

Void 651

Chapter 651 Emperor Bone Sea [1]

That day was a slow one.

The entire Hidden Death Valley was in an uproar over Julius' incident. After his body was taken down from Damien's door and inspected, it was found that his mind had completely collapsed with no hope of recovery. Even taking the duel arena into consideration, the level of mental duress he needed to endure to reach this point was absurd.

Naturally, the cruelty of Julius' situation caused people to wonder about the one that left him in such a state. As people with higher and higher status became curious, the name Damien Void was revealed to the public.

However, just as before, nobody was able to associate a face with this name. Damien was simply too new and hadn't had the chance to do any proper work in the academy yet.

Nevertheless, the nature of their circumstances didn't stop Damien or Zara from freely meandering the sect. With his spatial abilities and her concealment abilities, nobody could detect them when they left the dorm.

The commotion slowly died down within a few days. While Julius' state was rare to see, geniuses taking severe mental damage in the duel arena was a common occurrence. People only thought it was a shame that such a genius was reduced to this state and, at the same time, they wondered what the Wellspring Family's reaction to his death would be.

What they did know for certain were two things. Firstly, Damien Void wasn't someone to be messed with. And secondly, his true worth would be revealed based on the Wellspring Family's response.

'How troublesome.' Damien thought as he relaxed in a cafe and listened to the conversations around him. 'This Wellspring Family seems like a big group of assholes with tiny egos. Most likely, my expedition into the Emperor Bone Sea won't be peaceful...'

If the Wellspring Family wanted information on his whereabouts, it wouldn't be hard for them to receive them. And it wasn't just them. The Bloodlock Prince Damien had gone to great lengths to offend would also send pursuers after him.

Since he'd already accepted the mission, there was no way for Damien to back out from the challenge. To drop a mission without just cause, one needed contribution points.

'I need to prepare for the worst-case scenario. I can be sure that no Demigods will be sent after me, so I at least have assurance that I can run if things get too big for me to handle. Aside from that...'

He stood up and left the cafe after paying for his drink and perused Star City's streets. To say the city was convenient was an understatement. Unlike most facilities in Hidden Death Valley, a majority of the shops in Star City took currency cards as a valid payment method. This meant that as long as he was in Star City, Damien was rich.

It would be stupid to ignore this advantage.

He had plenty of preparations to make before going to the Emperor Bone Sea. Of Death Emperor Star's danger zones, it was one of the most mysterious. The reports he'd seen made the ecosystem seem evolved specifically to kill those who dared to intrude. But even then, he'd only been able to find information on the sea's outskirts.

His mission would take him far beyond that.

'Haa, I've only been rich for a few months and now I'll have to spend so much of it in one place. My heart can't take this.'

Despite his thoughts, Damien wasn't frugal in his spending. In order to attain the best results possible, he spent as much money as he needed to.

And thus, two days passed.

The time for his mission to begin was upon him.

The past two days were mostly uneventful. While Damien made preparations for the mission, Zara was actually the more active one among them.

Her first stop on the day after ruining Julius was the administrations building. As Damien suggested, she decided to enter Hidden Death Valley as an individual.

It was hard to tell since she spent most of her time shadowing Damien, but Zara was a freak of nature in her own right. Even when compared to Damien's wives, who were all peak talents, Zara was still superior.

It had to be remembered, Zara reached 4th class far before Damien. The only reason their strengths remained similar is because she didn't do too much training after she reached this level, instead opting to wait for Damien to match her.

Since she was the one who put them on an even playing field, she couldn't complain if she ran into a situation where he surpassed her by leagues. The only thing she could do was diligently work to increase her personal strength.

As Damien said, personally registering was extremely important for her future growth.

The registration was much smoother than either she or Damien expected. Her strength had already been proven in her duel with Julius, and since she was the contracted beast of a genius recommended by a Paragon, she had a degree of security when it came to her identity.

After her background was checked and her strength verified, Zara was handed the Hidden Death Valley uniform as Damien was before. Since Damien was still in the process of preparing for their expedition, Zara decided to spend her time wisely.

She returned to the dorm room and went through the information Damien obtained on the Emperor Bone Sea. She didn't want to hold him back due to her own naivety.

After memorizing everything over the course of a day, she spent the next day purely training. Her routine mainly consisted of individual training since she couldn't yet access Arcadia's training centers, but she wasn't shy about challenging other geniuses.

Her rank steadily rose during the time she had. With only a day of beating up those who accepted her challenge, her rank had already surpassed Damien's.

Still, this didn't mean anything to her. Right now, neither of their ranks reflected their strengths.

At the end of the second day, Zara returned to the dorm exhausted. She'd learned a myriad of techniques from Tang Lingzi and practicing them took a lot out of her. Slowly but surely, she was unraveling the Shadow Laws' mysteries, understanding the fusion of light and darkness that resulted in her affinity.

The Zara right now was a beast waiting to be unleashed. And she was truly anticipating the moment she was.

Emperor Bone Sea...sounded like the perfect place to fuel her evolution.

Damien arrived in the dorm not long after Zara. When the two met, they spent a few hours going over the information they had before resting their minds and bodies.

When dawn arrived upon them once more, they already stood in Hidden Death Valley's central area.

Here, aside from the administrative buildings and main security site, there were portals connecting to various locations across Death Emperor Star.

After all, the danger zones of this world weren't close to each other at all. It wouldn't reflect well on the academy if their students died in transit to their destinations. This portal system was an assurance that those who died would at least do so without embarrassing themselves. At the same time, it made sure that the academy could properly respond to any situation on Death Emperor Star regardless of distance.

It was a measure of both convenience and safety.

Right now, Damien and Zara were using this exact method to reach the Emperor Bone Sea.

With their mission registered in the academy's database, it didn't take long for them to gain access to the portals.

And only a few minutes later, their figures vanished from Hidden Death Valley.

Chapter 652 Emperor Bone Sea [2]

The location was a tall cliff overlooking the Emperor Bone Sea. Here, a small one-story building was present. Only a single old woman resides here. The rest who passed through its doors were merely travelers.

Today, two of such travelers arrived in her residence. After seeing to it that they were safe, she watched them leave without a change of expression.

Most likely, she'd never see those two again. The Emperor Bone Sea was too perilous for people of their strength level.

Naturally, the two travelers the old woman met were Damien and Zara. Currently, they stood at the precipice of the tall cliff and looked down at the Emperor Bone Sea, taking in its demonic majesty.

The air above the sea was filled with thick killing intent that almost coagulated into a fog. From various locations, structures of rock and minerals jutted out of the sea's waters. From above, it was hard to see any signs of life within.

After all, the Emperor Bone Sea was pure black in color. This wasn't due to the color of the water itself, but due to the sea's terrifying depths. It was hard to imagine the abyss that hid below.

"It was said that the sea's nature was influenced by an Emperor Beast who died in its depths. According to the rumors, that beast's skeleton still rests at the bottom, and some of these strange protrusions we see are actually broken pieces of that skeleton." Damien muttered.

"Mm, if possible, I want to know if those rumors are true. A beast that was able to gain the title of Emperor Beast, even a portion of its skeleton will be of great help to my training." Zara continued.

The two stood for a few moments staring into the deathly sea. Damien's sigh was the first thing to break their silence.

"We've prepared as much as possible. While it would be a lie to say I'm not feeling hesitant right now, I guess there's nothing else for us to do here." He finally said.

Their mission was simply to scout. Anything else that took place in the Emperor Bone Sea could only be considered training. As much as Damien wanted to stand on this cliff and organize his thoughts, he knew there was no point in doing so.

"Are you ready?" He asked lightly.

"Always," Zara responded with a smile.

Together, the two stepped off the cliff, allowing their bodies to plummet into the sea below.

Crash!

An eruption of blackish-blue water shot into the air when the two hit the sea. Their bodies immediately submerged within as if weighed down by something.

Kacha!

Without hesitation, they coated their bodies in mana and isolated themselves from the surrounding water.

They'd already been exposed to the Emperor Bone Sea's first danger: the water itself.

Even after isolating themselves with mana, the two could feel a black sludge-like substance sticking to their bodies. This sludge was the water's residue, and contained both poisonous and illusory properties.

Damien began seeing terrifying images of his own cruel death. Depictions of him being tortured and humiliated, of him losing those he loved only to be betrayed by his last strand of hope, depictions that could alter any normal person's mental state beyond repair.

But to Damien, these illusions meant nothing. He easily shattered their influence. Especially after experiencing the Challenge Gate, he felt that most illusions became lackluster.

The poison, on the other hand, truly did its best to ruin his body. Because of Damien's strong bodily defenses, this small amount of poison couldn't even enter his system. However, his skin was melted off in countless places where the poison tried to invade.

Damien wasn't the strongest, but he wasn't weak. Developing countermeasures against the Emperor Bone Sea's waters was the basic requirement one needed to meet to explore it.

When he finished dealing with the water's effects, he looked over at Zara just in time to see her do the same. Unlike him, she willingly absorbed the poison and used it to further her Laws.

"It looks like you'll gain a lot more from this place than I will." He said with a smirk.

"Then you'll just have to work that much harder to catch up to me," Zara replied without hesitation.

"Oho? When did my little Zara become so bold?"

"Hmph! I'm not little anymore!"

"Alright, alright."

The two smiled at each other before glancing deeper into the sea. Their objective was to travel farther not deeper, but if they wanted to face the Emperor Bone Sea's reality, they needed to reach its depths.

After exchanging nods, the two used mana to propel themselves through the water. Their bodies shot through the sea like torpedos on a downward slope, traveling deeper and further at once.

Their first 1,000 kilometers were easy. This much was bearable at their level.

However, 100 contribution points were only enough to reserve an hour of time at one of Arcadia's training centers. It wasn't even close to enough for them.

Still, the two didn't move on immediately. First, Damien used spiritual intent to mark a jade slip with information about the depth and distance they'd traveled, along with the organisms and dangers they'd seen along the way.

After adding a second marker to specify his current position, he put the jade slip away and began moving once more.

But it was like they hit a wall. The second they crossed the first 1,000 kilometers, the mild Emperor Bone Sea they'd been experiencing vanished, replaced by a place befitting of its rumors.

"Zara, behind!" Damien yelled.

Zara moved without thinking, turning into a shadow and reappearing hundreds of meters away. Just as she did so...

OOOOH!

A bellow spread through the water around them, rattling their eardrums. As Damien and Zara watched on, a mystical scene occurred.

The glistening silver body of a massive creature filled their vision. Tens of kilometers were covered in its breadth, but when they observed it, they could only see characteristics of a regular fish species.

The creature swam past the two as if they didn't exist. Its body agilely cut through the water, moving at speeds that didn't match its size at all.

The creature suddenly made an arc. Its mouth opened wide and an immense suction force was emitted into the space a few hundred meters from Damien and Zara!

In their eyes, this creature was simply drinking water. But as their awareness spread, they found countless organisms in the blackness that the creature was devouring. These fishes blended perfectly with the surrounding water to the point where their visages were entirely concealed even from Damien, yet that creature was able to find them instantly.

In that moment, Damien felt like he got a glimpse into the sea's ecosystem. A glimpse into something humans hadn't yet explored enough to adapt to.

But just as he marveled over that creature, blood splattered from its neck and painted the blackness red.

A pale gleam flashed near the creature's body. There, a much smaller but far uglier being sat concealed.

Xiu!

The sound of its body cutting through the water was piercing. With every movement, it causes another gash in the large creature's body. Chunks of flesh floated away, only to be devoured by the smaller beast.

Within seconds, the large creature had been wholly devoured without an ounce of resistance.

And with the smell of blood polluting the waters, things were sure to rapidly become hectic.

Chapter 653 Emperor Bone Sea [3]

20 shadows appeared on the precipice of the Emperor Bone Sea.

The auras they emanated were light and airy, almost nonexistent. But if one was skilled enough, they'd be able to see the terrifying power hidden in these individuals' bodies.

This group consisted of experts, with the weakest of them being mid-level 4th class existences. And the reason they gathered today...

Was for the sake of killing one man, a man weaker than even their weakest.

The group was made up of two different forces, easily distinguished by the emblems on their clothes. Despite their seemingly covert actions, they didn't hide their affiliations.

On 9 of their arms was the Wellspring Family's emblem, and on the other 11, a veiled moon. Though this emblem didn't mean anything to the untrained eye, anyone with a vast information network would understand that these 11 were special forces that answered directly to the Bloodlock Family.

No words were exchanged between them. With a single glance from the two leaders at their helm, they dove into the Emperor Bone Sea below, steadily pursuing their prey.

They had supreme confidence in their own abilities. The second they found him, that man would die.

End of discussion.

"We need to go. Now." Damien muttered solemnly.

Just as he spoke, he felt a subtle vibration in the water around him. His instinct clearly delineated that the approaching danger would be too much for him to handle.

Ha!

He reached out and grabbed Zara's arm, galvanizing his mana to push him as fast as possible. A small field of altered time enveloped them as well, further increasing their speed.

Flash!

Their figures disappeared, reappearing 100 kilometers away. Rapidly, Damien took out his information jade slip and began jotting down everything he saw.

They'd only recently passed the 1000-kilometer mark, and the fact that the danger level shot up so drastically was worrying.

But now, the only choice they had was to continue forward. After all, when they looked at the direction they came from...

A festival of blood was taking place. Various sea creatures of unknown identity appeared from the darkness as if they'd been laying in wait the entire time. The commotion grew without end, soon expanding until even the 100 kilometers Damien and Zara fled were encompassed in the violence.

"Tch!" Damien clicked his tongue as he teleported them further away. At the same time, he marveled at the insanity before him.

A tiny fish around the size of a finger shot through the waters without fear, entering the fray. Surrounding it were species far bigger and stronger than it, some even having many kilometer-long bodies.

Xiu!

Bang!

The tiny fish cut through a gap between two of its competitors just as the smaller one's razor-sharp teeth tore open the larger one's body. Unassuming in its gait, this tiny fish consumed a portion of the dead beast's body without any others noticing.

It continued through the battlefield and by the time a few minutes passed, that tiny fish was already larger than a human man. The evolution speed of this organism, or rather, all organisms in the ocean's chaotic environment was absurd.

Nevertheless, Damien and Zara kept moving. The smell of blood continued to permeate the sea, leading the expanding conflict to grow greater and greater with every passing second. The beasts at the head of this massive battle royale were already around Damien's strength level, and they were only getting stronger with time.

Damien begrudgingly pulled his eyes away from the chaos and directed his gaze deeper. He could feel multiple presences on the horizon, waiting for the opportune moment to strike.

'Only one will survive.' He realized.

Hundreds, thousands of 4th class existences were slowly embroiled in the chaos. Damien could instinctually feel that all of these beasts would become sustenance for a single being.

As for which being that was? That depended wholly on the victor of this battle royale.

'This is...simply impossible for other species. It's only possible because of the ocean's strange environment and the sheer amount of sentient life within. Even if one tried to replicate this scene on the surface, it would just collapse the existing ecosystem and run the area into ruin.'

An environment of insanity like this could rapidly produce powerful existences. Yet, all these powerful existences would eventually become prey for even stronger existences. In Damien's mind, he felt that the ocean was the rawest representation of the universe's functionality.

In the end, one was either prey or predator. Even as a predator, one would still be prey. The only way to survive was to kill, grow, and stand above everyone and everything else.

He and Zara began moving once more. They no longer had the strength to stay and watch the proceedings. But just as they decided to leave, a school of beasts broke off from the masses and rapidly pursued them!

'Shit!'

Damien immediately increased his speed. If he fought here, he'd inevitably be dragged into the massive conflict. His only option was to flee!

He darted through the water almost as agilely as a fish. As he experienced the feeling more, he realized how similar the deep ocean was to space. His movement abilities inherently improved when he started mimicking spatial techniques to traverse.

Suddenly, a glint caught his eye. The smell of fresh air inadvertently filled his nose. Without hesitation, he pulled Zara and moved in that direction.

"Damien, wait! That is...!" Zara tried to say, but unfortunately, she didn't have time to finish her words.

The duo burst through the water and arrived in a place free of it. As they looked around, they discovered a massive tree floating in the middle of the sea.

It wasn't anchored to anything, its roots didn't extend into the ground. It merely floated as if it were dead bark, but it clearly gave off an aura of life.

"This...the tree has created an air pocket around it?" Damien muttered. He heard Zara's panic loud and clear before they entered this space, and he was now examining it to the best of his abilities to find anything wrong.

"Zara, why did you try to stop me?" He asked as he did so.

Zara shook her head. "It's nothing. I just thought this tree looked familiar..."

"Familiar?"

"Mm, I remember seeing something like this in the notes you had in the dorm. But now that I look at the tree closely, it seems different."

Damien's eyes hardened upon hearing her words. Even if she was doubting her thoughts now, it didn't mean they had no validity.

Damien thought back on everything he knew about the Emperor Bone Sea as he further examined the tree.

And at that moment, it suddenly clicked.

"We're...fucked."

Existing without roots, creating air pockets to sustain itself, these features indeed mirrored a species Damien had researched before leaving.

But this tree was different. Zara was right about that.

The Unrestrained Life Tree was a species that mainly lived off the discarded remains of other beings left in the ocean. In simpler terms, it was a bottom feeder.

However, its carnivorous nature was still true.

And just like most other species, this tree had an equal and opposite.

The Unrestrained Death Tree.

Unlike its cousin, the Unrestrained Death Tree wasn't satisfied with mere scraps. No, this tree was far deadlier.

And judging by its proximity to the ongoing chaos...

It was definitely the initiator of this battle royale.

Chapter 654 Emperor Bone Sea [4]

The Unrestrained Death Tree had two main abilities.

The toxins it spread into the water around it could affect the emotions of those who passed through them, driving them mad with bloodlust. This ability would naturally cause a scene like the current one, a scene that was relatively common in an ocean ecosystem.

Its second ability simply allowed it to absorb blood to grow.

When these two were combined, the Unrestrained Death Tree could easily create slaughterfests where blood would form seas within the sea. And because of its unassuming appearance, no beast would target it while it casually absorbed blood from a distance.

However, if it was bothered...

'We need to go before...!'

Skree!

Damien's thoughts cut off as a screech resounded through the water. In that moment, the school of beasts that'd been chasing him burst through the Unrestrained Death Tree's bubble.

Damien's face paled.

"Grab onto me! Now!" He yelled. Zara immediately followed his instruction. With the quickest speed he could possibly output his mana, Damien covered the two in a cocoon of Void Mana before using Dimensional Cage to separate them from the Real Plane.

At the same time, the Unrestrained Death Tree began to shudder.

La~ la~ la~ la~

A soothing melody was emitted from its branches as its leaves brushed against each other and produced sound. The melody sounded like the angelic voice of a heavenly beauty, a pure woman who could cleanse any sin from one's soul.

It was bewitching.

The beasts that chased Damien, a species that looked like bipedal frogs, began to swoon. Their minds, still chaotic and not fully developed, were easily bewitched by this tune.

The Unrestrained Death Tree's roots slowly crawled out from beneath and latched onto these beasts. As Damien and Zara watched, all of their life essence was sucked away by the tree, leaving them as dried husks.

But the terror didn't end. These dead husks stood straight, their eyes alit with blue flame. Mindless like machines, they became the tree's slaves for eternity.

Damien shuddered and slowly backed away. The tree currently couldn't sense him and Zara due to the multi-layer protection he set up, but he didn't want to rely too much on this.

After all, the soothing melody that the tree emitted moments prior was powerful; powerful enough to even bewitch him if he had his guard down.

Becoming the tree's eternal slave wasn't his ideal death at all.

'If I teleport, it might sense the spatial fluctuations...no, it surely will. But...'

Damien stopped hesitating. He spread his awareness as far as it could reach and teleported several hundred kilometers away.

Through the sea's blackness, it was hard to see if the tree was following them. But Damien didn't worry. He was certain that it wouldn't.

The Unrestrained Death Tree was heavily territorial. Anyone or anything that entered its air pocket would become its slave or nutrients. However, in the current situation, the tree had to choose between two slaves and a whole buffet that it had set up beforehand.

Damien and Zara were still weak, this was their luck. If someone in the higher ranges of 4th class was in the same situation, it was unknown how the tree would react.

Standing far enough away to avoid the danger, Damien collected his breath. They'd only been in the Emperor Bone Sea for a few hours yet they'd already run into such a scenario. It was terrifying to think about what was present further and deeper.

Still, Damien and Zara both needed the contribution points this mission would give. At the very least, they needed 1,000 points.

That translated to 10,000 kilometers of explored sea.

"Are you okay to continue?" Damien asked Zara, but more than anything, he was asking himself.

The 1,000-kilometer distance was enough to challenge someone around his level. By his estimate, at most they'd be able to travel 4,000 kilometers before being forced to stop and Warp away.

It wasn't just about the mission, though. Damien had a goal when he decided to come to the Emperor Bone Sea.

'I want to find civilization.'

He wanted to see how those who grew past the level of these savage beasts, those whose spiritual intelligence matched humans and other species, he wanted to know how these beings lived and interacted.

'I want to find the Emperor Beast.'

This goal was mainly for Zara. Emperor Bone Sea's environment was much better for her growth than his own. If there was a chance to rapidly improve her strength, he obviously wanted to find it.

And finally...

'I want to know why this sea feels so hollow.'

He'd been feeling it since he first entered its waters. Despite its reputation and even the environment that he'd experienced so far, the Emperor Bone Sea felt...empty.

Something was missing, and he wanted to know what. It was a nagging feeling that he couldn't get rid of.

Zara clearly saw these emotions flash through his eyes. She smiled and grabbed his hand.

"Let's go. With our combined power, there should be nothing that can stop us from fleeing. As long as you can activate Warp, we will be safe, right?"

Damien looked over at her. Really, it wasn't just her appearance that changed. He didn't know when, but the little wolf he knew had grown into a woman who could even comfort him with her words. It saddened him a bit that he wasn't present to witness this development.

Nevertheless, Zara's words managed to calm his heart a bit. As long as he could use Warp...

His eyes firmed. Without another word, he and Zara continued on, heading deeper and deeper into the Emperor Bone Sea.

Roughly 5 minutes later, in the place they once stood, a group of 20 appeared, their bodies covered in a thick bloody aura.

"Even after witnessing that scene, the boy decided to continue. I at least have to praise his courage." A man spoke.

"Ha, that's not courage, it's idiocy. If he wasn't this insane, he never would've challenged the young master." Another responded.

"Mm, it's a shame that such a genius has to die early, but what can you do? He chose this fate for himself." The man nodded in agreement.

"You two, enough. We will wait a little longer before striking. The young master has declared that any treasures that man finds will belong to us as long as we kill him."

The eyes of those present lit up. In truth, they'd been stalking Damien for a while and had already caught up to him when he escaped the Unrestrained Death Tree. The only reason Damien still lived was because their leader stopped them.

Now that they knew the reason for this, how could their eyes not light up? Their job was akin to stealing candy from a baby!

The group moved with haste and stealth, soon leaving to follow Damien's footsteps.

In their wake was a clear ocean. The previous chaos was gone, all the blood in the water was gone. Only the wilted husks of beasts that once lived remained.

Along with a single tree. A tree whose hard-earned sustenance had just been ruthlessly stolen.

Chapter 655 Emperor Bone Sea [5]

The blackness of the Emperor Bone Sea really did remind one of the vast starry sky. The seemingly obvious vast emptiness was actually filled to the brim with life, forming a macrocosm in and of itself.

In the same vein, the deep sea seemed to mirror space itself as well. At this level, the obvious presence of water essentially vanished, the murky blackness in the surroundings instead beginning to feel like heavy space.

Water and space as elements generally mirrored each other more than most people realized. The spatial layers ebbed and flowed like tides, the heaviness of space felt like one was trying to walk while submerged in water. Space created a container, and water would expand however necessary to fill that container. The way they complimented each other was noteworthy when one realized the distinct similarities between them.

Damien and Zara had long since left their previous location not far from the 1,000-kilometer mark. Their bodies drifted through the sea, mapping it and scouring it for anything interesting.

However, their journey was mostly uneventful. Despite being surrounded by the wonders of the deep sea, their mission came first. The two traveled with utmost stealth and avoided any stronger beasts even if they could defeat them. In the ocean, the smell of blood was a death alarm.

The 2,000-kilometer mark saw a sharp increase in faunistic activity. Many more species were present at this distance and depth, making it evident that this was a more ideal living condition for most creatures.

At the 2,000-kilometer mark, the water pressure was just enough to shatter the bones of any 3rd class who dared to venture in, but even classless fishes and other aquatic beast species were able to survive it without a problem.

It made Damien curious about their evolutionary path. On a whim, he rapidly moved and grabbed a nearby fish beast before disappearing from the world. His body entered the Sanctuary with Zara for a brief instant before they continued their journey.

Without hesitation, Damien began dissecting the beast. While he didn't have much disassembling knowledge, he was at least good enough with the sword to make precise cuts.

Afterwards, he began to rapidly study the beast's physiological structure with the All-Seeing Eyes and his own comprehension.

'I see...that's interesting. They aren't withstanding the water pressure at all, rather, they're just offsetting it.'

The beast's internals weren't too different from what one would expect from an aquatic beast. It was the exterior that was special.

The fish's scales were made of a strange reflective material. Through the All-Seeing Eyes, Damien saw through the scale's structure perfectly. He watched as the scales cycled ambient mana in a specific pattern to create something akin to a magnetic field. This field displaces the water pressure around them, and through the connection between these scales, the offset pressure could even be used as an attack!

Being struck by the weight of the sea itself was bound to hurt. Damien couldn't imagine what the strength of these beasts would be once they matured.

'Still, this is a species-specific evolution. It doesn't explain why every single beast in these waters has the same survival ability. Unless...they all evolved differently to accomplish the same goal?'

It was an interesting theory to study. Different beasts developed differently based on their inherent traits. As they all took different routes to reach the same conclusion, studying them would help Damien supremely broaden his perspective and breadth of vision.

'After I finish the mission, I should return here to study more in-depth. If I just leave a spatial marker...'

Damien and Zara exited the Sanctuary just like that. The only reason they entered in the first place was so they could have a safe environment to drop their guards and wholly focus on examining the beast carcass.

Now that they were done, it was time to continue with their task.

Only, there was one thing they'd forgotten.

The second they arrived back in the Emperor Bone Sea's depths, all eyes turned to them.

The stench of blood.

Despite there being no blood on their bodies, the two still carried a whiff of blood scent with them as they returned.

'Shit...'

Damien immediately realized they'd messed up. Just like those who came before them, their lack of experience in aquatic environments led to a small mistake with heavy consequences.

"Let's run!" Damien exclaimed.

Zara didn't even need to say a word of affirmation. She understood just as much as he did.

The two turned and shot deeper into the Emperor Bone Sea without another thought.

Behind them, a cacophony of sound resounded through the waves as various beasts caught scent of the blood on their bodies.

Particularly enraged were the Bulletfish that shared a species with the fish Damien had killed.

Shaaaa!

A strange wail left their throats as they began to hightail towards Damien and Zara. Their bodies moved like rockets in the water, completely ignoring the water pressure's speed suppression and rapidly approaching the duo.

"They're too accustomed to this atmosphere. We can't outmaneuver them by just running." Damien realized. He looked at Zara and she nodded back. Their spiritual connection was continuing to grow stronger as their relationship solidified once more.

Zara grabbed Damien's shoulder and immediately galvanized her mana. The two quickly sunk into the surrounding blackness, their bodies becoming immaterial.

'This is...insane.' Damien marveled inwardly. Zara's shadow control was becoming more and more conceptual. As Damien allowed her full control over his body, he clearly felt separated from the Real Plane at a level similar to his Dimensional Cage.

Only, while the Dimensional Cage focused on stability and functionality, Zara's shadow abilities were wholly focused on concealment. Naturally, this shadow space was much more convenient in this situation.

The aquatic beast tide seemed to die down as soon as it started. With their bodies disappearing, the scent of blood disappeared as well.

And while the weaker beasts who were ready to charge at even a hint of blood scent were too weak to sense Damien and Zara and thus gave up. The stronger beasts didn't put enough value in the two's existence to continue chasing them.

At least, most of them didn't.

OOOOOOOH!

A bellow caused the seas to quake. The sound waves from this bellow alone were enough to cause raging tsunamis on the surface.

Ka! Ka! Ka!

Shaaa!

Skreee!

Various panicked noises rang out as every surrounding beast began to flee for their lives.

Damien and Zara weren't stupid either. Whether it was the crowd's reaction or the terror of that bellow, both were heavy indications that they should flee instantly.

And while that was exactly what they did, luck wasn't on their side.

A massive body slithered up from the depths, two car-sized eyes staring directly at their position.

The beast was reptilian, like a massive sea snake. Its body was around 10 kilometers long from head to tail, and its scales glistened with an aquamarine blue color.

Its tongue snaked in and out of its mouth as if it was drooling. The two fin-like wings protruding from the middle of its long body flapped in place as it set its target.

The beast bared its fangs and galvanized its aura.

And then, it charged.

Chapter 656 Emperor Bone Sea [6]

Damien's eyes widened in shock when he saw the beast's visage. Unexpectedly, he actually knew this beast's identity!

After all, he'd faced a variation of its species long ago when he first arrived in the Cloud Plane.

It was none other than a Sea Dragon.

However, compared to the one he saw before, this one was far more terrifying. While the first Sea Dragon had a degree of intelligence that allowed it to speak the universal language fluently, Damien didn't doubt that the survival instincts of a Sea Dragon that grew up in the Emperor Bone Sea far outstripped such measly intelligence.

"Block with everything you can!" He shouted.

A Dimensional Cage sprang up, isolating the duo from the world. The Space-Time River manifested with Damien's domain, putting the surrounding space under Damien's complete control. At the same time, Zara formed a massive wall of material shadows. A murky black color began to permeate the atmosphere.

Zara's domain stacked on top of Damien's, and with their two domains and strongest defensive skills combined, they confronted the Sea Dragon!

BOOOOM!

The Sea Dragon's massive body crashed into their barriers with the force of the entire ocean behind it. Even though these were the two's strongest defenses, they couldn't last more than a second against the Sea Dragon's terrifying power.

The barriers shattered one after another, and the explosive force that destroyed them rapidly traveled through the waters and arrived at Damien and Zara's position. However, the two didn't panic.

They pushed their mana fiercely, using it to redirect the shockwave's force and shoot themselves far away from the Sea Dragon!

"Now!" Damien commanded. Zara turned immaterial and sunk into Damien's shadow. The second she did so, he teleported hundreds of kilometers away.

But the Sea Dragon couldn't be underestimated either.

While Damien was forcefully transporting himself through space even while being heavily suppressed by the surrounding sea, the Sea Dragon was completely in its element. Blue mana converged from the sea as the Sea Dragon snaked through it, actively aiding its movements.

The Sea Dragon caught up to Damien rapidly. Its sheer speed allowed it to cross hundreds of kilometers in an instant. Its mouth opened wide when it saw Damien's body and snapped down with immense force!

Damien's eyes hardened. Escaping the Sea Dragon couldn't be easy. Most likely, it was tracking him through his dragon aura. This was also the most likely reason for it to be hell-bent on chasing him.

When two dragon descendants met, there were only two paths for them to take; either they befriended each other or they devoured each other. The Sea Dragon had obviously chosen the latter.

Damien's body twisted at an impossible angle, narrowly dodging the Sea Dragon's jaws. As he rapidly propelled himself backwards, his spatial mana raged, setting up a chain of Dimensional Cages between him and the Sea Dragon.

He turned tail and ran soon after. His goal was to go as deep into the Emperor Bone Sea as possible.

If there was one thing he learned from observing the Emperor Bone Sea's native species, it was that the sea itself was the greatest weapon. Almost every species he'd seen had biologically adapted to utilize the sea's natural environment to their own advantage, the Sea Dragon included.

Its two fin-like wings flapped furiously. The sea around it raged into a terrifying whirlpool that attacked Damien's stacked Dimensional Cages and rapidly shattered them.

The Sea Dragon didn't even wait for this task to complete before charging its next attack. It absolutely couldn't lose Damien.

From Damien, it sensed a powerful dragon bloodline on par with its own. Because they were equal, neither could use Dragon Pressure to make the other submit. But if the Sea Dragon managed to kill Damien regardless, consuming his bloodline might be the key to its evolution.

It wouldn't miss this opportunity.

The Sea Dragon's jaw unhinged once more. A swirling vortex of blue mana formed in its mouth, creating a vacuum that sucked in the surrounding seawater.

The water mixed into the mana and was compressed several times over. These terrifyingly powerful water bullets were then shot out with immense precision!

Despite being hundreds of kilometers away already, Damien could clearly feel the scent of death approaching him. His body immediately turned ethereal, vanishing and reappearing randomly in the surrounding 100-kilometer range.

At the same time, the water bullets reached Damien's general location and began exploding. Massive air pockets formed and imploded on themselves constantly, painting the black sea in white.

Damien gritted his teeth and continued dodging. In this chase, the only advantage he had was teleportation. And he was no longer one to ignore his advantages.

His teleportation became less random with time. At some point, he even began circling and taunting the Sea Dragon, enraging it into pursuing him with extreme speed and mania.

Like this, the chase continued. Damien watched the environment around him shift countless times. When they started this cat-and-mouse game, they were only around 2,000 kilometers into the Emperor Bone Sea.

Now, however, they'd already descended close to the 4,000 mark.

The Sea Dragon never gave up on Damien. Using its insanity-inducing speed and control over the sea, it pressured him heavily with every move.

Mirroring what it saw earlier, it began exerting control over the surroundings to a greater degree, forming the elementary form of what would one day become a domain.

Damien shuddered when he saw this. If the Sea Dragon was allowed to form that domain, his spatial advantages would no longer exist.

Thankfully, it was too slow in realizing this solution.

At the 4,000-kilometer range, the Sea Dragon was no longer in its element. Its control abilities were weakened and the sea's suppression severely limited its speed to a point where even Damien could escape it.

He let out a sigh of relief realizing that his guess had been validated.

Previously, he'd chosen to descend deeper into the sea with this exact gamble in mind. He had a thought: with the Sea Dragon's power, why would it decide to stay so close to the Emperor Bone Sea's shore?

After some thought, he guessed that the 2,000-kilometer range was the Sea Dragon's dominion, an environment that perfectly complimented its abilities.

However, as they went deeper into the sea, the environment began to change.

Not only was the Sea Dragon affected by the change in environment, but it was also being struck by another suppressive force.

Damien could feel it too. His half-dragon side was shivering in fear of the strange aura that permeated the sea. The aura only got stronger as they went deeper.

Luckily, Damien was born a human and his human side was dominant. This terrifying bestial aura wasn't able to affect him the same way it did aquatic beasts.

Damien continued teleporting as he submerged himself in thought. Even if the Sea Dragon was slowly fading into the distance, he didn't want to die from carelessness.

As he slowly passed the 5,000-kilometer mark, Damien let out another sigh.

The sea itself truly was the best weapon. If he had to escape the Sea Dragon with his own power, it would've been a terrifying chase that cost him at least a few limbs.

But with the sea inadvertently aiding him, he was able to get by after dodging the Sea Dragon's attacks and fleeing as fast as he could.

Once again, the Emperor Bone Sea made him marvel.

But now wasn't the time to do so. Zara soon exited Damien's shadow, and together, under the Sea Dragon's grudge-filled and unresigned glare, they began their exploration once more.

Chapter 657 Ruin [1]

The Emperor Bone Sea, more than anything else, taught Damien what it was like to be weak.

The hours passed drearily, almost like no time was passing at all. If it wasn't for Damien and Zara's constant state of movement and vigilance, they truly wouldn't have understood how rapidly time was passing.

After the 5,000-kilometer mark, as the duo descended deeper into the abyssal ocean, they came across self-sustaining ecosystems and magical sights they never would've expected in the ocean.

At their current depth, an early 4th class without a powerful body would be crushed by the water pressure alone.

In this environment, it was insane that so much life could persevere.

Aquatic flora was the most common sight at this level. Trees like the Unrestrained Life Tree were as common as grass, and smaller variant plants surrounded these trees, forming a symbiotic relationship in order to survive.

After all, the seafloor was nowhere in sight. If Damien had to estimate, the sea floor was a place only Demigods could survive in.

Still, the variety of flora and fauna and the way they interacted made Damien thirst for more. At the same time, he found himself constantly fleeing from unknown threats, driven to locations he never would've expected to go.

One of such places was the ruin he found himself standing in front of now.

Surrounding his body were dozens of swirling vortexes. But rather than natural phenomena, these vortexes were actually the defense mechanisms of a certain species of plant.

This plant, the Whirlwind Seaweed, didn't actually have much attack capability. Its physical body was also extremely weak, to the point where even a mortal could rip one apart like paper.

And this fact didn't change regardless of how much strength they gained. It was an inherent trait of this plant species.

To cope with their weakness, the species evolves and adapted to its environment. These vortexes were formed by the oscillation of these seaweeds as they interacted with the ocean's ambient mana. Through simple movement, they could conjure a defense mechanism that could terrify most beasts.

Of course, their actual power was limited. At most, they could redirect attackers away from them and obscure their perception. Still, this much was enough to help them survive in the wild.

What Damien saw now was a seemingly manmade ruin surrounded by this breed of seaweed. The vortexes completely hid the ruin itself from sight and perception, and if one fell into them, they'd inevitably be thrown far away from the ruin itself.

As a sort of home defense mechanism, these seaweeds were perfect.

The only reason Damien and Zara bypassed them was his spatial prowess.

'Who built this ruin? The knowledge to use Whirlwind Seaweed for both natural concealment and protection...this couldn't have been done by a human.' Damien thought.

Land species, whether they were humans, demons, angels, or any of Grand Heavens Boundary's other dominant species, were too uninformed about oceans to create such an ingenious mechanism.

And because the current location was on Death Emperor Star, it was even more unlikely for this structure to be manmade.

Damien and Zara floated closer to the ruins and began to investigate. The rocky exterior was thick and smooth, similar to obsidian. By Damien's estimate, the amount of pressure needed to create this kind of material could only be found on the sea floor.

'Strange. The sea floor is either a mystical undiscovered godland or an absolute death zone...it'd make more sense for this ruin to be located there, but why is it here? And why is it still in one piece?'

The ruin was like a small village. The fact that so many independent parts remained together and especially the Whirlwind Seaweed's presence suggested that the ruin was created at this sea level, but why would anyone use insane materials like this obsidian-like rock to build such a ruin? Damien couldn't understand it.

"Damien!" Zara suddenly called out to him. "Doesn't this pattern look familiar?"

Hearing the excitement in her voice, he hastened his pace to reach her. When he did, he found her standing in front of a circular mural shaped similarly to a bank vault door.

"This pattern...isn't this...!" Damien's eyes widened when he saw it. He didn't even have to thoroughly investigate to understand where he'd seen it before.

After all, this pattern had deeply carved itself into his subconscious.

It was the same pattern he saw in both the Storm Heavens Mystic Realm and the Challenge Gate.

"Is this...a Mystic Realm entrance?!" He exclaimed.

Mystic Realm entrances could truly open anywhere, so his guess wasn't too extraordinary. Still, this ruin didn't seem like the entrance to some newly opened Mystic Realm. If it was, the ruin wouldn't have been able to conceal itself so easily.

After all, even sea beasts would be attracted to the prospect of a Mystic Realm, especially those with intelligence.

'I have to investigate.' Damien thought to himself. He had the itching feeling that he'd stumbled upon something grand.

His hand reached out and touched the ancient engravings. With the amount of time that had passed, they'd been severely weathered down.

Still, their base structure remained.

Damien's hand traced the engraving as best it could. His eyes were closed as his entire mind focused on the pattern being etched into his brain.

'This pattern...no, this one...if you put these together then...'

As pieces of the pattern surfaced in his mind, Damien began piecing them together like a puzzle. Only, he wasn't following the pattern etched on the ruin.

Instead, he repositioned the portions in his mind in a strange new pattern. He didn't even have a grasp on what he was doing, he was merely following his instincts.

The mana was guiding him.

At first, the pattern merely looked like a circular formation without any special additions. However, as its form became more complete, it turned into a complete mural.

It was a depiction. Countless oceanic beasts littered the skies, ground, and everything in between. Their heads were bowed in reverence, and even the sun had been eclipsed for the same purpose.

The bodies of all these beasts were angled towards a signal location. There, seated atop a throne on an altar at the bottom of the sea, was a man.

A human man.

Damien's mind shook. Due to the nature of the engraving, the man's features were extremely vague. The only reason Damien knew he was a human was due to the lack of defining traits from other races, i.e, an angel's wings.

Nonetheless, as Damien looked at this human, he felt a pull from the very core of his being. He felt a connection to this mural that almost shared similarity with his connection to the Void.

'This...what is this?' Damien inwardly wondered as he tried to collect his thoughts.

Slowly but surely, he injected mana into the wall. The old debris and flora growing on the door after ages of abandonment flaked away with his touch.

And then, carefully maneuvering his mana, Damien began mirroring the mural in his mind on the ancient ruin.

The pattern changed to his will as if it was meant to do so from the beginning. The same scene Damien had seen prior manifested on the wall for Zara to witness as well.

That was the key.

The swirling vortexes caused by the Whirlwind Seaweed were sucked into the door and fused, forming a vacuum that dragged Damien and Zara inside.

Neither Damien nor Zara had the ability to resist this suction force. Yet, neither of them even thought to try in the first place.

Not only to escape the pursuers they were constantly forced to face, but also to discover the ancient secrets hidden within...

The duo fearlessly allowed the vacuum to consume them.

Chapter 658 Ruin [2]

When their bodies rematerialized, they were still submerged in water. But unlike the abyssal void the Emperor Bone Sea's waters emulated, this water was crystal clear.

It was light as a feather; if it wasn't for the refracted sun rays shining around them, illuminating the water's movements, they wouldn't have even noticed its presence.

"Amazing..." Zara muttered in astonishment.

Damien's expression, on the other hand, was strange.

'Isn't this...a massive fishbowl?' He thought to himself.

With the All-Seeing Eyes fully activated, Damien could see the flow of mana around him. He could vaguely make out the presence of a nigh-invisible dome that expanded far past his perception, covering the entire area they were now in.

"Let's go see if we can find anything interesting. Even if this place isn't a Mystic Realm, it's at least an ancient ruin. There's bound to be some goods hidden somewhere." Damien said after glancing around for a few more moments.

"Okay. We can split up and search as far as we can. Our spiritual link is enough to contact each other within a few thousand kilometers, so it should be enough to signal if we find anything." Zara agreed.

"That's true, but you can never be too careful. Take a transmission slip with you as well. I got these from that old man Tian Yang. They're top-notch items with a Demigod's guarantee, so they should work better if we stray too far apart."

Zara took the transmission slip Damien handed her and nodded. The two soon separated, heading in different directions to investigate.

Unfortunately for them, their current environment was much grander than they originally expected.

Hours passed to the point where the sun rays lighting the water disappeared, leaving it submerged in blackness.

This blackness, however, was decorated with majesty. With the sunlight's disappearance, many creatures began to emerge from their hiding spots. Fluorescent-colored fish floated through the water and algae and plant life of the same color painted the ground.

This grand display of color was truly magical, but in this environment, it was the most common of sights.

Unfortunately, despite being newcomers, Damien and Zara weren't able to enjoy these wonders. Their entire day of searching left them without any results.

'This place can't be empty. For there to be such a mechanism guarding it, it has to be special somehow...'

Damien's brows furrowed as he tried to figure out the problem.

"These...these fishes didn't come out at all when the sun was up...does it harm them in some way?" Zara suddenly asked.

"I'm an idiot," Damien said immediately after.

"Hm?!" She exclaimed in confusion.

"Ah, nothing," he shook his head. "You're a genius, though, I don't know if you realize it."

While Zara smiled happily at the compliment, Damien truly smacked himself inwardly. Right, the sea life in this environment didn't respond well to sunlight, otherwise, it wouldn't have been so desolate when they first arrived.

He finally took the time to appreciate the wonders around him, and at the same time, his eyes lit up.

Perhaps...the nighttime was the key he was looking for.

"Zara, let's go investigate again." He suddenly said.

"Hm? Will anything be different this time?" She asked.

"I don't know, but I have a hunch. Let's just try it out. Either way, we don't really have the option to leave."

Damien explained his reasoning to Zara, causing her eyes to light up in agreement. She'd been the one who originally put forth the theory, though unknowingly. Only, she'd already stopped thinking about the search by this point so the solution didn't cross her mind.

The two split up once more and began searching. Completely unlike their first attempt, they found results almost immediately.

"Traces of civilization..." Damien muttered under his breath as he used All-Seeing Eyes to thoroughly investigate the environment. Within the ground below, Damien could see clear traces of intelligent life.

'It seems Zara is finding traces too, but nothing significant. If I keep following this trail, though...'

Using the traces as a compass, Damien began traversing the strange realm at immense speeds. His body passed through the blackness like a rocket, and within a few hours, he found himself gazing into the distance at something that looked like a pack of fireflies.

After close inspection, he realized that they weren't fireflies at all. Instead, they were lanterns!

His body turned into a blur, rushing towards those lanterns. As he drew closer, the image of a small village became clear to his eyes.

The architecture mainly used clay as its base. The structures themselves weren't too complicated, but their dome-like shape stood out from the common architectural styles that Damien became used to seeing.

The village was, as implied by the lanterns, inhabited.

Damien watched a few hundred people go about their days. These people had pale blue skin with colored splotches covering their bodies. They had fanned ears and scales running up their forearms and necks. Not to mention, the gills.

'It's them...!' Damien exclaimed inwardly. The civilization he'd been searching for in the Emperor Bone Sea...he finally found his first trace of it in this strange realm!

He wasn't subtle in his approach at all. By the time he arrived, a group of strong guards was already awaiting him with their weapons drawn.

Unfortunately for them, their definition of strong wasn't the same as Damien's.

"I don't want to fight you guys. Here, watch this."

Damien's hand shot up into the sky. Spatial and Void mana combined as one, creating a terrifying black hole emitting an aura that far surpassed what these guards were capable of.

They looked at Damien and back at the vortex, but didn't move. They steeled their wills and prepared to fight. As long as their sacrifices gave others time to escape, their deaths would be worth it.

"Halt. Do not fight him." An aged voice stopped them from attacking.

An old man wearing nothing but a lower-body covering and a pair of ornate bone earrings appeared behind the men and looked at Damien.

"Hmm, a human...I haven't seen a human in several millennia. Boy, what is your purpose here?"

Damien sheepishly scratched his head. "To be honest, I have no clue. My companion and I were randomly transported to this realm after being sucked into a vortex, and now I've finally explored enough to find your village."

"And your companion?" The old man asked.

"Ah, she's on the other side of the realm, probably around 20,000 kilometers away. We split up to cover more ground, you see."

"Mm, she must have found the Oga village. If it's the Ogas...never mind. Boy, come in. Let's talk for a bit."

Damien nodded suspiciously and followed the elder. While he was wary, he wasn't afraid. By his estimation, the old man's strength should be similar to his own.

Damien and the elder entered a nearby dome hut and sat across from each other with a small sand table between them. A young woman brought them tea to drink as they spoke.

And while their conversation would surely be interesting, Zara's experience was far, far more hectic than either of them could've ever imagined.

She stood in the midst of the Oga Clan, massive explosions going off all around her.

This clan...seemed to be at war.

Chapter 659 Prominence [1]

After separating from Damien, Zara's experience was similar to his own. After wandering for a few hours, she found her way to a small village of a few hundred people.

Curiously, these people were friendly from the start. They didn't discriminate against her based on her unknown identity and made her feel at home. For around an hour, Zara stayed in this clan and met with its people, coming to learn its name, the Oga Clan.

The Oga village wasn't a very powerful force at all. Most of their denizens were children or elderly, their able men and women barely being enough to keep them living well.

The clan had such a peaceful atmosphere that it made Zara doubt whether or not this realm was truly connected to the Emperor Bone Sea. From her experience, everything in the Emperor Bone Sea was blood-crazed and deathly.

Seeing those same peace-loving denizens turn into blood-crazed maniacs in a split second was truly jarring.

The Tephit Clan attacked, these were the words of a guard that spurred everyone into motion. Within minutes, the entire village was destroyed in a bout of explosions.

"Haa!" A young Oga warrior shouted madly as he dug his fingers into an enemy's neck and ripped out his throat. As they fought, the Oga Clan only used their fists to counteract even the sharpest weapons of the Tephit.

The Tephit, on the other hand, were more refined. They used swift and piercing movements with their weapons, dancing through the water like glorious snakes. Wherever their swords struck, they would draw blood.

'This...what should I do in this situation?' Zara wondered. Combat experience, she had plenty of. But when it came to experience in society, Zara was still somewhat clueless. When it came time for a conflict like this one, she would usually defer to Damien for a decision. Unfortunately, he wasn't here at the moment.

'Ah! The transmission token!' She realized. She pulled out a small thumb-sized slip from her spatial ring, but before injecting her mana into it, she hesitated.

Her automatic response was to rely on Damien. She didn't realize how deep her dependence was rooted. Because they'd been apart for so long, Zara was sure she'd changed into a person who could stand next to him rather than beside him, but she couldn't help but want to follow in his shadow when they were together,

'I need to change.'

Her goal was simple. It was the goal of a little girl who didn't want to part from her idol and role model, a goal that she retained even after growing into a woman.

If she couldn't even make her own decisions, was she worthy of that goal?

Zara immediately put the transmission token away and merged into the shadows, expanding her presence to cover the ongoing battle.

"Oga and Tephit..." she muttered. The battle was relatively even. The Oga Clan's ruthlessness allowed them to cope with the Tephit Clan's ingenuity and armaments, but this strategy also resulted in faster deaths and injuries.

While the Oga Clan certainly had a chance to win, it would be a hollow victory.

'They helped me, so I should help them. Right?' Zara thought. If she was going to take her first steps toward changing, she couldn't opt for neutrality.

Thus, her simple reasoning ended up being the best one. In a conflict where both clans seemed to desire each other's extinction, she chose to help the side she had connections with.

Besides, neither side was out of her capacity. Their greatest forces were around her same level, but her combat strength far surpassed a mere early 4th class.

Her body rematerialized and turned into a hazy blur as she shot through the battlefield with insane speed. Once she arrived high above it, she raised her hand into the sky and galvanized her mana.

'Glacial Sphere'

Her mana boomed through the surroundings, immediately affecting the water. Within a few sparks of time, the water began to crystallize.

It had to be remembered, Zara's affinities weren't limited to Shadow Laws. Long ago, she even prioritized her ice affinity over her shadows.

Now that she'd reached 4th class, her Shadow Laws, the innate ability of her mysterious race, became her main focus.

But that didn't mean she neglected Ice Laws. In the Emperor Bone Sea, the strange death energy polluting the waters made it impossible for her ice to coagulate and spread and the presence of terrifying beasts made it difficult to use such flashy skills without drawing attention. But in this hidden realm...

With Zara as its highest point, a dome of ice formed around the battlefield, trapping everyone within. In the next instant, Zara's eyes turned a striking blue color as she fiercely exerted control over the elements.

'Chronolock'

Even time froze. The remaining water within the Glacial Sphere chilled to a maddening level and halted all movement. Whether it was the Oga or the Tephit, they were all affected.

Unlike the Tephit, however, the Oga didn't experience the terrors of this biting cold.

'Shadow Rose: Bloom'

Thorns of materialized shadows burst forth from the ground and stabbed through the arms and legs of the frozen Tipheth Clan members. A striking black rose bloomed in the middle of their formation, and the thorns retracted into its body, carrying their targets with them.

'Seal'

With one final word, Zara forced the rose to close its petals, sealing her enemies within.

For now, she didn't want to kill them. Through Tang Lingzi and Damien's constant warnings, she'd learned the importance of information.

Her body descended to the ground, the Glacial Sphere receding. She glanced at the Oga Clan members who were watching her in awe, and immediately, they separated, leaving only a single old woman in Zara's line of sight.

"You must be an outsider, aren't you?" The old woman said. "Regardless of where you come from, you are the savior of our village today. Please allow me to thank you over a cup of tea."

Zara's brows furrowed, but in the end, she nodded. After following the old woman into a hut she constructed in the ruins of the destroyed village, she sat down and asked her most pressing question.

"Why did they attack you?"

The old woman sighed. "As I thought, you've come here unknowing of the terrifying situation. Child, instead of learning more, it would be best for you to leave. We are but a small village connected to the main Oga Clan. The scale of this conflict isn't something a growing child like you should get involved in. It pains me to see promising youths die young."

Zara shook her head in denial. "Even then, you still have to tell me what's happening. If you don't, I'll release your enemies again. I have no reason to help you if you don't give me one."

The old lady stared into Zara's eyes as if trying to read her soul. Her bright golden eyes were firm and laced with defiance. It was clear that she had no interest in running away.

The old woman sighed as she spoke, "Haa...fine. In the end, a true genius' path cannot be hindered by anyone. This conflict's nature is simple. Currently, our beautiful realm of Aquazyl is engulfed in chaos. For this, there is only a single reason..."

"The Prominence War."

Chapter 660 Prominence [2]

"The Prominence War?"

Damien and the elder sat at a table together and conversed. Damien's status as an outsider was revealed instantly, so there was no need to put up a false front. Their conversation started from matters of the outside world; the Nox invasion, the different sectors and races of Grand Heavens Boundary, the Dimensional Leaderboard, etc., to matters of Aquazyl with time. Now that they'd laid their cards on the table and built a modicum of trust, they finally arrived at the main topic.

"Yes. Aquazyl has another name, the Sea God's Realm. The Prominence War is a war for sovereignty that takes place every 100,000 years. It is a fierce struggle between our five clans of Aquazyl, the Sea God's descendants." The old man explained.

"Mhm, that part is easy to understand. My question is: why, though? Wars for sovereignty aren't special, so what's the reason it only occurs every 100,000 years?" Damien questioned.

"Hm, you're an observant one, I see. I don't mind telling you. After all, even if you know, nothing will change. The Prominence War only takes place every 100,000 years because that is the standard set by the Sea God. As for the reason for this standard to even exist..."

"The reward for the final winner of the war is not merely sovereignty over Aquazyl. Rather, it is sovereignty over the Emperor Bone Sea as a whole."

Damien's eyes widened in shock. He slammed the table with surprise as he exclaimed, "what?! Is it even possible to have sovereignty over the Emperor Bone Sea?!"

"Of course," the old man replied with a smile. "The entire Emperor Bone Sea is a treasure refined by the Sea God using his life's achievements and knowledge. Gaining sovereignty over it with individual strength is naturally nigh-impossible, but if the Sea God grants the position, it will be universally accepted within the Emperor Bone Sea without question."

"Then I...!"

"That's impossible." The old man cut him off. "Only the five clans: the Tephit Clan, the Oga Clan, the Hubo Clan, the Verxis Clan, and our Ruvia Clan can lay claim to the throne. Our clans are descended from the Sea God and his five wives respectively. Only by possessing the bloodline of one of these clans does one have the right to the throne in the Prominence War."

"Though, this doesn't mean you can't participate. It merely means that the rewards you gain will remain material. You'd essentially be playing the role of a mercenary for whichever clan decides to hire you."

Damien sighed in astonishment as the old man finished speaking. "Just what kind of person is the Sea God? Is he still alive?"

The old man sighed as well, however, his sigh was far more downtrodden. "The Sea God...is dead. We do not know how or even where he died, but the Prominence War's existence is proof of his death. The legends tell many tales of the Sea God. He was a man who reached the peak of Death and Water Laws, even touching upon the Law of Creation. His wives were all mythical Godbeasts, none even close to ordinary. The legends are too numerous to recount at the moment, but I'm sure you understand just what kind of character the Sea God was."

Damien nodded strongly. He still remembered the system's message during his very first class change.

The foundational laws of the universe were separated into layers: The 5 elements, Life and Death, Space and Time, Creation and Destruction, and perhaps something above even them. For the Sea God to touch upon a law that symbolized the peak of the universe with its very existence was enough to show just what level of strength and influence he'd reached.

Not to mention, if the Emperor Bone Sea was truly a treasure refined by him, he was clearly above the level of the Grand Heavens Boundary.

Perhaps Damien was underestimating Demigods, but he didn't believe a Demigod could create something as intricate as the Emperor Bone Sea.

The Emperor Bone Sea held and birthed life. It was a self-contained macrocosm. It was just a single step below the ability to create one's own world, an ability that reached the realm of Godhood.

"The Prominence War created by such an individual...can't be simple," Damien muttered.

The old man chuckled. "Simple? Haha, not in the slightest. The condition to win the Prominence War is the complete extermination of the other four clans. Can that be called simple in any way?"

"Hm? There should only be a few hundred of you in each clan, no? It shouldn't be that hard." Damien asked curiously.

The old man shook his head. "You're wrong. We are merely an outer branch of the Ruvia Clan. Our five clans contain millions of descendants each. If not for our bloodline bond, it would've been better to term us as Empires."

"But I could've sworn I saw the barriers of this realm already...there's no way you can fit so many people here and conceal them so well. If they existed in the vicinity, I would've found them."

"Ah, you mean that barrier? That is but one of many. These barriers serve to separate various battlefields to lessen the chaos. We can battle without harming Aquazyl's ecosystem through this method. Even if we are at war, none of us desire the destruction of Aquazyl."

Damien nodded once more. Most of his questions had been answered by now.

"I get the gist of the situation, but there's still one thing I don't understand. Why would the Sea God want to exterminate his own lineage? Why is he asking his descendants to commit genocide against each other? And...if this genocide took place during the past Prominence Wars as well, how are your five clans still existing?"

The old man smiled and nodded, "I was waiting for you to ask. Our clans, when compared to the influences of the outside world, have a much stranger composition."

"Even after total extermination, our clans can repopulate. In truth, every beast in the Emperor Bone Sea has a trace of the Sea God's bloodline. When a beast reaches a certain level of bloodline maturity, they are transported to Aquazyl and granted intelligence, becoming a part of their parent clan."

"When a total extinction of 4 clans occurs in the Prominence War, the winning clan is given time to grow and fortify the foundation of their influence before the other 4 clans are slowly reformed. When 100,000 years pass, the 5 clans will be at their peaks once more and the Prominence War will begin again."

The old man's face fell. "In the last war, our Ruvia Clan was also eliminated. I've only seen scenes of that war through bloodline memories, but it was truly harrowing. It is not something I wish to see happen in my lifetime."

"That's understandable." Damien agreed. "But by your reasoning, the clan who won the previous war should be considerably stronger than the other 4. Which clan was it?"

The old man looked out the hut's window, seemingly wishing for his gaze to pierce reality and show him what he wanted to see.

"The victors of the previous Prominence War...were none other than the Tephit Clan."