

The Witch 971

Chapter 971: Overqualified for the Test

"Do I just enter the Sea God Temple to start the second test?"

"Yes, once you enter the Sea God Temple, the personality test will begin immediately. But... are you planning to take the second test already? Can't we talk a little longer? If you fail the test, I'll be forced to erase you."

The Stone Spirit felt very reluctant, seeing as Vaan already intended to enter the Sea God Temple.

Vaan nonchalantly glanced back at the Sea God Statue and asked, "How long is a little longer, exactly?"

"Not that long at all, just a few hundred years," the Stone Spirit said generously.

However, when Vaan heard the Stone Spirit's reply, his expression immediately darkened.

A few hundred years was not that long?

"I'm not that free," Vaan coldly stated before reassuring the Stone Spirit, "Don't worry. Not only will I pass this test, but I will also pass it quickly."

If even the Celestial Kingdom's first-generation Ocean Master managed to pass the personality test only to steal the Sea Warden's trident and run back to Pangea, then there was no reason why he couldn't.

Clearly, the personality test was flawed or had some loophole that allowed the first-generation Ocean Master to exploit it.

That said, the first-generation Ocean Master was truly an idiot.

If the first-generation Ocean Master had already chosen to become Sea God Proteus's in-name disciple and enter the Myriad Sea God Palace for training, why would he risk giving up the bright future and offending Sea God Proteus?

Was stealing the Sea Warden's authority and returning to Pangea worth it?

Or did he think he could share the information with the Celestial Kingdom and have more of his people past the Sea God Temple's trial?

In that case, the first-generation Ocean Master should have just chosen to become the Sea Warden instead.

However, Vaan realized the first-generation Ocean Master was likely a selfish and greedy person. He wanted to help the Celestial Kingdom, but he didn't want to be tied down by heavy responsibilities and a limited future.

As such, the first-generation Ocean Master chose the second option and stole the Sea Warden's authority.

He most likely thought he could use the Sea Warden's authority to give his people safe passage to the Sea God Temple. Unfortunately, he miscalculated and didn't expect the sea monsters to resist the authority of the Sea Warden's trident.

That must be why the Ocean Masters have a constant conflict with the sea monsters of the Outer Sea.

When Vaan decisively stepped through the Sea God Temple's giant twin doors, the Stone Spirit wanted to stop him. However, it was restricted by rules and laws placed on it. The Stone Spirit couldn't interfere with challengers taking the trial.

Inside the Sea God Temple, Vaan immediately found himself in a vast open sea—too big to be fitted inside the Sea God Temple naturally. As such, it could only be the workings of the Spatial Law or an illusion.

However, Vaan could still see the entrance leading outside when he looked back.

Furthermore, he had felt a change in the Law of Space when he stepped inside the Sea God Temple. Thus, he was more inclined to believe the Sea God Temple was utilizing the Law of Space to contain a sea realm within it.

In other words, the Sea God Temple itself was a priceless treasure.

After marveling at the ingenuity of the Sea God Temple's inner world, Vaan scanned the sea region with his senses.

The Sea Realm wasn't particularly deep—only over three thousand meters deep and a hundred square kilometers big. A sealed well was found at its center. The aquatic plants on the sea floor also showed signs of heavy harvesting.

Most likely, it had been cleaned out by the previous trial challenger.

However, after nearly a million years, the aquatic plants had recovered and thrived with newfound vigor. They were at least Divine-rank magical plants, thanks to the rich, pure mana that filled the sea.

When Vaan approached the sealed well at the center of the sea floor, countless marine life suddenly spawned. Large ships also appeared on the surface as humanoid fishermen dived into the water to hunt fish.

It was clear what the personality test wanted him to do: save the fish from humanoid fishermen and prevent their excessive fishing from affecting the continuation of marine life.

Vaan was surprised when he felt the force of every movement.

The illusion had made everything incredibly life-like, down to the minute detail; it was an illusion that could interfere with reality.

As such, there was also danger.

The weakest fishermen possessed the aura of a Divine Knight, while the strongest being was even a Divine King.

The trial seemed to be testing the choices he would make under the pressure of the strong—Whether it would risk his life to save the fish or watch them get hunted into extinction.

The available choices all had predetermined outcomes—was what Vaan thought when he dived into the middle of the fishing ground.

However, his Boundless Sea and Sky Aura stirred all the fish into gathering around him as they paid their respects and offered their worship. The fishermen paused with stunned looks.

No one expected the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura to affect even illusionary fish.

Although Vaan had suspected his Boundless Sea and Sky Aura would give him an edge in the second trial, he didn't expect it to be like this.

Just when the fishermen recovered their wits and intended to resume their fishing, the entire illusion disappeared. The personality test prematurely ended before it could even pass the early stages.

This time, Vaan wasn't surprised.

The Sea God Temple's trial tested the challenger's qualification to become a Sea God.

However, he was the Lord of the Boundless Seas and Skies who created the boundless seas and skies and all that lived within them.

How could the Sea God Temple's trial be worthy of testing his qualifications?

If anything, he was overqualified.

Rumble...!

Shortly after the illusion disappeared, the entire Sea God Temple shook. The sea floor split apart, and a gigantic azure crystal covered in runes rose from the ground.

The rune-covered gigantic azure crystal possessed incredible mana and contained intricate sets of laws within it that allowed the Sea God Temple to function the way it did.

It was the Sea God Temple's core.

Chapter 972: The Stone Spirit's Shock

Outside the Sea God Temple, the Stone Spirit was startled by the sudden tremors that came from within the Sea Realm. No matter how intense the fighting was inside, the Stone Spirit shouldn't have been able to feel it.

The Stone Spirit quickly realized the tremors weren't coming from the Sea Realm but the Sea God Temple itself.

Something like that has never happened before, nor should it be.

"W-What is going on? Is the Sea God Temple breaking down? Oi, Temple Spirit, what the hell is going on with you?" the Stone Spirit cried nervously. He was bound to the Sea God Temple.

If the Sea God Temple broke down, what would happen to him? Wouldn't he go down with it?

The Stone Spirit never would have imagined that the Temple Spirit voluntarily ended the trial and offered up its core for Vaan to bind and become the Sea God Temple's master.

If the Stone Spirit knew about it, the Stone Spirit would have been completely shocked.

...

Meanwhile, Vaan stared at the big azure crystal core that had voluntarily exposed itself to him.

Considering the Sea God Temple was practically a divine treasure created by a Sea God and was incredibly ancient, it wasn't too surprising to find out that it was sentient.

At the very least, it recognized the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura.

"What should I do with this? Destroy it?" Vaan rubbed his chin as he stared at the giant core thoughtfully.

The entire Sea God Temple shivered nervously at his nonchalant comment. If it were human, it would have been sweating like no tomorrow.

Vaan softly chuckled and decided not to tease it any further.

He quickly summoned a drop of his spirit-infused blood essence and merged it into the giant azure core. It was the standard blood-binding method of energy cultivation.

Ding!

<You have formed a spiritual connection with the Sea God Temple>

<The Sea God Temple's spirit has recognized you as its new owner>

After the connection to the Sea God Temple was formed, a Blue Axolotl-looking water spirit was manifested on the side, shaking with unease and fear.

It appeared virtual, like a hologram.

"Master," the Temple Spirit greeted.

Vaan nodded.

=====

[Sea God Temple]

Artifact Spirit: Blue Axolotl (Water Spirit)

Artifact Type: Growth, Defensive, Storage

Artifact Servant/s: Zanbar Kindhold (Stone Spirit Race)

Rank: Half-step True Divinity-rank Treasure

Age: 400 million Gehennan Years

Functions: [Manipulate], [Expand], [Barrier], [Cultivate], [Absorb], [Repair], [Gate].

Sea Realm Volume: 300 cubic kilometers

Energy Reserve: 250,000 units of mana

Status: [Low Power Mode] [Unsealed]

=====

After looking at the Sea God Temple's status, Vaan focused on understanding the Sea God Temple's limited functions.

=====

[Function]

[Manipulate]: Consume mana from the energy reserve to move the Sea God Temple according to the owner's will.

[Expand]: Consume mana from the energy reserve to increase the size of the Sea God Temple or Sea Realm.

[Barrier]: Consume mana from the energy reserve to generate a strong magic barrier around the Sea God Temple.

[Cultivate]: Consume mana from the energy reserve to accelerate the growth of aquatic plants in the Sea Realm.

[Absorb]: Consume mana from the energy reserve to open the [Gate] and draw in mana from the other side.

[Repair]: Consume mana from the energy reserve to restore the Sea God Temple to a previous state.

[Gate]: Consume mana from the energy reserve to open the water rift. Destination currently set to the Myriad God Sea Palace's Sea God Proteus District.

=====

It took a moment before Vaan completely grasped the Sea God Temple's current status. It was clear that the Sea God Temple's Sea Realm could be much larger than it currently was.

However, due to its low mana reserve after existing for countless millions of years, the Sea Realm had most likely shrunk to conserve what remained of it.

Vaan also noticed that some of the Sea God Temple's functions were sealed unless they contacted his Boundless Sea and Sky Aura.

Evidently, the Sea Warden's trident was the key to accessing these functions.

It was part of the Sea Warden's responsibilities to maintain the Sea God Temple's conditions, continue receiving new challengers, and open the [Gate] for those who passed the trial and chose the second option.

Vaan wondered if the Stone Spirit wasn't originally stationed outside but kicked out by the Temple Spirit after losing the Sea Warden's trident of authority.

Nevertheless, the Sea God Temple was intended to be permanently stationed at the bottom of the Darksea Abyss Territory to continue receiving new challengers indefinitely until the Sea God Proteus decided otherwise.

The Sea God Temple wasn't meant to have an owner who could potentially take it away.

However, since it had met Vaan and come in contact with his authentic Boundless Sea and Sky Aura, the Temple Spirit had voluntarily submitted to him.

Still, Vaan couldn't help but wonder what the situation was in the Boundless Sea and Sky Domain for his Boundless Sea and Sky Aura to be used like some high-security key and lock.

Unfortunately, that wasn't something he could easily find out just because he wanted to know.

Although he could ask the Temple Spirit and Stone Spirit, he didn't have high hopes.

...

When Vaan exited the Sea God Temple and returned to the Sea God Statue, the Stone Spirit stared at him with doubt and confusion.

Normally, the second trial would usually take one to three days to complete, regardless of success or failure. But from the time Vaan entered to the time he left, only five minutes had passed.

"I told you that it wouldn't take long."

"You..."

The Stone Spirit's eyes slowly widened in horror as it sensed a type of authority from Vaan that had not been present earlier. It was the type of authority that granted successful challengers some access to the Sea God Temple's functions.

The only difference was that Vaan's type of authority seemed to be the highest level of authority there was, surpassing his.

"You? No, you should call me Master now."

Vaan casually waved his hand, and the entire Sea God Temple shrunk to fit in the palm of his hand.

The Stone Spirit froze on the spot, looking terror-stricken at the miniaturized Sea God Temple.

What the fuck just happened? How could this have even happened?

Chapter 973: Sea Warden's Main Duty

As Vaan stared at the Stone Spirit's utter shock, he slyly teased him, "Do you still dare to erase me?"

The Stone Spirit was immediately frightened by the reminder.

At the same time, the Temple Spirit overheard Vaan's question. It quickly emerged from the Sea God Temple and grew countless times bigger, looking almost like an awe-inducing and grand sea dragon before glaring down at the Stone Spirit.

"You want to erase Master?" the Temple Spirit silently conveyed with its fierce gaze.

"N-No! Of course not!" the Stone Spirit quickly denied before pitifully mentioning, "I only mentioned that in case Master failed the test! It's my job to clean up failures to keep the secrecy of the Sea God Temple, after all...!"

"Hah..." the Temple Spirit gave a prolonged sigh before saying, "Keep the secrecy of the Sea God Temple, you say? After your last mistake, do you think the Sea God Temple's trial is still a secret?"

"Hmph, Master is a supreme existence. How could I dare test him? Master does not need to take any test," the Temple Spirit snorted shortly after.

The light in the Stone Spirit's stone eyes dimmed with guilt. But shortly after, the Stone Spirit stared at the Temple Spirit in disbelief.

"You didn't test Master? Have you lost your marbles, Temple Spirit?" the Stone Spirit criticized.

However, the Stone Spirit was quickly suppressed by the Temple Spirit's authority. The Stone Spirit only flared up for a moment before Temple Spirit made it seem infinitely small.

The Stone Spirit wanted to disappear instead of facing the Temple Spirit's anger.

"You don't have the right to scold me!" the Temple Spirit barked.

"You were cuter when you were smaller..." When Vaan suddenly said this, the Temple Spirit quickly reverted to its small and cute Blue Axolotl form and became docile in front of him.

Vaan glanced at the Stone Spirit and said, "You should also return to your original form."

"Yes, Master."

Shortly after, the Sea God Statue lost its sharp defining edges and humanoid form as it turned into a chubby boulder with short limbs and big round eyes. It looked like a rather cute stone golem.

Of course, the stone trident it held also disappeared, becoming one with its body again. The real trident had been stolen long ago.

"So, what's the situation with the thief?" Vaan finally asked.

"We are currently—"

The Stone Spirit and Temple Spirit simultaneously answered with eagerness before abruptly pausing. They stared at each other for a moment before the Temple Spirit glared at it.

"What are you doing? Go and repent on your previous mistake!" the Temple Spirit seemed to have said to the Stone Spirit with its gaze.

As such, the Stone Spirit backed off timidly. It dispiritedly moved to a corner and scribbled randomly on the sea floor with a small coral branch it found.

Vaan was amused by their childish behaviors despite their big age.

"We have been using the sea monsters to confine the thief in Pangea and prevent him from going anywhere else," the Temple Spirit stated.

"However, this is also the limit of what we can do with the Sea God Authority granted to us since we have been stuck here, Master. We can only push the thief out of Pangea's Outer Sea."

"If we try to send the sea monsters beyond the Outer Sea, the Sea Warden's trident in the other party's possession would wrestle control of the sea monsters from us," the Temple Spirit explained.

"I see," Vaan uttered with a frown before asking, "The Sea Warden's trident wasn't the only thing stolen, was it?"

"That's right, Master," the Temple Spirit admitted before saying, "The thief also took the star ocean map of the nine seas."

"If the thief had used the water rifts recorded in the star ocean map to escape to other seas, it would have been impossible to track the thief, and hopes of recovering the Sea Warden's trident would be lost forever."

"Fortunately, now we have you, Master. With your supreme authority and the Sea God Temple's influence, you can easily command the sea monsters to punish the thief and reclaim the stolen relic," the Temple Spirit said with a hopeful expression.

Vaan calmly nodded.

This was something he had to do since he was also curious about the Nine Seas. He wanted to know where the other eight seas were.

As for the Sea Warden's trident, that was also something he had to recover.

The Boundless Sea and Sky Aura within it was originally part of his power. How could he let others use it against him?

"Master, will you enter the Myriad Sea God Palace to cultivate?" the Temple Spirit asked.

"Not now, but in the future. I have too many things to deal with in my home world right now, including the threat posed by the civilization in possession of the Sea Warden's trident," Vaan stated.

Since the topic of the Myriad Sea God Palace was brought up, Vaan shortly asked, "Will there be any implications if I open the [Gate] to fill up the Sea God Temple's energy reserve?"

"Not at all, Master," the Temple Spirit cutely shook its head and said, "Sea God Proteus had set up several of these Sea God Temples across the Eternal Darkheaven Sector to recruit potential disciples while looking for the Boundless Sea and Sky Lord."

"Each of these Sea God Temples requires a lot of mana to operate and maintain. As such, we would periodically open the [Gate] to restore the Sea God Temple's energy reserve to a stable level."

"However, we haven't been able to do so after losing the Sea Warden's trident around a million years ago. You might attract slight attention from opening the [Gate] now after all these years, but it wouldn't be anything worthy of investigating."

"The other side would just think the Sea God Temple's guardian had been slacking," as the Temple Spirit said this, it glared at the Stone Spirit.

Vaan was relieved after hearing that.

If he couldn't restore the Sea God Temple's energy level due to the danger he might incur, he would not be able to utilize the Sea God Temple to its full potential.

Nevertheless, another important matter had been brought to his attention.

Although he had already suspected it, he was only able to confirm it after listening to the Temple Spirit.

The Sea Warden's main responsibility was to search for Varuna's incarnation, him, in the seas under their jurisdiction for Sea God Proteus. Moreover, Sea God Proteus most likely wasn't the only Sea God searching for him.

Whether this was a good or bad thing remains to be determined.

Chapter 974: Noble Beings

Although Varuna's Origin Laws allowed the Boundless Sea and Sky Domain to exist eternally, Vaan did not doubt that Varuna's long absence had brought it endless issues.

The Lord of Chaos might have looked after the Boundless Sea and Sky Domain, but he still believed it wouldn't be as stable as it once was.

Perhaps the inhabitants of the Boundless Sea and Sky Domain were no longer united and had been divided into countless smaller factions that served their interests.

Sea God Proteus could be one of the Sea Gods looking for him in hopes of restoring the Boundless Sea and Sky Domain to its past glory. Or, Sea God Proteus could also be one of the beings looking to kill him.

Given Varuna's Boundless Sea and Sky Aura had spread to the point that other beings could utilize it, Vaan wouldn't be surprised if it gave birth to ambitious beings who were trying to gather the scattered aura and become the new Lord of the Boundless Seas and Skies.

After all, sentient beings had free will and didn't necessarily respect their original creators. In fact, they can be very selfish.

As such, the Myriad Sea God Palace could be the most dangerous place for Vaan to visit. That said, the most dangerous place could also become the safest place to hide under the right conditions.

If he could find a way to blend in, his cultivation to the True God level could become smooth.

"Do you know if there are others like me?" Vaan asked vaguely.

"Of course!" the Temple Spirit answered without hesitation, saying, "I heard the Myriad Sea God Palace has several dozen noble beings like you, Master."

"While it is extremely rare, it isn't unprecedented for some beings within the Boundless Sea and Sky Domain to be born with the aura of the Boundless Sea and Sky Lord. I heard these noble beings are all considered royalties and are heavily nurtured by the Myriad Sea God Palace."

"However, I've also heard that although they are all born with the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura, it is very faint and requires intensive cultivation just to strengthen and control, unlike yours, which is very clear and stable, Master."

"If I have to compare your auras just based on my limited knowledge and feelings, I would say your aura is at least a hundred times stronger than the other noble beings. You're like the true chosen son of the sea and sky," the Temple Spirit said honestly.

In truth, the Temple Spirit wanted to say that Vaan seemed like the reincarnation of the Boundless Sea and Sky Lord.

However, impersonating or even indirectly implying such a status was greatly taboo in Chaos. A bloody disaster would always descend wherever such instances occurred.

As such, the Temple Spirit didn't dare mention it.

After Vaan inquired a bit more, he gradually understood the situation in the Myriad Sea God Palace and why the Myriad Sea God Palace placed such great importance on nurturing beings blessed with the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura.

It was because only such noble beings could increase the quantity of the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura and had the qualifications to become the new Boundless Sea and Sky Lord.

Vaan didn't expect to learn that the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura could increase in quantity without the original Boundless Sea and Sky Lord, even if they were only minuscule amounts.

If he could collect all of it, wouldn't his Boundless Sea and Sky Aura be even stronger than his peak first life?

He was quite curious how these noble beings were able to be born with his Boundless Sea and Sky Aura.

Were their parents under the influence of Boundless Sea and Sky Aura? Or was the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura where they were born?

Nevertheless, Vaan almost wanted to thank every one of these noble beings. They were practically growing his aura for him. More importantly, their existences were also layers of shield for him.

He wouldn't be easily targeted by those with ill intentions or enmity toward the Lord of the Boundless Seas and Skies.

When Vaan opened the [Gate] to refill the Sea God Temple's energy reserve with [Absorb], he was immediately stunned by the powerful surge of mana. It was a million years' worth of mana wanting to break out after accumulating over time for so long.

The Sea God Temple's energy reserve instantly jumped up to two million units of mana, a nearly tenfold increase, and continued to rise with incredible momentum.

The Sea Realm was quickly filled with pure mana and started to expand to its former size. Under the nourishment of pure mana from the Myriad Sea God Palace, its space tripled within mere minutes.

Vaan anticipated that the mana from a Holy Land-like place would be incredible, but he still underestimated it.

Compared to the Myriad Sea God Palace, Gehenna's mana was like a cheap penny covered in shit: people wouldn't want to take it; even if they did, they definitely wouldn't smell it.

Catching a glimpse of the Myriad Sea God Palace's wealth of pure mana made Vaan understand what it truly meant to come from a poor background.

He may not even need to hide in the Myriad Sea God Palace because powerful divine beings wouldn't want to visit such lowly places like Gehenna or the entire Skymagia Star Kingdom, for that matter.

Such places that struggled to produce even a single Divine King were hardly worth their time.

Eventually, the Sea God Temple's energy reserve reached ten million units of pure mana before Vaan closed the [Gate].

The Sea Realm had also expanded over a hundred times its original size during this time.

If not, the Sea God Temple's energy reserve would have hit ten million units of pure mana much sooner.

Now, the Sea Realm looked like a place that could rear some sea monsters.

After letting the Stone Spirit inside the Sea God Temple, Vaan reduced its size and allowed the Temple Spirit to control it to follow him like a protection drone, always staying within two meters of him.

On the way back to Pangea's Outer Sea, countless sea monsters in the Darksea Abss Territory sent Vaan off with reluctant respect and worship. They hoped he would visit them again, which he intended to.

He had great plans for the Darksea Abyss Territory.

When Vaan returned through the underwater dimensional crack, he was quickly greeted by a black-purplish Fighting Dolphin that had been inflated like a pufferfish.

"Ah, welcome back, my Lord!"

"..."

Vaan stared at Jamal speechlessly.

He had only left Pangea for a short while, but Jamal had already stuffed himself into an unrecognizable state.

Chapter 975: Prelude to War

Black Rose Empire

At roughly 150 kilometers northwest of Sunpeak City, a group of twenty blue-skinned Celestials appeared in the sky, hidden above the white ocean of clouds. It was not the first time they had been here, and they didn't plan on it being their last either.

If one had a closer look, the blue-skinned Celestials were actually moving around on solid clouds. Moreover, various facilities and infrastructure were found hidden within the clouds.

This particular cloud region did not possess the usual properties of clouds; it was more like solid land, and given the magnitude of its size, it was no different from a floating fortress.

It wasn't the only of its kind but one of several remnants of the lost Etherean civilization, which the Celestials had found when they first occupied Pangea.

After countless moons, the remnants of the Etherean civilization had been completely absorbed by the Celestial Kingdom.

The blue-skinned Celestials used the floating cloud fortress of the Ethereans to spy on the Sunpeak City's development.

"We have already been observing them for many days now. High Command is being too wary of this Land-Dweller country. Besides the Great Devil Slayer, who might pose a bit of a threat, the rest of the Land-Dwellers aren't even worthy of our concern."

"That's true. They don't have a single person comparable to the Divine Origin realm. The strongest among them are the dragon lords, who are only equivalent to the Half-step Divine Origin realm at best. They are far too weak."

"Exactly! I don't see why we don't just take over their damn space tower and destroy their space bases! The longer we let them develop, the higher the chances of Doomsday coming! I really don't understand what those in High are thinking!"

"This is why you are only stuck with this job and not part of the High Command; you only see the smaller picture. So long as the Great Devil Slayer is alive, these Land-Dwellers can just build new space bases."

"So High Command is planning an elaborate trap to kill the Great Devil Slayer? Then, what was the point of us observing this region? I thought we were preparing to take over the space tower?"

"Hehe, killing the Great Devil Slayer isn't the only way to stop the Land-Dwellers from rebuilding new space bases in the future. Capturing the space tower is only a means to attract attention."

As the blue-skinned Celestials had a full-blown discussion, many of them were suddenly startled by the subtle insinuation of genocide.

Gulp!

"H-Hold on a minute... the High Command is planning to wipe out the Land-Dwellers...? That's crazy! No matter how inferior the Land-Dwellers are, they still share human origins like us!"

"Since the Land-Dwellers are no longer satisfied with the land, we have no other choice but to destroy them utterly and thoroughly. Such sacrifices are necessary for the survival of our kind."

"But..."

"But what? Doomsday must be prevented at all costs! Don't forget your history lesson! You haven't forgotten what happened to Celeste, Obos, Cruna, Mypso, Solreitis, and Lundeon, have you?! Do you want Pangea to be next?! Pangea is all we have now!"

"The painful past of the Celestial Kingdom is something that has been ingrained into every Celestial. Of course, I have not forgotten about them. However, you speak as if Gehenna doesn't exist."

The moment Gehenna was mentioned, half of the group immediately glanced at the naïve speaker and snickered with disdain.

If Gehenna were so easy to conquer, the Celestial Kingdom have already done it.

However, the truth was that they still hadn't even found out how the Holy War between Pangea and Gehenna abruptly ended. More importantly, they couldn't comprehend the concept of Realm Lords and didn't dare to underestimate it.

Even so, Thanatos's sole existence was enough to make the Celestial Kingdom think twice before invading Gehenna.

"You can only consider Gehenna because you don't understand the terror of Gehenna's Realm Lord. Our Celestial Kingdom has sent people to investigate the strength of Gehenna in the past. The result they brought back was—Never offend Thanatos."

"Why is that?"

"Because Thanatos alone can wipe out our Celestial Kingdom's army if we send it into Gehenna. It only takes him a thought to kill anyone whose soul hasn't reached the Divine Star realm."

The naïve speaker immediately felt a chill run down his spine. He quickly understood why Thanatos was to be feared. Death Law Users were no different from grim reapers.

Even if the Celestial Kingdom sent Divine Star realm experts after Thanatos, they would only end up getting exhausted to death before they could reach the person since they would have no army of their own to fight the endless hordes of demons and undead.

Divine Star realm experts might be very strong, but their source of power wasn't endless.

"I'm sending the latest report to High Command," the Cloud Fortress Leader stated.

However, just as he was about to hit the [Send] button on the report he had prepared, he received a new mail from High Command.

The other blue-skinned Celestials glanced at the Cloud Fortress Leader's frozen hand with surprise before looking up.

"What's the matter?" they asked.

"High Command has received intel of the Great Devil Slayer's last traces in the Western Sea and has given us the green to take action in three hours. The three armies of Blackshell City, Razorfin City, and Tidsong City will immediately attack the UN's northwestern, northeastern, and eastern borders after confirming we have drawn the enemy's attention."

When everyone heard the Cloud Fortress leader say this, their eyes immediately lit up with excitement and anticipation.

"Finally! After sitting around, watching the Land-Dwellers for so many days, we can finally take action and relieve our boredom!"

The Cloud Fortress Leader's solemn gaze swept over his subordinates before he said, "Although the Land-Dwellers are weak, our mission requires us to attract all of the enemy's attention."

"In the event that our enemy's strength is actually much higher than we have thought, then this operation is no different from a suicide mission. I also want you all to treat it as such—Be prepared to die."

"We will be the spark that lights the flames of war between the Celestial Kingdom and the UN. So, make peace with yourselves now because, in three hours, there will be no turning back."

"Yes, Sir!" the blue-skinned Celestials answered with equal seriousness.

Unbeknownst to them, Fourth Dream had been lurking in the area with her invisibility spell, eavesdropping on their group discussion. After realizing the seriousness of the situation, she quickly returned to Sunpeak City to alert everyone.

As a result, Sunpeak City secretly entered high alert, followed by Blackthorn City, the rest of the Black Rose Empire, and then the rest of the UN.

Within a single hour, the Red Dragon Clan and Great House of Caelestis tirelessly travel with their spatial abilities to pass the information around to other members of the UN.

"Lady Fourth Dream, are you certain the Celestial Kingdom will attack us in another two hours?" Henrietta asked after making the secret trip to Sunpeak City.

Even though she had already instructed every border city to strengthen its defenses, she still had to hear the news from Fourth Dream in person.

After all, the Celestial Kingdom's plan was not a small matter.

Once the Celestial Kingdom launched its attack, it would most likely be very swift and destructive. No one could guess how they would be hit due to their limited knowledge of its military might.

"I am certain that was what I overheard them saying," Fourth Dream confirmed seriously.

Henrietta was silent for a moment before asking, "What did you make of the Celestial's strength on that Cloud Fortress 150km away?"

"Most of their strength ranged between Third-stage Divine Warrior to Seventh-stage Divine Warrior. Their leader's strength, however, I could not tell for certain. I suspect he might be at least a First-stage Divine Knight," Fourth Dream guessed.

"First-stage Divine Knight..."

Within the City Lord's manor, a depressive and suffocating atmosphere immediately filled the room. Henrietta and everyone else gathered inside all felt heavy-hearted.

Forget about the three armies that will their borders; just the independent force alone placed unimaginable pressure on them. No matter what, they couldn't let the Celestials take control of the Heavenreacher.

After all, if the Celestials figured out how to use the Heavenreacher, forget about sending people to space; they could use the Heavenreacher to shoot down the space station.

"Please ask Lord Astarot to disconnect the space station from synchronized orbit and enter battle fortress mode."

"At once, Lady Henrietta."

The Red Dragons outside the City Lord's manor immediately heeded Henrietta's instruction and departed.

"Has anyone been able to contact Vaan? What about Lady Hecate?"

"No one has been able to contact Lord Vaan since he entered the Western Sea," sighed a Red Dragon outside the City Lord's manor.

"Lady Hecate is currently in a life-or-death retreat to advance to Rank 7 Divine Being. Until she succeeds or fails, no one will be able to contact her," Fourth Dream stated solemnly.

"However, I have already sent Seventh Dream to seek help from the Dreamdust Territory. Even so, it will take time for reinforcement to arrive. They won't be able to arrive on time."

"We shouldn't count on them to face the first wave of attacks," Fourth Dream stated objectively.

Henrietta's mind spun for alternative solutions.

If there were no other choice, she would have to rely on her master to deter the Celestial Kingdom's independent force.

However, that should be a last resort.

Moreover, she still had to figure out how to defend against the Celestial Kingdom's three armies that planned to attack their borders.

"Recently, the situation in Gehenna has been rather strange. The Great Devils seem to obey Vaan now..." Henrietta suddenly recalled.

"We should use the dimensional cracks to seek help from Wolf God Domain and Evernight Territory. Their reinforcements will arrive much faster than the Dreamdust Territory."

Chapter 976: Prelude to War (2)

Great Ratholos Empire, Imperial Capital

"Lord Kemun, this is too abrupt. What do you mean the Celestial Kingdom will attack the UN in a few hours? Why are we suddenly getting attacked by these Celestials? Do you know how strong they are?"

"I don't have time to explain the details to you, Emperor Varan. Just know that the Celestial Kingdom will be the biggest we have ever faced, and you have to prepare for it immediately. Someone else will answer your doubts."

After delivering the message, Kemun immediately prepared to leave despite Emperor Varan's confusion.

"Where are you going now, Lord Kemun?"

"Since I am already here, I need to go seek help from the Evernight Territory. The vampires will be your country's best hope of resisting the Celestial Kingdom's eastern army."

Right after dropping that statement, Kemun immediately took off for the crimson-light zone connecting to Gehenna. The Evernight Territory's Valdigold City was just on the other side.

"Halt! What is a Red Dragon like you doing here? Don't you know travel between the two realms is currently prohibited?" a vampiric guard quickly obstructed Kemun's path.

"I understand," Kemun acknowledged before saying, "However, this is an emergency. I must meet the Vampire Lords and request reinforcements to combat a great threat in Pangea."

As Kemun said this, he couldn't help but feel astonished after noticing the great changes in Valdigold City. Various large projects were ongoing in the city, and even a massive ship was found on the outskirts.

What was going on with Valdigold City?

"Do you think you can meet our Vampire Lords just because you want to? Who do you think you are?" the vampiric guard scoffed, crossing his arms disdainfully.

Kemun frowned before replying in a low tone, "Look, Buddy. I don't have time for this. I am Kemun, the Seventh Dragon Lord of the Red Dragon Clan. I directly serve the Supreme Leader, Lord Vaan."

"If you know what is good for you, you will stop delaying my business. Otherwise, if Lord Vaan's home fails to receive timely reinforcements because of you, you will be held accountable," Kemun strictly warned.

However, he already noticed the vampiric guard's expression stiffen the moment he mentioned Lord Vaan's name.

"You directly serve the Heavenly Devil? Why didn't you just say so at the start?" the vampiric guard timidly complained before volunteering, "Anyway, I'll guide you to the Vampire Lords right away. Follow me!"

Shortly after handing his on-site duties over to other sentries, the vampiric guard quickly led Kemun into the city. Despite Kemun's confusion over the unfamiliar term "Heavenly Devil," he still followed the vampiric guard.

When they passed through a small outskirt market full of blood vendors, Kemun noticed the vampiric guard's thirst and craving.

"Do you Vampires really like drinking human blood that much?" Kemun started a casual conversation despite frowning over the vampiric guard's slow pace. It seemed there were various security checks they had to pass through before entering the city.

"Of course! You Red Dragons just don't understand how tasty human blood is!" the vampiric guard happily said.

"But is it tasty because it's blood, or is it tasty because it has life in it?" Kemun frowned with curiosity.

"Naturally, it's because of life. Human lives just burn more brightly than other species."

"Is that so? But isn't there much more life in semen? Why don't you Vampires just suck dicks instead?"

"..."

The vampiric guard fell silent.

It was unknown what he was thinking, but he appeared both enlightened and angry at Kemun's ridiculous thought.

"By the way, if the Heavenly Devil's home is in danger, why do you need to seek out the Vampire Lords?" the vampiric guard changed the topic, asking, "Can't you look for the Heavenly Devil directly?"

"Lord Vaan is a busy man. It's hard to keep track of where Lord Vaan is, so I can only ask the Vampire Lords for help while praying Lord Vaan hears of the situation and returns quickly."

"Hm? But the Heavenly Devil is currently residing in his floating castle?"

"What?"

...

A short ten minutes later, Valefor found out about Pangea's situation from Kemun. When he did, Vaan, who was currently in the Southwestern Sea, also found out due to their spiritual connection.

However, Vaan did not rush back to the Black Rose Empire.

He didn't need to be there since he could just send Valefor there. After all, they were one and the same person. Valefor being there was the same as him being there.

If he wanted to, he could even take over control of Valefor's body.

Nevertheless, he had another role to play in the Boundless Sea. The Celestial Kingdom wouldn't be able to focus on attacking the UN if its own home was on fire. The Celestials wouldn't be able to ignore the sea monsters entering the Inner Sea.

In the Southwestern Outer Sea, Vaan spread out his Boundless Sea and Sky Aura.

Moments later, the black seawater stirred, and gargantuan kings and emperors of the deep sea arrived one after the other, each with their army of minions or kins. Despite their enormity, the rulers of the local sea region acknowledged Vaan and paid their respects as if he were above them.

'Summon your friends. Spread the word that I want the Celestial Kingdom's bases in the nine seas to be found and troubled,' Vaan willed.

The gargantuan kings and emperors of the deep sea seemingly acknowledged Vaan's command with their heads lowered. Shortly after, they dispersed in different directions with their forces.

"Master, the conflict between the Inner Sea and Outer Sea has been going on for years. So long as the Sea Warden's trident remains in the enemy's hands, the sea monster will soon forget your command when they enter the Inner Sea," the Temple Spirit reminded.

"Then, we will deal with the Ocean Master and reclaim the Sea Warden's trident first," Vaan coolly replied, adding, "The Celestial Kingdom has borrowed it for long enough. It's about time we take it back. What do you think?"

"I think so too, Master," the Temple Spirit answered, feeling excited alongside the Stone Spirit.

They finally had the chance to recover the Sea Warden's trident and wash away their shame.

Chapter 977: Southern Battle

Southern Sea

At the border of the Inner Sea and Outer Sea, blood mixed with seawater as the conflict between Celestials and sea monsters persistently raged on for years. Sometimes, there would be all-out wars. At other times, they would have small skirmishes.

Today, the Celestials experienced their first unscheduled all-out war in years. The sea monsters' sudden aggression pushed them into high alert.

Bam..!

A humongous black whale full of battle scars, big and small, rammed into the silvery metal wall with gargantuan force, causing a seismic tremor to run along the crack-filled rocky ocean floor like a powerful pulse.

At the same time, high-tech hydro turrets on top of the long silver wall fired back at the agitated sea monsters indiscriminately. Each round of charged water zipped through the sea region like a blue beam of laser but punched like a railgun.

With each successful shot, the enormous sea monsters would stagger back and wince in pain and fury.

Suddenly, a Volcan Kraken's long, thick, and spiky tentacle whipped across the intense battlefield. Multiple high-tech hydro turrets were ripped away from the top wall in an instant.

"We've just lost three T6 Hydro Turrets! We need immediate replacements!" cried a Celestial within the silver wall.

With the absent firepower of the three T6 Hydro Turrets, several Great Whales rammed into the battered silver wall while Ancient Megalodons sank their sharp teeth inside the dented areas.

Rip...!!

A hole was suddenly torn in the battle-torn wall, creating a large opening.

The Rank 7 Volcan Kraken did not miss the opportunity to send one of its large, spiky tentacles through the open hole, catching a few unprepared Celestial soldiers and ripping them out of the silver wall.

"No—!!!" the abducted Celestial soldiers issued horrified screams.

With their meager Heaven Ascension Realm cultivation base, they could only become snacks for the great monster of the deep sea.

Needless to say, their fates were sealed.

This large silver wall was constructed after the first hundred years of conflict, not to keep the sea monsters out of the Inner Sea but to improve the defensive battles of the Celestial soldiers with lower cultivation bases.

"Why are the sea monsters so violent today?! I don't remember our side doing anything to piss them off like this! We need desperate backup! At this rate, the wall won't hold!"

"Section 13 has sustained too much damage! We need some Divine Star Realm experts to suppress the sea monsters in—Ahhhh! No, no, no—!!!"

A Celestial soldier cried tragically as he became another victim of the Rank 7 Volcan Kraken's lightning-swift abducting tentacles. The behemoth sea beast didn't have the slightest interest in what little meat the Celestial soldier's body provided.

Crunch!

With a slight exertion, the Celestial soldier was crushed into a body of bloody seawater and mangled flesh before getting tossed into the far back line.

Countless famished Dark Triggerfish immediately rushed toward the Celestial corpse with rapacious appetites. Within seconds, not even a piece of bone was left behind in the area.

The surviving Celestial soldiers within the silver wall did not even have the heart to mourn their fallen comrade. They were only concerned about not becoming the Volcan Kraken's next victim.

Its death-gripping tentacles had filled them with infinite dread.

Just when the Celestials were about to face an irreparable breach in their defensive line, an intense golden light suddenly brightened up the dark ocean depths, forcing the sea monsters to turn their heads away and retreat.

These powerful creatures of the deep sea weren't used to such radiant light. Although it didn't hurt their eyes, it certainly caused them extreme discomfort.

"Wretched Creatures of the Deep, have you forgotten I am here?!" the Ocean Master thundered, holding up his illuminating silver trident that shined with golden aura.

"You see the Sea God's trident, yet do not submit! Who do you serve, if not I?! I am the rightful ruler of the Boundless Sea! The Sea God's trident is my legitimacy and authority! Submit to me and cease your meaningless struggles!"

"Your stubborn resistance has gone on for too long! Today, your rebelliousness must come to an end!" the Ocean Master roared, exerting the Conqueror's Aura within the Sea Warden's trident to the limits.

Hiss!

The mighty Sea Kings and Sea Emperors of the Deep Sea backed off into the darkness of the Outer Sea with their forces. Furious and displeased as they were, they could not fully resist the power of the Sea Warden's trident.

Even so, they refuse to acknowledge the False Sea God!

Meanwhile, the Celestial soldiers cheered in relief and celebration at the arrival of the Ocean Master. Witnessing the sea monsters' retreat lifted a huge weight off their shoulders.

"Do not relax your vigilance!" a Celestial commander in the Divine Star Realm barked at the Celestial soldiers, adding, "There is something wrong with the sea monsters today! I don't think they will give up so easily!"

"That's right! The sea monsters are unusually aggressive—Oh my god!" Everyone, watch out!!"

The Celestial soldiers stared in horror as a colossal earthen plate hurled towards their silver wall.

The overlords of the deep sea had actually worked together to tear off an alarming piece of the ocean crust and used it to attack from a distance. The enormous earthen plate moved slowly, but it carried immense weight and power.

Even the Ocean Master, a Ninth-stage Divine Star Realm expert, didn't dare to take the hurling plate head-on. The enormity of the object was beyond him.

Did a Rank 8 Deepsea Overlord join the battle?! That has never happened before!

Boom!

The earthen plate slammed into the silver wall heavily, creating an unprecedented tremor that rocked the ocean floor.

Although the earthen plate shattered into smaller pieces upon impact, the large metal wall was also ripped apart like thin paper. The powerful shockwave also knocked out countless Celestials soldiers.

Some of their incapacitated bodies were quickly buried under the immense weight of the earth, while others were dragged out into the open by the strong ocean current.

"This... This terrible!"

Several survivors paled in horror after witnessing the aftermath of the destructive impact.

This was the biggest defeat in the history of their Celestial Kingdom!

Chapter 978: Recovering Aura By Force

When the Ocean Master observed the devastated silver wall and high death toll, he wore a grim and solemn expression. He could halt the sea monsters' advancement, but he could not stop their attacks from a distance.

Still, such a situation had never happened before.

It was as if the sea monsters had suddenly gained intelligence or had an intelligent being commanding them. Considering their sudden aggression, something was definitely going on!

"The defensive line has been broken! Everyone injured is to retreat to the second defensive line! Everyone else, assist the rescue effort and retrieve your comrades from under the rubbles!"

"Yes, Ocean Master!"

As the Celestial soldiers quickly carried out the tasks issued, the Ocean Master moved to the forefront with his trident to keep the sea monsters at bay.

Even so, the Ocean Master only stayed on the very edge of the border and didn't cross into the Outer Sea's domain, as if doing so might trigger the sea monsters' fierce retaliation.

He feared a Rank 8 Ocean Overlord could be lurking in the back of the sea monsters.

With the trident pointed at the Outer Sea, the Ocean Master tried to pierce through the veil of black toxic water with the golden light of the Conqueror's Aura. Unfortunately, his efforts failed to achieve its desired effect.

The toxic black seawater of the Outer Sea was more like ink; it wasn't darkness and, therefore, couldn't be dispelled by light. In fact, it even absorbed the light to a certain degree.

Nevertheless, the Ocean Master, like other Nauticans who have been reformed to adapt to the sea, relied on more than just their sight to "see" in the darkness of the deep sea.

As such, when the Ocean Master suddenly sensed the sea monsters splitting into two orderly rows to create a clear path between them, his eyes narrowed, and his body tensed up.

It was a subconscious reaction, considering he couldn't control the sea monsters unless they fully entered the Inner Sea.

Whoever commanded them in the Outer Sea had to be very dangerous.

"This..."

The Ocean Master's eyes widened in disbelief upon discovering a young land-dwelling man emerge from the pitch-black Outer Sea. The sea monsters also showed the person absolute loyalty.

"I-Impossible!" the Ocean Master instinctively denied the truth before him.

The land-dwelling humans were just weak primitives, incapable of greatness—Being the Celestial Kingdom's spirit farm doomed them to a life of mediocracy.

How could one of them command the sea monsters of the Outer Sea when even he couldn't? Maybe it was a sea monster with the ability to shapeshift into a human form?

Vaan stopped within 200 meters of the Ocean Master and eyed the Sea Warden's trident in his grip. After he sensed his familiar Boundless Sea and Sky Aura, he knew recovering it wouldn't be an issue.

He could feel the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura's desire to return to him due to the stronger resonance now that he was closer to the source.

The Boundless Sea and Sky Aura in him and the one inside the Sea Warden's trident were calling out to each other.

"Who are you? What do you want?" the Ocean Master interrogated, pulling the trident closer to himself.

While he could see that Vaan wasn't a Rank 8 entity, it didn't stop him from feeling wary.

"You have something that belongs to me. It's time that you return what your ancestors have stolen from the Sea God Temple."

"You want my trident? You must be dreaming! Do you think I will just hand it over obediently?!"

The Ocean Master glared at Vaan fiercely with ruthless killing intent. He realized Vaan might be someone from the Sea God Temple, here to reclaim its lost treasure.

However, that was something he absolutely couldn't allow to happen.

Although many Celestials have come to acknowledge the first-generation Ocean Master's mistake, no one could undo the sin of their ancestor. They could only continue it.

After all, if they lose the power of the trident, their Celestial Kingdom would lose its only means to resist the Sea God Temple's wrath.

Alas, the Ocean Master was wrong if he thought he had a choice.

"I wasn't asking," Vaan coolly stated.

Shortly after making a grasping gesture at the Sea Warden's trident, the Ocean Master immediately felt a tugging force competing to wrestle the silver treasure out of his grip.

"No!" the Ocean Master immediately tightened his grip, holding on with all his might.

His physical strength alone wasn't enough to resist the strong force of attraction on the trident. However, he had the support of his cultivation base, and that was more than enough.

Unfortunately, what was being pulled wasn't the silver trident itself but the unique aura trapped within it.

When the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura got drawn out of the Sea Warden's trident like countless golden silk threads, the Ocean Master felt the pulling force substantially weakened.

However, his eyes also widened in shock and horror.

"What!"

Under the Ocean Master's powerless yet enraged gaze, the Boundless Sea and Sky Aura sunk into Vaan's palm, becoming one with his body and soul.

In that instant, Vaan felt his Boundless Sea and Sky Aura strengthened by a level. But at the same time, he realized the additional aura wasn't part of his original Boundless Sea and Sky Aura.

While it might have seemed the same, it was also different on a fundamental level. It seemed to be one of the newer generations of Boundless Sea and Sky Aura created through the birth of Noble Beings.

Nevertheless, that didn't stop it from augmenting Vaan's existing Boundless Sea and Sky Aura. More importantly, he could also utilize the subtle differences in the aura to help him blend inside the Myriad Sea God Palace better.

Meanwhile, the Ocean Master stared at his silver trident, which seemed to have lost a crucial part of its existence. Without the Conqueror's Aura, the silver trident was just a strong weapon without special abilities.

"You!" the Ocean Master furiously pointed his finger at Vaan and condemned him, "Do you realize what you have done?! Without the Conqueror's Aura, my Celestial Kingdom will be doomed! Give it back!"

"The survival of your Celestial Kingdom doesn't concern me, so why should I?" Vaan replied nonchalantly.

"You—! Very good!" the Ocean Master spat furiously.

What Vaan said was true – The Celestial Kingdom had nothing to do with the land-dwellers.

However, that also simplified things.

Since the Ocean Master couldn't reason with words, he could only settle the problem with force!

Vaan's unknown control over the Conqueror's Aura was alarming, but he was still a trifling First-stage Divine Origin Realm being equivalent.

How dare he act so arrogant in front of a Ninth-stage Divine Star Realm expert!

Chapter 979: The Might of the Sea God Temple

After the Ocean Master reviewed the difference in their strength, he quickly calmed down. The trident might have lost its Conqueror's Aura, but that didn't mean he couldn't get it back.

In fact, he had to thank Vaan for being so arrogant yet so foolish.

Once the Ocean Master killed Vaan, he wouldn't just reclaim the trident's Conqueror's Aura but also take the new source of Conqueror's Aura on his body.

By then, all the sea monsters in the Outer Sea would finally be under his control!

As such, the Ocean Master stopped seeing Vaan as a disaster but as a blessing that had just fallen into his lap.

After all, Vaan was not hiding behind the powerful sea monsters right now. In fact, the sea monsters were quite far from him. On the other hand, there was only a short 200 meters between him and the Ocean Master.

The Ocean Master figured that his high cultivation base was wasted if he couldn't catch or kill a mere First-stage Divine Origin Realm equivalent being within such a short distance.

"Young Man, you are too arrogant. Unfortunately, you are also equally foolish—!"

Before the Ocean Master even finished speaking, he suddenly struck out with an underhanded sneak attack. The powerful divine art he used rapidly compressed divine energy and seawater before shooting out a lightning-swift manifestation of a furious water dragon.

Divine Art – Dragon Devouring the Sea!

The furious water dragon rushed toward Vaan with overwhelming momentum and force in a bid to smash him into a meat paste. Even if he avoided the collision course, the violent undercurrent behind it would rip his body to shreds like a million wind blades.

Although the Ocean Master acknowledged it was shameless of him to use his full might, a sneak attack no less, against a weakling First-stage Divine Origin Realm equivalent being, his face was trivial compared to his righteous cause.

For the survival of the Celestial Kingdom, all methods were permitted, and no shame was too much.

It was impossible for a mere First-stage Divine Origin Realm equivalent being to avoid his all-out sneak attack – was what the Ocean Master thought.

However, reality proved quite differently.

Peng!

Just as the violent surge of divine energy-infused seawater was about to reach Vaan, an even more powerful mana barrier suddenly shielded him from it. The water dragon instantly scattered in different directions without so much as a scratch on the mana barrier.

"What!" the Ocean Master's eyes widened with disbelief.

His absolute confidence shattered along with his broken divine art. He still couldn't comprehend how the mana barrier appeared.

Given Vaan's cultivation, he couldn't have conjured such a powerful barrier.

Either someone or something was secretly helping him, or he was using a divine treasure far superior to the Sea Warden's trident.

"What did you do?!" the Ocean Master barked with alarm, eyes darting around to identify the source of Vaan's protection.

However, Vaan didn't see the need to explain the intricacy of the Sea God Temple to someone who tried to kill him with underhanded means.

"Are you in a hurry to reincarnate? Since we are done here, you can die now," Vaan indifferently uttered.

With a downward wave of his hand, the miniature Sea God Temple immediately sprung forward, rapidly expanding in minute bursts like pulses. With each pulsation, the Sea God Temple grew incomparably larger.

On the fifth pulse, the Sea God Temple was already as big as the earthen plate that smashed away the silver wall, if not bigger.

By the seventh pulse, the Ocean Master and the surviving Celestial soldiers felt endless despair. With just seven quick clicks, there was already nowhere to escape.

Boom!

The humongous Sea God Temple smashed into the seabed with stupendous amounts of weight and force like a true celestial body dropping down from the heavens.

Everything beneath it was flattened into the second dimension. No one below the Divine Lord level could have avoided getting crushed to death by the heavenly hammer.

It was as if Doomsday had descended.

The sea floor split apart with vast cracks stretching deep into the earth, while the aftermath of the shock could be felt across the continent and eight Inner Seas in waves.

The Celestial Kingdom's Moonwater City was only situated 400km away from the epicenter of the shock. Thus, even it wasn't spared from the violent tremors as it got turned upside down.

Moonwater City suffered 70% damage to its surface infrastructure, 30% damage to its cultivation layer, and roughly 2% damage to its deep earth layer. The series of earthquakes only caused more destruction to buildings than people.

However, the seawater that poured through the large cracks and flooded the cultivation layer was enough to cause the entire Moonwater City to quake with fear.

If the seawater also breached the deep earth layer and flooded the Residential Zone, nearly 90 million residents would drown to death if they couldn't make it to the flood shelters, which had never been used.

...

When Vaan retrieved the shrunk Sea God Temple and confirmed the pancaked Ocean Master's death, he also retrieved the intact Sea Warden's trident. It was surprisingly sturdy.

Despite limiting the power of the Sea god Temple, it still caused such widespread devastation. If he had used its full power, the planet itself might not have been able to survive the earth-shattering blow.

This Half-step True Divinity-rank treasure was truly fearsome.

Vaan's low cultivation base did not restrict the Sea God Temple's potential. Its only limitation was its great appetite for mana.

With just a single usage of [Barrier] and [Expand] at the Divine Lord level, he had consumed over two million units of pure mana. Even true Divine Lords couldn't have been so extravagant with their mana.

The Sea God Temple was extremely powerful but also extremely wasteful.

Vaan realized that his recent refill of pure mana was nowhere near enough to last the Sea God Temple for a while. Its energy consumption was just ridiculously high.

Fortunately, it was connected to an endless source of pure mana and could be refilled anytime.

Furthermore, Vaan did not intend to use the Sea God Temple for offensive purposes again unless absolutely necessary. Its destructive capabilities were just too frightening.

Friendly fire would be difficult to avoid.

Chapter 980: First Death Over Sunpeak City

Inside the floating castle above Vladigold City, Kemun couldn't stop shaking with fear. Although he could recognize his Lord's appearance, there was something very off with his aura.

It was almost like his Lord had become a completely different person.

However, during their interactions, there were also times when he felt like his Lord had returned to his original self. The change between the two auras confused him.

"You did well coming here to inform me, Kemun. You can return now," Valefor coolly stated.

With a casual swipe of his hand, the Asura Law split open a spatial rift to Pangea, allowing Kemun to return in the shortest time.

"Then, I will head off first, my Lord," Kemun obediently took his leave.

Although Valefor didn't say what he planned to do with the news of the Celestial Kingdom's impending attack, Kemun trusted he would do something about it. In fact, he could only trust that was the case.

Valefor's terrifying aura compelled him to avoid asking useless questions and wasting his time.

After Kemun left through the spatial rift, Valefor's eyes beamed with interest.

"The Celestial Kingdom, huh? To think that such a strong, hidden civilization would decide to attack the land in this timeline..." Valefor muttered thoughtfully before snickering with amusement.

"This foolish civilization should have just continued hiding in its turtle shell. But since it has decided to come out and throw a fit, it'll make a nice warmup for my war on Nightmare."

"This life sure is interesting," Valefor smiled coldly.

In his eyes, the Celestial Kingdom was already a dead civilization, and its people were free slaughter energy for his Asura Law. Since they were his free slaughter energy, he was also not interested in sharing it with others.

However, he also understood that he would be blamed if he failed to defend the UN from the Celestial Kingdom's assault.

As such, Valefor immediately summoned three Vampire Lords to his floating castle and instructed them to gather troops without any specifications. He didn't care who they chose to enlist in the army and also promised they would have blood to drink.

They were only there to make up the numbers and be meat shields. Their role was to defend, not to attack.

The killing was his to enjoy.

Nevertheless, given such short notice, there were only so many troops the three Vampire Lords could round up in a short time. As such, Valefor deployed them to Pangea ahead of time after they passed the enlistment task to their subordinates.

"Your enemy is the Celestial Kingdom. Don't mistake the blue-skinned humans for any other humans. If I catch wind of a single UN human getting blood-sucked, I will look for you."

"U-Understood, Heavenly Devil."

The three Vampire Lords all trembled with fear after hearing Valefor's reminder.

Valefor only said he would look for him, but it was scarier than saying he would kill them because it left them room for imagination.

...

Black Rose Empire

After Kemun returned to Sunpeak City, he was immediately bombarded with questions. Everyone hoped that he had brought them good news.

"How was your trip to the Evernight Territory, Lord Kemun? Did the vampires agree to send reinforcements?"

"I didn't meet the Vampire Lords, but I found Lord Vaan, which is even better. It's just that..."

"Just what...?"

"Forget it. You'll understand once you see the Lord."

Kemun decided not to explain what he felt from meeting Valefor. It wouldn't be good for him if he were mistaken for talking bad about his Lord.

Sometime later, the scheduled three hours were up, and the time of the Celestial Kingdom's planned attack arrived.

However, not even the shadows of Vaan or vampiric reinforcements were spotted. Even so, no one in Sunpeak City felt abandoned or despaired. They could only do their best to defend the Heavenreacher whilst clinging to their faith.

...

Meanwhile, the Cloud Fortress Leader gathered his subordinates to the edge of the Cloud Fortress, preparing to set off.

"The time has come, everyone," the Cloud Fortress Leader announced before stating with anticipation, "Today, these primitive land-dwellers will learn to fear us! We will make history and send them back to the stone age! For the glory of the Celestial—"

"Wait, Lord Dhayu! The land-dwellers appear to be aware of our plan! Their city is on high alert! Take a look at their security!" a blue-skinned Celestial quickly pointed out.

"Hm?" Lord Dhayu scrutinized the situation on the surface with a frown before he dismissed it, "It matters not. These trifling land-dwellers are too weak to withstand our might."

"However, since they are aware of us, we will change our plans slightly," Lord Dhayu thought.

Originally, they were supposed to invade the Heavenreacher and seize control of it with lightning-fast methods before attracting all of the enemy's attention. Since the enemy already knew about their operation, they only needed to switch it up a bit.

"Someone needs to attack the city and cause widespread destruction. Any volunteers?"

"Me! I will do it, Lord Dhayu!"

Everyone instantly volunteered, full of energy and eagerness, the moment the Cloud Fortress Leader raised the question.

In their hearts, flexing their power on the weak city was much more fun than seizing the Heavenreacher.

"Good!" the Cloud Fortress Leader called Lord Dhayu exclaimed.

Shortly after picking out half of his elite group, he immediately ordered them to attack Sunpeak City.

"Go!"

Swish!

Two dozen excited blue-skinned Celestials in the Divine Origin Realm immediately leaped off the edge of the Cloud Fortress, nose-diving toward the human city. They raced each other to reach Sunpeak City.

Naturally, the Ninth-stage Divine Origin Realm Celestial was the fastest in the group. He took the lead by a huge margin.

"Hehe, see you guys there—"

Splat!

Everything took an abrupt change when the Ninth-stage Divine Origin Realm Celestial instantly killed himself by bashing his head into a Divine Lord-level barrier—that only revealed itself upon contact.

The strong impact sent ripples of green light across the invisible dome that covered Sunpeak City.

"Stop—!!!"

One of the Celestials in the rear cried in horror while halting his high-speed flight, risking self-inflicted injuries in the process.

The scene of the Ninth-stage Divine Origin Realm Celestial splattering into a meat paste against the powerful barrier was just too horrifying. It was like a moth striking the windscreen of a speeding supercar.

The Ninth-stage Divine Origin Realm Celestial did not even know how he died. The last thing that went through his head was his ass.