

The Witch 981

Chapter 981: The Celestials Tremble With Fear

In the forest on the eastern outskirts of Sunpeak City, Elder Willowthorn immediately expressed his regret after seeing his barrier had killed someone.

"Ah, Holy Mother, I have sinned..." Elder Willowthorn began praying to redeem himself.

After getting thrown out of the Profound Pearl of Life, Valefor instructed him to silently protect Sunpeak City and the Heavenreacher without alerting the Celestial Kingdom.

Originally, Elder Willowthorn didn't see a problem with this. He was only asked to protect and not to kill. Alas, he couldn't stop others from throwing themselves head-first into his barrier and killing themselves.

Hopefully, the rest of the Celestials had learned from this.

...

Meanwhile, the patch of meat paste and blood on the invisible barrier was like a hammer nailing a stake into the hearts of the Celestials, shattering their confidence and instilling fear.

Lord Dhayu was about to command the remaining half of his elite group to invade the Heavenreacher when he witnessed the horrifying yet pathetic state of his strongest subordinate.

After feeling a chill run down his spine, he felt shame and anger.

How could a Ninth-stage Divine Origin Realm expert die so pathetically? How strong could the barrier be?

"Fools! Why aren't you all guarding yourselves with divine energy?!" Lord Dhayu barked furiously.

Instead of feeling regret and loss, he felt greatly ashamed. Such a pathetic way to die was a big stain on his record. He would never be able to wipe it off if word of it spread to his peers.

After recovering from their shock and horror, the Divine Origin Realm Celestials covered themselves in thick divine energy and used divine arts and spells to destroy the sturdy barrier.

Every strike caused big ripples of green energy on the barrier's surface, but not a single crack was created.

"What kind of magic barrier is this? Why is it so strong?! Since when were the Land-Dwellers this capable?!"

"Something is very wrong! We should retreat and reassess the situation! The Land-Dwellers shouldn't have such a high-level barrier!"

"Nonsense! We can only retreat if Lord Dhayu gives us the order! Do you want to be labeled as a deserter? Put some more effort into breaking the barrier! Even if it's very strong, its energy shouldn't be infinite!"

Although the green barrier alarmed the Celestials, they soon glared at it with bloodshot eyes like it was their mortal enemy. They used every skill and weapon in their arsenal to break the barrier.

However, no matter what they used, they failed to inflict any damage.

Lord Dhayu's eyes flickered with a fierce glint before eyeing the Heavenreacher on the mountain next to Sunpeak City. Since the barrier over Sunpeak City was so strong, the Heavenreacher's protection had to be weaker!

He immediately led the second half of his elite group to launch an assault on the giant tower.

With his First-stage Divine Star Realm cultivation, he refused to believe he couldn't break the barrier. Even if the Great Devils of Gehenna personally reinforced the barrier, they wouldn't be able to stop him!

"Break for me!" Lord Dhayu roared, drawing out his precious spirit sword for a powerful downward slash.

Divine Sword Art – Heaven's Splitter!

Lord Dhayu struck down on the barrier with his azure spirit sword, fully augmented by his high cultivation base. The incredibly compressed divine energy infused in it threatened to split the sky and earth the moment it erupted explosively.

Even so, the barrier resisted the powerful sword slash, seemingly so effortlessly that it seemed simply unbreakable.

Ka-cha!

The azure spirit sword could not withstand the full might of Lord Dhayu's cultivation base and snapped in half. The pointed half rebounded off the barrier and stabbed into his left shoulder.

Boom!

Lord Dhayu was flung far away by his own power after clashing with the barrier, nearly losing his entire left arm in the process.

The unchangeable situation finally made him aware of reality. His pride and ego had blinded him from the danger.

"L-Lord Dhayu, are you alright?!"

"The barrier is impossible to break! Everyone, retreat—!"

Just as Lord Dhayu finally gave the order to retreat, a horrifying aura of slaughter filled the sky, suffocating everyone with its oppressive might.

Some distance away, the airspace was silently split apart by brute power, and Valefor stepped out from the other side.

His cold smile instantly sent a chill down everyone's spine and made them understand what true terror was. Just by seeing his presence, the Celestials couldn't help but tremble with fear.

They had encountered a murderous aura so thick in blood and slaughter that it had practically become a physical substance.

Just how much killing was needed to cultivate such an oppressive slaughter aura?

"Wait...!" Lord Dhayu's eyes widened as he recognized Valefor's appearance. "Y-You are Vaan Raphna! But that's impossible! You're supposed to be far in the Boundless Sea! You shouldn't have heard about this plan!"

"Well, you're not wrong," Valefor chuckled with amusement before saying, "But what makes you think such distance means anything to me?"

Valefor's question immediately silenced Lord Dhayu; he was unable to refute it.

Although it was a short period, Lord Dhayu seemed to have seen Gehenna on the other side of the spatial rift. Such means already placed Valefor far above the Great Devils.

The Great Devils required great preparations and time to create a dimensional connection between the realms, but Valefor only needed a single gesture.

Lord Dhayu couldn't even tell how strong Valefor was. However, he knew this killing star was definitely stronger than him. Only the Ocean Master might be able to match this person.

No!

Even the Ocean Master seemed inferior to this person!

"This is bad, very bad! Our information was completely wrong! Vaan Raphna's strength is far beyond our imagination! I must warn the three cities about this!" Lord Dhayu thought aloud.

However, just as Lord Dhayu retreated and took a spirit communication device, a soft breeze swept past him before he realized his entire arm had gone missing. Blood sprayed out of the open wound as the pain registered in his brain.

"Ahhh!!" Lord Dhayu clutched his shoulder painfully.

Meanwhile, Valefor remained in the same spot, having never seemingly moved.

However, Valefor held Lord Dhayu's missing arm, which still gripped the spirit communication device.

"What did you plan to do with this?" Valefor smiled slyly.

Chapter 982: Valefor's Brutality

"Lord Dhayu! Are you alright?" the Celestials quickly cried with shock and concern after seeing his armless state.

"Do I fucking look alright?!" Lord Dhayu furiously glared at them before barking, "Run! If you don't want to die, get the fuck as far away from here as possible! This monster is way beyond us!"

"But..."

While some Celestials hesitated due to their loyalty, the more decisive ones quickly fled at a moment's notice. Unfortunately, their wise choice was rewarded with swift deaths.

One correct choice did not make for three stupid ones.

A soft breeze brushed past them before their heads rolled off their bodies, severing their lives. Their motionless bodies helplessly plummeted to the surface.

Within Valefor's Killing Domain, the Celestials were greatly suppressed and moved at a snail's pace in his eyes. None of them could use their full strength, while Valefor's power was maximized.

It was like getting caught in a spider's net; the Celestials could only await their slaughter.

"You want to run? Did I say you can leave?" Valefor coldly uttered before stating, "No one is allowed to leave!"

"Your Excellency, we apologize for offending you. We didn't know—"

Lord Dhayu didn't finish speaking before Valefor interrupted him, "Don't be sorry. In fact, I want you all to offend me—the more, the better! If you want to live, do your best to kill me! That is the only way for you to live!"

The Celestials frowned at listening to Valefor's statement.

What the hell was wrong with this guy?

"Your Excellency, if you want to kill us, you can easily do so with your strength. Why do you need to toy with us?" Lord Dhayu frowned.

Even if they were opponents, there was no need to humiliate one another.

"Because I want to see you struggle with all your might. Hate me. Be angry with me. Your enmity is my nourishment," as Valefor said this, he made a grasping gesture for the weakest Celestial.

The Fifth-stage Divine Origin Realm Celestial helplessly flew into Valefor's death grip under the oppressive guidance of asura power. Right after, Valefor viciously tore off his left arm.

"Arghhh!" the Fifth-stage Divine Origin Realm Celestial cried in pain.

The other Celestials' expression turned ugly. However, they didn't recklessly try to save their captured comrade. As such, Valefor tore off the other arm.

"Arghhh!!!" the Fifth-stage Divine Origin Realm Celestial cried again, but Lord Dhayu and his subordinates remained unmoved.

"Bastard, let him go!" an angry Celestial demanded, trembling with the urge to pounce on Valefor.

Valefor glanced at him and coolly asked, "What's the matter? Why won't you save your comrade? At this rate, he won't have any limbs left."

"Arghhh!!!"

Following a third scream, the Fifth-stage Divine Origin Realm Celestial lost his left leg. Everyone's eyes became bloodshot with rage when they saw their comrade's painful despair turn to emptiness.

A cultivator without their limbs was basically a useless cripple, no matter how great their cultivation.

"Everyone, let's kill this fucking animal!" these words did not come from Lord Dhayu's mouth.

However, everyone acted on it, even Lord Dhayu himself. They could no longer tolerate Valefor's despicable actions.

Although Valefor's existence incited their fear of death, they feared humiliation even more. They were proud Celestials. If they were going to die, they had to at least die with dignity.

They couldn't let Valefor continue to humiliate them.

"Kill him!" Lord Dhayu roared.

Countless sharp spirit weapons and piercing divine spells aimed at Valefor's "lethal" spots. Unfortunately, none of them successfully reached their mark.

Valefor used the one-legged Celestial to shield all the incoming blows, turning his limb-severed body into a severely mutilated corpse. He didn't die from severed limbs but due to the fatal attacks of his own comrades.

"Hoh, you guys sure are vicious. Poor guy got killed by the very comrades he hoped to save him," Valefor softly chuckled before tossing the lifeless corpse aside like he was throwing away the trash.

While everyone was slightly stunned by the turn of events, Valefor disappeared from their sight. A brief moment later, a painful scream came from the distance. Valefor returned with a legless Celestial who had secretly fled.

"Ahh, noo! Save me, Lord Dhayu! I don't want to die!" the legless Celestial pleaded fearfully and desperately.

But when Lord Dhayu recognized the legless Celestial, his expression instantly darkened. The legless Celestial was the original speaker who encouraged everyone to attack.

He had actually used them to buy himself time to escape. Alas, his devious plan fell through. He couldn't escape Valefor's clutches.

Furthermore, his selfish desertion earned his comrades' wrath; they were completely furious and disappointed in his betrayal.

"Bastard!"

Lord Dhayu shot a divine water arrow straight through the legless Celestial's forehead and exploded his entire head.

Once again, another Celestial was killed by their kind. This time, however, it was intentional. The legless Celestial's cowardice and treachery warranted immediate execution.

"Kekeke, you can't blame this one on me, though I don't mind if you do," Valefor's joyful delight sounded.

As bloodshot eyes of rage and hate focused on Valefor, he relished the moment like he was tasting the sweetness of nectar. This was what he wanted—though not quite satisfied yet.

He needed their animosity to be even stronger.

Only after their strong feelings toward him reached their peak would he be able to harvest the most slaughter energy from killing them.

"Yes, yes. Hate me more. Give me your best shot... Why are your attacks so weak? Did you even eat...?"

"What kind of flimsy fist is this? You call that a punch? Even my younger brother hits harder than this..."

"How can you act so mad when you are so blue? I'm curious, though. Is the third leg between your legs also blue? No, does it even still exist...?"

...

As Valefor antagonized the Celestials, he eventually tortured each one to death, using the cruelest methods to incur their anger, hatred, and indignance. He played them all to death, leaving Lord Dhayu last to kill.

When Lord Dhayu drew his last breath without a shred of energy or limb left, his eyes remained open, glaring at Valefor with endless resentment and unwillingness.

He prayed he could become a vengeful spirit and haunt Valefor for life.

However, Valefor didn't give him that chance; his soul was enslaved, becoming part of Valefor's slaughter aura like the rest.

Meanwhile, Valefor's cruelty was on full display above Sunpeak City. It wasn't just Celestials who feared him; even humans and dragons had come to fear him.

No one expected "Vaan" to commit such brutality.

Chapter 983: First Spark of War

Within the past half hour, Henrietta and the others gathered inside Sunpeak City had experienced a rollercoaster of emotions. They were prepared to give up their lives defending the region when they failed to hear further news from Vaan and Gehenna.

However, everything changed the moment they witnessed the city-wide barrier kill the first Celestial that flew into it at breakneck speed. That was when they knew everything was under Vaan's control.

Even so, they never imagined Vaan could deploy such a powerful barrier or had someone capable of such a feat on his side.

Still, they were overjoyed by the pleasant surprise; that single barrier smashed away all the heavy burdens weighing down on their hearts and shoulders. Even the Red Dragons couldn't have imagined that they would have such an outcome.

It was not long ago that they struggled to deal with a Great Devil, and yet they easily handled a Celestial comparable to one.

When Valefor emerged and cruelly toyed the remaining Celestials to death, everyone's understanding and impression of Vaan underwent an earth-shaking change. They couldn't believe he was still the same person they knew.

His bottomless aura of blood and death was completely shocking—especially to Henrietta and the other witches.

An instinctive fear sprouted from the deaths of their soul, and unfamiliar visions of their death suddenly appeared. The scenes were so vivid in their minds that they couldn't just pass them off as mere illusions born out of fear.

Why did they have such visions? What did this all mean?

For a moment, Henrietta and the others did not know what to think of Valefor. They didn't dare to approach him even after he slew the last Celestial. His character and aura were just too different.

Moreover, they weren't something that could have been cultivated overnight.

'Stay away from him, Henrietta. That man is very dangerous. He is Vaan. But at the same time, he is not Vaan.'

'What do you mean, Master?'

'It's hard to explain. I can't fully understand it myself. It appears to be Vaan's soul, but the character, aura, and experiences are not his own. Anyway, just stay away from him for now. I need to observe him a bit longer.'

'Alright.'

Henrietta didn't object to her master's decision.

Valefor's aura and actions were so horrifying and concerning that everyone feared for their lives, even if they believed they were on the same side.

When the Celestial was getting toyed to death by Valefor, they had long thrown away the title they had given him—Great Devil Slayer. Valefor was not the Great Devil Slayer but someone more cruel and fearsome than the Great Devils themselves.

He might as well be the Great Devil Emperor.

...

Nevertheless, Valefor did not know the people and dragons in the Sunpeak Region currently thought of him. After cleaning up the last Celestial, he felt like he had forgotten something.

As such, he scavenged the Celestials' corpses for his loot and spoils of war before finding the spirit communication device that Lord Dhayu had intended to use to warn the Celestial Kingdom.

"This must be some sort of communication used to contact other Celestials... But why is its design so complex and fragile? A lot of buttons are already broken... How do I even use this?"

Valefor frowned as he studied the spirit communication device. The characters written on the broken keys appeared to be in the native language of the Celestial Kingdom.

...

Somewhere in the Northwestern Sea, the five million-strong Celestial Army of Blackshell City hid on the seafloor, just twenty kilometers off the coast of the Holy Knight Empire and the Scarlet Flame Kingdom.

Besides the Celestial Army, a hundred million-strong Emperor Crabs from the Emperor Crab Clan had also been gathered to lead the charge.

Despite their great numbers, most of the Emperor Crabs were weak and small, like ordinary crustaceans. Only a smaller fraction were considered true Emperor Crabs—as big as mountains and as strong as Demigods.

Within the ranks of the Celestial Army, the Blackshell General frowned as he stared at the screen of his spirit communication tablet.

Various data and information were displayed in real time, allowing him to see that the secret operation in the Black Rose Empire's Sunpeak Region had already started.

At the very least, the spirit energy fluctuation recordings proved the Celestials were fighting there.

A similar scene was happening with the Razorfin General and Tidalson General in their respective armies and locations.

"What's going on? It's been half an hour since the independent team initiated contact with the enemy. Why hasn't Sir Dhayu given us the signal yet?"

Just as the three Celestial Generals were wondering this, a text from Lord Dhayu finally appeared on their screen.

[Gu.]

"Gu?"

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

Although the three Celestial Generals finally received a response from Lord Dhayu since the start of the operation, none of them could decipher the meaning of the two-letter word even after wracking their brains.

[Gugugaga.]

"Gugugaga...?"

"What the fuck is this shit, a baby talking?"

"Is Sir Dhayu fucking messing around with us on such an important occasion?!"

The three Celestial Generals' expressions darkened at the sight of the new message.

"Maybe he forgot to lock the tablet, and it's punching keys randomly in his pockets..." a Celestial Captain suspected.

"..."

[Gogogo!]

A third message soon appeared, finally casting light on everyone's confusion.

"Go! It was saying go! That fucker was trying to tell us to go! Fuck, the pressure must be very great on Sir Dhayu's side if he doesn't even have the luxury of time to correct his typos!"

"All troops, advance! Raze every city you see and kill everyone in sight!"

After the three Celestial Generals eagerly gave their orders from their respective locations, the Celestial Armies of Blackshell City, Razorfin City, and Tidalson City immediately surged forward with full momentum.

Their great momentum brought the sea with them—a tall fifteen-meter-high tidal wave crashed into the shores of the Holy Knight Empire, the Scarlet Flame Kingdom, and the Everwinter Kingdom north of the Great Ratholos Empire's northeasternmost region.

All human settlements born of wood and stone along the three coastal regions were quickly wiped out and washed away in the strong tidal water.

The first spark of war had been lit.

Chapter 984: The Dreadful Asura Flames

Holy Knight Empire, Northwestern Coastline

As the receding seawaters drew the broken stones and splintered wood into the Boundless Sea, the Blackshell Army emerged on the wet beach with a large swarm of Emperor Crabs.

The famished sea of Emperor Crabs excitedly scavenged through the rubble ruins of the coastal cities and towns. However, they could hardly find any human corpses to feast on.

Ordinary people couldn't have survived the powerful sweeping tidal wave, but even they should have left behind bodies. There was no reason for a coastal city of more than a hundred thousand people only to have a few hundred corpses.

In fact, there was far more human food than human bodies in the coastal ruins. A comparison was not needed at all. The difference could be clearly seen at a glance.

There was so little human meat that the Emperor Crabs fought each other over them.

"Why are there so few people?" the Blackshell General frowned.

Despite taking over the coastline in a single move, the Blackshell General felt unhappy with the achievement. The destruction of the coastal city didn't mean anything if its population wasn't killed with it.

Where did most of the people go? Did they know the plan and evacuate beforehand?

The Blackshell General's doubt was spot on.

Although three hours was not a lot of time, it was still enough for Astoria to alert her empire's coastal cities and order an evacuation. With the Red Dragon Clan's help, it was far too easy to relocate entire cities of population.

Unfortunately, that was it—evacuate the people.

There was no time for anything else. The people had to abandon everything they owned in the coastal cities and couldn't bring anything that would slow them down.

Although Astoria planned to send disaster relief to help the victims get back on their feet after the war, it did not stop the old and stubborn from standing their ground. They preferred to live and die with their homes.

As such, they gladly stayed behind and welcomed the disaster.

Astoria could not save those who did not wish to save themselves. No, it should be said that she could save those who sought to die.

...

Ten kilometers inland from the coastal city, a defensive line was formed with imperial soldiers and holy knights. A defensive barrier was also erected to ward off the seawater in case it reached them.

However, their worries were for naught.

The fifteen-meter-tall tidal wave did not come close to reaching their defensive line, which was found on higher ground. In fact, the tidal wave only swept as far as two kilometers inland,

It was just a single wave brought by the Celestial Army. There was only so much seawater it could bring with it.

A large celestial object falling into the Boundless Sea from heaven would generate far more damage than what the Celestial Army could conjure with its troops.

Gilbert Vuron, the Twelfth Progenitor, was in charge of watching over the Holy Knight Empire's coast with his small army of twenty thousand vampiric soldiers. It was what he could gather in a short time.

Originally, he thought it was enough.

After all, how powerful could the people of Pangea be?

Alas, Gilbert Vuron had thought wrong. When he observed the flooded coast in the distance, he knew his twenty thousand vampires weren't enough, and his own strength was severely inadequate.

He could sense auras that were even more powerful than their strongest Great Devil. Moreover, such auras were at least in the dozens. As for auras on par with him, they were in the thousands.

"What the hell did I get myself into?" Gilbert Vuron muttered to himself.

There was simply no way he could hold back the Celestial Army, even if he teamed up with the local humans. Even so, he did not dare to flee since he was even more afraid of the Heavenly Devil.

Behind the defensive line, humans were still getting evacuated as the imperial army aided the officials in moving them to other cities.

As such, Gilbert Vuron had no choice but to hold his ground.

Meanwhile, the Blackshell Army of the Celestial Kingdom eventually grasped the situation after taking over the coast.

"General, we have located large groups of humans ten kilometers inland. It seems they were alerted of our attack and evacuated the city beforehand."

"I thought as much. Rally the troops. There's nothing of value here. We will continue to advance and sweep away the humans inland."

"Yes, General!"

Once the Blackshell General gave his order, the Celestial soldiers quickly complied. They reorganized their ranks and also informed the Emperor Crab Clan to lead the advancement.

The Emperor Crabs had never been so far inland, but the sight of their large swarm running across the plains could chill the hearts of most people. They would leave behind wastelands in their wake.

Boom!

As they crawled their way to the human's defensive line, a sudden beam of black-red flames struck the middle of the Emperor Crab Clan's swarm. A scorching explosion erupted on impact, consuming thousands of Emperor Crabs in an instant.

However, the black-red flames were unlike anything the Celestials had ever seen. It didn't burn as much as it was corroding.

Anything touched by the black-red flames would disintegrate rapidly, like trillions of tiny bugs eating away at them. Moreover, the flames howled like countless vengeful spirits.

The scene of getting burned by these black-red flames was beyond dreadful and tragic.

Even the Emperor Crabs weren't immune to the terror of the devilish black-red flames after witnessing it once. They quickly fled away in fear.

"We're under attack!" a Celestial Commander quickly alerted.

The Blackshell General glanced up at the sky, where the black-red flames had descended. After squinting his eyes, he noticed a human figure clad in jet-black clothes hovering there.

"An expert!" the Blackshell General determined, eyes lighting up with fighting spirit.

However, his gaze quickly froze in shock when he witnessed the magnitude of Valefor's follow-up attack.

Countless swirling whirlpools of darkness appeared in the sky like tiny entrances to the underworld before arrows of Asura Flames fired from them. They rained death from above and brought hell to the Emperor Crabs.

"Take cover!!"

Chapter 985: Killing the Blackshell General

Following the Blackshell General's earth-shaking roar of warning, he quickly conjured a large-scale divine shield over the Celestial Army with his powerful cultivation base at the seventh stage of the Divine Star Realm.

At his level, it was far too easy to cover entire cities with his divine energy in an instant.

However, the Blackshell General had only covered the Celestial Army and didn't care about the Emperor Crabs.

To begin with, most Celestials at the Blackshell General's level would have been reluctant to use such a large-scale divine spell. After all, not only would it generate large spirit energy fluctuations, but it would also consume a lot of divine energy.

Alas, the Blackshell General never imagined that his powerful, large-scale barrier was as weak as thin paper in front of Valefor's Asura Flames.

When the arrow rain of Asura Flames struck the large-scale divine barrier, holes instantly appeared. A small portion of the Asura Flame Arrows scattered along the barrier's surface, gnawing away at its divine energy.

As for the rest of the Asura Flame Arrows, they continued to rain down on the horrified Celestial soldiers.

"Ahhh!"

Horrific screams resounded as Valefor's dreadful Asura Flames incinerated the vulnerable Celestial soldiers. Even being burned alive by other flames wouldn't produce such terrible and agonized screams.

No, they were being burned and eaten by the Asura Flames at the same time.

Regardless of the defenses the Celestial soldiers put up to defend themselves, it was all useless in front of the unstoppable Asura Flames—Their divine spells turned into nothingness while their spirit tools were reduced to trash.

The Emperor Crab Clan's side was even more tragic.

Millions of its kind got decimated in a single brief barrage. There were simply too many Emperor Crabs to avoid the thousand falling arrows of Asura Flames.

The one-sided slaughter instantly shook the Blackshell General.

With his proud cultivation base at the seventh stage of the Divine Star Realm, he didn't believe the Great Devils could rival him, even if they stepped into Pangea.

However, he also recognized that Valefor's Asura Flames could only be something from Chaos, even if he didn't know who he was. Valefor's familiar appearance did cross his mind, but he failed to connect it to the Great Devil Slayer called Vaan Raphna.

The gap in the information between the two was just too great for him to force the connection.

Even if they looked the same, few would believe they were the same people.

"W-Wait, Your Excellency!" the Blackshell General pleaded to Valefor, saying, "You must not be from around here. There's no need for you to participate in this conflict. Please, this is Pangea's issue. We didn't come here to fight you."

"No, you came here to die," Valefor indifferently replied, continuing his slaughter.

Against the non-sentient Emperor Crabs, Valefor did not even bother antagonizing them to maximize his harvest of slaughter energy. After all, talking to them would be like talking to a brick wall.

On the other hand, while the Celestial Army had many experts for Valefor to exploit, he didn't have the luxury of time to deal with them slowly since he had to deal with all three battlefronts simultaneously.

"W-Wait!" the Blackshell General cried.

Valefor indifferently waved his hand in the sky, and a giant palm of Asura Flames descended on the Blackshell General. He had to take out the head to cripple the Celestial Army's chain of command.

The Blackshell General immediately sensed the overwhelming power of annihilation from the incoming hand of black-red flames, and every cell in his body screamed danger.

As such, the Blackshell General quickly fled away from the Celestial Army, abandoning his soldiers despite knowing that such an attack would wipe them out.

However, Valefor's Asura Palm did not continue to descend on the Celestial Army. Instead, he redirected its course and chased after the Blackshell General, even accelerating to catch up.

"Nooo!!" the Blackshell General howled in fear, sensing his imminent doom.

When the Blackshell General found himself at the crossroads of life and death, he no longer held back his reservations; he unleashed all the divine energy from his Divine World.

Swoosh!

The Blackshell General suddenly became overflowing with divine energy. The bluish energy that poured out of his body was so thick and concentrated that it was like heavy water.

When it expanded beyond his body, it was a sea hovering over the sky, except one formed from raw energy.

The divine energy rapidly transformed into a raging water dragon and rammed against Valefor's incoming Asura Palm.

However, the expected steam explosion resulting from the clash of fire and water did not occur. The two forces simply annihilated each other—or rather, the Asura Palm annihilated the water dragon.

The overbearing Asura Flames ate away at the water dragon while the latter received constant replenishment of divine energy to push back the Asura Palm.

The Blackshell General succeeded in stalling the Asura Palm, but only for a brief moment. When Valefor got slightly more serious, the Asura Palm quickly consumed the divine water dragon.

"No—!"

The Blackshell General gave one final short cry before disappearing to the unstoppable Asura Palm.

After the Celestial Army lost its general, Valefor did not even spare it a glance before slicing apart space to move to the next battlefield.

However, even after he left, a suffocating silence filled the ranks of the Celestial soldiers. A series of thunderous storms raged in their hearts and minds, crippling them with hesitation.

What were they supposed to do with their general gone? Who was going to give them orders? Were they supposed to keep fighting?

Even someone as powerful as their Blackshell General died a dog's death to that dreadful being.

Weren't they asking for complete annihilation by pressing the invasion?

When they initiated this war, they knew there would be a great slaughter. Unfortunately, they weren't the ones doing the slaughtering; they were the ones getting slaughtered!

"R-Retreat!"

A noble Celestial quickly fled before he even gave the order. He held the rank of three-star commander, but it was only acquired through powerful connections.

Nevertheless, another three-star Celestial Commander instantly pierced his head with a penetrating divine water art.

"Deserters deserve death! Who else dares to run?!"

Chapter 986: Celestials Looking For Answers

Following the three-star Celestial Commander's threatening warning, the eyes of the Celestial soldiers turned red with madness. The three-star Celestial Commander was basically forcing them to die.

Suddenly, the three-star Celestial Commander was pounced on by several fear-driven Celestial soldiers. The sneak attacks caught him off guard as he did not expect to be attacked by so many "comrades."

As such, the three-star Celestial Commander failed to protect himself with his superior cultivation base at the third stage of the Divine Star Realm.

His fate could only be described as tragic after getting ganged by a group of frenzied soldiers.

Who was he to stop them from retreating when even the Blackshell General tried to abandon them and run?

In front of that dreadful existence, everyone's basic instincts and desire to live were awakened. Even after Valefor's departure, his presence still lingered on the battlefield, gripping everyone's heart with an invisible hand like a death god.

They had experienced their fair share of danger but never something like this.

This... this was true terror.

After the three-star Celestial Commander was mauled to death by his troops, everyone's courage to flee grew, and several hesitant Celestial Commanders immediately ordered the retreat.

"Retreat! I will take responsibility for this order!" a five-star Celestial Commander shouted loudly and clearly, shortly adding, "Our retreat is fully justified! It was High Command that failed us!"

That's right!

Many Celestial soldiers found their own excuses to retreat after listening to the five-star Celestial Commander's statement.

High Command organized the invasion, but it had provided them with wrong or incomplete intel, resulting in their disastrous defeat. Even if they chose to retreat now, the burden of failure would be placed on High Command, not them.

As the Celestial Army of Blackshell City began to retreat, leaving behind the disorganized and terror-stricken Emperor Crabs, the imperial soldiers of the Holy Knight Empire cheered.

"The Celestials are retreating! Praise the Sun God!"

"Long live the Sun God!"

The Celestial Army had arrived on their shores with unstoppable force, but Valefor also appeared like a god and put them in their place. This was truly a prime example of ignorant infidels profaning god's land to incur the wrath of god.

"The Sun God has already solved our biggest problem! However, it would be too light of a punishment to allow these infidels to leave like this! We must kill as many of them as we still can!"

"Charge!" an Imperial Commander roared, rushing ahead of the defensive line.

No matter how strong the Celestials were, they had already lost their will to fight. Fleeing targets with their backs exposed were much more vulnerable.

Many imperial soldiers and holy knights shared the Imperial Commander's thoughts. Thus, they didn't hesitate to join the charge beyond the safety of their defensive line.

Nevertheless, between the Imperial Army and the Celestial Army was a sea of disorganized Emperor Crabs.

Compared to the disciplined and battle-hardened Celestial soldiers, the Emperor Crabs were far weaker, ignoring their scary numbers. Still, that made them much easier to deal with.

No one would blame the Imperial Army for not trying to end the Celestial Army when the sea of Emperor Crabs obstructed them.

Most of the Emperor Crabs were just newly-born offsprings of Demigod-rank Emperor Crabs; they were no bigger than adult bathtubs and strength no higher than Rank 2.

That said, whilst their strength was low, their defense was still high.

As such, the Imperial Army still had a hard time cutting through their ranks despite their obvious advantage and momentum. If they weren't careful, even the claws of a Rank 2 Emperor Crab could pinch a Rank 3 Holy Knight in half.

"After today, it'll be an all-you-can-eat crab buffet, Brothers! Crabs will be back on the menu!" an Imperial Captain roared excitedly.

Strangely enough, the imperial soldiers had a different source of motivation besides the obvious advantage on their side.

Emperor Crabs were rare delicacies due to the high energy and protein content of their meat. Everyone desired them, but not everyone could enjoy them due to the high difficulty of catching them.

After all, to anger even one Emperor Crab was to anger its entire colony. They were never alone.

Besides the Imperial Army, Gilbert Vuron led his vampire army around the Emperor Crabs to attack the fleeing Celestial Army.

Although blue-skinned Celestials looked unappetizing, their blood quality was clearly much higher than most humans. The Heavenly Devil did not lie to him about enjoying a blood feast.

Just the Celestial bodies that littered the battlefield were more than enough to stuff them all full, even if they didn't give chase to the fleeing Celestial Army.

Of course, it did hurt to work for more blood.

...

After the Sea God Temple's earth-shaking attack sent seismic tremors across the eight seas, Moonwater City was the first to contact the Ocean Master to learn the situation.

However, they received radio silence.

In fact, contact with the Southern Border had been completely cut off. No matter who the Moonwater Lord tried to contact, no one from the Southern Border responded to his call.

It was as if the entire Southern Border had disappeared.

Thanks to the Celestial Kingdom's advanced technology, it wasn't difficult for the other eleven hidden cities to pinpoint the precise location of the source of the seismic tremor.

When they discovered it came from the Southern Sea, they, too, attempted contact with the Ocean Master and Southern Border via their spirit communication technology. But alas, without an exception, they also received radio silence.

"What the hell happened in the Southern Sea? What exactly caused such a powerful earthquake? Why can't we contact the Ocean Master or Southern Border? Who can give me an answer?"

"We just connected through to Moonwater City, my Lord. It seems there were some problems with its communication line due to its proximity to the earthquake. Ah! We just received words from Moonwater City."

"What did Moonwater City say?" the Fanghorn Lord asked.

"Moonwater City... It doesn't know what happened either, my Lord. It seems no one does..."

The Fanghorn Lord couldn't help but frown with unease.

Such a strong earthquake had never been recorded in the long history of the Celestial Kingdom. As such, it could only be the product of unnatural causes. However, that was precisely his worry.

What could have generated such seismic shock?

Chapter 987: Openly Infiltrating Moonwater City

The twelve cities of the Celestial Kingdom faced a period of unease and uncertainty when they could not find the answers they sought. The Ocean Master's silence was a stake lodged in the hearts of the City Lords.

After all, the Ocean Master was situated at the Southern Border, where the seismic earthquake occurred.

As such, the City Lords could not help but consider the worst situation due to his silence.

Meanwhile, Vaan easily located Moonwater City in the Southern Sea after a brief search.

Originally, he figured he would have to rely on the sea monsters to scour the entire Southern Sea for it. After all, the Celestial Kingdom's hidden cities might have used advanced technologies to conceal themselves.

However, the Sea God Temple's mighty blow had created cracks in Moonwater City's defenses and ruined its concealment—allowing Vaan to detect its precise location.

Given the current level of his Astral God Divine Body, it wasn't too difficult for him to scour the entire Southern Sea. Unfortunately, that was also the limit of his physical senses.

If he could forge a Divine Soul of the same level, he didn't doubt he could scour the entire planet's surface instantly with his mind's eye. Cultivators of spirit energy would call it Divine Sense.

Divine Sense was simply that much stronger than physical senses.

Vaan thought about visiting the Iron-Scaled Shark Clan but ultimately decided to infiltrate Moonwater City first.

Moonwater City was also found in a trench region, a long split on the ocean floor that looked like the opening to a bottomless abyss, infinitely dark and treacherous.

Marine life subconsciously avoided the dark trench because they felt uncomfortable entering the sea region. This was due to the Celestial Kingdom's sonar technology.

The weak yet high-pitched periodic sonar pulses emitted from the trench's depths were more irritating than damaging to sea life.

From a human's perspective, the sonar pulse to the sea creatures would be like hearing the screech of nails on the blackboard. Approaching the depths of the trench would experience stronger sonar pulses.

Still, Vaan hardly felt anything as he dived into its depths.

Unnatural deformities along the trench walls could be found as a result of the Sea God Temple's mighty attack.

In addition to the damage caused by the seismic tremor, tiny traces of Deep-Sea Steel were discovered, which suggested that the trench region was artificially created after the deposit of Deep-Sea Steel was emptied.

Given the rich deposit of Deep-Sea Steel found throughout the Boundless Sea, Vaan didn't believe the Celestial Kingdom would ignore its potential usage with its advanced technology.

As such, Vaan was slightly concerned over the Celestial Kingdom's potential arsenal of nuclear weapons. If it existed, he had to seize control of it all before the Celestial Kingdom had a chance to use it against the land.

At the bottom of the trench, the entrance to the first layer of Moonwater City was found along the walls, hidden behind a big pile of crumbled rocks and stones.

A large section of the trench walls had broken off to reveal that smooth silver wall.

Naturally, when Vaan arrived at the location, the military operating on the first layer of Moonwater City had already been alerted of his presence through their damaged surveillance system.

"Captain, there's an intruder right outside our city entrance! It's.. a Land-Dweller!"

"What did you say? A Land-Dweller? Here? At this ocean depth? Since when did the land have such a powerful...!"

The captain at the border garrison was suddenly startled when he thought of one person – Vaan Raphna, the Great Devil Slayer.

Normally, Vaan's name wouldn't have drawn much attention to the Celestials of Moonwater City. However, they had just recently experienced the greatest earthquake in history and lost contact with the Ocean Master and Southern Border.

As such, the timing of Vaan's appearance was too coincidental to be ignored.

The Garrison Captain couldn't help but have a bad feeling.

"Do I even need to say it? Since it's an intruder, we have to get rid of him! No Land-Dweller has ever set foot in—"

Rumble...!

The spacious passageway behind the silver wall suddenly shook, reaching all the way to the border surveillance room situated a short three kilometers away.

"W-What just happened?!"

"This is bad, Captain! The Land-Dweller just tore away the city gate with his bare hands like it was some piece of paper!"

The Garrison Captain almost fainted after hearing that.

The city gate was made of high-quality special alloy and was meant to be impervious to damage below the Divine Star Realm.

Had Vaan Raphna truly transcended such a level already? How could he advance so fast?!

Even Divine Inheritors did not grow so quickly!

"Quickly send out everyone to stall him! It would be even better if they could kill him! I permit the use of every city defense weapon!"

"But..."

"I'll bear the responsibility for any damage they might inflict on the city."

Moonwater City was still in the midst of repair due to the previous damage it suffered.

However, the Garrison Captain also knew the city defense weapons were their best tools in the absence of experts to hold the fort.

"Inform the City Lord and request for reinforcement! A single Divine Star Realm expert will not be enough to deal with Vaan Raphna!"

"U-Understood!"

Vaan Raphna was able to tear apart with city gate with his bare hands.

Whether it was down with brute strength or not, he had already proven he was stronger than ordinary Divine Star Realm experts.

The Garrison Captain had a reason to be anxious; the border surveillance room wasn't that far away.

...

Near the city entrance, the Celestial guards began suppressing Vaan with hydro turrets and firearms the moment they received the orders from their superiors.

"Die!"

Ratatatata!

Volleys of energized water beams landed on Vaan, pushing him back and almost breaching the physical defense of his heaven-defying body.

Surprisingly, the firepower was not inferior to the ones equipped at the Southern Border.

Nevertheless, despite their great firepower, they also possessed little resistance toward the power of laws and magic. Vaan clenched his fist and all their ranged weapons got crushed by the power of space and water.

Step, step, step...

Vaan slowly approached the border surveillance room. Several Celestial Guards gritted their teeth and steeled their hearts; they lunged at him with powerful spirit weapons.

Pak! Pak! Pak!

Alas, these Heaven Ascension Realm Celestials were no different from snails in Vaan's eyes.

With a series of slaps like he was waving away flies, the Celestial Guards either disappeared into a body of blood mist or became a patch of bloody meat paste on the silver walls in the distance.

Such low-level grubs simply could not stop him in the slightest.

Chapter 988: Divine Inheritors

Given Vaan's surprising visit, Moonwater City's military didn't have enough time to put up a strong defense – This was especially so when most of their experts had left to supervise the reconstruction of the three layers.

After all, Moonwater City was under the governance of the Moonwater Lord now, but it used to be tightly managed by the military like every other celestial city. The important facilities and infrastructure all required military-controlled knowledge and expertise.

As such, the city entrance was at its weakest point in security.

There were mostly Heaven Ascension Realm and Void Realm Celestial soldiers, a few Divine Origin Realm Celestial elites, and only one Divine Star Realm Celestial captain guarding the area.

While Vaan was mowing down the Celestials, who impeded his path, he suddenly had some doubts.

There was nothing wrong with the Void Realm Celestial soldiers. Due to their overwhelming gap in power, there was nothing they could do to him. Even so, the strength they demonstrated was how he expected Rank 5 Transcendent Beings to be.

Divine Origin Realm Celestial elites, on the other hand, seemed far weaker than ordinary Rank 6 Divine Beings.

They had the aura of the divine, but the power they exerted fell short of it.

Rank 6 Divine Beings were supposed to be god-like existences to most people in Pangea. But these Divine Origin Realm Celestial elites were only stronger than Demigods.

Once Vaan became curious about this contradiction, he immediately sought the reason by taking his time dealing with another Divine Origin Realm Celestial elite.

The ignorant Celestial soldiers cheered the Divine Origin Realm Celestial elite on like he was some battle god when they saw he could hold his ground against Vaan. The person himself did not expect to be so capable.

Unfortunately, the Divine Origin Realm Celestial elite began to think he was an even match for Vaan truly; his confidence inflated, and his attacks became more vigorous and flamboyant.

"Yeah—! Take him down, Sir Navas! You can do it—"

The excited cheers were suddenly cut short when the Divine Origin Realm Celestial elite tried to block another one of Vaan's chops with his arms—only to realize its overbearing brute strength.

"No—"

Rip...!

The Divine Origin Realm Celestial got split down the middle by Vaan's bare-handed chop. The arms he used to block the chop got severed along with his body.

Silence immediately drowned the area.

The entire fight between Vaan and the Divine Origin Realm Celestial elite only lasted a minute. However, it was enough time to raise the weaker Celestials' mood to heaven before dropping it back into the abyssal depths of hell.

Although Vaan didn't uncover the entire reason for the Divine Origin Realm Celestial elite's lack of power, he did find some clues.

For reasons unknown to him, the Divine Origin Realm Celestial elite could only draw out a small portion of the power within his inner Divine World. The blood vessels and pathways within his body weren't wide or strong enough to contain the full outflow of divine energy.

However, such a thing shouldn't be happening.

As far as Vaan was aware, when Void Realm experts complete the formation of their inner worlds and breakthrough into the Divine Origin Realm, their bodies would also undergo a qualitative transformation to accommodate the newly formed Divine World within themselves.

However, most of the Divine Origin Realm Celestials and even the Divine Star Realm Celestials he had encountered weren't like this. They all faced the same problem of being unable to draw out their full strength.

It was like the Divine Worlds didn't belong to them, so they had never received the qualitative transformation of their bodies into the divine.

After giving it some thought, Vaan realized what was going on.

It was also the only reason why the Celestial Kingdom could still have so many Rank 6 and Rank 7 Divine Beings. The spirit energy level of Pangea was too pitiful for the Celestials to produce new Divine Origin Realm experts even if they monopolized all of it.

After all, the spirit energy harvested from Pangea still had to be divided among their celestial cities and didn't focus solely on one Celestial.

Throughout the years, the Celestial Kingdom might have a few Void Realm experts achieve lucky breakthroughs into the Divine Origin Realm.

As for the Divine Star Realm? That was nearly impossible.

Divine Origin Realm experts were not immortal like the Divine Beings of Chaos; they could only live up to ten thousand years.

Given the Celestial Kingdom's long history on Pangea, it wouldn't be surprising if it had less than ten Divine Origin Realm experts. However, the truth was that it still had hundreds to thousands of Divine Origin Realm experts.

As such, there was only one answer for this – Divine Inheritance.

The Celestial Kingdom must have figured out a way to transplant the Divine Worlds of its predecessors into the younger bodies of their successors, allowing the younger generations to inherit the power of their ancestors.

However, it has also become clear to Vaan that such Divine Inheritances were imperfect since the Divine Inheritors failed to receive the same level of cultivation as the original predecessor of their Divine World.

Divine Inheritors only received a strong headstart in cultivation.

Vaan guessed that after receiving the Divine Inheritance, the Divine Inheritors would spend most of their time increasing their compatibility with their Divine Worlds.

Considering the Ocean Master was the ninth stage of the Divine Star Realm, he wondered if the Ocean Master had inherited the Divine World of a Divine Transformation Realm Ancestor.

He figured this was most likely the case.

In fact, he believed all late-stage Divine Star Realm Celestials were Divine Inheritors with Divine Transformation Realm Divine Worlds.

'So this is how the Celestial Kingdom preserved its strength?' Vaan mused.

Before long, Vaan reached the border surveillance room within the military district. He kicked open the thick metal door and was greeted with several horrified gazes.

A path of carnage had been left behind in his casual stroll from the city entrance.

When Vaan swept the nervous and terrified group with his gaze, the Celestials shivered subconsciously. Since they were so fearful, they might also become very obedient.

"Do you want to resist or submit?" Vaan asked.

Chapter 989: Decisive Submission

Resist or submit?

When Vaan asked the Celestials this question, they struggled internally between their pride and survival, deciding whether their honor or life was more important.

Living in the Southern Sea, they have experienced their fair share of life and death at the Southern Border. Thus, although they were afraid of Vaan's power, they didn't fear death; they only feared a meaningless death.

"Wait... This aura...!" the Garrison Captain's eyes widened in shock, sensing the Conqueror's Aura on Vaan's body.

He immediately recalled the radio silence from the Ocean Master and the entire Southern Border after the last powerful earthquake. In that instant, he couldn't help but shiver uncontrollably.

"You... Your Excellency... May I ask what happened to our Ocean Master?" the Garrison Captain asked nervously.

"Dead, flattened by death by something beyond his understanding," Vaan casually answered.

"You're lying!" A frenzied Celestial suddenly jumped out to deny Vaan's claim, saying, "The Ocean Master can't be dead! He is the strongest—"

Poof!

Alas, Vaan wasn't interested in listening to him finish. He gave a strong flick with his middle finger, and a violent eruption of spatial power exploded the person's body into a patch of blood against the glass screens.

The remaining Celestials in the room trembled and didn't dare to speak recklessly like that last guy.

"Lying? Do I need to lie?" Vaan nonchalantly uttered, taking out the trident that had lost its authoritative shine.

Everyone's eyes were immediately glued on the silver trident, and their hearts pounded like a thousand hammers, shaking their souls to the core.

They could refuse to believe Vaan's words, but the silver trident was undeniable proof. Even if it had lost its shine, they still recognized it as the Ocean Master's symbol of authority.

More importantly, the Conqueror's Aura seemed to have become a part of Vaan's body. That was the most shocking realization they had made.

The Ocean Master was the god of the Celestial Kingdom's military and the protector of the seas. Without his divine protection, the Celestial Kingdom's twelve cities would become vulnerable to the sea monsters' attacks.

In other words, the Celestial Kingdom was currently sitting in the palm of Vaan's hand. Its life and death were his to decide the moment he seized the Conqueror's Aura.

The Celestial soldiers could die for their honor because they still had the behemoth known as the Celestial Kingdom to avenge them. But if there were no more Celestial Kingdom, then their deaths would be meaningless.

In fact, their choice to die for honor would be so foolish that others would mock them for being stupid and inflexible.

Sigh...

The Garrison Captain sighed with defeat before voluntarily lowering himself before Vaan as a clear sign of his submission.

"This lowly subordinate offers his allegiance to the new Ocean Master, the protector—no, god of the seas."

Under the shocking gazes of his subordinates, the Garrison Captain made a half bow with one hand behind his back and the other curling over his shoulder—the standard gesture of respect and worship toward the master of the sea.

"Captain, you... Have you lost your mind? How could you lower yourself to a..."

The Celestial soldier was about to use the common derogatory term for humans from the land when he remembered how gruesome the last person died for disrespecting Vaan.

More shocking, he had noticed a flash of killing intent in his captain's eyes when he was about to say it. He was dumbfounded when he realized his captain would have killed him.

"I understand how you all feel," the Garrison Captain acknowledged before saying, "However, if you are smart, you will also offer your service and devotion to the new Ocean Master."

"It does matter who the new Ocean Master is. It is even more irrelevant whether you like the new Ocean Master or not. You only need to understand this is our new Ocean Master."

"Moreover, he is also the only Ocean Master who wields the Conqueror's Aura more perfectly than any other Ocean Master in history!"

Shortly after the Garrison Captain gave his subordinates his words of advice, he faced Vaan subserviently again.

"Ocean Master, this Lowly One is willing to become your sword against the Celestial Kingdom. I will not hesitate to kill everyone hostile to you and the surface people. I won't even bat an eye doing so."

"I will not care, even if it means I am branded an eternal traitor and sinner by my own people. I only ask that you spare the innocent and leave them a road to life."

"Oho? You're quite smart."

Vaan glanced at the Garrison Captain with interest, surprised by his decisiveness. He could tell the person would hold true to his words by the look in his eyes.

"What about the rest of you?" Vaan glanced at the other Celestial soldiers in the room.

Plop!

The Celestial soldiers immediately lowered themselves in submission and offered their allegiance to Vaan, acknowledging him as the new Ocean Master.

Once they did this, they also felt a huge weight off their shoulders.

They may be slow, but they weren't stupid. At the very least, they could still put two and two together after listening to their Garrison Captain.

If they submit, they may be forced to kill their comrades to keep the new Ocean Master happy. On the other hand, if their defiance angered him instead... The entire Celestial Kingdom might cease to exist.

"We swear allegiance to the new and perfected Ocean Master!"

"Good!"

After receiving the Celestial soldiers' verbal submission in the border surveillance room, he immediately put their newfound loyalty to the test.

"I want to know everything about the Celestial Kingdom, inside and out. Does this place have access to such information?" Vaan asked, scanning the Celestials' expressions with crafty eyes.

"Every piece of information or knowledge ever obtained by the Celestial Kingdom is recorded in the Celestial Database. You can access them from any computer terminal connected to the Celestial Network as long as you have sufficient clearance. With my rank, I can only give you access to three-star captain-level information, Ocean Master."

The Garrison Captain hurriedly explained the database and network to Vaan without holding anything back.

However, he suddenly recalled something before his face paled.

"Ocean Master, there's something you need to know! Before we surrendered to you, we had already alerted the city of your arrival and requested reinforcement."

After the Celestial soldiers recalled that, their faces also paled, and they almost pissed themselves with fright as their legs trembled.

"This... we are not trying to defy you, Ocean Master!"

"I know."

Chapter 990: Celestial City

The border surveillance room was near the city entrance, so it was easy for Vaan to overhear and sense the situation inside.

Nevertheless, he was not concerned about the city's reinforcement.

After all, Vaan was currently inside their city. Even if they sent experts, they would have to exercise caution and restraint lest they bring about the destruction of their own city.

Moreover, Vaan had already discovered the Celestials' weakness in cultivation.

The Divine Inheritors were already weak due to the nature of the Divine Inheritances. However, their biggest weakness was their lack of understanding and utilization of the laws.

The heaven-defying path of energy cultivation required shattering the energy core at the Void Realm to produce a violent yet controlled energy explosion, which could form a miniature universe to accommodate the superior divine energy.

As such, all Divine Origin Realm cultivators have their own heaven, known as the Divine World or Inner World. They opposed heaven by creating their own personalized heaven.

However, the biggest difference of the heaven-defying path of energy cultivation was its ability to bypass the requirements for law comprehension to reach the Divine Origin Realm.

After all, the heavenly path of energy cultivation required entering the Truth Manifestation Realm instead of the Void Realm; it was the process of germinating the energy core like a plant seed instead of shattering it and inducing a world-creation explosion.

Unfortunately, the heavenly path of energy cultivation had a huge demand for spirit energy in order to reach the saturation limit required to germinate the energy core into a divine tree.

Furthermore, after entering the Truth Manifestation Realm, the cultivators needed to comprehend the laws well to grow their divine trees before they could eventually enter the Divine Origin Realm.

As such, most cultivators would choose the heaven-defying path since it had a much lower requirement and was easier. Even so, it was also far more dangerous.

After all, shattering the energy core to enter the Void Realm required being able to survive or withstand the energy explosion. Otherwise, death would be the only outcome.

Furthermore, any energy loss in the process would also result in an imperfect Divine World, making the Divine Origin Realm even weaker.

There were pros and cons to both paths.

Originally, Vaan kept his energy cultivation at the Heaven Ascension Realm because he wanted to enter the Truth Manifestation Realm perfectly.

However, after interacting with the Celestial Kingdom's cultivators, the heaven-defying energy path did not deter him but instead attracted his interest.

After all, he had already found out that the current heaven was not the same as the primordial heaven, making current cultivation realms weaker than the past. As such, conforming to the heavenly way would be like willingly putting invisible shackles on himself.

He had already cultivated the heaven-defying path of body refining. Cultivating the heavenly path of energy cultivation would only impede or conflict with it in unpredictable ways.

More importantly, the heaven-defying path was supposed to be the stronger path. So, how come the Divine Inheritors of the Celestial Kingdom were so weak?

There was only one answer – They were all trash.

Regardless of cultivation systems, one thing has always remained true: a sturdy foundation was the most important aspect of cultivation.

Suppose he could cultivate his energy core to the saturated point of germinating before shattering it and comprehending laws to a high level before the complete formation of his Divine World.

In that case, wouldn't he be far stronger than other Divine Origin Realm cultivators at the same level?

He already had one of the strongest, if not the strongest, vessels to contain the Divine World. Thus, he did not have to worry about issues in drawing out its powers. He only needed a perfect Divine World to match his Astral God Divine Body.

...

After the Garrison Captain logged into the Celestial Database with his access level, Vaan immediately perused the available information with incredible speed.

Fortunately, the Garrison Captain had enough permission to access information on every city's location.

In total, the Celestial Kingdom had thirteen cities in Pangea: eight in the Inner Seas, four in the Outer Seas, and one in the rumored Central Sea found in the heart of the Dragon Vein.

These thirteen cities were also categorized into eight Farming Cities, four Mining Cities, and one Privilege City.

The eight Farming Cities of the Inner Seas made up the majority of the Celestial Kingdom's population and its low to middle-class societies. They were self-sufficient cities that did not require any imports to maintain their basic functions.

On the other hand, the four Mining Cities of the Outer Seas were made up of lower-class Celestials. Mostly, criminals, slaves, and plebians without backgrounds were sent there for menial and hard labor.

Furthermore, the four Mining Cities were all founded in the Northern Outer Sea, the only Outer Sea that the Celestial Kingdom managed to conquer for development. Roughly seventy percent of all rare metal imports in the Celestial Kingdom came from here.

Lastly, the Privilege City of the Central Sea, Celestial City, was where the privileged upper-class Celestials congregated. They held the greatest power and enjoyed the best Divine Inheritances after the Ocean Master and twelve City Lords.

The world's spirit energy was also gathered here before distributing to other Celestial Cities via spirit transmission pipelines and cables.

Because of Celestial City's control of spirit energy distribution, it was able to haggle and enjoy regular resource tributes from the twelve cities. Cities with more generous tributes received more spirit energy than others.

Although Celestial City did not always possess such a dominant position, it grew into it due to its strategic and important location.

In fact, Celestial City had assumed such a dominant position that it considered itself different from the rest of the Celestial Kingdom; its people called themselves Celestial Dragons, and even the City Lord assumed the title of Celestial Dragon King.

It could also be said that the decline of the Celestial Kingdom's military faction truly began when it lost its grip on Celestial City.