

Unfathomable 641

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“This is starting to get annoying, how would a normal person get through this, even I can barely figure things out...”

Zhang Dong looked at his mapping device which was all covered in red lines. After descending into this maze of tunnels he didn't expect to almost get lost. There were many more corridors than in the other dimension and even if he had the mapping function with himself it was becoming hard to read.

Previously he assumed it to just be the usual same-looking tunnels with similar distraction tactics. Most of the time there was an easy pattern to them along with a few formations that kept the right paths from being noticed. He had already traversed many mazes like that and with the help of his system, he was able to traverse through them at a rapid pace. This one was a bit different though as there was a whole spatial element included.

Normally, illusory formations were used to confuse anyone that was going through the tunnels. Here on the other hand he was getting teleported to other locations after going through specific paths in the tunnels. To make all of this even worse these teleportation spots liked to shift around and put him in different places. The patterns were non-existent and some of the tunnels were actually moving and changing as he was passing through.

Due to this, it was almost useless to look at the map and the redline that represented the paths that he took. After a few minutes the pathways would shift into different locations and where he previously went through would have changed into a wall.

‘This isn't going to work... no one without a system would be able to get through this place, this is true but there has to be a way to find the exit. Bob, have you managed to analyze the spatial pattern?’

‘Calculations 96% complete...’

‘Good.’

After taking a little break to wait for Bob to finish the calculations he removed the red chicken scratch from the map. It would be of no help to look at the old paths that he took if the maze was constantly shifting around. His attempts to drill through the walls were also ineffective. Even he with his current power could barely scratch the walls here. Only if there was a thin layer of rocks between other paths would it actually be possible.

‘Calculation complete. Sending the spatial readings to the user.’

‘There we go... So that's how it works...’

Only thanks to Bob was he able to make out what was actually happening. It seemed that this whole place was riddled with hidden portals and spatial traps. Sometimes he would be teleported to another location while other times he sunk through a side dimension into this one. There were multiple ways of getting lost here and without Bob he would have probably needed the system to teleport himself out to the start of the dungeon.

Now after the code had been cracked he could try searching for the correct patterns or go through a different approach. If he could change the coordinates of the traps like he did before then it should be possible to arrive at an area that lacked these time wasters. There was also a third approach he could take by disabling the traps he already went through. This would not do anything about the shifting tunnels but would still allow him to see the paths that he had not yet been in.

‘Let’s go Bob, this isn’t over yet.’

Thus he started trying to pinpoint the issue and reverse engineering the spatial passageways. After going through a few more of them Bob had enough data to block out the traps from ever activating. Now he could map out the area again which started looking a lot more uniform.

Whenever a shift in the maze occurred he just needed to either backtrack to a location that had not been traversed yet or just force himself through a thinner wall. Without the teleportation traps being able to halt his advance he was soon able to get through this first stop-gap and only had to waste a few hours of his time on the whole thing.

‘A regular cultivator would probably be stuck there forever...’

It wouldn’t be strange for anyone else to just starve to death inside this spatial maze. He wasn’t even sure how a regular system holder with the cash shop would get over this thing. Perhaps there would have been some treasures that they could buy for a huge amount of spirit points for this part. This would explain all of the cloned troops that could be farmed for points beforehand.

Nevertheless, after passing through this last tunnel he would be out of this dreaded maze. Going through the narrow tunnels in darkness was not for the faint of heart. Luckily this was only a test of pathfinding, there were no monsters lurking in the shadows to push in the course. Perhaps if he spent more time then he would start seeing things, there were some illusory formations here and there that were dormant.

‘It’s bright.’

His eyes were hit by a radiant glow of light after he pushed through the last spatial tunnel. He was finally out but this place didn’t look like the inside of the soap bubble that he was working to turn off. For the whole trip through the maze, it felt that he was going in all sorts of directions but mostly down.

‘So is this now a monster level? Kill all the monsters and arrive at the end where the big bad boss is or something?’

He gave out a sigh as he could instantly feel the presence of living beings around him. They looked like some kind of mix between the fish people that attacked his lands and spirit or demonic beasts. This area was crawling with them and only thanks to his deceptive techniques was he able to keep them from becoming aware of his presence.

‘It was the right choice to keep myself hidden, these things seem to have been placed here for an ambush. Some are even hiding within the ground ready to pounce...’

The area was a mix of rocks and forests which made it easy to use the previously gained shadow-hiding technique. Within a few moments, he was out of the introductory space right outside the maze and up a

large tree. The plants here were gigantic and the trees reached up to half a kilometer. This was the same for the monsters hidden everywhere, the whole place was swarming with them.

‘This would have really been troublesome if I took more people with me. It looks like another smaller pocket dimension again, the person that made this place was really good at making those.’

The area he was in wasn’t as large as the pocket worlds he previously visited. It was hard to make out as there was something like a giant fog blocking his senses from spreading further than a few kilometers. There didn’t seem to be a fake sun to keep everything illuminated, instead, he could see many smaller glowing squares stuck to the rocky ceiling above.

‘Are those giant centipedes in there?’

When glancing up he could see holes in the rocks that were occupied by giant insects. There were thousands of them up there and their size was above that of an average human. It wouldn’t be strange if they pounced at him if he attempted flying through the air.

‘Do they want a person to go through the forest instead? There are also flying beasts everywhere...’

Another area to keep him away looked to have been prepared for someone with a system. Zhang Dong could see a system holder training here for weeks and taking out the nascent soul and core formation level beasts until moving on. Perhaps this area was here to make up for the loss of spirit points that were needed to traverse the earlier maze.

‘Well... I don’t really need to do this.’

He couldn’t get any points from slaying these monsters so there was no reason for him to stay here. With the use of the shadows, he just continued to traverse through the forest while examining the beasts stationed. They seemed to be aligned with the water and wood elements the most. A lot of insectoid variants were fused with fishy monsters. At his current power level, it didn’t take him long to get through this place as he didn’t lose any time hunting the creatures.

‘Is this supposed to be the way forward? I never liked spiders...’

The entire forest area was encased in a massive barrier of rocks and there was only one place to go through. A chasm covered in webbing was before him and inside he could see many tiny eyes that belonged to the spider monsters inside. With his mastery of the Darkness, he could clearly see the hidden monstrosities inside.

‘There are so many of them, big and small...’

Luckily for him, in his shadowy form, he was unable to get stuck in the net. The monsters that made this their home weren’t much different than any other demonic spider species. They usually reacted to sound or body heat. Whenever someone arrived in their territory the sound waves of their footsteps would travel through the net to inform the arachnids of their prey.

In a matter of minutes, he was already traversing through the nets. They had some poisonous attributes along with a paralyzing effect. However, while in this strange shadowy form, he was fully immune to it all. Without much trouble, he arrived at the last chamber with what looked to be a sleeping spider queen.

‘Hm... looks like a black widow Arachne...’

The monster had a part that was humanoid in nature. It was actually quite beautiful and very similar to the human part of the mermaids he encountered. It was just stuck to a massive spider with many more tiny ones crawling all over its body. This monstrosity was probably supposed to be his last enemy as it was slumbering right above a large gate.

‘ So, normally if I stepped forward it would jump down on me along with the smaller spiders to act as a distraction... Whoever made this thing will probably be mad...’

Zhang Dong slithered away towards the gate and squeezed himself through a tiny gap in his shadowy form. The last spider boss would not be able to fulfill her duty as he was already on the other side. Two obstacles were gone but how many more troublesome areas awaited him was unknown. He could only hope that whoever created all of this wouldn’t be mad after seeing that he just ignored most of their hard work.

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‘I guess this one can’t be cheesed as easily...but that doesn’t mean that it isn’t possible.’

Zhang Dong sat in the shadows while looking at a large monster on a huge circular platform. After passing through the level with large numbers of monsters he arrived at this location. This one seemed to be similar to the second stopgap but not quite. Instead of a large open area, it was a smaller closed one with an enemy waiting for him. This enemy was just waiting for him while nothing was happening.

‘Scan complete.’

‘There we go, let me see...’

He did not try to attack the monster just yet. This would obviously set something in motion that perhaps he could not stop later. It was better to sit back in shadow form while letting Bob analyze the situation. To no surprise, this location turned out to be something like a boss gauntlet.

This was the first floor of a tower-like structure. It was around a hundred meters in diameter with thick walls that could not be easily destroyed. What Bob counted were fifty floors with a new enemy waiting for him. The one that was standing here was relatively weak but this didn’t mean that the other ones would be the same.

‘So, I reckon that after I kill this one, I’ll be forced to the higher floor, rinse and repeat.’

After looking at the data before him it was easy to come to a conclusion about this place. It was more a test of stamina than actual power. He would need to face beasts that probably became stronger with each level. The breaks between the fights would probably be quite short and he had no place to run.

‘Are there any cracks to slip through or will I need to just do this the traditional way.’

Conserving his energy was an important tactic. If he continued to fight these beasts then he would not be at his best when facing off against the main enemy. He needed to plan for the future and not be stuck here fighting the lackeys one by one. Luckily he was not the average system holder and there were ways to hack into these trials with the help of his Ai. The predecessor that lent it out to him was truly a lifesaver.

‘So there is something like this here...’

The walls were made from a similar material to the one where he found those strange cubes. It lacked the ability to block out his map but was similarly resistant to any impacts and spirit energy. With some help, he spotted a side entrance that would normally not be accessible to anyone. Perhaps the person that made this thing used it to travel through the levels. Only by waiting here and letting Bob analyze everything was he even able to discover it.

‘Hack it Bob.’

After spotting the area in the wall he waited another fifteen minutes for his Ai to open the path forward. After triggering the mechanism the black rocky walls opened up to reveal something that looked like a modern-day elevator. When looking inside he could see the same number of levels represented as buttons on the side. They went all the way from one to fifty with one level being even above this.

‘This should take me all the way to the next spot.’

This was a strange side entrance so he still needed to remain vigilant. When inside of it he gave Bob the order to look for anything detrimental to his health.

‘No protective systems spotted.’

‘Hm? I guess this makes some sense. Whoever made this probably didn’t expect anyone to find this elevator. No reason to bother with defensive measures.’

People with immense power tended to undervalue anyone that was below them. The immortal that created this tower with many nascent-level monsters in it probably didn’t expect anyone to be able to get in here. There wasn’t even a system to scan for a spirit signature of the owner, they clearly didn’t expect Zhang Dong to have something like an Ai to open it and guide him in.

Thus after stepping in he pressed the last button that would take him to the fifty-first level. With some more luck, it would take him to another area through which he could easily travel through. Usually after finding one of these secret areas, traversing through the others was easier.

‘This place looks similar, could that guy have been here too?’

After traveling through all of the fifty levels he arrived at the top one. After the doors opened up he was ready to defend himself against some ancient golems that were left behind as a defensive mechanism. Instead, he found a room with many monitors, it looked like something a person could find in a casino just without anyone actually working there.

‘This design looks like something from earth... Could someone from there be the one behind all of this or...’

When moving forward into this strange monitoring room he began thinking. Usually, there were no coincidences in this world. This place looked similar to the one back where it all started. These monitors were very similar to the ones that his predecessor used along with the machines here. There was a difference though, they weren’t as destroyed by time.

‘Could he have found one of these locations and based his technology on them? That wouldn’t be strange, that’s probably how he was able to figure things out and was able to crack my system...’

This theory had some merit to it, or at least that's what Zhang Dong was thinking. If this location existed then perhaps other ones were out there as well. He usually didn't sit tight for half an hour while letting Bob scan everything. It was normal that he didn't locate any other of these locations.

'This is good... Bob, take as much data as you can from here.'

'Affirmative.'

If he could have his Ai get the pattern down of these spots it would help him against the overseer. Ways of combating those beings could very well be at one of these locations. This one didn't seem to have much to it as it was just something used for monitoring and getting around the locations. He could even see all the fifty levels and beasts waiting for him there.

'There is some sort of time lock on these levels... that's how these creatures have managed to survive for this long...'

This reminded him of his encounter with the Azure Empress. For a moment she managed to halt time and grab the item that was left behind by Wang Long. This was also a type of Dao that allowed people to affect time. It seemed that whoever was behind this all had some type of understanding in it and perhaps this sample here could help him find a countermeasure in the future.

'This will probably take a while...'

Normally he would have to give Bob some time to analyze the strange frozen zone. At the moment he didn't really have any time for that. His people were waiting outside for him to get through these blockades. Instead, it would have been better to get something that he could analyze later.

'Luckily whoever made this place, liked gaming rigs...'

Everything that was here looked like a replica gaming PC from his time. It had purple lights going through the water-cooled fluid part. Even now as the whole thing was working the PC case underneath was glowing through the transparent screen. No dust seemed to have built up either so he could see everything vividly.

'I don't recall the GPU model, it looks quite large...'

Zhang Dong could recall the two main GPU companies from his old world but none of them seemed to have a model like this one. From the outside, it looked very similar but wasn't quite there. Perhaps whoever made this place decided to customize it to their own liking or they came from a different earth than he did.

'For all I know, the earth I came from could be a recreation too...'

He didn't really want to think about the godly being working in the background but the closer he got to defeating all Emperors the closer he felt the last confrontation was approaching. His current white seed was slowly opening up and he could feel himself growing stronger by the day. After absorbing the Dao of the Cerulean Empress he could see himself progressing even further and perhaps breaking through to the next level.

'Bob, what will happen if I take this with me...'

‘Unable to come to a conclusion, need more data.’

‘So you fail me now...Hm...’

He stared at the RGB lights that started turning on and illuminating this dark room. On one end was the entrance he came through and on the other another door through which he would arrive in the next area. If he took this PC there would possibly be an adverse reaction.

‘I’ll just take the whole room with me...’

After nodding at himself he moved over to the exit door. After opening it he could see the next area through it. The door was seemingly hovering in the air above a large castle-like structure. There was also the inside of the bubbly barrier that he could see from here. If he jumped through the door it would probably close behind him along with this room and the PC in it. Thus he needed to grab everything he needed while the door was still open.

Soon he pulled the replica of the medallion out while quickly working on the walls of the room. Forcing everything out and placing it into the medallion wasn’t easy and he needed to do it in one fell swoop. As he was working the whole tower part of the trial area began to collapse and along with it came all the monsters that were trapped inside.

‘Well, sorry about that guys...’

All of the room along with all the constructs in it made their way into his medallion. Just as he expected the moment they were in there the door started to vanish. Luckily he was already prepared to step through it with most of the room making its way into his possession.

At almost the same time he started hearing a strange rumbling. In the distance, a large sinkhole had formed and started to collapse. From within he could hear the roars of strange beasts that were quickly drowned out by the sounds of destruction. The whole thing was collapsing onto itself, it was as if a black hole had formed inside to swallow all of it in one quick gulp.

‘I really hope no one heard that...’

He was floating right up in the air with light shining from all sides. There were no shadowy spots that he could disappear to. His position had become exposed and he was not alone here, from the distance he could feel something coming and it was not a weak opponent.

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‘At least I tried...’

Zhang Dong looked down at a large army of flying fishmen coming his way. After he took out a large portion of a hidden room and appeared here his location became known. His Dao of Darkness couldn’t help him this time around as there were no shadows to sink into. He had appeared up in the sky and right in front of the enemy base. Instantly when he came out the people living here became aware of his existence and were coming his way.

‘There are a lot of them, I need to find a way to open up this damn bubble, I can’t even teleport out back to the golden palace...’

The person that made this place really didn't like the teleportation function. Now that it was gone Zhang Dong realized how much he was reliant on this feature. There was a possibility of getting out through similar means but he would first need to create the correct gate through which he could leave or a formation. Without it, there was no way of getting back to his people or the area he previously was in. After ripping out the secret room the entire section he was in vanished from his map. It was as if the whole place didn't exist in the first place.

It was more of the clones coming his way. There were quite a few at the general level. With this many around, even Zhang Dong didn't feel confident in his victory. Together with the men holding tridents also came a swarm of fish monsters. There were many nascent soul-level beings here that numbered in the thousands. They continued to pour out of the castle and it didn't seem like there was an end to them.

'I don't see any way of opening this bubble from this side, the mechanism must be inside of their main base...'

To his dismay, there was no way for him to avoid this battle or get back to his people. He was in for the fight of his life and the Empress he was supposed to face off against didn't even show herself yet. He was hoping to save his battle armor for the last battle but as it stood now he needed all the help he could get against the swarm of lackeys.

"You guys probably don't want to talk this over, right?"

He called out to the underwater people that came to greet him. In his mind, there was no way for them to communicate after all of the events that transpired before. His armies had killed massive numbers of the cloned soldiers and they had been battling against each other for months now. However, for some reason when the large group arrived something happened. Before he could take a fighting stance and start blasting, they called out to him.

"The Empress is expecting you, please come with us."

"She is expecting me? The Empress?"

"Yes!"

Instead of attacking him, they moved to the sides. A tunnel surrounded by various creatures was formed from up in the air and stretched all the way out to the faraway palace. Apparently, their leader knew that he was already coming their way. Perhaps she had a way of observing his movements as he was trying to come in through the back door.

'Could it be possible for there to be peace between our two factions?'

Zhang Dong wasn't sure what was going on but he couldn't know if this was just a trap. He had already met one of the Empire sides that weren't totally his enemies like Argus and his people. Perhaps it was possible for this Cerulean Empress of theirs to be the same. Perhaps some kind of treaty could be reached.

'Maybe if I just offer them the sea they will leave us be?'

These people were beings that needed some water to survive. The cultivators above ground didn't really need the great sea for anything much. They could survive without really fishing outside and there were also many sea-sized lakes on the main ground that could be used instead. An agreement could be reached for the hundred or so years this empire was there. They would keep away from the water and the Cerulean Empress would not push into the land.

'That is if it's not a trap, it could be possible that she just wants to lure me into some type of trapping formation but, I might have a chance to disable the bubble if I get inside the palace.'

The whole thing looked fishy but not like he could decline. They were opening up the gates before him and he felt confident in his own abilities. Thankfully most people in this world tended to underestimate his abilities. As long as he was careful he didn't see himself getting defeated.

'Just to be safe I'll leave an escape route ready...'

While he didn't want to depend on his teleportation feature too much, it was still working when inside this large bubble. Even if he couldn't get outside of it to his people he could still set up a place to escape if something inside of that palace happened to him. After putting the save spot into his faction window he nodded at the person that came to pick him up.

"Fine then, I'll meet your Empress then."

"Please come this way, the Empress wishes to see you now and she doesn't like to be kept waiting."

Soon he was flying through the tunnel of monsters. A thin layer of golden energy was surrounding his body and ready to explode. It wouldn't be strange if these monsters decided to just push themselves onto his body. They were acting strange though, just standing there without even blinking. At least for the ones that had eyes, some of them were just fish with no eyelids.

'These beings... they aren't quite there...'

Zhang Dong realized something, there was something off about these beings. There was something affecting their movements, something was jolting their souls into acting a certain way. Previously the army of clones didn't seem to have this attribute to them but the creatures here did. Something strong was pulling at their strings and the closer to the palace that he got, the more this feeling he received.

'I guess it must be their Empress.'

There was nothing really known about this Cerulean Empress to him. The cloned soldiers weren't good at describing their leader as they had never actually seen her before. There was also no mention of the huge angler fish that had swallowed them whole.

'If it was just soul arts then I might be able to break her hold on them but there seems to be something more there...'

His expertise in souls was one of the greatest in this world. Normally if someone was controlled by some demonic art it would be possible to affect the person in some type of fashion. If the armies here were getting controlled through some corrupt technique then breaking it would have been his priority. Even though he could feel a connection through the soul there was something else binding this control.

'Could it be... bloodline arts? Could these people really have all come from her?'

After arriving at the palace gates he somewhat grasped the situation. There were connections through blood that existed in this world. Ancestors of immense power could sometimes affect their descendants through their bloodline. Usually, this type of control died after the ancient being of power died out but what if such an ancestor managed to survive? In theory, the control would never be removed and the descendants would be forced to comply.

‘But this many? Or could this be why they are cloned... If they remade members from the first or second generation it’s feasible to retain the bloodline purity and keep control.’

With each generation, some of the bloodlines were always muddled. With time only a few individuals would retain those ancient abilities that made their ancestors famous and powerful. By cloning people with high amounts of purity in their blood the ancestor in question could retain absolute control through generations. The question was if this was the case here or if there was something more to it.

This was not good news for him. Perhaps he would be able to break control over these clones if they were bound to the Empress’ soul. It would be impossible for him to go around the bloodline ability which he could not affect with any Dao. The only way to counter this ability would be through an individual of the same line that was at a similar level to the ancestor.

After that, there was a third way if a person had a similar bloodline to the ancestors. It was sometimes possible to draw in people from another bloodline if they accepted the new one as their own. However, in this case, this wouldn’t be possible. He was a human cultivator and these were some types of underwater beings. There were no close relations with their bloodlines and this would be impossible.

‘So this is the place? I don’t see anything that could turn off the bubble yet but there must be something inside, the connection is there.’

While he could not see anything that was powering the defensive formation there was a way for him to sense where the power source was coming from. Large defensive shields like the one this place had needed a lot of power. Even if he couldn’t break the array or treasure that was generating it as long as he found the power source, it would be enough. Going by the spirit energy of this place, it was somewhere in here and these clone soldiers were actually guiding him to that spot.

‘There are a lot of mermaids in here... not many men though.’

One thing that he spotted was the lack of any male mermaids in this place. The soldiers that were guiding him looked more like regular human men or were like a mix between a fish and a person. All of the females of this species seemed to only consist of one type, the mermaids that were peeking out from the corners and looking at him.

‘Wang Long would have probably liked this place a lot... that is if the Empress looks anywhere as beautiful as these mermaids.’

Finally, he came up to a huge gate made out of sea coral. It started to slowly open and he was welcomed with a nice fragrance along with the music.

“So you are the one that harmed my children...”

From within a voice that belonged to a beauty was heard. His eyes quickly darted toward the location it was coming from. There he finally saw his new enemy that finally revealed himself to him, the Cerulean Empress.

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‘So that’s the Empress? She does look Empress-like but... something feels strange about her...’

Zhang Dong arrived at the throne room. It was a luxurious-looking place with many many smaller mermaids gathered on the side. The fish ladies were smiling and laughing without a care in the world as if they were meeting with a friend instead of someone that could turn them to minced meat with a snap of his finger.

The scene was truly strange and perhaps one of the reasons was the tune that was playing. This enchanting music was similar to the one he encountered when he rescued Zhang Jin from the mermaids. It was a magnified version of it and would probably have enticed anyone else than him by this point. Along with the music, there was also a sweet smell that he instantly blocked out from entering his body. It was clear to him that this Empress here was some type of enchantress that was trying to brainwash him.

Her looks were astonishing and quite exotic. Her form was larger than that of the other mermaids and it was hard to see if she was an actual one. Her lower body was covered by some type of gown with only her upper body showing. This part was quite voluptuous and the lower part of her face was covered by a veil. She looked like some type of exotic dancer with that light pink dress she was wearing. Her belly button was exposed and so were her shoulders along with quite a bit of those breasts that jolted with vigor each time her body moved.

She was just sitting there while facing forward. Her elbows were forward and her fingers were in between each other. Her chin was resting on the back of her palms as she watched him enter. Those enhancing eyes that seemed to belong to an otherworldly succubus continued to be glued to his form. For some reason, it felt as if he was getting undressed by this person while the people on the side remained silent.

“Not bad, haven’t had such a great specimen in a while, you shall do quite nicely...”

“A specimen? I’m not sure if I understand.”

“Hoh? You seemed unaffected by my beauty. This makes things even more interesting, I might have rated you too low.”

Zhang Dong could feel her voice trying to penetrate through his defenses. It seemed this person was in control of some type of Charming Technique. The only reason that he was able to resist was thanks to his new cultivation method and his strong soul. Even when his body and brain were being affected by this strange technique, as long as his soul wasn’t penetrated through he would be able to retain his faculties.

‘If Qiang or Gramps were here they would probably already be licking this woman’s feet... that is if she has any, to begin with...’

The mysterious lower body was the least of his problems as it was clear that this person was constantly trying to control his mind. If they were up in the empire something like this would be considered extremely rude. Reacting with anger wouldn't be strange as she was performing something similar to demonic arts.

However, before everything turned bloody he had to attempt a more pacifistic approach. The person was apparently the leader of these people and could end all of this animosity between their two parties. While killing her and absorbing the Daos she came equipped with was on his agenda, he would abandon the notions if peace was possible. Even without absorbing more Daos he felt that he would eventually break through and this fact had become more apparent after defeating his last foe where he earned multiple ones.

"It does seem so... Would you please stop that? It won't work on someone like me, I'm also a happily married man with children of my own."

"...You refuse to accept my offering of love?"

"Offering of love? You have a strange way of defining coercion."

"He dares talk to the Empress this shamelessly as a male?"

"How could this be possible, is the Empress allowing him to talk?"

The other mermaids that were around here were shocked for some reason and so was their leader. From their whispers, he deduced that men didn't really have a high standing here. Even now none of the males in the room dared to speak out, they were just acting like guards while the mermaids continued to speak. Perhaps this was the first time they even saw a man continue to speak without being allowed to. This was perhaps a matriarchal society where a man like him had no say in anything.

"You're an interesting one, just wandering into my palace while destroying my toys, why should I listen to anything that you say?"

"By toys do you mean them?"

Zhang Dong pointed towards the clones of the generals that were all gathered here. The strongest of them were all here together and after the little conversation with their Leader, they were standing up at attention. In their hands, they had tridents of various shapes and sizes. Their power was tremendous and if all of them attacked at once even he wouldn't get off scot-free.

'Hey Bob, are you done with the analysis, I'm not sure how much time I have here.'

'Calculating, 76% done...'

He did not just come here to have a talk. The bubble that blocked his people from entering here could still be broken. If he could just figure out what was powering this defensive formation and turn it off, then he would have a winning chance. If not then facing all of these people along with their leader would be difficult. Her true power level was unknown to him but considering that she was one of the Emperors, her strength had to be great.

"Those? No, I wouldn't call those objects my toys... Nevertheless, why did you come here human? What is your desire?"

"My desire? I guess there is one."

It was even worse than he anticipated, the Empress didn't even consider these clone soldiers to be people. This meant that he would probably have a hard time talking about the current war effort. Normally a leader had to at least watch for their troop's approval rating or how much they were feared. But even fear had its limits and troops would abandon the fight if it was too inconvenient and the leader fell.

"I wish for you to halt your advances into the empire."

"My advances?"

"Yes, the losses on our sides will just continue to pile up and you have also lost a lot of troops."

"Troops?"

The woman looked bored and as if she didn't understand where he was going with it. Just like he anticipated it was hard to work with a person that didn't consider their army living beings. To her the masses of soldiers and sea creatures that were sent out to the empire were nothing. She probably considered them to just be cold weapons with no emotions that would never hold her responsible for their deaths and were loyal to a fault.

"Y-yes, I'm sure you wouldn't want to waste your resources for a war that won't amount to anything?"

"You want me to stop? It amounted to you coming here... can't you see it? I've already won by you coming here~"

"Huh?"

A bomb was dropped during the conversation that he didn't fully understand. What was the meaning behind those words and why was she looking at him like a juicy piece of meat?

"Yes my dear, all that I wanted was to find a toy like you. The next generation will be even stronger than the previous one, it will take some time to foster them..."

"Hello?"

"I can't wait to see how well the first batch will come out... they will probably not be as ugly as this one..."

Zhang Dong wasn't sure what was going on but the woman started talking to herself as if he wasn't there. For some reason, he was the prize and she started talking about another generation. Then suddenly it started dawning on him, this strange woman wanted to foster a new generation of clones and probably use his genes as some type of base.

While she was talking he took a good glance at all the clones and mermaids in here. While he wasn't that great at interpreting bloodlines these people were eerily similar to each other. The same could be said for the mermaids. While at first glance they looked different it was due to the change of fashion, makeup, and hair styling. They had the same face, the same voice, and very similar body movements to their queen. It was as if all the mermaids were clones of the bigger one here.

‘Could this be why she feels so old... maybe that’s why her soul feels strange...’

There were demonic arts that allowed people to switch bodies but they were quite risky. First of all, a soul needed a vessel that fit it perfectly or during the transfer some of the energy would be lost. A person that attempted such an art would soon find themselves forgetting things and losing their mind. That’s why demonic cultivators that performed these arts just turned into soul-sucking monsters. These creatures were trying to get back the part of the soul that they lost but this was an impossible task.

‘But what if the body could be remade to be an exact copy of the original one... then it could be possible...’

This was his current theory. All the mermaids here were just clones of the Empress and perhaps if she started getting older she just switched to a new and younger body. There were quite a few of these fishy women here which could have meant a few things. Either the Empress needed to switch quite often or the procedure had a high failure rate. Perhaps it only succeeded once in a hundred or a thousand tries.

‘I don’t think I can reason with a person like this... Bob, are you done?’

‘Sending data to the user, updating the map with the coordinates.’

‘Nice.’

Zhang Dong looked at his minimap that now showed him the places that were most likely to have the off switch that he was looking for. It was lucky that this woman didn’t see him as much of a threat and decided to tell him her glorious plan of stealing his juices for her plans. However, this didn’t mean that it would be easy to bust his way into the forbidden areas of this castle.

‘Here goes nothing then...’

[Chapter 645](#)

“Hey what are you doing...”

“Oh... Don’t mind me, I’m just looking for the toilet...”

“The toilet?”

“Yeah...”

“...”

Zhang Dong showed a bright smile to the large mermaid in the throne room while moving to the side. She had been busy talking to herself and apparently while she was in that state the soldiers gathered here remained in a passive state. There was certainly something ingrained in the clone programming that made them freeze whenever their Empress was talking. This fact was used by him to begin his plan of sneaking away.

“Well then... I’ll be right back!”

“What!?”

He quickly shifted into his shadowy form that allowed him to pass through so many troublesome trials. While in it he could traverse through this room while evading the guards that were unable to pinpoint his position. This of course didn't sit well with their leader that started thrashing about.

"What are you waiting for, CATCH HIM AND BRING HIM TO ME!"

"Yes, Empress!"

The group of mermaids that were in this room scattered to the side. They didn't seem to have been made for combat. Their bodies seemed to be close to the levels of core formation but it didn't seem that they had been tonight much. Perhaps their mother that had created them to act as vessels wanted to keep their bodies without any blemishes like scars. Instead, the cloned warriors with tridents tossed themselves his way as he sunk into the ground.

'Are you sure you can't limit it to the right one, Bob?'

'Requires more data'

'Any way to input more data? I'm not sure what we are looking for Bob.'

'User must get closer to one of the locations to gather more data.'

'I see...'

Bob gave him more than ten locations in this place that could have the power source for the grand formation outside. If he wanted to have a fighting chance he needed to let his people inside. Teleporting wasn't an option and it also didn't seem that this Empress wanted to talk. She had mumbled some obscenities while alluding to wanting his child making juices.

Apparently, she wanted to enhance her cloned troops from his DNA. For all he knew these men here had been cloned from some other system holder. There was a possibility that this was the way of going around this disaster but he was not Zhang Jin, his loyalties lay with his wife. Until he had exhausted all his options it was better to not go with her.

'What if she sticks me into a test tube or starts draining my blood to make more clones? Yeah, not worth the hassle at all.'

The whole glorious palace which was even larger than his flying fortress was in an uproar. All of the soldiers that were stationed here were out looking for him. They had seen him dive into the shadows which had been a mistake. While they were cloned soldiers they did have reasoning, figuring out that they needed to turn on the lights to remove the shadowy spots was one of the first things that they decided to do.

'Shit, they are turning on the lights everywhere...'

The biggest weakness of this traversing technique was light and soon enough there weren't that many places for him to hide. This area that he arrived in was one of the rooms that contained a strange spiritual energy signature. It was a copy of the large kitchen he saved his sect members from and all the energy was radiating from the food that was gathered here.

"There he is, stop him!"

“I didn’t think that you’d be cannibals too, have some fish!”

One of the generals stormed into the area he was occupying. Just as he pushed through the door a large amount of fish flew his way. They were all quickly deflected by his weapon but while he was busy with the food fight, Zhang Dong began his escape. Sinking below the door frame where there was some shade was still possible but when he came outside there was too much light to keep his formless form.

‘Okay Bob, do your work, that was one of the spots you pointed out...’

When outside he witnessed a group of fishy people ruining his way. They were quick to toss themselves at him without seemingly caring for their wellbeing. Without much trouble, Zhang Dong sent them flying to the sides. The difference in power was substantial but they persisted. Even when their bones were shattered and blood was coming out of their orifices they kept crawling his way.

“Are you zombies or something?”

Bob removed two locations from his map while he continued running. Behind him, a conga line of angry fish people was quickly forming. Even when he turned around and blasted them with some spirit energy balls, they just ignored them. It was clear that they were forced to carry out the order that their leader gave them. The brainwashing was strong and even seeing some of their allies getting decapitated didn’t stop them for even one second.

After the kitchen, he punched his way through a closed door. Inside he spotted a lot of the same type of weapons. On the left there were tridents and on the right, there were also more tridents. There was no time to process why these people liked to use this type of weapon as he needed to continue running.

‘Another room down... there aren’t that many more left... I can do it!’

He pumped himself up while dodging all the attacks and groups of monster fishmen that were tossing themselves in his direction. Following the weapon chamber he arrived at one that was filled with precious metals and crystals. It was a large haul the size of a hill covered in spirit stones. If this was any other time then he would have just sucked them into his spatial ring yet with so many people behind him, even a second could cause his mission to fail.

‘Why is it always the last one...’

Just like he expected it was the deepest location on the map that he was given by Bob. All those treasures were radiating a lot of energy but this was still not the one that he was looking for. After blasting his way through a nearby wall he slid into a giant corridor with a gate at the end.

“That must be it!”

He shouted while propelling himself at the wall with his foot aimed at the large gate. His body was surrounded by lightning and the radiant energy made even the powerful masters behind him tremble. Yet even when his foot connected with the large door it didn’t open. His spiritual energy seemed to have been absorbed right as his attack connected. Arcs of golden lightning were forced to the sides and then quickly absorbed by the metal that this whole corridor and gate were made from.

“You fool, your powers won’t work here!”

His expectations weren't met as he was still in the corridor and his path was being blocked. This place was composed of some strange materials that were able to absorb large amounts of spiritual energy. Yet even though the enemies were coming from behind he didn't stop staring at his destination. Even though all of his energies were dispersed, there still was some damage on the spot that he hit.

"They won't? Are you sure about that?"

After shouting at the man that was approaching from behind with some other cloned soldiers he pushed forward. His upper body became a blur as a massive barrage of punches connected with the metallic gate. The men that were chasing after him stopped for a moment as they couldn't believe that he was producing holes in the high-quality material, this was not something that should have been a possibility.

Zhang Dong's spiritual energy was great and all of his attacks could only be blocked by a handful of people in this world. Qi was perhaps his forte when it came to fighting but it was not his only weapon. His body had long since left the realms of humans, he was like a person made from metal and his strength was humongous. If his spiritual energy was absorbed by the materials here he just needed to change his approach. The indentation that he left behind by his first attack was proof that he could break through with just his body alone. There was no need for fancy techniques or abilities, his fists were enough.

"I'll be going through first, see ya!"

Even though he was punching like crazy, only a small hole was produced. This however was more than enough for him to get through. His enemies didn't think that he could get through this barricade so they didn't fully illuminate the room inside. Thanks to this he was able to slip into the shadows that were produced and get himself inside.

"So this is it?"

'Large energy signature detected.'

Bob confirmed that they had found the source of power that lay right in the middle of this chamber. It was a mostly dark room with some light shining at a lone dais. Right in the middle there was a floating object that was encased in a soap bubble. At first glance, it looked like a pink sea shell but it was not that simple. It contained a massive amount of water Qi that was on par or even superior to the engine from his flying fortress.

'This is it!'

He could hear the fish soldiers pounding on the door. After he dent a hole into it, the opening mechanism was also destroyed, and squeezing through the small hole was not an easy task. This was the end of his mission, after grabbing the item inside of the soap bubble the outside soap bubble would pop. Zhang Dong nodded and sprinted forward with his eyes glued to the prize.

"Hah, did you really think that I'd fall for a simple trap like this?"

Yet before his hand grasped for this treasure he pointed in another direction. A beam of light escaped from his fingers that sent his holy lightning at the being hidden in the shadows. During the charge he had realized that this was all a setup, if he grasped the treasure there it would be encased in a bubble.

“You figured it out? My my, you might actually be worthy of being my mate~”

The voice belonged to the Cerulean Empress and it echoed throughout the entire chamber. Yet even with his eyes being able to see through the darkness, he could not see the woman’s form, instead, there was something else.

“Why does it always have to be tentacles..”

[Chapter 646](#)

There he was, looking at a bunch of squiggly tendrils coming his way. Without much thought he instantly started dodging and throwing his holy energies around. To his surprise, the slimy appendages didn’t burn to cinders as they were supposed to. Instead of being demonic in nature as he expected them to be, they were filled with water energy.

‘So it’s a giant squid and not a demonic beast?’

“My my, you are a feisty one but how long can you last?”

“Could you stop talking like that? if my wife overhears she will think that I’m doing something bad.”

‘Where is that voice coming from, I don’t see her upper body.’

The Cerulean Empress’ voice echoed through this chamber. It was not coming from any particular direction which was confusing to his senses. While the tentacles thrashed about this room the voice continued to taunt him as if it was coming from the appendages themselves. Even after pulling out his sword and cutting a few, they quickly grew back while producing many thinner tendrils.

‘I need to find the core or main body, this thing is clearly just a part of this Empress... maybe this is part of her body?’

His new opponent had been hiding half of her body behind some carefully placed materials. Perhaps this was the form that was hiding under, a mass of ugly-looking tentacles. When he was cutting into them, he realized that they had a resemblance to the monster he met in the other pocket dimension. In contrast to that monster, this one didn’t seem to have any cores for him to pierce through.

‘Maybe the core is inside the humanoid part... Could these stretch through the entire palace?’

He wasn’t fighting something that he could defeat here and at this critical juncture, his focus needed to be on something else. Even though the tentacles were here to entrap him inside this chamber, this didn’t mean that there was no way out. The power source for the outside bubbly was still here and he just needed to get to it.

This item in question had been entangled by a large mass of squiggly tentacles. They needed all to go along with it and thus as time was running out, he raised his Qi to the zenith. His body started glowing with various lights as he tried to combine all the higher Daos that he knew. Gravitational force, Heavenly Lighting, Holy Energy, Wind Energy, and also Darkness were all combined to blast everything.

The soldiers that were chasing him were greeted by a massive explosion almost immediately after opening the gate. For a moment they could see Zhang Dong's body blur from the spot to fly at a mass of tendrils. This was followed by a massive tremor before everything went white.

"That wasn't the smartest move... but I got it somehow."

Zhang Dong with part of his robe missing was hovering up in the air outside of the castle. In his right hand, he was holding a pink shell. He had plunged himself into the gross appendages and managed to grab this treasure during the explosion of spiritual energy. Instantly after grabbing it he utilized his teleportation escape to get to the save point he left outside. Now he was floating outside while looking at the castle before him and some sea creatures coming his way.

"HOW DARE YOU STEAL FROM ME!"

The voice of the Cerulean Empress echoed throughout the inside of this bubble as she had realized that her treasure was stolen. The shell that he was holding in his hand was more robust than he expected so he needed to act fast. Both of his hands pushed on it from both sides while increasing the gravity around it. Together with this Dao, he was able to shatter this power source and finally, the bubble popped.

"United Element Sect, your Patriarch orders you to attack!"

"Yes, Patriarch!"

Right on cue, a large group of cultivators started charging forward. A few large ships which were the size of the Argonaut moved in first and were followed by various large attacking formations. Some looked like golden serpents while others looked like blue turtles and were primed for defense.

A huge fortress that seemingly was made from pure gold was right behind them. It was floating in the air and already had its cannons pointing at the swarm of creatures coming Zhang Dong's way. The way was finally clear for his sect and it was time for the final battle to commence.

"You took your time... and what's with that smell."

"Don't ask..."

Zhang Liena appeared next to her husband that was covered in bodily juices from the tentacles. While teleporting some of them had gotten stuck to his body and even his hair. Luckily now that they were away from the main body they were quite easy to burn away. Within a few moments, he managed to cleanse the smell away and also change into something more battle ready.

His body started glowing like a radiant star as his transformation took place. Now that the last boss had revealed itself there was no need to hold his trump card. Just like Liena and Huo Qiang, he was in possession of his own armor set. Liena's was green while Qiang's had a crimson tint to it. Zhang Dong on the other hand had his two staple colors, white and gold.

The explosion of energy could be even felt by these mindless cloned soldiers. Their charge forward was interrupted by the appearance of an armored man. While the shiny white parts took up most of the design the gold outlines popped out a bit more thanks to it. For a moment a sect of shiny white wings appeared behind him and gave him the appearance of an archangel. A fitting appearance as soon after a large group of angelic puppets poured out of the golden fortress.

While his forces didn't have large numbers they made it up with quality. The clash started and all hell broke loose. The cloned forces seemed to not care about their well-being as they tossed themselves into the lines of the Qi-powered attacks. It was as if they had gone berserk after their leader had become enraged. It was the same with the generals that were now swinging those tridents around with no care for their allies.

Usually, they had some type of personality and were even able to speak. The battles his people had with them a month ago were still vividly remembered by them. Now on the other hand every one of the clones was like a rabid beast. They had no care for their well-being and were clearly running on instinct alone. While a berserk rage increased their ferociousness and attacking power it was also easy to read.

The sect members here had gone through many battles now. They were quickly able to adapt to this type of blind charge and took their time in luring the crazed clones into a disadvantaged position. After dancing around them when the time was right, many techniques filled the sky to deliver devastating blows that even they couldn't resist.

'They seem to be doing fine, I'm probably not needed here but the last Boss isn't showing herself or she might not be able to...'

The scene that was playing out before his eyes was favorable to him but this made him restless. Whenever things seemed too easy, there was something that always went wrong. The Empress also wasn't showing herself; instead, he could see some of those tentacles wiggling around in the palace. Something was happening there and he didn't like it.

"Are they getting bigger?"

"Watch out, something is coming."

Zhang Dong called out to his two allies and Qiang instantly responded while appearing inside his armor.

"Let it come then!"

"I don't usually agree with this fool but this time he is right, we shall face this enemy together."

Zhang Dong nodded at his wife and friend while smiling. Normally he would face this threat alone and probably get himself injured in the process. After years of fighting, he was not alone anymore. Many sect brothers and sisters were fighting together with him. Even if they weren't as powerful as he was, they still all found ways of helping out in times like this.

When glancing to the side he could see all of them giving their all to push back the maddened clones and sea monsters. Even without the three main elders, they would be fine or at least buy them enough time until they got rid of the main enemy. This was the Empress or whatever this mass of tentacles was before them. At this point in time, they were slowly lifting the entire large palace into the air.

"So this is our target? I don't like it... why does it have all those squiggly things... Disgusting."

Liena frowned as she saw the tendrils squirming around. They were attached to thicker black tentacles that wrapped around each other to form something that looked like flesh. It was forming into something strange, a monster with a long fishtail similar to a mermaid but with many smaller centipede-like legs on the sides.

“This form...”

Even Qiang was confused about the look the Empress took. She was composed of black tentacles with a body bigger than the dragon they met in the lava region. The backside was shaped like a very long insect while the top part was more similar to a sea monster. The mouth even had something similar to teeth but they were quite black and made of some hardened tentacles instead.

“Be careful, this monster isn’t the real Empress, her true body is still somewhere inside of that castle.”

“So someone needs to get in there to get to the beast’s core...”

Zhang Liena looked at the palace that the monster was now wearing like some type of breastplate. It was clear to Zhang Dong that his wife would probably not want to get anywhere near those squiggly tentacles.

“I’ll do it, both of you just keep the monster busy while I get to the real body.”

“Sounds good to me!”

They all nodded at each other and finally the last battle was upon them. Perhaps after this was over, he could finally relax and focus on more important things like figuring out if the Azure Emperor was his enemy or ally...

[Chapter 647](#)

A massive inferno rained down from the skies. Cyclones made up of flaming energy raged through the entire battlefield as two cultivators worked together. Zhang Liena was on one side and Huo Qiang was on the other. Both had managed to toss their differences aside to open a path for Zhang Dong.

The monster they were focusing on was really tremendous and composed mostly of water. This would leave Huo Qiang weakened by the extensive Dao of water swirling around. Only with Liena’s help who was able to fan the flames to the next level were the two able to compete with the monster’s defenses.

Those tentacles started crumbling and had the water trapped inside to evaporate. While Water was the weakness of fire it went both ways. With a high enough temperature, all water would evaporate and be unable to reform back into its old shape. This immense heat was affecting the monster’s regenerative capabilities as the withered tendrils were not being replaced by new ones.

This was all done to give him some time and open up the path. The monster’s size and tree trunk-sized tentacles had been wrapped around each other to form something resembling muscle fibers. These fibers were quite hard and would be almost impossible to break through. Now with the heat turned up Zhang Dong could attempt his plan of entering this creature’s body.

There was no reason to fight this outer shell, it was obvious to them all that this was nothing more than a distraction. The more time they spent fighting the outside of this monster the more energy they would just waste. It more than likely had a lot more Qi to power itself that it was siphoning from somewhere inside that tentacle-covered castle. The fastest way to end this would be by Zhang Dong facing the real Empress on the inside.

While it was perhaps possible to overpower this last boss from the outside with the help of his flying fortress, he didn’t want to prolong any of this. His current power level went above what the system

should have been able to give to him. The seed inside of him had already absorbed multiple Daos which in his mind made him one of if not the strongest person in the world. He just needed to get in there to quickly finish all of this before any more of his sect members suffered critical injuries.

‘Keep it busy while I’m in there, I won’t take long.’

‘Take care and return to me.’

‘I will.’

Before shooting forward he sent one last message to his wife that was concentrating on the large centipede monster. Soon after he was shooting forward like an arrow drawn from a huge bow. His form was surrounded by swirling golden energy that was empowered by several others.

The creature before him reacted to the attack by defending itself with its many tentacles. The huge body was also surrounded by a strange dark blue haze of water energy. Luckily he was not alone as another man in flashy azure armor appeared to create a better path for him.

Zhang Zhi had also been boosted by his faction system and was in the possession of some powerful treasures. One of them was similar armor to those Huo Qiang and Zhang Liena were wearing. Coupled with a blade that could slice through almost anything he quickly let his attack fly.

A water dragon was formed from the piercing strike. It flew forwards to push the large amounts of tentacles and tendrils that were coming its way. Before it dispersed it even managed to create a small opening in the watery barrier the creature produced. This helped him tremendously as when he arrived he was already drilling into those huge muscle fibers with no resistance.

While he was surrounded by a lot of energy it began to slowly chip away the further he got inside the monster. This thing was really sturdy and even with the help from the heat on the outside he could feel the monster quickly regenerating this wound. If he didn’t make it inside in one go then he would be trapped inside by these tentacle parts.

‘Bob, are you sure there is an open space where I’m going for?’

‘Affirmative.’

Zhang Dong didn’t choose a random location to attack. Bob had previously scanned the palace for energy signatures. This allowed him to have a schematic of the entire place inside of his system. Then he just needed to let his Ai scan the whole creature to show him parts of the castle that weren’t covered in tentacles.

Normally the Empress should have covered her real body or the core in a mass of tentacles that would render her unkillable. Yet for some reason, there was a section of new tunnels inside of the castle the monster was now wearing. If he saw this as another game map created by a higher being then this made sense. He was probably supposed to find an entrance and go through it to find the weak point. The world was giving him a way to end it and there was no reason to refuse this help.

‘I might not make it... maybe I should have chosen a thinner area...’

This didn’t mean that he didn’t want to cheat the system slightly. There was one area that was quite thin and entering it wouldn’t even need the help of his allies. Instead, he chose to attack a more robust

section for the sole reason of hastening the whole process. That entrance point was directly at the start of the monster's centipede section. He would need to travel through the whole length which was another maze of tunnels. Thus he chose to go right into the castle part that didn't have that many of those passages.

'Luckily it's quite dark in here...'

His spiritual shield and swirling Qi that he covered himself was slowing down. The path that he created behind himself was already closed so there was no way of backtracking. Instead, he pointed out with his finger to generate one of his old attacks. A beam of concentrated light escaped creating a tiny opening to the chamber he wanted to arrive in.

'I can see some light there.'

His body shifted into a shadowy form and quickly traveled through the finger-sized opening he created. The little passageway he created began to get smaller and smaller until it was the size of a needle right at the end. This was enough for him as his shadowy form didn't need much space to squeeze through.

'I made it... but where did I really make it in?'

His body changed into his armored form after he canceled his shadowy technique. The place he found himself looked like some sort of bed chamber that perhaps one of the mermaids had used before. The whole place was destroyed and some of the black tentacles had gone through the walls to trash everything. When looking at those pulsating things everywhere he put up his guard but just as he expected, there was no reaction.

'It does seem like the walls will attack me at least...'

After taking this form the black tentacles shifted into something like muscles and had apparently lost their previous properties. They were now incapable of reacting to his presence and were nothing more than flesh that acted as a biological barrier. Even after giving them a few pokes with his finger he wasn't getting any adverse reactions which meant that he could safely traverse through this place by himself.

'Bob, search for the nearest route to this monster's core or its true body.'

'Scanning in progress...'

While going through this place he started looking around. There was actually some light on the side that was produced by some glowing pearls that replaced torches and candles. Most of this place was destroyed but some of the passages still remained. Now that he was walking through them he could examine some of them.

'This looks like the picture of the Empress... and only her pictures...'

It was a bit strange to see her face is drawn and placed everywhere. It was as if she was the only real person living in this gigantic castle. The other people were just clones that she could control so perhaps she chose not to get them immortalized in the art here.

'She might actually be some type of false immortal, there was mention of them inside some of the libraries.'

There was a distinction between a true immortal and a false immortal to the people living in this world. The former was someone that as the name stated, could live forever or at least had such a long lifespan that it felt like they lived for an eternity. The latter was someone that had to prolong their life through other means. If this woman had a way to insert her soul into cloned bodies without losing the essence in the process, then she would be in this category.

Zhang Dong didn't really have the experience of living in this world for too long. More of his time was wasted in the other world as he had lost a whole five years in this one while not feeling the time pass him at all. Even though he had no experience with living that long he was sure that it would probably affect a person's psyche.

'Can't live for hundreds of thousands of years and still be normal, it's probably even worse if they have to continue passing into new clone shells... would the memories of the person she takes over mix with her own or would they be erased beforehand?'

He kind of knew how this process should work. After analyzing the cloning devices and some of his knowledge about souls he could bring a thesis to the forefront. The technique was probably flawed in a few spots which made this person believe that she was the only real being left alive. Perhaps these cloned soldiers were nothing more than life extenders in her eyes. Even when they actually grew up normally and had their own dreams it didn't matter.

'I wonder what will happen to them after their leader is dead... I guess I'll find out soon enough...'

At first, he thought that making a deal with this creature would have been an option. After wandering through these tentacle-coveted halls his opinion had changed. It was better to let this false immortal fall before she ruined even more lives and the chamber that she was in had already been discovered.

'So that's where you are... it's time to end this.'

[Chapter 648](#)

"She won't just let me into the throne room without a fight huh?"

Zhang Dong commended while slicing open a strange creature made out of tentacles. One of them was dissolving into black goop after getting sliced in a hundred pieces by his blade. It wasn't alone though as many more of its kind were quickly running in his direction.

They had a vaguely humanoid shape with tree-like characteristics. Their hands looked like long roots made of some type of black bark. On further examination, this was due to the previous tentacles hardening. This process must have taken place during the creation of the centipede monster's outer shell. These smaller monstrosities were something akin to an immune system response and he was being treated like a virus.

After finding a route to the last boss he started encountering these strange beings. They all were at the level of a weaker nascent soul master which made them not that much of an issue for him. They were more of a nuisance as he was slowly burning through some of his spiritual energy to get through.

There was also the problem of the path being lit exceptionally well. The Empress had clearly decided to counter his shadowy technique after he had started slipping past these monsters previously. All of them

had strange glowing veins inside their bodies which made traversing these tunnels a lot harder. Thus he decided to take them out with melee attacks that conserved most of his spiritual energy.

“Are these supposed to be mobs before the last boss?”

Considering that he should have entered from another location to travel to this place, this wasn't that troublesome. This place was made for one person to go through it and only thanks to all the experience he gained throughout years of training and battling was he able to move at a reasonable pace.

‘They don't seem to be scaling to my level or I've just become too strong for this world...’

When beating up the various monsters and going through the tunnels he thought back to the encounter in the previous world. There when he showed off his nascent soul power that went above the limits of that location, the overseer appeared. It wouldn't be strange if the same thing happened here, when he reached a new level of power his enemy would probably be there to snuff him out.

‘I need to be ready for that time, the only reason I defeated that other overseer was that he was limited to that world's upper limit.’

In this world of cultivators, the upper limit he was thinking about was much higher. The person he encountered was really powerful, much more than he was as he couldn't tell. Then there was a problem with the whole time-stopping technique which he first needed to contend with. After all of this was over he needed to examine the special room that he ripped out of this pocket dimension. In there he hoped to find the secrets behind stopping time which would help him counter his next real foe.

‘This should be the place...’

His sword went through a few more monsters that quickly burst into smoke. Their bodies lacked the regenerative capabilities that the tentacles which made clearing waves of them out rather easy. Within fifteen minutes or so he arrived at a large broken gate. It looked like the same one that led into the Empress' Throne room. There was only one particular thing about it, a strange thick white mist was blocking him from peeking inside.

‘It isn't toxic...This reminds me of one of those games...’

While holding his weapon he decided to traverse through the fog. It felt like he was walking through water and when he was on the other side he saw an area similar to the throne room the Empress had been in. The spot that she previously occupied was still there but now it was devoid of anyone, instead, there was an opening that he could probably go through.

‘Hm... I probably need to go in there but what's with this fog, it became red and hard.’

The white mist that he went through had changed colors and became quite resistant to any impacts. Even his sword when he applied pressure wasn't able to pierce through it. This whole place reminded him of certain video games that trapped the players in boss chambers. Unless the enemy within the place was defeated there would not be a way out.

‘A boss room huh? Well, as long as I defeat it, it should be fine.’

Zhang Dong moved forward while frowning. The moment he entered this place his teleportation function had been disabled. It was clear that this place was set up as a challenge for a system holder.

Getting out of this place was only possible if he managed to survive which made him have even more questions about the person working in the shadows.

‘I’m not sure if they want the people that have these systems to survive or not...’

While the system would help him or anyone else survive through many hardships, it wasn’t perfect. It wouldn’t give anyone free points to spend or any lives either. When Wang Long died, that was it for him, there were no second chances. If this was a game, even if he lost then his life would not be ended and he would be able to try again. Here, on the other hand, the system was blocking his escape.

‘Could this person want to see me struggle? Would an easy victory not achieve the goal they were aiming for?’

Several theories were swirling around in his head but he needed to focus on the task at hand. The throne the woman was laying on was now empty and he could actually walk through it. It was clear that the Empress was several times larger than he was. She had previously been laying down on her belly here and the tunnel was three times his height.

On the sides, he could see many smaller tunnels leading in various directions. Previously he thought that the Empress possessed a fishtail like the other mermaids but now it was clear that she was more similar to the tentacle creature he encountered with his grandfather and Huo Qiang. All those openings were previously filled out by those black tentacles. They went all through the castle and probably connected to everything.

‘Maybe instead of taking out the barrier, I should have just attacked her when I had the chance.’

Considering that he had previously encountered the Cerulean Empress in this room, he had missed his chance. She was babbling on and not ready to take an attack if he actually went through with it. Back then he didn’t want to get attacked by her armies which made him go with the other option. Now that he was here, it was perhaps the wrong decision.

‘That should be the place... it’s huge.’

After walking for a minute he finally reached the end of the main tunnel. The first thing that he noticed was a strange thumping noise that was akin to a heartbeat. There was also a strange blue glow coming from that area that got brighter along with the slow heartbeat.

‘It’s a large tree?’

To his surprise, he came out in a large chamber that was the size of several football fields put together. Right in the middle was something that looked like a tree. It was not made from wood though, instead, it was some type of strange biomass created from those tentacles. They continued to pulsate like veins along to the heartbeat sound coming from within that huge tree.

“It’S yOu.”

The moment he ventured through the threshold he heard the Cerulean Empress’ voice echo through the entirety of it all. At first, he thought that it was coming from the huge pulsating tree but he was wrong. The entire place was covered in those tree-tentacles that were pulsating. It was as if the Empress was this whole room and all of her soul energy was infused into everything here.

“Yes it is me but it’s probably too late to talk this over, right?”

“yOu wILL dIe aNd bEcOmE oNe wItH mE...”

“I guess not.”

The voices continued to echo from all directions but soon started to focus on one spot which was the huge tree in the middle. When glancing at it he discovered that a somewhat feminine figure was protruding from the bark that resembled the Cerulean Empress he saw before. Her upper torso was there under the dark blue bark and the heartbeat was coming from within her chest.

‘That must be her weak point, perhaps if I pierce it then she will die...’

There were a lot of glowing spots on the tree but the most intense one was coming from that humanoid part within the tree. This strange tree had its roots shoved into the ground and ceiling. His gaze fell on the upper part right after noticing a strange occurrence. From within the many branches that continued to glow something akin to a fruit was taking form. Within those cerulean fruits, he could see various shapes that were reaching the power level of nascent soul masters.

‘Are those cloned soldiers?’

Not much time had passed since he entered here but with the help of his Dao of the Souls, he could feel beings being formed inside of those fruits. They were not like the mindless drones that he was fighting outside. These were more similar to the cloned soldiers that his people were fighting outside. Their strength was also quite superior and around the level of the trident-wielding generals.

“bEcOmE oooNNNNeeee...”

Yet before they could form he decided to act. The Cerulean Empress that had become a tree started to mindlessly repeat the same sentence while creating those cloned beings. Before she would form them he would act. His finger pointed at the humanoid shape on the tree and soon after a beam of condensed light escaped. It traveled with immense speed and aimed at the heart that was beating inside this tree monster.

Suddenly just as this beam of light was about to collide with the glowing parts the humanoid shape twitched. She moved to the side to protect the weak point as the beam drilled inside of the bark. The strange bluish wood started to quickly regenerate while also encasing the weak point in more wood.

“yOu dArE?”

“It was worth a try.”

Zhang Dong shrugged while jumping forward. It wouldn’t be that easy to defeat this new enemy. If he couldn’t hit the weak point from range then he just needed to get in close to stab his blade into this tree woman’s heart. The battle that could potentially end this whole war had finally started and only one of them would be walking out of this alive.

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Zhang Dong dodged to the side while evading a sharp object from the left. Right after he was greeted by multiple projectiles that looked like seeds from the other side. His body twirled around and turned into multiple blurs as he attempted to confuse the thing that was shooting at him.

After arriving at this place he didn't think that he would be fighting a sentient tree but here he was. This strange tree started producing fruits that quickly landed on the ground and turned into strange monstrosities. If this wasn't enough it continued to fire off various projectiles from its many branches. They looked like seeds and when they collided with something they started to quickly germinate into small spider-like beings.

'If I get hit by one of those things, would it burst from inside my body or something?'

The strange creatures reminded him of an old horror movie involving monsters and he was not willing to test out his theory. Luckily with his white and gold armor on, he wasn't afraid of taking some hits. Also with his current skills, none of the attacks were able to really land on his body, instead, the area was becoming more and more covered in many strange-looking creatures.

"You know Empress, this isn't really fair, I left my Bahamut at home and you're just summoning more and more of your own pets..."

"...bEcOmE oooNNNNeeeee..."

"I see, great talk..."

He gave out a sigh as the Cerulean Empress had turned into a mindless monster. There was no way of reasoning with her and the longer he spent trying the more people would die outside. Even though his wife and Huo Qiang were turning up the heat they would probably not be able to defeat that monster outside. It was his fault for bringing his forces into an area that was meant for a solo battle and the faster he finished this, the sooner all of them would go home.

'After I kill this thing, some way will probably become open but I can't really feel a connection to the outside yet... Bob, did you finish your analysis?'

'76% Done...77%...'

One of the reasons that he was taking his time was the nature of this battle. If this was supposed to be an encounter that he was to face alone, what would happen after he won? They were inside a strange fish that had multiple pocket dimensions inside of it. Would this creature collapse onto itself after the Cerulean Empress was defeated?

It wasn't strange to believe that something in this main pocket dimension was controlling the angler fish outside. There was a possibility that the Empress was this control feature and after she was defeated the whole place would become unstable. If this was the case then he would need to get back to his people and quickly evacuate.

This is why he was dodging and weaving in all directions to evade the smaller cloned monsters here while gathering more data. The only problem with this approach was that there was no end to these beings. The more time was wasted the more of them appeared even if he killed one, two new ones appeared in its place.

After slicing one of the humanoid tree beings its body would turn into some type of gelatinous mass. It would then quickly seep into the ground and then roots that were spread everywhere. He followed the pathways this goop followed and it was clear that it ended up in those fruits once more. This coupled with the Empress tree also generated its own resources it only increased the mobs that he needed to clear out.

‘I need to start attacking it soon or I’ll be overrun... Hm, maybe I can use that to clear out a wave...’

When looking back he remembered the tunnel in which the original body of the Empress was previously in. This part of the chamber was not sealed out yet. Some of those large roots were quickly creeping to shut off but for now, he had enough space to wiggle through. Just as he expected the small army of creatures chased were quick to chase after him.

‘At least they aren’t too intelligent, their elements are wood and water...’

Zhang Dong smirked as he had just the Dao that would work on this combination. His holy element wouldn’t do much but it didn’t matter, lightning energy was enough to destroy these monsters. Thus after arriving at the end he gathered his heavenly lightning energy into both his arms and then quickly slammed his palms together to generate an orb of lightning.

This orb started increasing in the side before being shot forward. Its size encompassed the entire tunnel and the small space that it didn’t was covered in massive amounts of lightning energy. Crackling noises of this sphere of electricity echoed through the entire place and were combined with the strange wails of these monstrous creatures.

Electricity traveled through water quite well and began charring the monsters from the inside. There was enough juice in there to quickly evaporate all of the water that they were composed of and even the wooden parts. The sphere of concentrated lightning energy made short work of the creatures that were mindlessly pouring into the tunnel.

It was to the point of Zhang Dong needing to change his technique into a beam. The ball of light was beginning to get pushed back by the blue gelatinous mass on the other end. Even when the creatures were defeated they bound to each other to form some type of slime monster that just didn’t want to let up on the push. However, it just wasn’t powerful enough to fight against the energy beam that he was producing.

Everything was bathed in a deep blue hue of his lightning beam that shot forward. The roots that were blocking some of the path on the other side were blasted away. His attack traveled far and wide to finally collide with the Empress tree inside the initial chamber he escaped from. Right on cue he heard Bob’s monotonous voice call out to him to give him more info about his enemy.

‘Analysis complete, sending data to the user.’

‘Took you long enough, let me see...So that’s how it is, good that I waited.’

A part of his theory was confirmed after he read through the log that Bob gave him. It would have not been the wisest move to just destroy this massive tree without making the right preparations. Now that he knew what would happen afterward he could safely make the calculations.

‘This is going to be close... I need to tell them not to spread out too much...’

Now that he knew about what would happen he contacted his wife to send forward his order. Luckily the system's audio options were in working order and he was only being kept from teleporting outside of this boss room and not from talking.

"You wish for me to retreat to the Golden Dong Palace?"

"Yes, make sure that everyone is in range of the outer shields, I'm going to end this and we won't have much time afterward, evacuate the people from the large ships into the palace if you have to."

"Are you going to be fine?"

"Don't worry, I won't vanish this time."

"I won't you forgive if you don't not this time..."

"I'll keep that in mind..."

Zhang Dong cut off the feed to his wife and left the rest up to her. He was not planning on getting blown away into another world again. Perhaps he was lucky that only five years passed that time around. It was possible that if the same thing happened that he would arrive at an era where his kids were already grown-ups or had already died.

The sludge that was created after his attack wasn't recovering as fast as before. During the large attack, he made sure to bathe his enemies in his heavenly lightning Qi. With the spiritual energy infused into this gelatinous mass, it was having a hard time reforming itself. This time could of course be used to launch a counterattack at the Empress inside.

He shot forward while surrounding his whole body with lightning energy. This torrent of blue light took the form of a dragon and flew forward while roaring. The puddle of goop that was trying to reform itself was electrocuted once more. The energy dragon that he surrounded himself with bulldozed through the roots that were trying to close off the entrance and when back inside the chamber it exploded.

The whole area was covered in his energy that spread in all directions. The Empress that had taken the form of a tree tried to fight against his might but there was a difference between their battle prowess. It was clear that his cultivation had become something slightly above the limitations of this world. He did not really need to find the weak point as an area of effect technique was enough to win this battle.

"wHaT aRe yOu? hhhhOOOwww..."

To no surprise, his opponent could not figure out why they were losing. They were in their own territory where they should have been invincible. Yet with all this electrical Qi flying around everywhere, she just couldn't regenerate all of the damage that was being produced.

'I see you...'

Within the torrent of lightning energy that was electrifying everything his form emerged. He shot forward at a lone little vine that was trying to make its escape. This was the true core of the being that he was fighting. It looked like some type of hideous worm with tiny tendrils and a toothy mouth at the end.

It was some type of tiny parasite that probably attached itself to the clone mermaids in an attempt to prolong its life. The soul energy it was carrying around was easy to spot by someone like him. Without much thought behind it, his sword was utilized to sever this strange thing's life. Along with its true body, the soul was also dispersed in one quick move.

A tiny shriek escaped from this thing as it perished. Perhaps if he failed to learn any soul arts then he would have been able to escape. The moment the thing perished the large tree behind him that was trying to resist the electricity started to wither. The fruits all turned to dust and the goop that was the clones evaporated.

Where he sliced the strange small parasite an item appeared. It was a pink shell that contained two Daos. The Dao of wood and the Dao of water was clearly radiating from this time that he quickly stored into his spatial ring.

‘Good... now I need to make it back...’

The moment he grasped the shell to put it away he could feel the whole space rumbling. This shell that was created was collapsing but this wasn't all. The whole pocket dimension and all the others connected to them were crumbling just like this tree. He needed to get out of here now, if he didn't then becoming trapped between these dimensions was a possibility.

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“The Patriarch ordered us to evacuate, what are you doing? Get moving if you don't want to be left behind, this place is collapsing!”

A large group of cultivators was quickly flying back into their golden palace for protection. Luckily their elders had informed them of the impending doom before they got too far away from their golden fortress. At the moment the massive army of clones was getting pushed back but after the order was given they started retreating.

Some of the warriors were saddened by this decision but their trust in the leaders was unbreakable, they must have had a reason for ordering them to stand down. The huge monster that was before them that looked like a black centipede continued to produce shockwaves while battling with multiple nascent soul masters. They too started retreating which brought the attention of this monster to the flying golden fortress.

This exposed it to more danger and damage as all the enemy forces that had been previously spread out throughout the battlefield started concentrating on one location. There were a lot more of them there but at least the angelic automatons didn't seem to be going back. They aided the cultivators in retreating while taking the brunt of the counterattack. Soon the whole area started rumbling and finally, everyone realized why their leaders ordered them to retreat.

“The pocket dimension... it's collapsing!”

A ripple shot through the entire area and came from within the huge monster. The moment this shift took place this large being stopped in its tracks and started crumbling. It wasn't the only one that stopped, the same happened to the cloned troops that just remained stationary. It was as if there was

some type of off switch in their brains that was triggered and now they didn't know what to do anymore.

Some of the creatures started crumbling into dust just like the rest but the humanoid clones just remained there. They seemed confused by the situation as if a veil was lifted from their heads for the first time. Even when the whole place was collapsing they just stared at it all while not knowing what to do. Some of them even started crashing to the ground as if they forgot how to utilize their spiritual energy to keep them afloat.

Everyone previously saw the Patriarch charge into the beast not that long ago. Now that it was crumbling it was clear to them that he had managed to destroy what was keeping it alive. The bonus of the clone armies becoming disoriented was a fortunate boon as it allowed them to quickly rendezvous at the golden palace.

"Everyone, hurry up, we don't have much time."

To their surprise, the man that they were just thinking about suddenly appeared right above the golden palace. The blue light that shone before his appearance informed them about the teleportation technique that he used. Before they could give out a resounding cheer of praise to their leader they felt a strange force surrounding them.

It didn't feel dangerous or out of place, instead, it actually felt quite warm and welcoming. It looked like a veil of golden light wrapping around their bodies. The energy was very reminiscent of something familiar so they didn't defend against it. Soon after though, this warm force quickly yanked the people that were still outside of the golden palace towards it.

Even the large ships that were slowly floating back into the range of the golden palace's shields started speeding up. It was as if there was a black hole created in the middle that was sucking them all in. Soon enough all of them were in range of the outer shields and Zhang Dong gave out the next order.

"Everyone, grab onto something and close your eyes, this won't be pleasant!"

The soldiers weren't sure what to make of it but before they closed their eyes they could see the world around them crumbling into pieces. It was as if even the air was disintegrating into nothingness before them. This was the moment when they realized why their leader was forcing them within the confines of the golden palace. Right before the world crumbled they were teleported somewhere.

"Ugh..."

"Blergh..."

Some of the people that were caught in the teleportation technique started vomiting the moment it finished. It was a lot rougher than what they remembered from before but they were safe. Now that they could open their eyes they saw darkness everywhere. They were under the dark sea again through which they traversed before. The silence was quickly broken through as something started to rumble in the distance.

"Isn't that the chasm that we dove into before? It's collapsing..."

There was a strange scene playing out before them. The large gash on the sea floor was vanishing before their eyes. It was surrounded by a strange dark glow as it began to close onto itself.

“Was this some type of spatial anomaly?”

Some of the elders called out as they could feel various energy fluctuations coming from that spot. It seemed that the angler fish that they were swallowed by before wasn't the real entrance to the pocket dimension. This was this large chasm and now it was collapsing unto itself.

“Does this mean that even if we escaped from that beast, we would be stuck in a crumbling pocket dimension?”

The elder cultivators started sweating while thinking of what would have become of them if they were stuck in there. Only thanks to their Patriarch that were able to teleport them out of the crumbling dimension were they able to survive. It was either a miracle or his knowledge that allowed for this miracle. They could see themselves escaping outside of the large fish only to be then greeted by nothingness and no way home.

“The Patriarch is great...How did he know?”

“I don't know but it's over now...”

Everyone looked up to where a man covered in shiny white armor was floating. This was the leader that had brought them victory once more. Even though this trip didn't bring them many treasures they had gotten rid of the underwater bearings plaguing their lands. Now they could claim this territory and its riches as their own. This was enough as there were still many undiscovered locations down there, even being able to harvest the fish living down here was worthwhile.

Their eyes started sparkling almost as much as their leader was. They all quickly clasped their hands together while bowing before him. It started with one person and quickly turned to thousands of soldiers honoring their leader.

“Long live the Patriarch, Long live the United Element's Sect!”

...

‘Whew, that was close, glad that I had Bob make an analysis or this could have gone really wrong.’

Just as some of his elders assumed he was going to attempt teleportation that took the shop into the chasm. His first thought was to get out of the large angler fish before escaping back up. However, this was a trap in itself as all of them would be caught in another pocket dimension that was now going through self-destruction.

‘Who would have thought that the chasm was the entrance to another dimension, I didn't feel anything at all when going through it...’

Bob was able to present him with the full scope of the pocket dimensions they were all trapped in. He knew that after defeating the Empress a chain reaction would be started. The smaller dimensions would start imploding while also generating a strange effect.

‘This was really a mission for one person.’

The calculations presented him with the truth. He was a system holder and would have been affected by these pocket dimensions in a different way. Others would be torn to shreds but he would be sucked into another teleportation gate. It was hard to pinpoint where he would come out but it was just a setup to force him to go down a certain path.

‘Perhaps I’d end up in another Empire and have to make my way back home again? Or it could have been another hidden area that I haven’t discovered... I need to analyze this room first.’

He was not sure what was in store for him but for now, he decided to gather more information. The shell that would allow him to absorb two new Daos was not used yet. Zhang Dong wasn’t sure what would happen after adding the two. Perhaps he would manage to germinate this seed that was stuck inside of him. If that happened it would be better to prepare for a confrontation with the Overseer as they would probably become aware of his change.

‘I might become more powerful than her but it might not be enough... The transformation to the next level could also take longer than I expect...’

There were too many variables for now so he decided to let it rest. Three out of the four Empires were now dealt with and the last one was part of his allies. Argus and Lucious weren’t around for this journey and he had also not discovered any new parts of their secret armor. However, they didn’t pose much of a threat to him at this point. Even if they decided to point their swords in his direction, they weren’t capable of defeating him.

After destroying the Cerulean Empress he realized that his power had risen tremendously. The Emperor level enemies he faced were all around the same level with the transformed Phoenix Emperor being the strongest of the bunch. Their power level seemed to correlate to the number of Daos that he could get from them. This would put this Empress somewhere in the middle of the other two.

“Is everything all right? Are there enemies somewhere?”

“Enemies? No, I was just thinking about some things, we are safe here.”

While the chasm was collapsing Liena approached him. Her form was clad in the armor that he created for her with the help of the system. Right behind her was Huo Qiang as well as Zhang Zhi in similar ones that allowed them all to be closer to his level. Thanks to these four people he was able to somehow get the larger group outside. Now that it was finally over he decided to deactivate his own armored garb and look at his friends and family that had gathered here.

“Let’s go home, everyone.”

The others nodded back and removed the armored pieces just like he did. The battle was over and the war was almost over, now only one real threat existed that he needed to prepare for...