out his new ability. He couldn't wait to test out its effectiveness.

Chapter 966: Forbidden Abyss

While the Fighting Dolphin Clan Leader was familiarizing himself with his new ancestral talent, Vaan performed the bloodline awakening procedure on another nine Fighting Dolphins at the Demigod rank.

Among the nine Demigod-rank Fighting Dolphins, three awakened the same [Poison Eater] ancestral talent, four awakened [Iron Stomach], one awakened [Far Sight], and the last one awakened [Hard Skin].

Evidently, not everyone could awaken the same ancestral talent, and not all ancestral talents were great. Some were higher ranked than others.

[Far Sight] only enhanced vision slightly, while [Hard Skin] toughened fleshly defense slightly.

[Iron Stomach], on the other hand, was somewhat better; it could process everything eaten into energy. It was more versatile than [Poison Eater] in energy conversation but significantly weaker in effects.

As such, [Poison Eater] remained the top ancestral talent within the Fighting Dolphin Clan's current pool of ancestral talents.

...

Sometime later, Jamal returned to business after calming down from his excitement.

"Regarding the Celestial Kingdom and the Southern Sea, my clan does know a little bit, my Lord," Jamal mentioned.

"Rumor has it that the Southern Outer Sea had been especially chaotic in recent years, so the Ocean Master had been staying in the Southern Inner Sea to restore order at the sea border."

"However, the Ocean Master doesn't seem to have complete control of the sea monsters in the Southern Outer Sea," Jamal stated.

"Oh?" Vaan was surprised, but he also couldn't help but frown.

The Boundless Sea and Sky Aura had a much stronger influence on non-sentient life forms than sentient life forms. Yet, the Ocean Master was having trouble controlling the sea monsters in the Outer Sea.

Did that mean the sea monsters in the Outer Sea were far more intelligent than he imagined?

Or were there other factors allowing the sea monsters to resist the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura on the Ocean Master?

Regardless, the Outer Sea was certainly a curious place.

"Which marine clan rules the Southern Sea?" Vaan asked.

"That would be the Iron-Scaled Shark Clan, my Lord," Jamal answered, adding, "They used to rule the Southwestern Sea until we drove them out. Now, they have become a lifelong rival – They will find any chance to pick a fight with us when they can."

Of course, the Iron-Scaled Shark Clan would lose every time it fought the Fighting Dolphin Clan.

Sometimes, the Fighting Dolphin Clan even wondered if the Iron-Scaled Shark Clan just liked to be bullied by it.

"Does the Fighting Dolphin Clan not have access to the Dragon Vein?"

"What is a Dragon Vein, my Lord?"

Looking back at Jamal's blank expression, Vaan quickly understood he truly had no idea what the Dragon Vein was.

It was surprising that the Fighting Dolphin Clan didn't know about the Dragon Vein, given the Fighting Dolphin Clan Leader's good luck blessing.

If there were openings in the Southwestern Sea, the Fighting Dolphin Clan would have discovered the Dragon Vein long ago. Since that wasn't the case, the Dragon Vein's entrance could be obstructed or hidden.

Did the Iron-Scale Shark Clan hide them before it was driven out of the Southwestern Sea?

Vaan felt like this was possible.

After all, given the Fighting Dolphin Clan's fanatic drive towards body refining, it would have become even more powerful if it had the aid of Golden Dragon Blood.

However, if the Iron-Scaled Shark Clan was weak enough to be driven out by the Fighting Dolphin Clan, it might not have access to the Dragon Vein either.

How can the Fighting Dolphin Clan not know about Golden Dragon Blood if the Iron-Scaled Shark Clan had been using it?

Indeed, after further inquiry, Vaan learned that the Fighting Dolphin Clan and Iron-Scaled Shark Clan never knew about the Dragon Vein and Golden Dragon Blood.

Upon further thought, Vaan recalled the Southwestern Sea's aquatic plants were thriving much better than the other Inner Seas he had visited. The overgrown kelp region was proof of it.

Walls of aquatic plants may have blocked the Southwestern Sea's entrance to the Dragon Vein.

However, the Southwestern Sea was also relatively flat and had little to no seamounts. It was mostly covered in corals and aquatic plants.

After reviewing the Southwestern Sea's geography, he figured the openings to the Dragon Vein had a higher chance of being found along the walls of the continental slope or the trench walls beyond the abyssal plain.

"How much do you know about the trench beyond the abyssal plain? Has your clan ever explored it?" Vaan asked curiously.

He was quite interested in that mana-rich sea region.

"Are you talking about the Forbidden Abyss that lies beyond the Abyssal Stone Plain, my Lord?" Jamal Squatz asked. After receiving Vaan's confirmation, he continued, "I'm afraid I will have to disappoint you, my Lord."

"Some of our clan members have tried to explore it in the past. However, none of them has ever returned from the Forbidden Abyss. As such, we aren't able to learn much about it."

"That said, we do know that it's an especially dangerous place. There must be a reason why it has such a strong current to keep our weaker members out," Jamal speculated.

Only Demigods were able to swim against the strong discharging current and enter the Forbidden Abyss.

However, once they do, the Fighting Dolphin Clan has never seen them return, even when they were given strict orders to retreat as soon as they sensed danger.

As such, there was something eerie about the Forbidden Abyss—something that prevented the Demigod-rank Fighting Dolphins from ever returning once they entered that dark and gloomy place.

The murky black water reminded the Fighting Dolphin Clan of the toxic Outer Sea, while the strong water density made Vaan think about the deeper layers of the Dragon Vein.

The Forbidden Abyss seemed to have a connection to the Dragon Vein, Outer Sea, and Chaos simultaneously.

"I'm going to explore it," Vaan suddenly said, shocking the Fighting Dolphins.

However, shortly after they recovered from their surprise, determination filled their eyes as they fearlessly volunteered to accompany him.

"My Lord, please allow me to brave the secrets of the Forbidden Abyss with you!"

Chapter 967: I'll Do It Myself

In the Black Serpent Clan, the new arrival of blue-skinned Celestials immediately sent the black mutant serpents on high alert. Everyone feared the Celestial Kingdom had already learned about their defection.

(Everyone, calm down. Act normally and do anything suspicious. The Blue Skins aren't here to punish us.)

(That's right. These Blue Skins are only a group of Transcendents. They can't threaten us at all. Someone, quickly inform the Clan Leader about this.)

(Shareiss, congratulations. You have just been promoted to an Elder. Go and meet the Blue Skins and see what they want.)

(Eh?)

The Late-stage Demigod-rank Gold-horned Mutant Serpent was stunned by the sudden promotion and arrangement.

However, it didn't take long for her and everyone else to understand why the ten elder serpents promoted her unanimously. The physical appearance of the Dragon-Serpent Bloodline was too eye-catching.

If the Blue Skins asked about it, they would find it hard to explain.

Furthermore, the awakened bloodline could even attract the Celestials' greed. Those Blue Skins never needed a reason when they wanted to take something.

(Understood, Elders.)

Outside the Black Serpent Clan's den, Shareiss shortly met up with the Blue Skins, who stayed outside of the radioactive seawater. While they weren't affected by the weak radiation at their level, they didn't need to dirty themselves in its tainted waters.

"May I ask why the Esteemed Celestials have decided to grace our humble clan today? I am Elder Shareiss. Any questions you have, I am here to answer them."

"Four precious members of our proud Silverscale City have been killed, so we are tasked to gather information on the killer. Nine of your Demigods have also been killed. Do you know anything about this?"

"What? How is that even possible? Nine of our Demigods were also killed? When did that happen? Where did they die?"

After Shareiss feigned shock and ignorance with her quick thinking, the faces of the blue-skinned Celestials immediately fell; they became gloomy and depressed.

They came to get their questions answered, not answer questions.

"Shit. I knew these black snakes were unreliable. They haven't even found that some of their clan members have been killed yet. Their network is truly trash."

"I told you we should have gone straight to the coastal region. We would have likely gained more useful information there. The black snakes here don't know shit."

The blue-skinned Celestials did not waste any more time with Shareiss. They immediately departed east without a word of goodbye.

They were so arrogant that they didn't think Shareiss could be hiding information from them.

...

Shortly after blue-skinned Celestials departed, Dragon-Serpent Leader Sutu learned about their visit. He immediately instructed the dragon-serpent elders to lay low for a while.

At the same time, he also sent a group of talented black serpents to the Southwestern Sea under the guise of mutual exchange with the Fighting Dolphin Clan.

However, their main goal was to warn Vaan and ask him to stay out of the troubled waters of the Western Sea for a while to ensure his safety.

...

Meanwhile, the blue-skinned sea patrollers did not spend too much effort on their information gathering. In fact, it could be said that they lacked enthusiasm. They only spent three hours in the coastal region before returning to Silverscale City.

When the limited information was passed on to the Spirit Observation Department, Chief Ethar immediately fumed on the spirit telecom.

"What the fuck do you mean the sea patrol has only this bit of information?! Can this even be counted as information? What the fuck did your men even do!? They didn't even gather intel from the DSE land region!"

"Don't be unreasonable, Chief Ethar. My men are just sea patrollers. The land is not part of our jurisdiction. If you want information from the land-dwellers, you should contact the Land Investigation Branch," the Border Garrison Captain coolly suggested.

"The fact that I even listened to your request is already me giving you face, Chief Ethar. Do you think it makes for Heaven Ascension realm experts to investigate a murder case involving Divine Star-level threat?"

"My men aren't expendable tools for building your career profile! Go and find another department to help you with your case. We are done here," the Border Garrison Captain coldly ended the call.

Bang!

Chief Ethar smashed the spirit telecom device in rage. He didn't expect the sea patrols to be so uncooperative. It made him realize the military was not happy with the personnel change.

As such, even if he contacted the Land Investigator Branch, he would still get the same cold treatment. No one from the military took him seriously.

If he wanted things done, he could only do it himself.

"A bunch of bastards! Just you all wait! Once I make a major contribution to the Celestial Kingdom and receive a higher title, see how I'll make all of your lives miserable!"

As Chief Ethar uttered venomously, the members of the Spirit Observation Department continued their work in dreadful silence like they didn't exist. They feared making a sound would turn them into the target of his wrath.

They didn't even dare to fart.

As such, Chief Ethar didn't receive any criticism despite destroying military property, which was punishable by up to thirty spirit lashes, depending on the damage.

"Inform me through this Sound Talisman if there's any new information!" Chief Ethar threw out his instruction before storming off.

After leaving the Spirit Observation Department, he immediately gathered his Divine Star realm knights and Divine Origin realm servants to set out on a hunting expedition.

"I should have done this from the start," Chief Ethar stared at his powerful lineup of subordinates.

Although he alone had enough power to deal with a First-stage Divine Star-level threat, he also knew that it was only a rough estimate due to limited information. For his safety, it was always better to bring a force several times stronger than the estimated threat level.

'Four First-stage Divine Star realm knights and ten Ninth-stage Divine Origin realm servants... Who can stop me?' Chief Ethar thought confidently.

With such a powerful lineup, even the Great Devils of Gehenna would have to flee for their lives.

Chapter 968: The Source of Mana

At the edge of the Abyssal Plain, Vaan stared into the dark opening of the Forbidden Abyss with Jamal. Other Demigod-rank Fighting Dolphins have gathered around with mixed feelings.

For this trip into the unknown territory known as the Forbidden Abyss, Vaan had decided to bring along only Jamal despite the many volunteers. He only needed a lucky charm and not additional burdens.

Since even Demigod-rank Fighting Dolphins have failed to return from the Forbidden Abyss, bringing the additional numbers was meaningless.

"Please be careful, my Lord. You too, Clan Leader."

"We wish you both a safe trip."

The Fighting Dolphins voiced their concern and well wishes one after another.

For a short period, the busy Demigod-rank Fighting Dolphins in the Abyssal Plain stopped lifting Abyssal Stones. They chose to join the crowd in sending Vaan and their clan leader off.

"We'll be back," Vaan promised.

Shortly after, Vaan and Jamal dived into the abyssal trench of infinite darkness.

They easily went against the strong current and entered the so-called point of no return, which had stopped past Fighting Dolphins from returning—a different directional current that pulled them deeper into the abyss instead of pushing them out.

Although the descending current wasn't much stronger than the ascending current, its water density was many folds greater.

As such, Jamal was quickly incapacitated despite holding his breath. His internal organs were protected, but he couldn't extricate himself from the high-density water current and could only be dragged by it.

It was like getting stuck in fast-moving rat glue.

But seeing that Jamal wasn't in immediate danger, Vaan didn't see a reason to save him. He allowed the current to pull them deeper into the abyss.

As they sunk deeper and deeper, the faint traces of golden dragon blood in the seawater became clearer. It was clear proof of an existing opening to the Dragon Vein.

Furthermore, the existing golden dragon blood, high water density, and strong current all fit the description of the water surge in the deeper layers of the Dragon Vein, as Dragon-Serpent Leader Sutu had previously explained.

However, the direction of the current contradicted the increasing content of golden dragon blood in the seawater.

After all, if the water surge were expelling the high-density seawater from the deeper layers of the Dragon Vein, that would imply that they had already passed the Dragon Vein opening.

However, Vaan had not discovered it during their descent.

Furthermore, the increasing golden dragon blood content and water density also implied they were getting closer to the Dragon Vein opening.

The two points directly conflicted with each other.

Nevertheless, it didn't take long before Vaan's doubts were answered. The strong current stopped dragging them down and began to push them up again, forming a looped current.

Basically, they had found themselves in a strong current that only flowed in circles. It was no different from a wheel of death.

If they were powerless to extricate themselves from this looped current, they could only follow the current in circles endlessly until death took them. The previous Fighting Dolphins who entered the Forbidden Abyss must have met this fate.

Such would have also been the fate awaiting Jamal if Vaan wasn't around.

After Vaan grabbed Jamal, he kicked against the water current and descended beyond the looped current, entering another descending high-density water current. His powerful water kick almost shattered the endless cycle of the looped current.

A virtual map of the Forbidden Abyss was formed in Vaan's mind after he entered the third current.

The middle looped current was formed by the ascending current and descending current it was situated in between. The third current was also the water surge of the Dragon Vein's deeper layers.

If Vaan followed against its current, he would definitely locate the entrance to the Dragon Vein.

However, Vaan wasn't as interested in the Dragon Vein entrance as he was in the source of the first ascending current. As such, he continued to follow the descending current with Jamal in tow.

At some point, they finally reached the bottom of the Forbidden Abyss, where the descending current began to follow outward in the Outer Sea's direction.

Vaan quickly realized a huge underwater passage connecting to the Outer Sea existed at the bottom of the Forbidden Abyss. Not only did the water from the Dragon Vein flow out of this place, but the toxic seawater of the Outer Sea also flowed in it.

The two forces would collide, creating the death wheel looped current along with many smaller looped currents in the gaps between the two great currents.

These countless small looped currents also acted like grinders, mixing and canceling out the golden dragon blood and toxic seawater. As such, minimum amounts flowed into the Southwestern Sea.

'It seems like the source of mana is from up ahead...'

Vaan followed the underwater passageway leading to the Outer Sea. The seawater became increasingly murky and black with toxins, but neither he nor Jamal were affected by them.

The toxic water couldn't enter the pores of Vaan's highly dense flesh, and it was only nourishment to Jamal, who possessed the [Poison Eater] ancestral talent.

By the time they exited the end of the underwater passage, they were already in the vast territorial waters of the black Outer Sea.

Jamal instantly felt a cold chill.

Countless pairs of terrifying gazes locked onto his being from the dark depths of the Outer Sea. Just their faint presence made Jamal feel infinitely small and insignificant. The sea monsters of the Outer Sea weren't just powerful but also unreasonably huge.

Jamal felt like he had stumbled into the den of primitive sea gods.

'Stop!'

As the terrifying shadows and auras drew closer, Vaan's single will cause them to freeze in their tracks. Shortly after, they retreated to respectable distances, and the oppressive pressure on Jamal was also withdrawn.

Vaan focused his gaze past the group of colossal sea monsters and finally pinpointed the source of mana he was looking for – an underwater dimensional crack connecting to another boundless sea of Chaos.

Although he had suspected the Outer Sea might have been connected to the Darksea Abyss Territory, he was still surprised by the discovery.

Meanwhile, Jamal was even more shocked by the sea monsters' sudden retreat.

Chapter 969: Sea God Temple

Jamal had never heard of or seen the Outer Sea's sea monsters being so obedient in front of the Conqueror's Aura.

Unlike other marine clans, the Outer Sea's sea monsters were far more resistant and rebellious towards the Conqueror's Aura. It was also for that reason that the Celestial Kingdom's Ocean Master had to stay in the Southern Sea.

The sea monsters in the Southern Outer Sea constantly caused trouble, even with the Ocean Master there to quell the chaos.

For some reason, the Ocean Master's Conqueror's Aura did not work very well on the sea monsters.

Many marine clans believed the sea monsters were simply too strong to listen to obey the Ocean Master obediently. However, some also speculated the sea monsters were obeying the will of a stronger being.

Today, Jamal felt like he had found the answer to the three-hundred-year-long riddle.

At the very least, he could see that his Lord's Conqueror's Aura was superior to the Celestial Kingdom's Ocean Master's. Otherwise, the sea monsters would not have retreated so obediently, even offering their respects.

The new bearer of the Conqueror's Aura was truly built differently.

After the sea monsters came in contact with Vaan's Boundless Sea and Sky Aura for some time, the chaotic group became orderly. They suddenly separated into two files, creating a clear path for Vaan to follow.

The path led straight to the underwater dimensional crack.

On the other side of the underwater dimensional crack, where more fearsome sea monsters dwelled, another set of files was formed by the sea monsters. The long path led deeper into the dark depths of the Darksea Abyss Territory.

Clearly, the sea monsters wanted Vaan to follow the path; they tried to guide him somewhere.

Although Vaan had no reason to reject, he also didn't necessarily need to agree.

While the sea monsters have shown preferential treatment and respect due to his Boundless Sea and Sky Aura, it didn't necessarily mean they wouldn't harm him.

After all, they didn't have the same blind worship as weaker marine life. As such, there was a chance that they could resist its influence if they chose to.

Vaan also had to take note of the sea monsters' uniform behavior.

He did not command them to clear him a path; they did so on their own accord after contacting his aura. That seemed to suggest some other, stronger being had instructed them to react this way when they came across the Conqueror's Aura.

When Vaan also considered the chaotic situation that the Celestial Kingdom's Ocean Master was facing in the Southern Sea, he realized there could be danger at the end of the path.

That said, he was not the same as the Ocean Master. What awaited him wasn't necessarily a trap but an opportunity.

As such, Vaan decided to see what was waiting for him at the end of the path.

When Jamal wanted to follow him to the other side of the underwater dimensional crack, he was suddenly stopped by the overbearingly huge sea monsters. Two Krakens used their long tentacles to block his way and warned him to back off with their fierce gazes.

"This..."

"You can stay here and train while I go and see where they wish to lead me to, Jamal. Your body can't handle the high water pressure on the other side."

"But... Alright, my Lord. Please be careful."

Although Jamal was reluctant, he quickly accepted Vaan's decision and stayed back. After Vaan left, he felt rather vulnerable in front of all the enormous sea monsters.

However, Vaan had willed the sea monsters to look after him. They also gladly accepted the task. He didn't leave until he confirmed the sea monsters wouldn't harm the Fighting Dolphin Clan Leader in his absence.

...

After entering the ocean depths of the Darksea Abyss Territory, Vaan immediately felt the water pressure increase significantly, reaching a level fatal to Demigod-rank beings.

In other words, only Divine-rank beings could survive at this depth.

However, the path created by the sea monsters continued to guide him deeper and deeper. New sea monsters would arrive to continue forming the line. It almost seemed like they intended to lead him to the very bottom of the ocean.

Indeed, Vaan's guess was correct.

He eventually arrived on the ocean floor, where the water pressure was so great that even Rank 6 Divine Beings wouldn't survive. The ocean floor was like a world of its own, with an independent set of laws governing it.

An ordinary person wouldn't have seen anything in the murky black seawater, but day and night made no difference in front of Vaan's powerful senses.

Surprisingly, bright light existed at the bottom of the black ocean. It came from a radiant, glowing white temple. Time seemed unkind to it as much of its white limestone walls and pillars were covered in green moss. Even the Sea God statue in front of it wasn't an exception.

However, it clearly showed the underwater white temple had existed for a very long time.

When Vaan arrived before the Sea God Temple, the sea monsters all respectfully took their leave after worshipping the moss-covered Sea God statue.

Seeing no one or thing come out to receive him, Vaan focused his attention on the Sea God statue.

It was a humanoid Sea God covered in fish scales, raising a large trident in one hand while looking up and dignified. There were signs that the trident used to hold immeasurable power and authority.

However, much of it had been lost; only its vestige remained.

'Is this a Sea God's inheritance site?'

Vaan blinked twice with astonishment, not expecting to find such a place hidden at the bottom of the Darksea Abyss Territory.

When he approached the Sea God Temple a few paces closer, the moss-covered statue suddenly glowed with a stronger white radiance. The green moss shook off, and the intense light seeped back inside the statue.

A few moments later, the white radiance reappeared in the eyes of the Sea God statue as it came to life, turning its head to look down at Vaan.

"Welcome to the Sea God's Temple Trial, New Challenger."

Chapter 970: True Meaning of Boundless

Ding!

<The target's information has been collected>

=====

[Target's information]

Name: Zanbar Kindhold

Race: Stone Spirit Race

Age: 390 million Gehennan Years

Position: Sea God Proteus's Spirit Servant, Temple Guardian

Existence Level: Half-step Divine King

Abilities: [Protect Temple], [Punisher], [Give Reward], [Conceal Temple], [Detect], [Deep Sleep], [Transform], [Absorb Earth], [Lesser Sea God Authority].

Status: [Bored], [Lonely], [Surprised], [Happy], [Contracted], [Restricted].

=====

After looking at the Sea God statue's information, Vaan raised an eyebrow in surprise due to its age. It was much older than he had anticipated, even the oldest existence he had come across from Gehenna.

It was even more ancient than the Garden of Thyia.

Vaan couldn't help but wonder why it was hidden at the bottom of Darksea Abyss Territory and if the black seawater and powerful sea monsters had anything to do with its existence.

It seemed to contain a profound secret.

"What does this temple trial entail, and what is it for?" Vaan calmly inquired.

"The Sea God's temple trial consists of two tests: a qualification test and a personality test," the Stone Spirit answered.

"Since you have managed to reach this place, you have already passed the qualification test and only need to take the personality test within the Sea God Temple. The personality test only requires you to overcome an illusion and answer some questions."

"If you pass it, you will have the choice of becoming Sea God Proteus's Sea Warden and be put in charge of this regional star ocean domain. This position naturally comes with the authority to command the ocean."

"Your other choice is to become Sea God Proteus's in-name disciple and enter the Myriad Sea God Palace for cultivation. If you achieve stellar results there, you will have a chance to upgrade your status to direct disciple and receive tutelage from the Sea God Proteus himself."

"I also personally recommend you choose this second option on the off-chance that you pass the trial," the Stone Spirit eagerly mentioned.

He was quite happy to be able to speak to another intelligent life after so long. After all, the Sea God Temple hardly received visitors due to its hidden and difficult location.

"Why is that?" Vaan asked curiously, feeling mildly astonished and stupefied.

He was astonished because he seemed to have stumbled upon a rather extraordinary place. He was also stupefied because the Stone Spirit didn't seem to realize he was guided to this place and didn't have to challenge the sea monsters at all.

"Sea Wardens have a limited future and heavy responsibilities," the Stone Spirit stated seriously.

"On the other hand, the disciples of the Myriad Sea God Palace have a much brighter future due to its superior resources and cultivation grounds. Everyone who enters its doors has the potential to become a True God and create their own Holy Land."

"Of course, that's just the main reason why you should choose the second option. There's a problem if you want to become the Sea Warden, Challenger."

"What problem?"

"The Sea Warden's symbol of ocean authority got stolen by a previous Challenger who chose the second option, unfortunately," the Stone Spirit sighed regretfully.

If it weren't bound to the Sea God Temple, it would have left to recover the stolen relic from the audacious thief long ago.

Sadly, it was also due to its negligence that allowed the symbol of ocean authority to be stolen in the first place. As such, it was ashamed to face the Sea God Proteus. It did not guard the relic properly.

Meanwhile, Vaan felt strange when he heard a previous challenger had stolen the Sea Warden's symbol of ocean authority. He felt like there was a connection between it and the Celestial Kingdom's Ocean Master.

"What does the Sea Warden's symbol of ocean authority look like?"

"It's a powerful trident containing a tiny trace of the Boundless Sea and Sky Lord's aura—Oh, shoot. I wasn't supposed to tell you that yet. Looks like I have to erase you if you fail the trial."

After hearing that, Vaan stared at the Stone Spirit residing in the Sea God Statue with a dumbfounded look.

Wasn't this Temple Guardian a little too unreliable?

He could already see why the Sea Warden's symbol of ocean authority was stolen if the Stone Spirit was this sloppy.

More importantly, the Stone Spirit revealed some crucial information – The Sea Warden's symbol of ocean authority was most likely the Conqueror's Aura possessed by the Celestial Kingdom's Ocean Master.

But if that were true, it would imply Pangea's Boundless Sea had been connected to the Gehenna's Darksea Abyss Territory for almost a million years—far longer than the mere three hundred years everyone knew.

How was that even possible?

"How do I reach the Myriad Sea God Palace if I choose to become Sea God Proteus's in-name disciple? Will a True God come and pick me up? Or is there a star portal leading there from here?" Vaan casually asked, unaffected by the Stone Spirit's previous threat.

Considering how mighty and powerful the Myriad Sea God Palace sounded, he figured it would also be unimaginably far away from the Skymagia Star Kingdom.

How could the distance between a Tier-1 Star Kingdom and a possible Holy Land-level power possibly be small?

He wouldn't even be surprised if it was billions of light-years away.

At first, the Stone Spirit was surprised by Vaan's lack of concern. However, the Stone Spirit couldn't help but chuckle after listening to his questions.

"What kind of status do you think a True God has? How can a True God possibly be free enough to come and pick up some nameless being in this remote star ocean domain? We also don't need anything like those star portals; we have something better – water rifts."

"Water rifts?" Vaan raised an eyebrow.

"Hahaha, you really don't know anything, do you? Since I'm in a good mood, I will explain for you," the Stone Spirit said merrily before stating something shocking, "All the seas in Chaos are interconnected."

"Wherever a sea exists, at least one water rift will be formed, connecting it to other nearby seas in the infinitely vast Chaos. These water rifts create a complex network that connects all seas back to the Boundless Sea and Sky Domain."

"As long as you know the right set of water rifts to take, it's theoretically possible to travel from one end of Chaos to the other end in a short time. Of course, that requires an incredibly detailed star ocean map to navigate through."

"It's almost impossible to know where every water rift leads without a star ocean map. Just this ocean realm alone has eight water rifts, each connecting to a different sea or ocean."

"Together, these nine seas are what we call a regional star ocean realm, which you will guard if you choose to become its Sea Warden. This is why the Boundless Sea is called the Boundless Sea."

"Fortunately for you, Sea God Proteus opened a water rift connecting the Sea God Temple to the Myriad Sea God Palace. So, getting there would only take an instant," the Stone Spirit grinned.

Vaan couldn't help but sigh.

The power of the Boundless Sea and Sky Lord was truly astonishing—to be able to connect all seas and skies in Chaos was such an unimaginably impressive feat.

As expected of one who has stepped beyond the heavens... How long would it take him to return to such level of power?