

Unfathomable 621

[Chapter 621](#)

“...”

“Is something wrong?”

“Oh? No, everything is fine...”

“Is that so? You think that I wouldn’t know if my own husband wasn’t worried about something?”

“Ah...It’s just, Everything is going too well.”

“Is that such a problem? Wasn’t this what you were fighting for?”

“Well yes but ...”

“Think you might be worrying too much? We still have troubles at the sea and then there is still that brother of yours.”

Zhang Dong nodded at Liena that was standing right next to him. The two were both in their new house where they could see both their children training their martial arts outside. Ever since the war had started the two had been focusing on getting their skills up, it was as if they wanted to help out their father and mother during this conflict that could last for centuries.

A week had passed since the Emerald Phoenix Emperor had died and his main forces were driven out of the east side of the empire. Just like with the demi-humans, a few stragglers remained here and there. They were now getting hunted down by bounty hunters and people trying to go back to their old cities that had been destroyed.

Where the bridge to the Emerald Phoenix Empire existed a large stronghold was being built. It would have giant spirit cannons and protective formations established to not let another group of them inside. The base they had there could be transformed into something like that so the building process would be rather quick. With this there only existed one obvious bridge that hadn’t been closed and that one belonged to Lucius and his forces.

For the time being Zhang Dong decided to let them be. Some people from his side contested this idea as to them it was a bomb that could explode at any moment. He had of course relayed the information he gained from visiting their base and also explained that he believed that their main troops were on standby on the other side. To his people it wasn’t a risk worth taking and forcing Lucius and Argus out to their own kingdom was the best idea. They were no match for the current United Elemental Sect’s forces.

However, he had promised to cooperate with the golden knights and for the time being, they had proven themselves as good allies. During the Demi-human battle, Argus had helped them hold back the animalistic body refiners. Then they also helped him with the Emerald Phoenix Empire. There was no reason to turn their backs on them; it could backfire. What if they had another way of coming to this place even if the bridge was closed?

Their base looked like it had existed on this side for a while; it was possible for them to have some teleportation relics that could do the job. If Zhang Dong started to drive them out it was also possible for the King to show up. While he might have been weaker than Wang Long or the Emerald Phoenix Emperor, it was always a risk. Thus for now they were free to roam the lands in search of their sacred armor. Unless they started performing some heinous acts against the civilians he couldn't see them becoming a problem in the future.

This only left the Azure Emperor that had somehow vanished and the northern sea that was becoming strangely silent. After the last attack during which he told his army to back off, there was no new news of the Cerulean Empress either. Considering that the clone armies had started to struggle perhaps they finally decided to go with a different approach.

"Yes, the Azure Emperor... he might see this as a challenge to his authority, we can't exclude that he might be planning to attack our forces when we least expect it."

"That is true, perhaps it will be wiser to wait now."

"Wait..."

Liena smiled at him which put his heart at rest for a moment. Yet soon enough he was wondering if waiting would solve anything. What if the Long Clan just used this time to prepare a proper army or if the Cerulean Empress was building up a counter-offensive of immeasurable numbers? Perhaps her tactic didn't change but the scale did, if her armies were depleted of cloned generals and sea creatures now was the time to strike. If he let this drag on for too long the northern battlefield could suffer greatly.

His main goal was to end this conflict as fast as possible before secluding himself and progressing into the immortal stage. It wouldn't be wrong to wait but he had been successful enough by being more aggressive. If he didn't rush to the east side he would not have had such an easy time with the Emerald Phoenix Emperor. None of his own people had to participate which left his army in full power. Without the need to teleport the golden bastion he was now free to invest these points to level it up instead and before going after the sea people, this had to be done.

"I don't think my husband likes listening to his wife..."

"Ouch..."

While he was spacing out he could feel Liena pinching his arm before standing up and walking away. He could only smile while looking at her pouty face but she was right, he was probably not going to listen to her. The war was not yet over and it was unwise to just sit around twiddling his thumbs. Thanks to the quick resolution in the east, he was ready to continue and he would not even need anyone else than his own armies. Previously it was either Lucius or the Heavenly Crane sect but now, he could do all of this himself.

'I'll still have to watch out for the Long Clan, even if Long Qing isn't planning anything all those people around him probably hate me, then there is his wife that is behind it all...'

What was bothering him the most was the overseer. There was a teleportation spot at the Azure Palace that he could use to get more information. Perhaps after the Cerulean Empress was dealt with it would

be time to use it. It was too dangerous, the woman could stop time and it was possible that he would be dealt with if he attempted to get there.

Then there was the second option, that nothing would actually happen. After the war between empires was over there would be nothing standing in his way of ascending. The system wanted him to ascend after fainting some trials and tribulations but it didn't really seem like it wanted him to die. It was possible for an inept system user to perish but even Wang Long with his disregard for anyone was able to persist. If Zhang Dong wasn't there, he would have probably conquered the entire empire, eventually.

'I'll never know what this is about until I cross over... but if I do, what will happen to all of them?'

Through the window, he could see his wife slowly walking over to his children. After arriving by their side she started scolding his daughter for not being easy on his son. Little Jun was holding in the tears while holding his nose that was punched by his sister. Before Liena arrived Xiu was making fun of him for being so slow. Now she was almost ready to run after seeing the stern face of her mother.

He wanted these days to continue, it wasn't that long since he had become a father and by losing five years in the other dimension he was even more behind. There was a real chance that if he advanced to the next cultivation level he would be forced to leave this place. It was also possible that where he went to could have another time variation like before or even worse, he could not be able to ever return. This world gave him a long life and at least before making the attempt he wished to see his children grow up and find their own paths just like he did.

'But it shouldn't force me out, that guy that came before me was able to postpone leaving until he was more than a thousand years old, I should be able to do the same. After I clear things up in the north and then settle things with my dear 'brother' I should be able to relax for a couple of hundred years...'

This was his current plan. First, he wanted to clear up the disturbances in these lands before going into a retirement phase. Perhaps this wasn't feasible but he wanted to at least enjoy a few years with his family before he tackled the problem with the system. If it was possible he would not interact with the scary overseer and slowly gather more power.

There were still some truths that he might be able to unearth in his predecessor's old home. While most of those tapes there had turned to dust Bob was working on restoring some of the lost materials. However with the main version used for other purposes that part was being stalled.

'I'll have to consider that the Azure Dragon and Golden Dragon might not be able to coexist with each other. The story that he told me might have been a lie and the moment the issue with the Cerulean Empress is done, they might strike... though with Lucius around, they might not act...'

He started seeing Lucius and Argus as a possible buffer between him and the end of the scenario. Normally a game would only move to the last stage after all of the main story events were finished. If the golden knights are never defeated and just stay around searching for their holy armor, it could give him time to prepare. It might be even better to hide the armor if he finds it to prolong their stay in this empire.

'But where could that armor be? It wouldn't be strange if it was somewhere at sea, I already found the sword at the Golden Dong Palace so there shouldn't be another one there... unless they hid it away in their treasury or something... It wouldn't be strange if that Overseer lady placed it there...'

There was a possibility of his enemies playing around with the settings. He did not truly know what these moderators were tasked with besides hard resetting the setting if a strange bug appeared. This happened in the other world that he visited and could happen here if they find that his cultivation was different.

'I guess I'll have to take that into consideration, for now it's time to pay those fish a visit and upgrade the palace, maybe it would be wise to make it waterproof...'

[Chapter 622](#)

"This farm really paid off, maybe more than the whole visit to the eastern side of the empire. Now, what should I change this thing into, let's look over the options."

Zhang Dong was seated at his chair in the command station of the Golden Dong Palace. The first thought in his head was to change the name that he had given to this thing but going through spirit points for something like this hurt his very soul. Maybe after all the danger was over and the passive spirit point gain was good he would just change it to something more regal. The Golden Dragon Palace had a better ring to it and was also more aligned with his new title.

"Hm... Not that many options, one will add a few defensive features but what I need now is something that can do a few things..."

With the Emerald Phoenix Emperor's and his son's passing there was only one main enemy that he stood against. It was the underwater empire that was led by the Cerulean Empress. The usual time for their attack had already passed so now everyone was curious about what was happening. Either they had decided to change their tactics or were just out of disposable soldiers.

Their cloning technology was quite advanced but it required a stable infusion of resources. The cloning mechanisms didn't just run off spiritual energy they also required some type of strange biomass. His people were able to capture one of those cloning facilities and were somewhat able to deduce the mechanics behind it.

There was one component missing which didn't allow them to copy the technology but it still allowed them to make some strides in the healing field. It was possible to clone body parts which then could replace lost limbs or organs. Making a full human with a working soul was impossible but creating a body was feasible. They theorized that a person that could move their spirit around freely could potentially go into a created body like that.

This reminded him of some stories that he heard about or read. There were some powerful individuals that were said to have lived for longer than the millennial limit this world was stuck on. The soul that a person was composed of was much more robust than their body which would start falling apart. Zhang Dong, who had quite a powerful soul could potentially drag his life span out by using clones of himself.

However, this wouldn't last forever as the process was a bit unnatural. Each time a body was swapped some of that soul energy would be lost forever. If that core component was affected the cultivator would start getting holes in their memory. With time they could even forget who they were or turn into something different. When used in conjunction with demonic Qi, a person could become violent or a monster.

“Going down into the deep blue sea won’t be easy, even if people are able to survive the crushing pressure and lack of air, they have no training in underwater battles.”

His mind drifted back to the problem at hand. The people from the underwater empire probably had their base deep in the sea. Even he was only able to contend with the monsters because the power differential was really huge and he didn’t really go down as deep.

His spies had done some research about where the enemy monsters were coming from. It was easy to follow the swarm of sea creatures back from where they came from. Everything indicated that they had a base of operations many kilometers under the sea. No light was able to reach that far underground and they had to be ready to fight vast quantities of sea monsters when they got there.

“Going by the report it’s possible that this base of theirs isn’t fully submerged in water. They did spot some type of protective barrier that couldn’t be peered through, first we need to destroy that before we can get further. I think this upgrade will allow my troops to move more freely there...”

Zhang Dong looked at the options of the castle and one allowed it to augment its shielding technology. This barrier was also quite special, besides forming one layer on the inside that acted like a semi-transparent wall, there was an outer region that could drive the water back. In this region that could be pushed out to a couple of kilometers around his base, his other ships could maneuver around as if they were up in the air.

“Concentric Barrier Fortress, that’s quite the long name for it...”

Concentric castles were ones with at least two layers of walls surrounding them. In this case, his bastion would gain another layer of regular walls along with separate barriers and generators powering them. Even if one protective wall fell there was another one that his troops could retreat behind. In a way, this was turning into a huge city castle with multiple layers of defenses that could also fly and work underwater.

“It’s going to double in size and even include some residential housing for the soldiers... It can also hold twenty thousand people now, I guess there is no reason not to pick it.”

He was already set on going with the more defensive fortress as that was its main reason for existing. When it came to attacking his sect members and masters would take care of that part. What they needed was a base that people could hide in where they were injured and one that couldn’t be easily breached even from multiple sides. How fast it moved wasn’t really important just how much of a beating it could take.

“Now that I have decided, I should probably post an announcement...”

While he could just spend the points and the transformation would start taking place, he couldn’t just do it while people were outside. The walls would start stretching out and some of the buildings would get shifted around. He wasn’t sure if someone could get crushed or stuck in a wall but it was better to exclude all variables.

“Let’s see...”

After clearing his throat he pressed a button that allowed his voice to go through the whole place. Even though Zhang Jin was here already, he didn’t know what his grandson was planning.

“This is your Patriarch speaking, please move into the inner palace in an orderly fashion. The Golden Dong Palace is going to go through a change so be sure to take all your important belongings with you as they might not be there when you return, that is all.”

The place was mostly populated by military personnel composed of the best experts from his sect. There were no questions asked as they knew that they could trust in the announcement. The only complaints he could see were from Zhang Jin that was interrupted while spending some time with several of his wives.

‘That old fart really changed this into his own harem... that bathing area is bigger than that aqua park I once visited when I was younger...’

“Dong’er, was that you? You could have said something to your dear grandfather!”

“You seemed preoccupied with something else... There is no need for you to do anything, just stay there and wait for everyone else to move into the main palace.”

While the outer areas would be changing, the original palace wouldn’t so it was safe to stay. With his order out he watched people quickly swarming for the main palace gates. They didn’t crowd or push each other and with the help of spatial rings, there wasn’t much luggage that they needed to carry around. Soon after around ten minutes, everyone was safely inside the main hall.

“Let’s get this over with.”

Soon he was pressing the accept button that activated the next step for this Golden Dong Palace. The whole place started rumbling slightly as the change was taking place outside. People that were not stationed inside the flying castle started pointing up at the golden light that was produced. The bright glow masked the transformation slightly but he could clearly see what was happening.

First, the large foundation that looked like a floating island started expanding. The underside was made of something that looked like regular rocks but was just as sturdy as the walls surrounding the whole palace. After this underside was enlarged the walls started popping out from the ground. It was like watching someone assemble something at a hundred times the normal speed. The ground was filled with white tiles that reflected some of the golden structures. This was still the Golden Palace so the motive was kept as it was.

“Everyone is free to go outside, please explore the new palace and make sure that you are familiar with all the new facilities.”

After everything was done he was quick to give the order for everyone to go out. They needed to look through all the new buildings before they descended into the unknown and dark sea. With the expansion of this place, a need for more personnel also arose. Thus the second thing he did was inform Zhang Jin that was meant to lead this place.

“Gramps, I expanded the palace. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the new layout and get new personnel from the main sect. After everything is in order we will be taking this new palace for a spin.”

“Hoh, where are we going with this thing?”

“Where else? Under the sea of course!”

“Under the sea?”

“Yes down where it’s wetter, take it from me...”

“Huh?”

“Ah never mind, just an old song that I remembered. Now, be sure to go through the new floor plans and tell the alchemists and blacksmiths to stock the whole place up, we might be down there for a while and must be ready for any possibility.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll get everything ready.”

“Good.”

After a short conversation with his grandfather he sunk back into his chair. The people outside were already flying all over the place. The moment he gave the order they would normally drop everything that they were doing just to appease him. Luckily this was not out of fear but instead out of reverence.

“I guess it would be bad if I ever disappointed them. Their image of their great patriarch must never be tarnished or the whole place could collapse.”

His image of the glorious leader had to persist. He already saw that his sect was slowly falling apart when he was gone for five years. Now if anything happened to him as long as the basis for his sect was strong, even if he was gone it wouldn’t fall apart like last time.

“Well then, let’s get this show on the road!”

[Chapter 623](#)

“Finally it’s time! ... But you don’t look too enthusiastic, senior brother, is there something bothering you?”

“Oh it’s nothing, I just don’t like dark places.”

“Ha ha, if you are joking like that then everything must be in order, just call me when I’m needed, I’ll be at the spiritual gym.”

“I’ll be sure to do that.”

Zhang Dong watched Huo Qiang as he left the room he was occupying. In it, he had a nice view of the dark ocean that they were above now. The upgraded flying fortress was in the middle of nowhere. Everything was covered by water and the shoreline was not visible even to someone that could enhance his eyes like him.

After a few weeks of preparation, they had packed up more than half of their army to set out on this attack. His change in mood was noticed by his friend as he did not like the way things were unfolding. The enemies that should be coming in waves weren’t appearing at all. In reality, he predicted them launching an attack in the time they were making their preparations.

‘Could the scenario have changed due to the Emerald Phoenix Emperor’s death? Is it possible that there is some type of hidden difficulty gauge?’

He couldn't discount something like this as he was in the ending phase of driving back the enemy empires. Some games that he played back in his old world had an alternating difficulty where it would change depending on a player's level. Mobs changed to make the game more challenging even when the player gained more and more power.

'Could she be stronger than the Emerald Phoenix Emperor? It's a possibility, I should probably be careful and not expect a cakewalk like I previously did.'

From the exchange that his people were having with the fish people, it was clear that they weren't that strong. When even his regular sect masters could contend with the enemies without his involvement, then it meant that they weren't the greatest. When he was fighting the demi-humans his forces could only give him some cover fire but would mostly be unable to take care of even the tribe heads. Now, on the other hand, even the named generals of these underwater armies could be soloed by a few of his companions.

'This might be true but it could also be a cakewalk like with the farty emperor, I just need to watch my back and be ready to teleport everyone out of there when the time comes.'

While he burned through a lot of spirit points to upgrade his flying fortress there were now enough for an emergency retreat. This was one of the reasons he waited close to a month after the defeat of his last foes. Even though he didn't spend any points on getting his army over to help him, the expenditure for the upgrades to attempt the underwater voyage were just that big.

"Is everyone ready?"

"Aye, they were just waiting for their leader to give them the sign."

"Well then, without further ado let us depart, make sure the battleships don't go outside of the outer barrier."

Zhang Dong contacted Zhang Jin who had become the de facto captain of this palace. He himself was stuck in a more secluded area. Even though he had gotten used to talking to people and commanding them, it didn't change the fact that he preferred not to do it. Even less when he was already in the company of someone else.

"This is quite the interesting spot you have there."

"Isn't it? We can even circle through all the vintage points of this palace."

His wife Liena was coming for this mission with him. Normally she would be left back home with the kids but with no real threat there it was fine to leave them in the hands of other relatives and his disciples. Through the five-year gap that he was gone some people close to Liena had emerged and they could be trusted with this mission. There were also ways for him or her to go back instantly if any trouble arose.

Thanks to their sect being the governing body of the whole western region the threat was minuscule. Even if someone moved against them, the powerful weapons and protective formations at their base would be able to even stall him for weeks or even months. It was a possibility that the Long Clan could make a move when he was gone yet that would probably not happen.

The main problem with that tactic was his location being shrouded in mystery. He could frequently teleport through various areas thanks to the system and there was no way of telling where he was. His appearance in the eastern region was already a shocker. Before the news was spread he was already back in the main city to make a speech.

Through various teleportation efforts, he was making everyone doubt his true location. They wouldn't even be sure if the person that traveled to the east was actually him or some other powerful master from his sect. Without proper information, the fable of the Golden Dragon just kept on growing. Bahamut who could move through the whole empire without him was also a force to be reckoned with. Some even believed him to be Long Dong just in his true form.

Thanks to all these diversion tactics he implemented no one could be sure where he was. Without knowing his true position even the Long Clan wouldn't dare to attack. His system also helped him find all kinds of spies in his main city. To his surprise, there weren't all that many, and none that actually belonged to the Long Clan.

"It sure is beautiful and terrifying at the same time, some people say that this whole sea could be larger than our entire empire and go down further than the tallest mountain... Hey, are you even listening?"

"Ouch..."

While he was thinking about the strange spy situation and the absence of the Long Clan looking into his sect, a small feminine fist connected with his forehead. Their fortress slowly descended into the dark sea below and Liena was still looking at the sun reflecting in the waves.

She seemed to take it a bit personally that her husband was spacing out on her. During the battle between empires, he had become somewhat distant, always somewhere away and never really interacting with her as much as she wanted to. The last time they had a proper interaction was when he gifted her the new armor and enhanced her power to another level.

"You're quite daring my dear husband, spacing out when your beautiful wife is right next to you."

"Ah you know, there were things that I was thinking about."

"Such as?"

Liena started pushing herself up against him while he was trying to figure out the things to say. While his wife knew some of the facts of his origins he wasn't sure if she truly believed it all. To begin with, there were many strange powers in this world, so explaining Bob and the system to her was extremely hard.

"That the enemies that we will be facing might be stronger than I expected and that we need to be careful..."

"You worry too much, haven't you already proven yourself to be the strongest? Can even that little Azure Dragon compare to you at this point."

"Hey, if they heard you talking like that then ..."

"Then what? They would not dare attack us at a time like this, hmph!"

His lovely wife had become quite prideful of her husband that had been missing. It wasn't strange for people to talk behind her back when he vanished. Some even wanted her to be remarried to another sect master. Luckily he had returned before anything like that could have happened.

"I'm glad that you hold me in such high regard..."

As he attempted to talk her down a bit the whole place began shaking. Their flying ship was hit by some waves as it had become submerged and was now spreading out various barriers to allow the other flying vessels to follow after them. This was the cause for all this shaking and also a little unforeseen mood maker as Liena landed in his arms when trying to hold her balance.

Zhang Dong wasn't sure what to make of this. After taking into consideration that she was a high-level nascent soul master, she would have naturally been able to balance herself out without the need of falling into his arms. The only reason would be that either she was feeling playful or was just that distracted to not do anything about it.

'Come to think of it... we haven't really been together that much lately and it will take a lot of time to get to that underwater kingdom...'

His hand moved over to Liena's thin waist as he tried to hold her closer. After not feeling any resistance he began smiling. No words needed to be said here as he knew his wife well. The place that they were in could only be accessed by a hidden entrance to which only he and now his wife had access.

"I already showed you the console but you haven't seen the other rooms yet."

'Bob, notify me if the Cerulean Empress appears or if there is any trouble that the other sect members can't happen, if the old fart asks for something, just tell him that I'm busy.'

'Affirmative.'

Luckily he didn't have to monitor everything that was happening around this now-submerged fortress. Bob could ring the alarm if something happened and the deed that he would perform here would certainly lower his stress levels. With a little application of his spiritual energy, a previously hidden entrance revealed itself. His hand never left his wife's waistline as the two headed towards the path that opened. The door then quickly shut behind the pair while no one else was the wiser.

The journey toward the deep unknown had begun and while the grand leader was having some stress relief the people around them were still tense. This was an unprecedented event that had not come to pass at the Empire yet. Many people had attempted to conquer the sea but it always won in the end.

No one knew what to expect to be down there but with this fortress protecting them from all sides, they at least believed that they could make it out in one piece. The teleportation function had been presented to them already and with it as a sort of get away from jail card, they were willing to believe in their safety. Thus they finally departed for possibly their last dangerous mission that was supposed to put an end to this war.

[Chapter 624](#)

“Captain’s log, Stardate 800869. After descending into the depths of the sea we have encountered little resistance. The crew had been constantly circulating but was unable to discover any life signs of the enemy fleet. With no fish in sight, we fear for the worst...”

“What are you doing?”

“Huh? I uh... this is...”

Zhang Dong turned off the recording device that he was using to keep himself from being bored. The screen was showing just nothing but darkness in all directions. He wasn’t sure how far down underground they were but it was still going and the bottom of this sea had not presented itself to them.

His troops were able to pick up the path the underwater creatures took back by analyzing their spiritual energy. Everyone usually left behind trace amounts of Qi that could be sensed by some devices but also other cultivators. While masking this signature was possible these fish people certainly didn’t do their due diligence. The path was quite obvious but even after following it for a week, they didn’t find anything.

It was clear that their enemies didn’t expect anyone to dive down so deep and probably without the Golden Dong Palace in its current state it would not have been possible. The sheer amount of water pressure from all sides, coupled with the darkness that could easily disorient anyone made traversing these depths difficult.

“Is it something you picked up from that place you visited?”

“Yes, something like that.”

“Well, I’ll take a stroll around the palace and check up on a few things.”

“Take care.”

After giving his wife a smooch the two parted ways. After a whole week down here some people were getting spooked. They could go outside into the new outer yard of the castle but besides the shining light of the gold palace, everything was covered in darkness. There were no sounds from the outside and a battle could break out at any moment. Without knowing how long this would take, even the veterans were getting affected.

‘The palace isn’t the fastest but we have been going down at around a seventy-degree angle, this depth is quite staggering, how far does this sea even go?’

He could only continue to monitor the surroundings with his own superior senses while waiting for Bob to give him some kind of warning. Luckily with his system ever present he could check up on the state of the empire and confirm that nothing had changed. Now that they were a week into this dive, it would have been the perfect chance to attack their main city.

Nothing had happened, his previous assumption that the Long Clan was planning something was wrong. Now on the other hand he was concerned that they were acting strange. This was the perfect chance to make a move but perhaps his random teleportation escapades kept everything safe.

'I hope that I'm just overthinking this and it will all be over after I take care of the Cerulean Empress. Though first, I have to actually find here... this trail could be a dead end too.'

At first glance it looked like the Cerulean Empire forces didn't care about being found as the trail they left was quite obvious. This of course could have been a red herring. He could not discount the possibility of this being a path toward some type of trap or a wild goose chase that would take them nowhere and give his enemies enough time to regain their forces. Though after more than a month's passing since the last attack, he wasn't sure if they needed more time to create more clones.

'Maybe they just run out of ingredients for their classes, there don't seem to be any fish left here, haven't encountered any of those sea kings either. Could they have just used up all of them for the attacks?'

While pondering he looked at one of the screens and began waiting. There was nothing there and so it remained until they finally arrived at a new location. This location seemed to be at the ocean floor that was finally reached after another week of deep diving. His senses and the palace's detectors also picked up something interesting. The sea here was quite unruly and in the distance, the currents seemed to bend in unnatural ways. This was coupled with a surge of spiritual energy very familiar to him.

"Is this the edge of our empire's sea?"

He asked himself while trying to compare the underwater current storm to the elemental one that separated the western region and the demi-human empire. It was very similar which made him believe that going any further than this would not be possible. Even the enhanced shielding of his fortress would be minced into pieces if he tried going through it. On the other side was probably where the Cerulean Empress and her forces came from.

"But I don't see any bridges..."

The map that he copied from the Long Clan wasn't very detailed when it came to this region. There was a giant red blob in the entire region which made it very hard to pinpoint the bridge from a glance. Now that he was here he finally realized why this bridge was somewhat unique.

While they were down on the ocean floor there was still somewhere that they could go. A huge chasm was down below and that was also where the trail was going towards. When looking even further it became clear that the enemy combatants would probably be somewhere down there,

"So they got in here through that... maybe beyond this blockade there isn't really anything and this 'Empire' was hidden below this chasm but still within the Azure Empire's borders?"

He asked himself these questions while the golden palace was coming to a stop. It was possible to take a bit to come up with a strategy and also shed some light on this entire place. However even though the large lights from all the other ships and even the palace tried to pierce down into the giant hole, no bottom could be spotted. Soon enough he decided to leave this personal cabin and join his wife and all the other high-standing masters from his sect.

"What do you think?"

"I think that we are getting closer, what are we waiting for senior brother? Let us descend and get those damn sea monsters!"

“Why don’t you think for a moment? That chasm is wide but our maneuverability will be severely decreased if we go down there... what if it’s a trap?”

“A trap? This Huo Qiang doesn’t fear any traps, let them try!”

“How this idiot became the head of the Huo Clan and a founding elder at our sect...”

“Hah, if you are scared then you can stay here, me and my senior brother are enough to clear a path.”

“Don’t you even dare to talk about taking my husband along for a silly plan like that.”

“Uh... please you two, calm down... you are kind of making it hard for all the other elders to speak...”

Zhang Liena and Huo Qiang were back to arguing while everyone else could do nothing more than a glance. When the three founding grand elders were talking there was no space for anyone else to raise their voice. Now even less when Zhang Dong was also here, before the Zhang clan and the Huo clan sides would start arguing.

“If it was possible I’d like to send out a scouting vessel first. What if they placed some bombs on the walls to cave them in after we descend inside.”

Zhang Jin commented and the other elders started nodding. It was a reasonable assumption and a very old strategy everyone was familiar with.

“Isn’t this the only way out for them, would they block their only path outside just to get to us?”

This time Huo Qiao, one of the more faithful members and previously personal bodyguard of Huo Qiang, spoke out. In his eyes, the Cerulean Empress would risk losing access to the mainlands that she was trying to conquer if she caved in this place.

“Elders, the preliminary analyzation of the rocky formations has been done, a cave is not a probable event, the walls are just too hard to be broken, it’s like a natural barrier of heavenly might not much different than our own shielding technology.”

Another elder from the science department chimed in informing everyone of their surface-level analysis.

“If what they say is true then we should proceed inside, sending a scout vessel in these conditions will be hard, without the Golden Dong Palace our ships won’t be able to take the pressure of the sea.”

Zhang Dong decided to sit back and let his people decide on the best plan. There was no need for him to get involved in all of the decisions, moderating the conversations was enough. With him here the conversation couldn’t devolve into a shouting match like it did before his return.

The only downside of this method was that if he ever went away then things would probably go back to the old ways. He had not been able to think of a good solution for this problem but at least for the time he was here, he would make sure that things continued in this fashion.

“I think we have come to a decision then? Judging by the fact that it would be suicide for a smaller vessel to travel in so deep we will push forth with the palace.”

Everyone nodded as after an hour of deliberations they had come to a conclusion. While nascent soul masters and maybe some stronger core formation experts were able to resist the pressure, they still

needed air to breathe. Some could hold out more than others but they would certainly not be able to sustain themselves on their spiritual energy forever.

Producing air with the Dao of air was possible but also draining without any natural air pockets around. Sooner or later everyone would succumb and suffocate. The gold fortress they arrived in had many plantlife that could produce oxygen and also some other devices to speed up the process.

“Let us depart then, be sure to light the path as the enemies could be coming for us from any direction.”

“As you command Patriarch!”

Thus the descent into the great unknown continued, what was down in the large chasm was unknown to them. They would certainly need to be careful as they were going to fight in the lands that were the home territory of the Cerulean Empire, a place they had never seen before.

[Chapter 625](#)

‘I don’t like this...’

Zhang Dong decided to step out of the protective layer of the inner shield. There most of his forces had retreated and the ships that were left outside were keeping a tight formation around the golden fortress. It was possible for some unforeseen attack to come out of any direction while they were descending into the chasm. Yet even after a whole day had passed nothing seemed to be happening.

‘Could they have actually fled back to their own Empire? Following them there would probably not be the smartest move, is there even another empire, or did they come from this side?’

A few theories were floating around in his head. The first theory was about the Cerulean Empire not really existing outside of the Azure Empire. There was a possibility of them just being locked away in a large underground cavern that this massive gush on the sea floor represented. Perhaps if they continued they would arrive at a whole new underground world filled with strange monstrosities they were ill-equipped to handle.

The other possibility was that this was just their temporary headquarters just like it was for all the other Empires. The bridge they arrived through would be somewhere down there. This would make this large chasm they were going through something that had already been here for millenia.

‘It will be better if it’s the second option, I don’t think my people can face an entire Empire filled with enemies. If they were able to make all those clones on this side, I can only imagine what numbers they must have back there.’

Thus he decided to go outside to start his spiritual sense. If something started going wrong he needed to pull his forces back and perhaps think about another solution for the situation. Perhaps defeating the Cerulean Empress was not something possible and their forces would act as constantly increasing waves that he needed to contend with. Now that he found the chasm they were all coming from, perhaps creating an underwater stronghold would be possible.

Yet before he could make his decision they needed to get to the bottom of this place. considering that they were traveling at a slower pace than before it could have taken them a bit longer to get to the

bottom of this problem. However, he had a bad premonition that took him outside and this time around he was right.

"Hm?... What is that... I'm sensing something but it's weird..."

'Hey Bob, are you picking it up?'

Trying to identify anomalies... Life signals detected... caution is advised.

For a while, he wasn't able to sense anything but in just a second he was getting overwhelmed by the number of beings. It was as if they were waiting for them to get closer. Could have this been a trap or something else?

'These life signs are strange, it's as if they are all separate from each other but also part of something bigger... it's as if...'

Everything was dark in this place and even his spiritual sense was incapable of painting a picture in his mind. Because of all these factors he was unable to make the right decision and blundered. The cavern they were diving into started to open up into a huge chamber filled with even more darkness.

'What's that glow...'

Inside this darkness, a glowing circle of light was pulsating as if trying to guide him towards the right path. The whole fortress was traveling the pathway of the leftover spiritual energy and that too was guiding them toward this destination. Perhaps if the light wasn't so enticing he would have noticed that there was something off about it. While it looked like it was getting larger in actuality there was something else happening.

'Is it getting closer? Oh, shit... are those... are those supposed to be teeth?'

"Everyone, this is an order from your Patriarch, evacuate from the ships and quickly gather up in the fortress."

What he spotted was quite gruesome. The light show was just there to lure them into the maw of the beast. What he was looking at was a gigantic angler fish that was many times larger than their whole armada of ships and the golden fortress combined. The teeth were the size of mountains and while the guiding light was dangling before them, those chompers were spreading apart to draw them in.

No one asked questions as they quickly started trying to land with their ships. The fortress was now floating on a large piece of land that left enough outside for them to create a landing strip. After getting there the people could quickly run inside into the more tightly protected inner fortress. This was easier said than done though as the massive beast outside was causing quite a stir.

'How huge is this thing... I can't really see where the mouth starts or begins, just teeth...'

The creature was of unprecedented size, Zhang Dong had never seen something like this before. The sheer size was incomprehensible and the amount of spiritual energy this thing possessed was even greater than him. This was something above the level of the nascent soul and perhaps it would be their grave if he didn't do something about it.

However, even though he ordered a full retreat the golden fortress was unable to pull away. Coupled with the opening mouth a giant suction force was created that was even drawing the city-sized stronghold inside. At this point, the only thing that he could do was to minimize the damage and use his own energy to boost the outer shields that were about to slam into one of those mountainous teeth.

“Senior brother!”

“Husband!”

“Stay back you two, I’ll be fine.”

Both Huo Qiang and Zhang Liena came outside to help him. Yet without his permission, they were not able to get outside of the inner barrier that needed to be kept up. The outside one could break at any moment so he could not risk opening the path outside. The people that had landed on the strip were still able to get inside just not leave.

Suddenly all hell broke loose as the golden fortress tumbled inside the massive mouth of the anglerfish. The beast outside didn’t really react but remained stationary as if waiting for the next prey to arrive. The glowy appendage that it used to lure its prey inside started going out and nothing but silence and darkness remained in this cold place.

...

“ARGH...”

‘I need to hold it, not everyone made it inside...’

Back on the inside, the whole palace was going through a strange torrent of water. They had been swallowed by this giant creature and were now inside its mouth. Normally what Zhang Dong was expecting to do was be sent into the beast’s stomach while keeping the barrier up. As long as it didn’t fail them there was a chance of getting out of this whole place alive. However, there was something strange after the beast had swallowed them he noticed something.

‘That was a spatial resonance?’

It was similar to the Dimensional Regalia that he had increased the size to a continent. This place was giving him similar vibes but before he could figure out what was really going on a powerful crushing force attacked them from all sides. The outer barrier began shrinking instantly as it was being pushed back. His main problem was now the people that were evacuated to the inside. He gathered all of his power and everyone that was inside the golden fortress did the same. Even though all of them tried, the bubble burst and the outer barrier collapsed.

“Shittttttttttt.....”

Zhang Dong felt a lot of strange pressure being pushed onto his body as the protective layer disappeared. He was tossed all over the place while trying to remain steady. Before he could activate the system’s teleportation feature to go into the golden fortress he felt it vanishing from sight. His whole body was then tossed somewhere far, he could feel everyone instantly vanishing to some distant location before everything went dark once more.

...

“Uhg... my head... did I actually pass out for a moment?”

This was not something that happened often but the forces inside of this strange creature had given him a headache. After the barrier collapsed he could feel various things clashing against his body and in his weakened state he had become more susceptible to them. But for some reason, he could feel a warm tingling feeling over his body. He was not trapped in what was supposed to be a monster fish's belly but instead somewhere comfortable.

“What is this place?”

Zhang Dong was greeted by a vast plain of grass. In the distance, he could see a forest area and even mountains. When looking up, there was even something that looked like a sun. However, his keen senses couldn't be fooled as he identified the orb to just be an imitation.

‘Bob, It seems that I have found myself in some type of pocket dimension... could it be possible that that creature that had swallowed us wasn't an actual living being?’

Calculating... The possibility is at 84.56%

‘Yeah that's what I thought, that thing must have been the real entrance to the Cerulean Empire, they must have used it to arrive at this place.’

After putting a few things together he realized that the creature in itself didn't really possess any life in it. The life signals were coming from within it where all the people from the Cerulean Empire were probably located. The monster anglerfish was something more similar to his own golden fortress or ships, some type of fleshy construct that transported people through its mouth to this location.

It didn't look like a place that would be populated by undersea creatures. There were a lot of rivers and even lakes all over the place but the air was quite breathable. One part was worrisome as he couldn't really get a feel for where everyone else was. Also while there were living beings around this place, they were just simple animals without really anything similar to a cultivator nearby.

‘It doesn't matter, I should be able to teleport back to the palace.’

Error error.

‘Or not?’

A problem arose, when trying to access his faction system he was unable to. For some reason, it was being blocked and all the ways of teleporting out were locked. This could only mean that he had come across some type of event that was prepared for a system holder and that it might not be as easy to end this war as he had previously thought.

[Chapter 626](#)

“This sure looks like a nice place to retire, but I'm not sure the wifey would want to live inside a giant anglerfish.”

Zhang Dong joked out loud while slowly floating through the place. At first glance, this was quite the paradise, with nice trees, and green grass that a person could just relax and sleep on while the sun's rays

hit their face. Lakes with clear water filled with various fish that would make all sushi chefs dreams come true.

'Everyone else should have made it to the palace, if I survived then they should be fine too just at a different location. There should not be a reason to rush...'

While going through this place he was trying to calm down his own nerves. This time around a lot more people had come for this supposed last battle. Zhang Liena, his wife was there which caused him to worry even more. In theory, the golden palace wouldn't be easily breached even by someone like Wang Long. However, with his faction system being blocked by something he could not check nor teleport back to their location.

'Bob, can you explain why the system isn't working?'

'Data inconclusive, a spatial anomaly has been detected and is interfering with the system. The system needs to analyze the data before an assessment can be made.'

'I figured as much, it's never easy.'

There was some type of anomaly that had been triggered when he entered this place and it made him worry even more as he was part of something similar in the past. Then one instance of the system becoming bugged had transpired. This was when he was sent off into the other world as just his soul. Back then he could also not reach his old faction as he was in a whole other world.

'It couldn't be that I'm in another world again?'

He stopped while trying to use all of his senses. During the previous event of him traversing between worlds, his soul was ripped away from his body. He was only able to survive thanks to his involvement with the system and powerful pure soul. Then when he returned, Bob helped him reform his old body at the cost of most of his cultivation and old resources.

'This isn't like it... I am clearly in the same world, the energies here are the same, it must just be some type of pocket dimension that might be above the level of even the Dimensional Regalia.'

After some deliberating, he came to a conclusion. He had been tossed into a pocket dimension that had some similarities to the other worlds but was not quite there. Perhaps there were other ones like it that kept him away from his golden palace where everyone else was. If he was able to find his path there then at least some of the faction system features would open up.

'That should be the case, but if I'm being blocked from even teleporting back to the sect, then even if I find everyone, we won't be able to retreat. I guess this has to have been prepared beforehand or...'

In his mind, this place was prepared for some type of event by the powers that made this world. It had been probably designed before he even arrived in this world. The only other reasonable explanation would be that the overseer was responsible and she made a few changes to make things more difficult.

'Perhaps I was doing too well for my own good? But that shouldn't be the case, with the old system in place taking care of the Emerald Phoenix Emperor shouldn't have been that hard either.'

He could only speculate while moving through these locations. His first attempt at getting out of this place was to fly straight up into the air. From the ground, it looked like this place had a normal blue sky along with a star shining over it. Yet after he got up to around twenty kilometers he hit an invisible wall.

Before giving it a good old punch he decided to let Bob run a few tests. It was not a formation barrier but something else. It felt like the end of the world imposed by whoever made this spatial space. One thing was clear, even without giving it a thwack he knew that he would not be able to force his way through. This thing was something on the immortal level and would not be damaged by someone that was still at the nascent soul realm.

‘I guess I’ll have to find a pathway instead...’

When glancing up he could see the glowing orb that represented the sun. It was further behind the invisible wall in an unreachable location to him. This somewhat reminded him about the trial area he had died before and was freed from his system. It could be the case that it was similar to that.

‘If this place was made by the same person that made this world, then one of those cubes should be here to power it all. Maybe if I can find it and remove it, then it will collapse on itself...’

If he managed to grab the power source he would attain a large number of spirit points. However, there was a danger of removing something that was creating a pocket dimension. Without enough energy to sustain it, there was a possibility of it shrinking on itself and even imploding.

Perhaps he had enough power to shield himself from harm and leave through the thinned-out walls but what about the people that he came here with? If they were wandering outside just like he was now, then their lives were at risk. Staying in the golden palace and waiting for his return would be the best option for survival but he could not count on his people being passive. Liena along with Qiang were probably already out and searching for him. They could also be in trouble, this was in fact the place where the Cerulean Empress resided.

WARNING, WARNING

“Huh?”

While floating up in the air and touching the invisible wall, a strange shift in the environment occurred. First, he noticed that the wind had picked up and it wasn’t just a little summer breeze, this wind was sharp as a razor blade. Thanks to his recent gains of new Dao’s he was barely able to dodge the mass of wind blades that appeared out of nowhere.

‘These attacks are coming from behind the invisible wall? Did I trigger some type of defensive measure by coming so close to it?’

He wasn’t sure but the more he stayed up there the more turbulence he spotted. It was as if this place didn’t want him here, considering he reached the end of the map by going straight up this made sense. If this was some type of trial that had to be done, getting out through another location had to be forbidden.

Soon the temperature up in the air started to drop below zero and the fake star that was in the sky vanished. Something was triggered and he wasn’t sure if the process could be reversed as when it

started to descend down, a blizzard had formed. All the nice green trees and nice lakes were instantly frozen over and when he was back down everything looked much different.

‘It’s like an apocalyptic wasteland now... wait, I sense something...’

After surrounding himself with a barrier of holy energy to keep the cold winds away, he noticed a new event. From the frozen lakes that had a few minutes ago been filled with various fish, a monster emerged. It looked similar to the humanoid fish people that were part of the Cerulean Empire army.

‘No it’s similar but quite more powerful than the drones my people encountered...’

The creature was much bigger than the counterpart that was encountered above ground. The scaly skin looked like it was made from dragon scales and its power was above that of core formation. When this monster fish noticed the golden glow it instantly was tossed into a maddened rage. Without giving Zhang Dong a moment to relax it charged forward.

It had powerful arms and webbed hands which ended with claw-like nails. Before it even got close it discharged a stream of yellow-green liquid from its mouth. Without even blinking he dodged to the side, the discharge hit the iced-over ground behind him and quickly dug into it.

‘Is that acid?’

Normally he would have stayed in place and just let the attack bounce off his holy shield but for some reason, it gave him a bad premonition. To test this theory he sends a secondary barrier in the path of the follow-up attack. The radiant glow was intensified after the corrosive substance collided with it. He expected it to evaporate or at least be bounced back onto the ground but instead, it persisted on his shield. The fluid started slowly dissolving the barrier he created, a feat that shouldn’t be possible.

‘This creature isn’t that strong, how can it disperse my Qi this easily?’

While the attack was able to get through his defenses, the creature was not up to par with his skills. A few dodges later he decided to create a sword of light to remove the fish's ugly head. Without it, the monster fell to the ground and quickly started turning into the same yellow-green substance. It was quite dead but the hole it left behind was becoming deeper as the ground wasn’t even able to contend with this strange liquid.

‘It must have some Qi dispersing properties along with eroding attributes, as long as I keep recreating the shield it won’t get through but I’m not sure if I’d be able to survive for long in a pool of that substance.’

The first enemy that appeared was dead but it wasn’t the only one. He wasn’t sure if this was due to him trying to escape through underhanded means or if it was a trap created from the start. Nevertheless, now he was feeling multiple creatures like the one that just attacked him appearing all over the place. They were all jumping out of the now frozen-over rivers and lakes to attack him.

‘I can’t let them surround me...’

While he was closer to the ground and the blizzard made it hard to move, he needed to get out of here. It would be over for him if he just remained in one place where the monsters could surround him. Thus after choosing a path he took for the skies. The monsters down on the ground in unison started spitting

the strange goop toward him. Even with the winds raging they were capable of using their attacks like high-speed projectiles.

‘I think I saw something this way... I hope they don’t encounter these creatures...’

With a heavy heart he pushed onwards, what he needed to do now was find his people that were perhaps ill-equipped to fight these creatures for a prolonged time. Even the shield of his improved fortress might not be able to contend with these acidic attacks.

[Chapter 627](#)

A giant white claw descended from up top. Its swipe caused a massive blizzard and sharp ice fragments to fly in all directions. The aim of this massive sharp appendage was a sphere of golden light in front of it. Yet when it collided with this radiant orb of golden energy instead of cutting through it the claws broke into many smaller pieces.

The creature that the large claw belonged to revealed itself to be an ice dragon. While the pain from losing its claws was excruciating it didn’t stop with its attack. Its large toothy mouth opened up wide to produce a dragon breath attack which these types of creatures were known for. It flew forward and produced even more cold energy that this place was already filled with.

Yet the man inside the ball of golden light didn’t move an inch. Instead of evading he propelled himself toward the attack. The protective barrier he was surrounding himself with pushed all the frozen flames to the sides. His entire form propelled itself into the monster’s mouth before it could even close it. Then within a matter of moments, the dragon began to inflate like a giant balloon. Soon the golden light the man was clad in burst from within and signaled the death of this creature.

“Can you just leave me alone, this is getting annoying...”

Zhang Dong looked at the pink chunks of flesh that were bursting around him turn to icicles the moment the dragon was dead. He was still stuck in the area he arrived in and ever since he attempted to check the sky of this pocket dimension the monsters were after him. Usually, these types of traps had some type of end but there was no end to it.

‘They aren’t strong but there are a lot of them... Will my spiritual energy hold up without me being able to recover? I need to find some kind of safe haven where I can rest.’

Even though he was a master that reached a realm that was slightly above the nascent soul, he was not invincible. His spiritual energy reserves were finite and sooner or later he would also run out of pills to recover. Already half a week had passed since he arrived in this place and the beasts just continued to come at him.

First, it was the frozen versions of the undersea soldiers that he was more familiar with but then more varied ones appeared. Ice Dragons, Ice Tigers, and Ice Serpents were only some of the creatures he had to contend with. Some were weak, others were strong and even close to his level. Coupled with the harsh weather that would freeze him to the bone if he decided to drop his protective barrier, it was a troublesome trial of attrition.

He could not sleep as the monsters were somehow able to always pinpoint his location. Even when he used his new Dao of darkness to hide himself, they always found him. There was probably something

guiding them to his location as he did not belong to this place. Even with the best hiding skills he was unable to keep even the smaller beasts from finding him. Thus he was forced to travel through these strange lands in hopes of finding an exit.

‘Luckily the mapping feature is still working, at least I won’t get lost like this.’

The visibility of this place was also abysmal. Even when straining his eyes he could not see more than around a hundred meters in all directions. If he was at the core formation stage he would probably not be able to see anything above ten. The blizzard was constantly blowing crystal shards in his face and the temperature was at around minus hundred degrees celsius.

‘If this is another immortal treasure, then the space inside could be huge, we never managed to fully repair the Dimensional Regalia, could this place be a finished product or maybe even multiple treasures in one?’

Considering that he could not feel any presence of his sect members even before the whole place turned into a giant ice cage, it could be possible that these pocket dimensions were separated from each other. He could be going through several Dimensional Regalia-type pocket dimensions with each being the size of the old planet he came from. Luckily he was capable of flight at high speeds.

‘Hm? What’s that?’

Only thanks to the mapping feature of his system was he able to fly in one direction. Without it around he feared that he would go around in circles until all of his Qi reserves ran out. This was probably the way this place intended to bury him by disorientation and continuous waves of beasts.

‘It looked like a tower... Can’t even see the end of it...’

Finally, he arrived at something that looked like a structure. It was a massive tower that stretched into the sky. Due to all the ice and blizzard, it looked like a giant tower made of blue crystal but when he squinted he could see the rocky outlines inside.

‘This could be the way out...’

When looking behind he saw some more strange creatures charging at his location. The tower made of ice crystals looked to be quite thick, at least a kilometer in diameter. This was the only reason that he could see it with the blizzard storm still raging around him. Without thinking too much he decided to investigate further as it was the first actual building he managed to come across.

‘I hope it won’t be a dead end like some of those caves...’

Previously he discovered a couple of large caves yet besides a mass of angry monsters inside he didn’t find anything substantial. A large structure like this had to be placed for some type of reason. It could be his way out of this frozen hell hole. Thus he sped towards it with utmost care. From his experience, he knew that a potential trap or encounter with a powerful beast was probable.

“Hm? Are you not going to follow after me?”

To his surprise it was the reverse, the moment he arrived at the bottom of the giant icicle, the monsters that were behind him started chasing him. It was as if they were being kept away by another invisible

barrier that surrounded the whole palace. This was mostly confirmed by the perfect circle they made around this place without any of them being able to take even one step inside.

'I could probably kill them all now, they are sitting ducks just standing like that... but it might not be wise to waste my energy on trash mobs like these.'

This would have been a nice place to farm for spirit points if he ever had his old system. Without it, killing the monsters was somewhat meaningless. He also considered that more and more were appearing before him. Taking the cloning technology that the Cerulean Empire was known for, there would be another swarm waiting to replace these if he killed them.

'There is an entrance...'

Instead, he turned around to face the crystal-like ice, with a swipe of his finger he was able to cut a rectangular opening to get to the entrance gate. There was no writing to indicate that this was some type of test.

'Hm, usually these types of places have some warning or a tip about what is inside... perhaps the person who made this didn't expect any visitors?'

Before going in he took one last look at the monsters behind him. They were just staring at him with those lifeless eyes of theirs. Thanks to his knowledge of the soul arts he knew that these beings were nothing more than hollow husks. There was nothing in them and they were purely moving on instinct. Only a tiny fraction of what used to be a soul remained inside and it was probably left there by whoever created them.

"Sad creatures..."

For some reason, he didn't feel any fear when looking at these beats, only sorrow and sadness. This could be his future if he ever stopped fighting and also when he decided to reach the next stage. He was still convinced that the being that set this whole thing out couldn't be doing it out of the goodness of their hearts.

His idea of the reason didn't surface yet but he had a few theories. The one that was winning was due to the concept of boredom. Perhaps this entity was just entertaining itself due to its immortality. An immortal lifespan might have seemed in theory but then what would happen after a million years? Everything that could have been done on this plane of existence could have been achieved. There would be nothing more than performing the same mundane tasks with no goal.

For the time being he had things that he wanted to do. But after everything was secured his long lifespan might become problematic. Even though this empire was huge, what would he do for a thousand years? Then potentially after he ascended he might become an actual immortal. Would he go crazy or would his mind be somewhat able to cope with all the time he had on his hands?

'Why do I always ponder these existential questions when I'm out in places like this, I need to focus on the current problems, living for too long will probably be the least of my problems.'

After getting all the ice from the entrance gate he gave it a push. The thing started buckling under the pressure but needed a few well-placed kicks to actually open up. If someone of his stature had trouble

opening this thing up then anyone that wasn't a nascent soul master at the later stages would be out of luck.

The stony gate slammed open while he prepared to take on any potential hidden attacks. Yet instead of any attacks, only darkness greeted him. Thanks to his newly gained Dao he knew that he didn't have anything to fear. No monsters of the night that would be able to previously sneak up on him could remain undetected.

'This is not a tower of any kind... this energy... It's a gate?'

When he began approaching the entrance he could feel something tugging at his body. At first, he planted his feet firmly in the frozen ground but soon after he began to move inside. This place would not give him any trials, it was just a passageway through which he would reach another destination. Thus he accepted the pull and quickly vanished into the darkness.

'I hope all the others are on the other end...'

He could feel getting dragged through some kind of passageway. It was somewhat similar to going through a teleportation gate but not quite. His body was actually flying through a weird dark corridor that sometimes produced a purple haze. Without his Qi shield raised, he would have already been torn to shreds. He could only hope that this led somewhere, otherwise getting stuck in an endless tunnel might be the end of his journey.

[Chapter 628](#)

"Woahhhhhh..."

Zhang Dong could feel his body being tossed around through this space like a pinball. He could not imagine anyone else surviving this treatment or at least not anyone that wasn't prepared for it. Perhaps there was a way of traveling in a normal fashion but after he triggered the blizzard it might have become inaccessible to him.

'Bob, are you sure this is safe?'

'Affirmative, we will be reaching the exit in 3... 2... 1...'

His Ai partner informed him about the safety of this dimensional tunnel so he decided to take the plunge. After the countdown was finally over he could see something at the end of this strange tunnel. Soon he was able to stop holding his breath as his body appeared outside, in an area with increased temperature.

"Where did I end up now? Bob, be sure to inform me if there are any more beasts nearby."

Zhang Dong popped out in the middle of the ground and had to stop himself from being thrown up into the air. The first thing he noticed was the heat, it was a stark contrast to the desolate lands filled with snow that he came from.

"About thirty degrees I would say? A good temperature to take a dip... and it seems that someone has already decided to do so..."

To his surprise, he could quickly feel the presence of living beings. There was no way of seeing these beings with his own eyes but they were certainly not human. Previously he had analyzed the underwater creatures that plagued their lands and these were similar in nature. Their Qi was a lot purer than what he was used to, even the generals that were at the pinnacle of power didn't have this pure.

'Considering that all of that army was made out of clones, could these be the original denizens from the Cerulean Empire?'

This was one of the theories floating around his head yet for a place that should belong to the royal family, it wasn't very well protected. The spiritual energy coming from these creatures was quite low, they were around the level of core formation experts at the early stage. Even his old self that just arrived into this world would be able to handle them in combat.

'Their strength won't be a problem, but those two energies with them...'

To his surprise, the creatures that were there weren't alone. He could feel a familiar presence. It was only two people but they were of the nascent soul variety. For some reason, they were surrounded by the being there. It didn't seem that they were injured or anything but it was very suspicious that they would just be sitting there with the enemy.

'Could they be under some type of spell? or could these people be non-violent or something?'

Zhang Dong really hoped that his somewhat calm way of approaching things rubbed off on his sect members. Yet this scene that was unfolding before him was kind of strange. Considering that the last place he came from turned into a death trap of ice, it could be possible that his companions were being duped. Perhaps this time around he would be able to use his Dao of darkness to erase his presence.

Thanks to it he could sink into all the shadows that the strange trees here were producing. It was a strange movement technique that allowed him to approach without making a sound. Thus he quickly departed towards the area that had his sect members and potential brain-sucking monsters. Perhaps the nascent soul masters that were there would be under their control, so he had to prepare for a fight with them. Subduing them could be tricky as one of the people there was quite strong.

"..."

'What the hell are those two doing there?'

Finally, he was there, hiding in the shadows as an inconspicuous blur. What he saw when he arrived at the spot was truly baffling. The two energy signatures that he recognized belonged to Zhang Jin and Huo Qiang. The latter posed an actual threat if he engaged in a proper battle so he wanted to make sure that there wasn't any trickery here. Yet, instead of someone being controlled by some demonic spells, the two seemed to be having a swell old time.

"No~"

"Come here, he he he, I'm going to get ya~"

"Pervert!~"

"Yes, guilty as charged!"

On one side he could see his grandfather slowly chasing after one of the beings that he previously felt. This person looked like a beautiful woman from the waist up but had a large fishtail instead of legs. It was a beautiful mermaid, like in the stories that he read. She even had a bra made out of seashells like that famous one with red hair he still remembered. At this time, she was being very playful with his grandfather who had a very perverted look on his face.

When he glanced to the other side he saw Huo Qiang partially submerged in water as well. He was resting his hands on the edge with one mermaid on each side resting on them. There was a certain grin covering his face as he was trying to take a peek at the large peaks that these two fishy women had. It seemed that these two were enamored with these lovely ladies, considering that these two were horn balls by default he was not sure if they were actually under any mind-affecting technique.

'I can't throw out that possibility yet...'

Zhang Dong knew that he couldn't be hasty. Even though he wanted to just jump in there and give the two idiots a good smack on the head, he couldn't. It was possible that something down in that environment was making them act like this. It could be the mermaids themselves but could also be the food they were eating or even the water they were in.

All of them were gathered in what looked to be a lake. The water was really clear and some other mermaids were seen in the deeper parts just having some fun with the other fish. It was some kind of tropical setting, the trees were somewhat similar to palm trees. It had some strange pink-looking fruits on them that Huo Qiang seemed to be munching on.

It was quite bright outside and the light source over them looked quite real. He remembered the moment that he flew up to the other one in the other pocket dimension. There was a possibility that he would trigger another ice age if he flew up there again or that it could be triggered by his interaction with the natives.

First of all he needed to identify the fruits. After sinking back into the shadows he arrived at one of these trees with the fruit already on the ground. Thanks to it being surrounded by shade it was easy enough for him to pull it right in. Bob was initiated to give it an assessment and just as he thought there was something in this food.

'So, it's something like an aphrodisiac?'

'Affirmative.'

'How did those goofballs end up eating these...'

By the look of it, the fruit was a potent drug even nascent soul masters weren't safe from it. Yet the preliminary analysis told him that it shouldn't be enough to make them lose their mind and just take a dip with the enemy troops. Next he approached one of the mermaids that had decided to sunbathe a bit. With a little poke to her forehead he sent her into a deep slumber and quickly made the second test.

'So... their vocal cords have some type of hallucinogenic effect that could work in conjunction with that aphrodisiac?'

'Affirmative.'

Bob answered him again while he moved away from the sleeping mermaid. After analyzing some other things, like the water in the lake he came to one conclusion. All of the things here were tailor made to take out these two idiots. They would only work on people that couldn't keep it inside of their pants for too long. The small amount of substances here should normally not be able to force a nascent soul master to act this way. There was only one reason that it actually was, the two must have wanted it to happen.

This didn't make any sense otherwise, why would they have fallen into such an obvious trap. Even though some of the mermaids were producing a very sensual tune it wasn't hard to block out. It was as if the two arrived in this place and allowed themselves to be enticed by these beauties just so that they could have some fun with them. Perhaps if it was any other person he wouldn't believe it but considering that these two had harems of women everywhere, this was quite plausible.

'The possibility of a hidden expert doing this to them isn't very high...'

Bob confirmed all of his claims as the two weren't showing the telltale signs of being coerced. Normally their eyes would be a lot more droopy and the way they moved would be impaired by something. On the other hand, the two looked quite chipper; they were probably just trying to get something out of these encounters. It was probably them that were trying to coerce these mermaids into some naughty acts and not the other way around.

'Uh... are they playing stupid and hoping that they would commit to something more?'

Zhang Dong frowned while stepping out of the shadows. He was standing directly over Huo Qiang who was trying to peel off one of the mermaid's shells from her chest. Before anything could happen his large fist connected with the man's head. The force from the impact plunged him directly into the ground while causing water to splash everywhere.

"What the hell are you two idiots even doing? Get ahold of yourself!"

"D-Dong'er is that you?"

"Don't you Dong'er me you old fart, stop chasing that mermaid already!"

He started shaking his Qi-covered fist at his grandfather that was close to two hundred years older than he was. The moment he appeared on the scene the mermaids that were gathered here started scattering to the sides out of fright. They quickly dove into the lake and headed to some underwater tunnels that it was connected to. It seemed that there was a large web of those underground.

These Zhang Dong had somewhat investigated with his spiritual sense and there was a possibility of them leading to their next destination. However, before he attempted to get through this pocket dimension he needed to get some information out of these two bozos. They were clearly inside the golden palace before they were swallowed by the large anglerfish, he needed to know how they ended up here.

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"Senior brother, can we at least get off the ground?"

"No, you can't and if you ask me again, I'm going to deck you in the nose."

Zhang Dong shook his fist at Huo Qiang who was forced to kneel down on the ground before him. To the left of the muscular man was an older gentleman that was doing the same. His face already had a fist imprint on it that he was rubbing.

“How could you hit your dear and only grandfather?”

“Keep talking like that and I won’t have any grandfathers left.”

“So cruel...”

Zhang Jin moved his face to the side to face Huo Qiang. He covered his mouth to send a message to his partner in crime that Zhang Dong was able to quickly intercept.

‘I think Dong’er is a little mad, let’s give him some time to relax, just follow my lead.’

‘I’ll leave it to you elder.’

“Dong’er it’s...ack.”

“I heard all of that, you two idiots. Instead of trying to fool me, how about you explain how you ended up here? Where are the others? Where are the Golden Palace and the other sect members?”

His fists rained down on their heads before they could try to bullshit their way through all of it. He continued to berate the two until they gave in, their heads began to spin around from the impacts. Zhang Dong's fists were quite heavy, even when he was pulling his punches they went through even the best defenses.

“We... we don’t really know...”

“You don’t know?”

“Yes, we just ended up here and decided to take a little break in our journey.”

“A little break? Wait, how about you go back... what journey?”

Zhang Jin gave out a sigh before finally deciding to give his grandson the whole timetable of what had happened.

“At first the whole palace and all of us together were swallowed by that strange monster fish. We could see you being swallowed by the darkness while the others made it back inside.”

He nodded while listening, this was the start of his own trek through the frozen wasteland. Zhang Jin on the other hand and the others were all transported to another location. It was a stark contrast to the one that he ended up as it was even hotter there than in this tropical environment.

“We ended up in a place mostly filled with lava, only thanks to the Golden Palace’s flight capability were we able to remain unharmed. Liena wanted to form a group to search for you but we couldn’t allow this.”

“Ah yes, if I’m gone the palace will switch to the next in the command line.”

“Yes, and she also is aware of some secrets that I’m not aware of because of a certain Patriarch never disclosing them...”

Zhang Dong could see his grandfather squinting in his direction. This was true as he had shown Liena all the secret rooms and granted access to the hidden command station only he had access to. Zhang Jin would be able to command the ship but some functions would be unavailable to him. Liena would actually be able to activate the teleportation feature back outside, that is if something here wasn't blocking it.

It was possible that it was due to them being inside of a living being and not at a location. It was constantly moving throughout the highly pressured waters. It was also filled with pocket dimensions, maybe even the system had trouble locking onto the coordinates in a situation like this.

"Maybe if a certain old man could be trusted to not engage in lewd acts with the enemy, then he would have told him everything... but that's not important now, what happened next? So you arrived at a lava location and then?"

Zhang Jin put his head down in shame after hearing Zhang Dong's rebuttal. He at least was sure that his wife wouldn't have fallen into a strange trap like this. Perhaps they were sure that the aphrodisiacs wouldn't affect them but the danger wasn't zero. If his grandfather was given all the secrets and then controlled then it would be quite a problem for everyone. Without him around his Golden Palace could have been turned into a grand weapon against his own people.

"Yes, the golden palace should still be at that location at least it still was when we activated the trap..."

"A trap?"

"We decided to form a search party to look for you Dong'er, Huo Qiang here who is well versed in the Dao of fire was the perfect choice for it."

"Yeah, but why did they let you go outside too?"

It made sense for Huo Qiang to go outside, his Ifrit Soul Beast was capable of controlling flames and so was its master. Moving through a lava-filled environment with people from the Huo clan side of the sect was a good idea.

"We couldn't let the Huo clan go alone, we needed to send a force capable of contending with many other issues."

"That makes sense... so why did they let you come with them?"

"What is that supposed to mean? I am one of the most experienced experts in the entire sect!"

"I guess you are...I keep forgetting each time you pull a stunt like this..."

Perhaps Zhang Dong was a little biased against his grandfather who seemed to only think with his lower half. He was still a nascent soul master with over two hundred years of experience. There were a lot of things that he knew and was a capable general of his own accord. Having him along in the search party wasn't a bad choice.

He was the Patriarch that towered over everyone from his own sect. His perception of them was a bit more realistic so he forgot that others were considered masters. In the eyes of his sect members, a person like Zhang Jin was not a useless pervert but a legendary figure. Huo Qiang wasn't a brainless

musclebound idiot but an honorable warrior at the forefront of the empire. Some even considered him to be in the top ten of the strongest people in the whole empire.

There was a moment when he started feeling that he was perhaps too harsh on the two yet after seeing Huo Qiang dozing off during Zhang Jin's tale, he went back to his old preconceived notions of these two. Finally, he started getting to the important part where they were transported to this place.

"So you were fighting some volcanic creatures and activated some type of teleportation formation which split you all up into smaller groups?"

"That's correct, it hasn't been that long since we arrived here so we decided to take a little break before moving along..."

"By little break you mean?"

"Yes..."

"Hm..."

The story was over and he could kind of fill in the blanks by himself. After getting here and encountering the natives they forgot about their mission. It was more likely that all of the two were actually affected by the alluring forms of the mermaids to some extent. Perhaps if there was someone like Zhang Zhi with them the story would have ended up differently.

"But you're fine so now we just need to find the way back to the palace! Or perhaps you could create a teleportation formation to send us back!"

"I can't do that, these pocket dimensions are strange, I can't pinpoint the location of the Golden Palace but we could try finding some of the people that came together with your group but remember not to fly too high up..."

"We shouldn't fly?"

Zhang Dong nodded and after giving a smack to the back of Qiang's head he explained everything that happened to him. Soon the group of three nascent soul masters was going through the deserted encampment that looked like a resort. Without the mermaids being here to look over their shoulders they were free to investigate the place in peace.

"So it's possible for those lovely creatures to turn into ugly monstrosities?"

"Yes, there might be some type of trigger that changes the environment and it would be better if we first found the others, have you been able to detect them?"

"No... I wasn't able to sense any of the juniors that came with us, nor the other masters, perhaps they have been transported to another of these 'pocket dimensions' you speak of Dong'er."

"That could be the case but I hope it's not."

It took him multiple days to just get past the first frozen area. If there were multiple pocket dimensions inside this anglerfish then it would be a difficult task to go through them. Even for masters like them, it was disorienting. Normally they had Zhang Dong and his system to ask for help but it was being blocked.

The current function that was somewhat helpful was that he could still map out the entire place and this included the underground tunnels that these mermaids went through. However, this wasn't all. After getting back with this two some of the old faction-based perks were back to working but to a limited degree.

"I and the elder have been here for two days but we were unable to discover any of our brothers even after arriving at this place."

Huo Qiang was finally allowed to get up as the three needed to think about a new plan. The quickest but the most dangerous way of escaping would be to split up. Thankfully, his system was now picking up these two back on his faction screen. It seemed that if they were this close that it could recalibrate their positions again.

'Bob, does this mean that there are no other of my faction members here or that I need to get closer to them for them to be registered in the faction window?'

'There are several unknown errors plaguing the system, an answer can not be given.'

'I see...'

It was possible that he only needed to be in the same pocket dimension as his faction members for it to work. Yet considering that he wasn't able to see Huo Qiang and Zhang Jin there before he got closer then it was possible that more people were somewhere here. Normally he would be against splitting up but this was not a good time to take things slowly. They needed to get back to their main force and either escape the belly of this beast or find a way to conquer it.

"Fine then, I'll head into those tunnels and you two examine the surroundings from outside, we will meet back at this location in two days..."

The three masters nodded at each other and now that they could communicate via Zhang Dong's system the danger was lowered. All of them jumped in different directions and resumed their search for their lost sect brothers and sisters.

[Chapter 630](#)

'Going through the surface is much faster than these narrow tunnels, good that I'm not claustrophobic...'

Zhang Dong was squeezing his body through the narrow passages that the mermaids escaped to. He had even noticed some of them watching him as he was passing without giving him a greeting. It was clear that these creatures were scared of him but this didn't mean that they were docile. They were still trying to entice his horny grandfather for some reason. If it was just out of fright then it would be fine but perhaps they had something else in store for the two idiots that he 'rescued.'

'Should I just drill through the ground... but these rocks are quite thick and sturdy, I'll be out of qi in no time...'

For a moment he decided to stop and look at his mapping device. The whole place was like a maze. There were hundreds of these narrow tunnels everywhere and only thanks to the map was he able to navigate through them. When looking out the window there was a red line formed behind him to

indicate where he had already been. He had already managed to follow one of the tunnels to one that he already took and thanks to the map he was able to quickly adjust to a new pathway.

All of them looked the same and were quite disorienting. It also didn't help that there was seaweed everywhere. It was quite thick and even able to block off some of the paths that he had already been on. It blended with the narrow walls and would probably cause people to miss some of the old pathways they had taken.

'It's good that I can track the paths they took with the little Qi those mermaids use for swimming but where will it lead me to?'

He had already spent several hours down here. Due to the narrow pathways and the seaweed everywhere, it was pitch dark down here. Normally he would be glowing like a lightbulb but thanks to his newest Dao of Darkness he could comfortably move through this place like it was nothing.

His eyes couldn't see anything but he could still tell what was happening around him. It was a different type of vision that didn't require any light to be present and allowed him to be a bit more sneaky. If he tried to produce light then he would open himself up to a potential trap. Like this, even if the mermaids were trying to lead him toward doom, he would have the upper hand.

The journey continued for a couple of more hours until he managed to sense something. Even with the thickness of the walls in place, he managed to pick up something nearby. There was a larger concentration of living beings in the area that was before him. Thanks to his shadowy sneaking skills he was able to approach the area without needing to slow down that much. After squeezing through one last hole he was greeted with quite a large cavern with a huge castle in the middle.

'Is this their lair? Looks like it's in a large air bubble...'

He was now inside a huge cave. There were many small tunnels that popped out of the ceiling and some mermaids could be seen going through them. Instantly he could see that there was something fishy about those mermaids. Two of them were swimming with something that looked like a big soap bubble. When straining his senses a bit he managed to notice that there was someone inside that bubble.

They were all going towards the giant dome in the middle of this cavern. At first, it looked like it was just a massive pocket of air but when taking another look he noticed that it was actually a large barrier. It allowed the mermaids to easily move inside but quickly cleared behind them. Inside this barrier, there were several large structures. Some type of palace was there which could mean that he had found what he was looking for.

'It's probably not where the Cerulean Empress lives, a bit too small to be a castle the Emperor would live in...'

With the help of his system map and his own senses, he tried peeking into the inside of this bubble. Now that he was free of the strange rocks he was actually able to peer through the veil. On the inside, there were many nascent soul-equivalent beings and also more of the mermaids. This wasn't the part he was interested in though as besides those creatures his people were present.

'That person in the bubble was probably someone from the search party... I shouldn't assume the worst but this doesn't look good... Now how do I get inside without alerting them of my presence?'

After finding that his people were being dragged into the palace he needed to do something. It was probably possible for him to force his way in by sheer brute power. Yet this would alert everyone in this underwater city to his presence. Even he wouldn't be able to contend with swarms of nascent soul-equivalent monsters. Considering that this place could also turn into a deathtrap like the frozen wasteland he left behind, it would be better to try the hidden approach first.

'It might not affect me but not many people would survive those temperatures...'

Considering that his people were being brought here he could not risk another disastrous change occurring. He assumed that he would be fine even in extreme temperatures but this wasn't the same for the people from the search party. Some of them could be out cold, others were just core formation experts. They would surely perish if the same monsters that he left behind in the desolate frozen wastes appeared before them.

'Is there a way to sneak in...'

When thinking about the way to go his eyes landed on two mermaids but mostly on the big bubble, they were dragging through a hole. Inside was a man at the core formation level that was probably going to get transported on the inside. This was his ticket into this area, he just needed to cloak himself in darkness. Even though the palace behind the barrier was filled with light, the rest of the underwater areas were flooded with darkness. He just needed to take up a shadowy form and keep to the backs of the mermaids which wouldn't be clad in light.

This new Dao had improved his hiding technique to the next level. Even while moving no one that was close to his level was able to detect him. The only weakness of this new technique was light. However, there weren't that many places in the world that light reached everywhere. Even now, he was sticking to the mermaid's back that was shrouded in some shade while she approached the protective bubble. Soon she was swimming inside without anyone being able to pick him up.

It was actually like passing through a soap bubble and on the inside there was a mix of water elements with breathable water. Yes, it was a strange phenomenon where the surroundings were composed of water with infused air. It was a strange phenomenon where two existed at once which allowed people with regular lungs to breathe. Before coming here he was sustaining himself with the other Dao that he had gained, the one of wind. Without defeating the Emerald Phoenix Emperor, investigating a place like this would have been quite troublesome but if he could produce his own air then there was no problem.

'Where are they taking him...'

Even though the little bit of shade behind the mermaid allowed him to sneak in, if she turned around to face a light source his location would be exposed. Thus when inside he quickly jolted to a safe location before anyone discovered his presence. There was a whole city around him that offered a lot of shaded spots that he could now move undetected through.

His gaze landed on the bubble of water that began to open up after the mermaids made it in. He was prepared to instantly jump into action if he felt any killing intent from the denizens here. The main reason that he decided to come here is to find the people that were searching for him. Perhaps it was unwise to cause a scene but he wouldn't just let one of his sect members be killed right in front of his nose.

Luckily the man didn't look to be injured and his face had a rather odd expression. There was a certain grin there similar to the one that his grandfather and Huo Qiang had when they were interacting with these mermaids. Considering that he was only a core formation expert the mermaid's aphrodisiacs and enticing melodies probably had a larger effect.

'Was he just drugged and brought here? Or perhaps he tired himself by having fun with these mermaids?'

While the women were quite beautiful and exotic from the waist up he had a hard time believing that anyone would go through with the deed. They still had long fishtails with no legs to be seen anywhere. He wasn't really sure about the logistics here but perhaps it ended before anything could have been explored further.

'They are on the move, I need to follow them.'

After the man was freed from the bubble the mermaids continued to drag him towards a large palace-like structure in the back. It looked like it was made out of hollowed-out coral with uneven towers and seashells everywhere. Fish were swimming in this strange environment which if not for this situation would have been quite captivating.

'The people are starting to show up on my faction window, there must be something about this environment that is blocking my system.'

It was quite interesting to see that his system wasn't perfect. Only after getting inside of this bubble and the member of his sect getting out of the smaller one, was he registered back in his faction window. It seemed it were the bubbles and perhaps this protective formation that was doing this.

Before leaving this palace he made a mental note to investigate. If there was something able to block out his system, it could perhaps be used against his true foe. Perhaps this would give him a tip on how he should counter the time-stop effect that the Overseer was producing but first he needed to get his people out of this place.

While using the shadows to keep a low profile he entered the strange palace. There he found guards that looked like the clone generals. They were wearing bulky armor and holding tridents in their hands while not moving. Some lesser commanders were even patrolling the corridors through which he was sneaking.

All of the people that he was picking up on his faction window were getting moved to one location, there he would find his answer to what these mermaids were attempting to achieve with the kidnapping.