

Void 901

Chapter 901 Training [3]

The time of the great tournament approached closer and closer, and with the passing of a month, several thousands of different forces had made their way to Beast Emperor Star in preparation for the proceedings.

In fact, the world was currently enveloped in a festive atmosphere. With the number of external influences congregating, massive trade fairs and auctions were held all over the place as treasures found their way to their rightful owners.

Even the common people were able to enjoy the festivities, setting up their own carnivals and using the opportunity to make a profit and enjoy themselves during these few days of peace and cultural exchange,

However, with the sheer number of people gathering, there were bound to be those who didn't know how to respect law and order.

Those who killed and stole from others, those who tried to rape the women and bully the common people, all of these types of unscrupulous people also saw opportunity brewing on Beast Emperor Star.

But would the Golden Dragon Clan allow such degeneracy to fester on their soil?

Absolutely not!

Shing!

A light sword not too different from a rapier cut through the air, a spray of blood following behind it.

A man's head flew into the air and slammed against the pavement.

"Phew..." the assailant let out a small sigh.

"Come on, you're okay now. There are people waiting to take you home."

She turned to a nearby group of women with their clothes nearly entirely torn off, bloody scrapes covering their bodies.

They shivered as they looked at the bloodied surroundings, but the woman's words seemed to bring them back to their senses.

"A-ah...!" One of them exclaimed.

"Thank you so much for saving us! We'll definitely make sure to repay this grace!" She continued, establishing herself as the leader of the group.

"No need. Take these blankets to cover yourselves and head outside the alley. The guards will make sure to compensate you."

With those words, the blue-haired heroine disappeared from the alley, leaving the group of women by themselves.

Their eyes remained wide for many minutes before they finally came back to reality.

'So...so cool!' They thought in unison.

Without even realizing it, that woman had become an idol in these young women's hearts.

As for the heroine herself...

'This job is far more difficult than I expected. When is that tutor going to show himself?'

The woman frowned to herself, thinking back to the affairs of the palace.

Right, this woman was none other than our favorite Valkyrie, Elena.

In the past month that she'd been staying on Beast Emperor Star, she had no plans of remaining idle.

According to the Golden Dragon Emperor, the little princess's Master, the man who was promised the Genesis Bead, was currently in the middle of training his disciple and wouldn't be available for a period of time.

Elena needed to have a talk with that man to try and negotiate for the treasure, but until this day, she hadn't even seen a single trace of him!

'Haa...how troublesome.'

Elena stopped moving, bringing two fingers up and touching her forehead.

'Call of Valhalla.'

A pure white magic circle surfaced in the earth around her, soon expanding until tens of shining armors manifested into the Real Plane.

"Go, keep order. Damon, I pass the command to you. Summon your brothers as you wish."

Upon Elena's command, a particular cavalry soldier dismounted his horse and stepped forward, kneeling in submission and affirmation.

After him, the rest followed behind. Evidently, he was the soldier nicknamed Damon.

Under his command, the Undying Warriors of Valhalla's Army spread first through the city, and eventually, through a large portion of the world.

Elena's army was already at the level of tens of thousands of troops, and while she couldn't keep control over the entire planet, it wouldn't be impossible for her to accomplish such a feat in a world the size of Apeiron.

'Helping with the guardian duty is taxing, but it builds trust. If I keep going like this, the Golden Dragon Emperor will be more inclined to listen to my demands. If not...'

Elena didn't think she was powerful enough to take on everyone who wanted the Genesis Bead, but she was semi-confident in escaping.

As she submerged herself in thought, she kept moving and responding to emergencies that her legion couldn't handle. Eventually, a token on her waist began to vibrate.

'Hm? Contact from the palace?'

Elena poured her mana into the token and was immediately met with an urgent voice.

"The little princess and her master have returned! Come back quickly!"

Elena's eyes widened. The message was from a close friend she'd made in the palace, the vice-captain of the palace guards. The second the words entered her ears, Elena dashed into the air and took off.

She arrived near the palace within 5 minutes. The first thing she noticed was that the strange fluctuations coming from the little princess' courtyard were long gone.

Now, a similar presence stood in the throne room.

Elena's senses extended several tens of thousands of kilometers past her body, allowing her to sense these things, however, she was still at least 30 seconds from the palace!

'I can't miss this opportunity!'

According to his previous behavior, this mysterious master was likely to disappear for several months again after this time exiting his seclusion. If Elena missed this chance, she would likely miss her opportunity to get the Genesis Bead without using force!

30 seconds was an eternity and an instant at the same time.

To Elena, these 30 seconds passed like hours. Every step she took was deliberate and geared to move her at the fastest speed possible, every movement in the atmosphere was caught in her perception.

However, in the grand scheme of things, 30 seconds wasn't much at all.

Boom!

Elena arrived before the palace with a sonic boom, rushing through the gates and maneuvering the halls to the throne room.

Within seconds, she reached her destination and threw open the doors to find...!

The Golden Dragon Emperor and the rest of the Golden Dragon Clan's direct lineage seated in the throne room...

Except for the little princess.

Elena's face fell.

'Was I too late?'

She wondered how powerful that person must've been to simply disapp—

'Hm? Spatial fluctuations?'

"Young Elena, I'm afraid you've come a moment too late. Just now, that sir took my daughter away once again to train."

The Golden Dragon Emperor finally acknowledged her presence, willfully ignoring her disrespectful entrance.

Elena shook her head. "It's fine. Say, the princess' master...is a spatial practitioner?"

The Golden Dragon Emperor raised his brow. "Hm? Indeed. According to him, my daughter has a supreme talent in space, which is what led to him accepting her as a disciple. Have you not heard this news throughout the palace yet?"

Elena shook her head, internally this time.

She furiously refused the prodding voice of hope in the back of her head.

"Do you know when he will return?" She finally asked.

However, the Golden Dragon Emperor could only shake his head in resignation.

After all, even if he told her, she probably wouldn't believe him!

Just how could anyone believe that a man not even properly at the extreme peak of 4th class...

...could instantly transmit himself to an entirely different Sector?!

Chapter 902 Training [4]

"M-master...?!"

A panicked voice rang out in the starry sky as two people materialized from thin air.

The girl among them stumbled to her knees, supporting herself with mana and calming her rolling internals to at least avoid vomiting.

"Ah, right. I forgot about that," Damien muttered with a wry smile.

Even normal spatial movement was taxing for non-experts. Even though Astoria was also a spatial practitioner now, she wasn't nearly practiced enough to make such a long-distance jump with ease.

"Take your time to stabilize yourself. We still have another jump to make."

"Another one?!" Astoria exclaimed, her face turning pale.

"Relax," Damien said with a smile, "the next one is only a few hundred thousand kilometers. It'll be fine."

"Oh, just a few...few hundred thousand?! Master, are you insane?!"

"What? Is there something wrong with that? The jump we just made was several hundreds of millions of kilometers, you know. We're pretty deep in the Divine Realm right now."

"Ha...haha...r-right...h-hundred...million...haha...Divine Realm...hahaha..." Astoria muttered robotically.

"What're you making a big deal out of? Quickly rest and recuperate so we can jump again."

Damien tried to wave Astoria off with that, but she wasn't so easy to manipulate.

"M-a-s-t-e-r, even though you're my master, it still bugs me that you don't understand what kind of monster you are! If you think like this, how can I ever meet your expe— I mean, slack off more in the future?!" She exclaimed, quickly correcting her slight mistake as she spoke.

"Master, even the Golden Dragon Clan doesn't have the means to travel so far in a single leap. You're basically a personal cross-sector teleportation array! That's an immense power that's completely unique to you!"

Astoria's words were filled with excitement. How could they not be? The more powerful her master was, the better for her training, and the more she'd be able to brag to her acquaintances from other Holy Lands.

However, Damien himself remained unimpressed.

'I know Warp doesn't have enough freedom to just take me wherever I want to be, but I shouldn't spoil this little girl's mood right now.' He thought with a wry smile.

The overactive imagination of his disciple would be a great motivator for her future training.

Besides, even if Damien wasn't quite at the point of freely traversing the universe, he was close enough.

And if it was Astoria, she could definitely surpass his movement capabilities if she worked hard enough in the future.

"Master, Master, what else can you do? I knew you were a secret powerhouse in disguise! What if— blegh...!"

Astoria began enthusiastically rambling again, however, she found her words interrupted as she keeled over and introduced the universe to her breakfast.

Damien sighed and used mana to lift her hair out of her face, patting her on the back gently.

"I told you to rest but you didn't listen. Now look what happened." He scolded lightly.

"I'm sorry...Master...bleurgh!"

Damien smiled to himself at the comedic scene and slowly helped Astoria readjust her body condition.

"I didn't expect you to react so violently now that you've reached your current level. Likely, it's a mental matter rather than a physical one. Therefore, just this once, I'll make an exception."

Aa Damien said, Astoria's body could definitely handle the large jump. And when he said mental problem, he didn't mean that Astoria had some sort of hidden trauma inhibiting her.

Rather...

'Her talent is too high.'

Even though she had barely graduated from the beginner level in Damien's books, her natural talent and affinity made her instinctively attempt to comprehend the mysteries of his methods, leading to the current situation.

After all, Damien's usage of Space Laws far exceeded Astoria's comprehensive ability, and even disregarding that, Damien had recently made a switch so all his techniques would be manifested through the Void rather than his affinities themselves!

When Astoria tried to comprehend this mana, how could she remain unharmed?

It was likely only due to her Void Disciple title that she received such a minute rebound.

Damien wrapped Astoria in his mana and formed a shield for her, ensuring that she wouldn't feel anything during the secondary Warp.

And soon after, the two disappeared once more, leaving only a puddle of...Dragon Clan Breakfast™ floating in the void.

"Hm? Waaaaah!"

Splash!

"Fwah!"

Damien and Astoria's new materialization point was above a large body of water. While Damien stood in the air calmly, Astoria seemingly forgot to do so, plummeting into the sea below.

She surfaced soon after and made her way back to Damien, utterly soaked in seawater.

"Hehe~ oopsie!" She said, quirking her head cutely.

Whoosh!

Astoria's figure vanished and reappeared several meters away just as Damien's flick was going to land on her forehead.

"Hmph! Silly Master, I can totally predict you no—ow!"

Without suspense, the smack landed on her forehead, though Damien didn't move to chase her at all.

Horizon Break's concepts were especially in training Astoria.

"Haven't you learned by now? This young master's smacks...can never be stopped! Hahahaha!" Damien proclaimed smugly.

"Damn Master, I'll definitely beat you up one day!"

"Oh? Is that a challenge? Well then, my cute disciple who can't even handle a little bit of teleportation, how do you plan to do that?"

"I-I...hmph, why should I tell you my plan?!"

"Hahaha! Alright, stop joking around. Trouble has come looking for you."

Damien stopped their banter abruptly and glanced in a certain direction, attracting Astoria's gaze as well.

There, the sea was churning violently, on the verge of forming a massive sinkhole.

"Master, that is..." Astoria muttered with a pale face.

"Hmm, that should be the ruler of this territory. He's not very happy with the scene you made when we got here."

"Are you sure it's not because you teleported us into his territory?!"

"Hm? How could that be? No creature could possibly hate a benevolent and magnanimous young master like me."

"Keuk...! Master, I think your words gave me critical damage. I don't think I can fight him."

"Nonsense. I'll be cheering for you on the sidelines, so if you ever want moral support, just look over. I'll flash my most handsome smile to motivate you."

"E-eh? Master, what do you mean by tha-ooooooooah!"

"Why do I always get thrown?!" Astoria exclaimed as she flew through the sky, a very familiar feeling to her at this point.

Her current trajectory put her directly in the face of the mysterious monster in the depths.

Damien tossed her perfectly so she'd have no choice but to fight.

'Damn Master! Setting up a Dimensional Cage is unfair!' She thought to herself with a frown.

However, she didn't complain out loud.

Instead, as she watched the massive Kraken-like monster raise its body from the water, as she felt its terrifying aura almost at the late stages of 4th class, she readied her fists and took a combat stance in preparation for the battle to come.

If she could help it, she'd definitely choose to be lazy.

She wanted to play around and tease her master more, not fight against ugly beasts.

However, even she was curious...

Just how much had she grown in the past year and a half?

Chapter 903 Training [5]

Astoria was an interesting character. Her personality was geared toward playfulness and mischief. However, it didn't take away her ability to get serious.

As someone born and raised as part of a royal clan. She'd of course been schooled in discipline and class, but in her normal life, she tended to ignore these teachings.

The first time she ran away from the palace, she understood the pleasures that life could have. Thus forth, she'd been indulging in such pleasures, playing around to her heart's content without a care for anything else.

It was a mindset she adopted for several years, even putting aside her training for the sake of this joy.

In the past year and a half, she started to see a subtle change in herself.

No matter how she wanted to play, she simply couldn't convince herself to give up everything to do so. No matter how mischievous she wanted to be, she no longer wanted to sacrifice her training for it.

Was Damien the reason for this change?

In part, sure. As a teacher, Damien was strict and relatively indifferent to Astoria's struggles and complaints, however, as an individual, Damien was incredibly amiable and charismatic.

The difference in how he acted during training and outside of it definitely influenced Astoria and changed her attitude, especially since she's been taking his punishment whenever she disobeyed him.

But the change Astoria saw was not completely due to Damien. In fact, his influence was minimal.

The change in Astoria had a simple origin.

It was simply...joy.

The joy she felt in learning with Damien was something she never felt at the palace. Whether it was during noble training or combat training, nothing about the Golden Dragon Clan's techniques sparked her interest.

Space was different.

Space was...

"Fun! This is too fun!"

Astoria laughed joyously as she flashed through the air, never remaining in one place for too long.

Her arms waved through the air with purpose, her mana flaring along with her movements and interacting with the environment.

BOOM!

A massive tentacle exploded forth from below the ocean and slammed through the air with speed that betrayed its size. It was accompanied by three more at different orientations that blocked any route Astoria could take to attack.

But for a spatial mage, when was this ever a problem?

"Hahahaha!" Astoria laughed as she finished her movements.

As the tentacles slammed into her position, her body vanished and appeared opposite to where she once stood. She pushed her hands forward and yelled with fervor.

"Dimensional Cage!"

A much smaller and less stable Dimensional Cage appeared within the one Damien conjured. Despite its flaws, it was more than enough for her current purposes.

'First step: establish control, complete!' She thought to herself as she began to push her mana again.

'Second step: gain an advantage!'

Astoria flew into battle, completely subverting the Kraken's expectations. She pushed closer to its body and shoved her arm forward to strike it.

The Kraken's massive eyes narrowed in fury.

OOOOOOOH!

It bellowed loud enough to shatter eardrums as a light of mana covered it.

"Foolish girl!" A voice boomed into the atmosphere.

"Humph! Only Master is allowed to insult me!"

Astoria's body flashed forward. Her arm extended rapidly, letting out a powerful force that exploded into the Kraken's body!

However...

BANG!

Crack!

"Ack!"

A dull sound rang out. Astoria disappeared, teleporting several hundred kilometers away.

She shook her bloodied hand and winced in pain. She could feel several broken bones rattling around where they shouldn't be rattling at all, but she ignored it.

'Pain is power.'

One of Damien's favorite mottos. The more pain she felt, the stronger she'd grow.

Astoria's eyes narrowed as she peered into the Kraken's skin. With just a quick glance, she was able to see the thick layers of mana protection layering its internals.

'That's a natural protection. I won't be able to break it easily.'

Bang!

The air exploded as a tentacle narrowly missed Astoria's side. Before she could teleport away, three more banging explosions rang out.

Pillars of water rose from the sea below and reached the heavens, entrapping Astoria within.

'Perfect!'

She wasn't panicked at all. In fact...

'Perfect Reversal...'

Astoria flicked the air with her mana. The forceful water pillars around her seemed to respond to her touch, bending far away from their intended trajectories.

'Return!'

BOOOM!

A phenomenon that defied the laws of physics. The water pillars whipped into perfect right angles and acted almost like cannons as they shot with terrifying intensity back at the Kraken's body.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

CRACK!

"Girl, you dare?!" The Kraken roared as its defenses cracked.

Astoria didn't respond at all. She took the opportunity while the Kraken was distracted to teleport directly next to its body and strike her hand against its skin.

'Des—'

Bang!

"Keuk...!"

A blast of mana slammed into her body and pushed her back. Astoria coughed a mouthful of blood as she tried to regain balance, but before she could...!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

A tentacle crashed into her side and flung her backward. A water pillar rose up under her and threw her into the air. As if finishing a combo, the Kraken opened its mouth and shot out a blast of compressed air that impacted Astoria straight in her chest, cracking several of her ribs.

"Hak...! Hak...! Hak...!"

Astoria threw up blood with a pale face as she teleported away several times, getting as far away as possible from the enemy.

She assessed her injuries while gritting her teeth to avoid screaming out in pain. Her bones were broken in several places, she was bleeding internally, and some of her organs had experienced serious injury. If it wasn't for her dragon body, she would've been dead already.

'I can't...'

She almost gave up at that moment. The battle hadn't gone on for long, but she hadn't been able to do anything but get beat.

Worst of all, it was done in just a few moves by a beast who didn't even take its human form.

It was unacceptable.

Astoria gave up on attacking and changed her approach.

She took several healing and mana-replenishing pills and teleported endlessly, almost ignoring her mana capacity as she took a moment to heal her injuries and think of a way to defeat the enemy.

'Master is right, my space abilities aren't geared towards attacking.'

She could makeshift attacks with Vector Control and exert great power, but it wasn't nearly enough.

Even her Vector Control was meant for support rather than attack.

'Then, I can only improvise.'

Damien had told her several times that her main combat power would still come from her Golden Dragon techniques, but she didn't want to listen to him.

She almost wanted to throw away her old techniques and be completely reborn.

But it was nothing more than delusion.

Reality didn't allow one to simply change in an instant if one wished it.

It was an extremely tedious thing to change oneself.

But in most cases...

'Why should I change?'

Astoria's eyes hardened.

What would it look like if she stopped denying her true self?

This time, she wouldn't stop herself from finding out.

Chapter 904 Training [6]

'Imperial Dragon Body: Open!'

Astoria stopped holding back her full potential. A bright golden aura surrounded her body as a layer of scales surfaced on her skin. Wings, horns, and a thick draconic tail followed soon after, leaving Astoria in a half-dragon form.

'Golden Heavenly Sun!'

She pulled her fist back and concentrated her raging aura into it, causing the aura around her body to slowly subdue itself.

Her body flashed forward at amazing speeds, though not quite teleporting. She swerved through the Kraken's dozens of tentacles and narrowly dodged each and every terrifying water attack it threw at her, approaching its body in an instant.

Once again, the Kraken released a massive pulse of mana that slammed into Astoria's body, but before it could make contact...

She disappeared!

Astoria appeared not even 10 meters to the right, standing on the Kraken's body where its tentacles connected to its head.

"Feel my wrath, old beast!"

Astoria slammed her fist down, releasing all of the built-up golden aura into the Kraken.

BOOOOM!

For the first time, the Kraken took serious damage.

Its flesh exploded as its internal mana protection was shattered thoroughly by the golden energy.

And to make matters worse, Astoria immediately utilized Vector Control to severely multiply the amount of internal damage that was being dealt.

"Girl, I will kill you today!" The Kraken roared.

Up to this point, he'd been treating Astoria lightly because he couldn't feel any threat from her. There was no need for him to go all out.

However, he wasn't a young and arrogant beast. Now that he's been injured, why would he show the same ignorance?

"Waves, rise!"

His voice caused the seas to churn. Towering waves rose into the sky, several tens of kilometers high, threatening to swallow Astoria whole.

She immediately teleported into the air above the tsunamis and used Vector Control to shield herself from the mana fluctuations.

'I need to take this opportunity! He should've lost some mobility from that—'

"...!"

Astoria's senses suddenly rang major alarm bells in her head. She instinctually teleported before even realizing what had happened, however, as soon as she reappeared, she felt something clasp around her neck.

"Girl, you've pushed the limits today. I was going to be generous, but you've forced me!"

A naked man with wild red hair with a large bloody hole in his side held her throat and tightened his grip, crushing her neck in his grasp.

Hak...!

Hak...!

Hak...!

Astoria took short breaths as she tried to salvage as much air as she could and stay breathing. She tried to teleport, but the Kraken's tightening grip didn't give her the mental stability she needed to do so.

'Escape! I need to escape!'

Her eyes widened. Her focus heightened to the absolute maximum as she surveyed the surroundings and tried to find a way out, but they were currently high in the sky, away from anything she could use to help herself.

'I need to...master...'

She glanced around, looking for Damien, but he was nowhere to be found.

'Master...where are...'

The Kraken's voracious gaze was piercing holes through her body as he slowly killed her, enjoying every second of her pain.

He wasn't someone who enjoyed bullying the weak, but after Astoria managed to wound him, he needed to save face.

They were alone, but the ocean had eyes. If he didn't exert his authority here, rumors were bound to spread.

Astoria also realized the gravity of the situation.

Damien wasn't here.

He wasn't coming to save her.

He—

'Master thinks...I can...!'

Her mind suddenly cleared.

Damien might've seemed indifferent, but he wasn't someone who'd let her die like this.

'Pain...is...power...!'

Astoria gritted her teeth and revolved her mana, scavenging oxygen from any source she could find. Her eyes blazed with fiery determination as her mind spun in search of the solution Damien saw for her.

"Girl, you still haven't given up?!"

The Kraken's eyes sharpened when he saw Astoria's defiance. He slammed his leg down on her knee, snapping her right leg in the opposite direction.

"Hak...!"

Astoria wanted to scream in pain, but there was no air in her throat to produce the sound.

The pain was immense.

But it was this immensity that forced Astoria to face reality and face death, to face herself and to face her power,

And under that circumstance...

'Damage...transfer!'

...she found her solution.

"Heuk...!"

A strange sound exited the Kraken's throat.

Crack!

A strange sound was emitted from the Kraken's body.

Suddenly, he violently jerked backward, inadvertently letting go of Astoria's neck.

"What did you...!"

Astoria didn't wait for him to finish. She teleported directly behind him and sunk her claws into his head.

'Burst!'

The Kraken was a powerful foe, but how could he react in time?

In that instant, Astoria used Vector Control to transfer all the damage she'd taken back to the Kraken, severely wounding him in an instant.

Now, that didn't mean Astoria's wounds were gone. She was still struggling to catch her breath as she moved.

But she had time to acclimate to her pain.

The Kraken, on the other hand, received the sensation of all that pain in a single instant, which severely amplified the effect.

Now that he was stunned, how could Astoria let something like pain stop her?

That wasn't the sort of coward her master was raising her to be!

Her grip tightened without hesitation. The golden scales on her fingers extended into several claws that stabbed into the Kraken's skull.

"You...!" He tried to exclaim, but it was already too late.

BANG!

A golden burst of energy slammed into the Kraken through the holes in his head, directly exploding his head into meatpaste that flew everywhere.

The Kraken's limp headless body collapsed into the sea.

Astoria stood silently for a second, processing what just happened.

'I...did it...?'

Her body immediately relaxed. A relieved smile surfaced on her face.

"Master...I...did it..."

A warm embrace enveloped her. A soothing energy entered her body and began repairing it.

Her heavy eyelids slightly pushed open, allowing her to see the smiling face of the man who was holding her.

"Congratulations, on your first kill across ranks! For now, get some rest. I'll handle it from here."

Damien's voice was like a fairy's melody in her ears. The second she heard it, the fatigue that had accumulated in her body immediately took over.

She fell asleep within seconds.

Damien smiled as he looked down at her.

'You nailed the execution, but I can't say the same about the ending.' He thought to himself.

He kicked his foot lightly, sending a bullet of mana into the sea below.

Within seconds, the blue seas were dyed red for kilometers on end.

Under the waves, a massive black hole was tearing apart a horde of beasts that had gathered.

The corpse of a territory lord and his injured and weakened killer were both extremely enticing meals for these beasts. It was only natural for them to gather.

"But you don't need to know that for now," Damien muttered.

Astoria was fast asleep with a wide smile on her face.

That sense of victory that she was currently feeling, the sensation of overcoming adversity and triumphing...

Damien simply couldn't bring himself to take that away from her.

'Next time, I won't be so nice.'

If it happened again, he would allow her to properly experience the consequences of her actions.

But for today...

He teleported away with Astoria in his arms.

In this vast place with endless challenges and endless secrets, it was utterly wasteful to spend the whole time training in the ocean.

After all, this place was only open to the world every hundred thousand or so years!

But now...

Damien and Astoria had the whole Celestial Realm to themselves, free and open for conquest.

Chapter 905 Festival [1]

Somewhere in the universe, there was a far-reaching wall of bloody fog, a natural phenomenon whose cause was unknown.

For many years, this phenomenon had remained unblemished. Even when it was broken apart, it always returned to its original position to act as a fortress wall protecting a specific corner of the universe.

BANG!

With a single punch, a hole was torn through the fog, completely dispersing it in a certain area.

A man calmly stepped through and traveled several thousand kilometers before finally exiting the tunnel he'd made for himself, watching the fog return to its place thereafter.

'Beast Domain...this must be it.'

The man's red eyes glowed with fervor.

It had been a month since he left Eien after a largely incomprehensive search.

Now, Arthur Bloodlock had found his way to the Beast Domain.

'I heard that a very interesting competition is going to take place soon.' He thought to himself.

In fact, Arthur hadn't come to the Beast Domain after tracing Damien.

He made his way here naturally after hearing rumors about the Genesis Bead.

'A treasure of the Ancient God Clan that was stolen by the Golden Dragon Clan in the previous war...if it wasn't for those lizards, the supreme treasure of Life would have been our Bloodlock Clan's.'

Arthur's eyes sharpened. At the moment, he was filled to the brim with rage. His son's killer had disappeared without a trace and was largely assumed dead, but Arthur didn't believe that sentiment.

Someone who would dare to provoke the Bloodlock Clan so openly wouldn't die so easily. Someone who could evade his search for so long absolutely had to be alive.

'The Beast Domain is a gathering place for warriors. According to that man, that boy should be here, however, finding his traces will require intense effort. Nevertheless...'

Arthur grinned as he began moving through the void.

'As long as I have the Genesis Bead, I can find his location in an instant.'

The Genesis Bead's abilities were truly vast. The reason it was so coveted, the reason it was called a supreme treasure wasn't just a matter of conger effectiveness.

The Genesis Bead was the greatest vessel of Life in the universe, and as such, tracking someone's unique life fluctuations through it was a menial task.

Not to mention this, in the hands of the Bloodlock Clan, the Genesis Bead would be a truly terrifying force.

'Beast Emperor Star...that golden bastard's territory. I heard he has a beautiful daughter. If our clan can obtain her...'

Arthur's ambitions ran wild.

The Bloodlock Clan was born to conquer. The Bloodlock people were destined to rule the universe.

Even in this quest of vengeance, Arthur never disregarded his clan.

He never had and he never would.

Because the Bloodlock Clan was everything.

'Humph. Let's see what kind of resistance a group of mere beasts can put up.'

Arthur's body turned into a stream of red energy as his speed reached an unprecedented level.

At this time, it had been a month and a half since Damien took Astoria to the Celestial Realm.

And now, only days remained before the festivities began.

"Fuwah! Master, wake up! It's time to go!"

An energetic voice rang through an isolated cave. A young woman happily bounced through the cave, humming in excitement as she eagerly awaited the awakening of her master.

Suddenly, she vanished.

A karate chop landed where she once stood, but she was already 10 meters across the cave by the time it arrived.

"Good. You've gotten better in the past year and a half."

The karate-chopping assailant nodded his head in satisfaction. Even though he hadn't tried too hard, he had indeed coated his arm in spatial mana that should've cut off her ability to teleport.

Since she'd been able to do so regardless, it was clear that her comprehension of Dimensional Magic had reached a new level.

Damien felt nothing other than elation from this fact, knowing that in just three years, he was able to completely transform Astoria...

....at least, strength-wise.

"Master, Master, isn't it crazy?! I'm already 21, but 2 months ago, I was 18! Isn't that crazy, Master?!" She chirped ceaselessly.

Damien rolled his eyes and ignored her. She'd been squabbling about his time-dilation ability for several years already, and he'd long gotten used to it.

'Three years, eh?' He thought to himself.

At first, he didn't think he'd get so much time. He expected to be able to extend the time they had by another half a year at most.

However, the Celestial Realm provided him with an unexpected boon. In fact, his ability to control time within the realm didn't differ much from the Sanctuary.

'After that bastard appeared here, along with this new revelation, it's become clear that the Celestial Realm has some connection to Void Palace in the Heavenly World. I need to come back after the Grand Assembly and try to excavate it.'

Unfortunately, he didn't have time now.

A year and a half was the maximum he could do. Since he didn't have absolute control over the realm, slowing time to the point where half a year could pass in a few hours simply wasn't possible like it was in the Sanctuary.

Still,

'Three years was a perfect duration. Not too long, not too short.'

"How come you're so excited to go back? Last time we spoke about it, didn't you want to stay as far away from the competition as possible?" Damien asked with a teasing smile.

Astoria turned her head away in embarrassment. "W-well, I changed my mind, that's it!"

"Mhm, and it's not because you want to pummel a few people back on Beast Emperor Star?"

"Third brother, fourth brother, Peng Haotian, Rena Asagaki— hm? Master, did you say something?"

"Nothing, don't worry about it."

"Oh, okay!"

Astoria happily hummed and skipped out of the cave.

The second her foot exited the cave's protection, a massive shadow enveloped her body.

The maw of a beast closed around her, its razor-sharp teeth sinking into Astoria's...

Crack!

The beast's teeth directly shattered upon contact with her skin.

Astoria looked up and tilted her head curiously. "You're just a little mid-level 4th-class beast. What gave you the confidence to attack me?"

She flicked her finger and send a beam of mana into the beast's head.

It traveled through the beast's skull without any interference and came in contact with its brain.

Immediately, the previously harmless mana expanded.

A Dimensional Cage opened in the beast's skull and enveloped its brain.

In the next instant, Astoria clenched her fist, compressing the Dimensional Cage into a marble-sized ball.

Squelch!

A strange sound rang out.

The beast's eyes went dull.

And it collapsed to the ground, strange fluid leaking from its eyes.

"Master~ I took care of the problem! Come on, let's go now!"

Astoria called for Damien, completely disregarding the beast carcass.

His figure materialized nearby not long after with a smile on his face.

'Raising disciples is great.' He thought to himself.

Was this how all masters felt when they saw their disciples expertly use a supportive spatial skill to attack and efficiently assassinate their enemies, or was it a feeling unique to him?

Either way, it was something he thoroughly enjoyed.

In fact, he also couldn't wait for their return to Beast Emperor Star.

After all, those little Holy Land disciples thought they were on the same level as HIS disciple...?

He couldn't wait to see how she'd slap their faces.

Chapter 906 Festival [2]

"Lord, this little one has accomplished the assigned task."

The grisly voice of a cloaked man echoed through a dark and humid area. This place was far separated from existence, a place that rarely anyone even knew the identity of.

Despite the prolonged echoing of his voice, it still seemed incredibly small not only in relation to the environment, but also to the individual he was reporting to.

That person didn't have the posture of an Emperor. They sat casually on a jade stone pillow large enough to carry their entire body. They held their head in their hands noncommittally with glazed eyes.

Nobody who came in contact with this person would believe they were mentally present. By all logic, it should've been impossible for someone with such strange eyes to exist in the same world as any common expert.

However, the man didn't move from his kneeling position no matter how much time passed.

It was an entire 12 days later when this situation changed.

"You had something to report?"

That person's smooth voice glazed over the atmosphere, filling it with an odd sticky feeling.

The man bowed his head without hesitation, repeating his original "Oh? How long has it been?"

"Responding to the Lord, it has been a little over a month."

report without any resentment.

"Lord, I have accomplished the task you assigned me. A proper vessel has been found."

"Oh? How long has it been?"

"Responding to the Lord, it has been a little over a month."

"Quite fast. Did you have a fortuitous encounter?"

"Affirmative, Lord. While this little one was in the midst of his search, he happened to come across Arthur Bloodlock, a direct descendant of Immortal Blood Asura. With a bit of coercion, your humble servant was able to plant the Devil Seed in his spiritual world. The corruption shall be complete within a week." the servant claimed with an ounce of pride in his voice.

For the first time, the figure's expression changed.

"Child..." the figure muttered, "you do not have the courage to lie to me, so it must be the truth. However, it cannot be so easy to coerce such a figure, no? Explain to this Lord how you accomplished this feat."

The figure's voice was soft and its words were light. Any normal person would absolutely believe these to be magnanimous words.

However, the servant knew better. His Lord was not someone who would accept baseless chatter. If he couldn't justify his words and provide evidence...

His fate would be far, far, far worse than death!

"Lord, in actuality, this success is not my doing at all. I was able to take advantage of a coincidence to coax Arthur Bloodlock with ease."

"Oh?"

"Lord, Arthur Bloodlock has a blood debt against a genius that Sir Saint Emperor has been observing. Sir Saint Emperor's legions have been tracking that genius' location with absolute precision, and I was able to sell that information for Arthur Bloodlock's cooperation."

The figure's brow raised in curiosity. The corners of their lips curled up into a strange smile.

"That old ghost has found another plaything? Very well, this Lord is also curious about what can make that old man move so aggressively!"

OOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

A terrifying aura enveloped the area. Space immediately shattered into countless pieces, and even the chaotic void beyond was stilled by the almost solid aura.

"Lord, please calm down! This universe cannot handle your full power!" the servant yelled desperately.

The figure's eye twitched slightly. Their aura immediately retracted back into their body.

"Hmph, this pathetic universe. Why do those old ghosts put so much focus into it?" they complained with a frown.

"7 days, was it...?"

In 7 days, Arthur Bloodlock would be overtaken by corruption, and at that time...

His physical body would become the property of the absolute worst individual it could possibly be given to.

This person, this person with no true gender, no true form at all, was a ruler of the mortal body. This person was an experimentalist who would do anything to satisfy their own curiosity.

This person was the Marionette Lord, one of the top three Nox experts under the Emperor level, and by far the most insane member of their race.

This was a person with puppets stationed in various parts of the universe, acting as people in positions high and low. It was unknown just how many people this Lord had under their control, but it was largely speculated that they were nigh immortal.

After all, each body under their control had a unique life fluctuation.

If this person decided to escape their physical body and take possession of a puppet to live on, nobody would be able to find them.

And this person...

This person was never truly in one place.

Their mind was always split between at least 10 different puppets, never leaving a moment where they didn't have a path forward.

When it came to the Marionette Lord...

Even Emperors would rather avoid interacting.

Back in the Golden Dragon Palace, a great commotion was taking place.

There were only a few days remaining before the proceedings began, yet the princess was still missing!

Of course the palace residents knew where Astoria had gone. However, they didn't expect her to cut it so close! If she didn't make it in time for the opening festival, many plans would fail.

After all, Astoria was, in the crudest terms, bait.

Astoria was the only reason the Emperor had just cause to put something like the Genesis Bead up for grabs without suspicion.

Because if the tournament winner was his son-in-law, would the Emperor truly suffer any losses from giving away the treasure?

Nevertheless, the Golden Dragon Emperor was certainly feeling the stress.

'The Black Dragon Clan has already arrived and begun gathering forces. A member of the Divine Realm's Bloodlock Clan is on the way, many Beast Emperors have secretly docked on our star in wait for the Genesis Bead's unraveling...'

On one hand, his plan was working. Slowly but surely, the enemies he wanted to flush out had been showing themselves one by one.

However, on the other hand...

This number was far outside of his expectations.

The Black Dragon Clan had already grown to the point where they could truly contend with the Golden Dragon Clan for hegemony.

And even putting them aside, the Golden Dragon Emperor had to wonder: just when did he make so many enemies?!

It was an aggravating truth to realize, but there was nothing incorrect about it: an innocent man with treasure is guilty.

'Want to touch my Golden Dragon Clan's Treasures...?'

The Emperor's sharp golden eyes looked like they could cut holes through reality.

'Let's see you try!'

"Raise the flags! Announce the news! We will begin the opening festival...in 12 hours' time!"

The Emperor made his announcement without leaving any room for objection.

He watched the palace officials scramble around as they tried began to set everything in order.

And eventually, his eyes went to the sky.

'You must return soon, my good daughter.'

Honestly speaking, he didn't think any progress could be made in 3 months.

Damien deciding to take Astoria away from the palace seemed to affirm this thought.

But on the slight chance...

On the slight chance that Astoria had truly grown...

She wouldn't just be bait anymore.

She'd be one of the central pillars that allowed his plan to succeed!

Chapter 907 Festival [3]

"Everything is going according to plan. Our forces have infiltrated Beast Emperor Star and spread throughout. There shouldn't be any problems."

A man sat among a table of those who looked similar to him, sharing the same onyx black eyes and hair, as he gave his report,

"Has the Golden Dragon Clan made any movements?" Another man asked.

"None. It seems they are focused on making sure their festival proceeds according to plan. However, they have acquired the aid of a strange protective unit that scours the world, so it is unknown whether or not they have information we are unaware of."

"Protective unit?"

"Yes, sir. According to our scouts, the unit is made up of summoned creatures, though the identity of the summoner is unknown. It has been difficult for our teams to move freely with this troop around."

"I see..." the second man muttered to himself. "Is there anything else of note?"

"We were able to receive a small glimpse of information from the palace. Our informants say that Astoria Golden has been accepted by a master, but no other information on this so-called master has been found. The Golden Dragon Royal Family is keeping a firm lock on that person's identity."

"His power level?"

"Also unknown, however, it can be speculated to be at the 6th revolution at most. Any expert above that level would have been sensed by the Supreme the moment they entered the atmosphere."

"Mm, be mindful regardless. At this stage, we cannot let even a single outlier slip by."

The second man looked the first in the eye and continued, "Keep a firm grasp on any incoming information. It has been almost a thousand years since we began acting on this plan. We cannot let it get ruined in the final moment!"

The first man bowed his head in compliance and withdrew to his seat.

Of those present, he was the last to speak. Now that he'd finished his report, there was nothing more to be said.

The meeting soon dispersed, leaving only a single man in the room.

'The Golden Dragon Clan's enemies are greater than expected. If we encounter some interference...no! The words of that person all those years ago...we cannot allow them to come true!'

The man bit his lip nervously.

He couldn't help but remember the divination the Black Dragon Clan had been forced to receive all those years ago.

Back then, he was just a child, a child who only managed to hear the final words of that prophecy.

"He who tames the Golden Star will one day enslave the Black Dragon."

A fate of slavery, was this the only end for his clan...?

Unacceptable!

The veracity of the prophecy couldn't be doubted. Even the Demigod Elders at the time verified that the Seer wasn't a fool.

But could anyone accept such a fate?

Absolutely not!

For the past 1000 years, the Black Dragon Clan had been slowly and covertly growing themselves to antagonize the Master of the Golden Star, the Golden Dragon Emperor.

If Beast Emperor Star, the Fate Star, could be overtaken, if the Golden Dragon Emperor could be slain, then wouldn't the Black Dragon Clan see their fate reversed?

This long-awaited day was finally on the horizon.

"Everything must happen perfectly tomorrow..." the man, Pretus' eyes sharpened into swords.

"...otherwise, even a single mistake can cause the end of our clan!"

The Golden Dragon Clan Estate was truly a gargantuan area.

With its size, it absolutely wouldn't be strange to call it a country rather than label it as the estate of a single clan. On Beast Emperor Star, no influence could occupy nearly as much territory as the ruling family had, especially for personal use.

However, it wasn't as if this massive plot of land was used for mere decoration or authority. In fact, the Golden Dragon Clan was an influence with several hundred million existences under its banner, and the entire Clan Estate was occupied by them, essentially in a structure not much different from a functioning country.

The only difference was that each and every individual living in the estate had at least a noticeable amount of Golden Dragon Bloodline.

What set the Royal Family apart was the fact that their Ancestor was a True Godbeast and also the founder of this empire that now spanned the entirety of Beast Emperor Star and the Beast Domain it resides in!

Nevertheless, the Golden Dragon Clan Estate's physical and spiritual meaning was evident. It was a place all people desired to visit at some point.

And now, one of the rare occasions where the main estate, the portion of the country where only those with pure bloodline could enter, was open to the general public.

"Hey, hey, let me through!"

"I was here first! Stop trying to cut me!"

"Eh? You want to see how I cut you?"

"I'd like to see you try!"

Two people fell to the floor in unison, not even able to finish their arguments. With absolute swiftness and efficiency, they disappeared from the clogged lines that spanned the Golden Dragon Clan at the moment.

"Don't push! Move in an orderly line! Anyone who causes trouble will be immediately removed!" A nearby guard yelled, emphasizing the point.

He wasn't the only one yelling. For several thousand kilometers, countless guards were stationed to manage the lines of people and maintain peace.

Along with these guards, a shadow unit remained to rapidly remove any troublemakers so the guards wouldn't have to personally act and cause a commotion.

Overall, the security measures in place were extraneous. But at the same time, nobody questioned them.

After all, when they finally made their way into the estate, they forgot all about the troubles they experienced before.

Beautiful golden fate clouds hung in the air, showering all those under their gait with auspicious air. The mana was calm and enlightening, even directly healing some elderly and sickly mortals back to their peak state.

The streets were lined with extravagant decorations no matter how many thousands of kilometers one traveled. Street stalls were set up, selling souvenirs, food items, and anything else one could think of to the average consumer.

The atmosphere was filled with joy and laughter as the festive aura enveloped and infected everyone.

It was like a fairyland.

With the passing of time, the cities crowded and millions of people made their way through the lines.

And when it hit noon on the second day...

VOOM!

A titanic projection appeared in the sky, depicting a domineering and handsome man with piercing golden eyes that seemed to look down on the entire universe.

"Citizens, visitors, and those from other worlds and walks of life, welcome to our Golden Dragon Clan's Festival of Fate!" He proclaimed, his voice booming for millions of kilometers without end.

"As you all know, the main event of this festival is a grand tournament for many treasures, and most importantly, for my daughter's hand in marriage! However, we cannot have the main event take place so early! Eat, drink, and celebrate! Enjoy the next few days of small events that we have prepared and when 5 days finally pass..."

"We will finally hold the grand tournament, the most prestigious event of our Beast Domain in the past decade!"

RAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!

Immediately, the earth shook as if a natural disaster was going to take place. Raucous, wild cheers rang out from every corner of the Golden Dragon Estate as not only the clan members, but also the guests cheered to complete the Golden Dragon Emperor's speech.

The second his projection faded from the sky, the world became a party bus.

The Festival of Fate had finally begun.

Chapter 908 Festival [4]

"Commence the plan."

Multiple teams moved upon receiving the command. Their first task wasn't something as grand as assassination, nor were they planning to collapse the festivities.

No, if the Black Dragon Clan wanted to succeed in their objective, they needed to be far more subtle.

After all, destroying the Golden Dragon Clan wasn't as simple as it sounded.

For a clan so connected to fate, merely attacking them head-on wouldn't work. Their fate was too strong, making it highly likely that they'd somehow pull through or find a way to survive and rise up another day.

To destroy the Golden Dragon Clan, one first needed to disperse their fate.

This was the main goal of the Black Dragon Clan for the past thousand years. Slowly but surely, they encroached upon the Golden Dragon Clan's influence in the Beast Domain and heavily undermined it.

While their efforts didn't directly damage the Golden Dragon Clan, they did have an effect.

They brought the ruling clan down from their pedestal.

The illustrious Fate Clouds that protected them from harm and offered them countless fortuitous opportunities, one of such landed the Genesis Bead in their hands, were far weaker than they used to be.

Now, it wasn't impossible to bring the clan down like it was when they first started their endeavor.

Now, if the Black Dragon Clan could use this grand event to strike a fatal chink in their enemy's armor...

The first group of teams was sent out for menial disruption. Their job was to inconvenience people and bother them, evading the security troops and causing trouble that went unsolved.

The people would slowly build slight resentment towards the Golden Dragon Clan who couldn't keep them safe during the festival that occurred in their own lands.

If one couldn't even protect people within their reach, how could one be expected to rule an entire empire?

The plan, on paper, had no flaws. Because the Black Dragon Clan didn't plan to make any big movements, there would be no reason for the Golden Dragon Clan to suspect or pursue them.

At least, that's what they thought.

Shing!

A sword slashed through the air.

"Who are you?! Why are you attacking us?!" A panicked civilian exclaimed.

He huddled together with his children and protected them under his body as he looked at the woman slowly approaching them.

She was already surrounded by a pool of blood, blood from those who had no ability to even speak before they were killed.

Looking down at the man, the woman smiled. Her ocean blue eyes were ironically without waves as she raised her sword.

"I don't know who created your disguise technique, but it means nothing in front of my light."

She slashed her sword down, and immediately, the terrified civilian's eyes changed.

"Dammit!" He exclaimed, jumping back to avoid the sword.

Elena's blade slashed directly through the two children he was holding in his grasp, however, a ball of light soon enveloped their remains.

Puff!

The "children" exploded into a ball of murky fumes that almost melted through Elena's mana barrier.

"Smart move, but using poison on a Valkyrie? Please."

Elena flicked her finger, dispersing the light ball and using the force to propel the poison back at the man, who narrowly dodged.

The poison landed on the ground next to him and melted a hole almost a kilometer deep in a single instant.

"How brutal."

Elena's voice rang in the man's ears.

His eyes widened.

His head snapped to the side...

...and then kept going.

It spun through the air with a fountain of blood before he even realized what was happening.

Elena looked down at the man's body in disgust.

"Hmph."

She pulled an object out of her spatial ring. It was something of a glass ball, filled with milky white liquid and purple sparks that looked like a strangely inverted cosmos.

'Black Dragon Clan...none of you can escape me today.'

She grinned as she felt the Life fluctuations entering her body nourishing her mind, and elevating her comprehension.

'I only have it until the festival ends, but this is more than enough for now. If worst comes to worst, I can just run.' Elena thought to herself.

This object was none other than the Genesis Bead, something she'd managed to get her hands on after ceaselessly bargaining with and convincing the Golden Dragon Emperor.

For the next few days, she'd be able to use it to her heart's content as long as she spent at least 3 hours a day tracking down and suppressing the clan's enemies with its abilities.

It was an absolutely advantageous deal, and Elena didn't plan to return the emperor's sincerity with disrespect.

Until the event ended, she didn't mind being the emperor's sword.

And when it ended, she didn't mind becoming his enemy.

'A spatial expert, eh? You're unlucky to have met me. If it was anyone else, I'd be worried, but when it comes to spatial experts...'

'...I have way too much experience for your kind to fool me.'

She smiled slyly as she tracked the next group of enemies, this time from a smaller influence called the Fiery Anaconda Clan.

'...I have way too much experience for your kind to fool me.'

Elena wasn't some newbie.

The Black Dragon Clan was obviously plotting something malicious, but she and anyone with some sense would understand that these small teams wouldn't have the information she needed.

To gain information on the Black Dragon Clan's true objectives, she needed to attract their attention to her and make them send more valuable assets to suppress her.

And to do so, wasn't the easiest way to absolutely oppress them to the point where they could only seethe in silence or attack?

This was Elena's exact strategy. While she targeted other smaller influences as well, she made sure to specifically make things difficult for the Black Dragon Clan.

The Valhalla Soul named Damon was extremely advanced, and could share its sight, hearing, and even memories and skills with Elena. Using it as a medium, Elena was able to essentially take half the planet under her web and turn it into her absolute domain.

'They sent out 62 teams, but none of them had a soldier over 3rd class. It looks like their original goal was to move quietly and cause harm in the shadows, but how can I let that happen?'

After leaving the Valhalla Mystic Realm, Elena had changed in many ways, one of which was her fighting style.

Elena used to be a frontline combatant, an infinite warrior who would never tire.

She never let go of these traits, of course, but her training path had long deviated from keeping such a thing as a focus.

The current Elena was an Empress, a cunning general who could expertly maneuver her troops to get her work done for her.

However...

'Even the Empress should have some time to play, no?'

The Genesis Bead wasn't a treasure that worked best in solitude, it was a treasure whose greatest benefits could be felt when one was constantly on the move and using it.

'Aha, do such coincidences happen all the time on Beast Emperor Star?' Elena thought with a smile.

She'd just been thinking about wanting to play, and as if on cue, the Black Dragon Clan had finally sent her some playmates.

The day ended and the night passed, filled with uninterrupted festivity.

And under the veil of peace and security, a single woman was facing off against an entire clan of dragons.

What an exciting event!

Chapter 909 Confrontation [1]

The location was a relatively unpopulated region in the Golden Dragon Clan Estate.

Elena currently stood face to face with a group of figures wearing tight black clothing as expected of assassins.

"You've finally decided to show yourself?" She commented with a smirk, panning her gaze over the group.

'They're all in the middle stages and early stages of 4th class. This Black Dragon Clan is seriously underestimating me.' She thought inwardly.

It was to be expected since this was only the second wave, but she was still a bit disappointed that she wouldn't get to personally fight today.

'16th Infantry Unit, respond.'

Elena allowed her hand to hover over the ground below, dripping her mana into the earth as if it was liquid.

Within milliseconds of her snarky remarks, a group of 15 soldiers in glowing white armor materialized before her.

The assassins hadn't yet been able to move yet.

"Let's make this fun. The 16th Infantry is the weakest unit in my army. If you can beat them, maybe you have the qualifications to be considered ants in my eyes!"

She smiled giddily and flicked her wrist forward, giving the command to charge.

In such a situation, why would she let her enemy have the first move?

As she'd claimed, the 16th Infantry was Elena's newest formed and thus weakest unit. Its strength was still around the same level as that of the assassins', making it so they wouldn't suffer an immediate defeat as they would in front of any other troop.

15 white-clad soldiers charged as one, meeting the group of 20 assassins before they could take advantage of their mobility.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Swords and spears clashed against short swords and knives. Despite the sudden nature of the situation, the assassins didn't panic in the slightest.

They worked as a well-oiled machine and immediately reacted to the change in the situation.

The leader of the group was a man named Dylan. Within the Black Dragon Clan, his rank wasn't too high, but he was the son of an outer elder.

This mission was one of many he'd been assigned in the past few decades, and the team that followed him was able to follow his command as if they were parts of his body.

Whoosh!

He slid his knives against the great sword of his enemy and forced the larger blade to the side. The second he finished this maneuver, he pushed on the balls of his feet and retreated several meters.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

His unit followed directly after, waiting for his command to move.

'The enemy is more difficult than expected. This might not be an operation our team can handle.'

Dylan was a man who'd been in the field long enough to develop an instinct for these sorts of things, and he wasn't the type of person to throw away the lives of his brothers in a hopeless battle.

'First, test the waters.'

His eyes sharpened as he made the decision. Within a split second, he'd already vanished into the shadows, turning into a small trail of smoke that swerved through the air until it was directly behind the head of the main Valhalla Soul.

'Shadow Demon Art First Form: Void Slash.'

The Shadow Demon Art, the main art of the Black Dragon Clan's Covert Operations Division, was an art that used a single slash to end all things.

Dylan's figure materialized like a ghost, his legs wrapping around the Valhalla Soul's head and constricting its movements. Within an instant, his knife was already stabbed through the enemy's helmet, his attack in the process of executing.

Shing!

A black flash of light cut through the Valhalla soul and connected Dylan's knife to the ground. As the Valhalla Soul split in two, Dylan jumped back and surveyed the area, keeping his eyes focused on Elena.

Shing!

Xiu! Xiu! Xiu!

All around, the 19 remaining members of his squad followed his movements and launched a coordinated attack. From the start, they had higher numbers than the enemy, and as a unit trained to fight above their own level, dealing with them was far easier than their initial collision made it seem like it would be.

Dylan's eyes narrowed.

'It shouldn't be this easy.' He thought with a frown.

The dangerous aura he felt from Elena indicated that her true power was far beyond this.

The itching feeling in the back of his mind refused to leave, and as if confirming his thoughts...

"Oh! You're a lot more skilled than I expected."

A teasing voice came from the very enemy he'd been so carefully watching.

"Hmm, this is where we have a problem. Everyone else is too powerful, and I don't want you to die just yet..." Elena muttered, placing her finger on her chin in thought.

"Well, I guess I'll just do it myself."

She smiled and swept her hand through the air, grabbing the sword that materialized from her spatial ring.

It was an incredibly familiar thin single-edged blade, the same blade Damien had Vormec forge her all those years ago.

However, this blade was no longer the same as it used to be.

In its current state...

Xiu! Xiu! Xiu!

Elena's movements were soundless. Her sword moved through the air with such precision that it barely made a sound.

Before Dylan could process her movements, he suddenly felt a stabbing pain in his legs.

Spurt!

Spurt!

Spurt!

Simultaneously, the extremities of each member of the squad tore open, forcing them to collapse to the floor, blood spraying wantonly around them.

'What...just...'

Dylan's eyes widened in shock.

'This mission is impossible.'

The thought he had earlier was instantly confirmed.

'Our priority is escape!'

Dylan gritted his teeth and pushed his mana, connecting to his spatial ring and summoning a certain item.

"Ah, ah, I can't have you doing that."

Elena's voice was like a reaper's. She appeared behind Dylan and stabbed her sword through his torso, pinning him to the ground.

"You seem to be the leader of this little group, so answer a few questions for me. When it's done, I'll give you a painless death. How's that for a deal?"

Dylan's eyes burned in rage. Dying on a mission was one thing, but being humiliated by the enemy like this wasn't something he could ever accept!

Ptui!

He launched a ball of spit at Elena's feet.

"I'll never bow to scum who opposes our clan!" He said firmly.

Without waiting for a response, he flared his mana into the atmosphere.

VOOM!

A talisman appeared in the sky and covered the area. The 20 members of the assassination squad were covered in a bright light as their bodies were connected to the talisman.

"Teleportation Device?" Elena muttered. "That's a bit troublesome."

She wasn't a spatial expert who could interfere with the spell's activation, nor was she a formation master who could break the talisman's function before it activated,

However, on the other hand...

'Isn't it better for me if they return?'

Fighting an endless horde of weaker enemies wasn't fun at all. Even if Elena was participating in this fight for more serious reasons, it didn't mean she wanted to prolong something that didn't need to be prolonged.

"But I can't let you think you beat me. I can't cancel the whole formation, but..."

Elena smiled and looked down at the man pinned to the ground before her.

"...I'll keep you here for now."

She withdrew her sword and brandished it into the air.

'Severing Evil.'

A flash of light encompassed the environment.

In reality, it was two flashes combined into one.

In the first, a bright white sword light cut through something ethereal, something formless.

In the second, 19 bodies vanished from the surroundings, leaving only two.

Dylan shivered as he collapsed to the floor and coughed blood, backlash from his sudden disconnection from the talisman formation.

Meanwhile, Elena stood with the same indifferent smile on her face.

This man might've been somewhat low on the food chain, but he surely had some information...right?

Well, there was nothing left to do but find out.

And finding out...was one of Elena's favorite things to do.

Chapter 910 Confrontation [2]

'Hmm...this is troublesome.'

Elena stood not far from where she originally defeated the assassination squad.

It hadn't been too long since the battle ended, and though she tortured the man named Dylan for over an hour already, he didn't seem to want to spit out any information.

And along with that trouble...

"You Black Dragon Clan guys are seriously annoying," Elena muttered.

Surrounding her were over 200 assassins, a group assembled to counter her the second the original 19 were teleported back to wherever they went.

The part that annoyed Elena, however, was the fact that none of them were nearly strong enough to make a difference.

"Let's just get this over with." She sighed.

"Damon, take care of them yourself. I'll give you two moves."

Upon Elena's words, a figure appeared before her like a blur.

The Valhalla Soul named Damon panned his gaze over the crowd, the blue flames that acted as his eyes flickering in arrogance.

He raised his sword without hesitation.

The assassins moved at the same time.

But the outcome was already known. It was impossible for these troops to do anything.

Damon's sword slashed once. A beautiful white sword pattern formed in the air, depicting a world-devouring wolf howling into the void.

The wolf looked down upon the world below with eyes indifferent to all things.

And then, it slammed down its paw.

RUMBLE!

BOOM!

The earth exploded. Half of the assassins that were in the middle of their charge were skewered by claw-like protrusions that rose according to the wolf's will.

Damon's sword swang once more.

This time, the effect was a single line cut through the air. It was a seemingly simple attack, however, as soon as the remaining assassins moved to avoid it, the attack split into countless branches that chased them to the ends of the earth until they were pierced.

Just as Elena ordered, they were slaughtered in two moves.

"As I thought, it was a terrible idea to send those wastes."

A voice resounded. A woman with beautiful black hair and golden eyes walked into the scene, unaffected by the surrounding gore.

"You are?" Elena asked.

"Hm, you can call me Dalia." The woman responded as she glanced at the corpses on the ground in disgust.

"You're here for them?" Elena questioned again.

Dalia sneered inadvertently. "Don't lump me in with these useless wastes. The clan elders seem to value these lower-level troops, but what's the point in having them if they'll just die randomly like this?"

"I am indeed a member of the Black Dragon Clan, but I'm not here on the clan's orders."

She turned her gaze to Elena with a condescending smirk.

"Today, I've come to see whether or not you're worthy of our clan's attention."

Elena's eyes narrowed. "And are you worthy of judging me?"

"Don't be so hostile from the start. I'm also a believer in give and take. If you manage to impress me, I'll tell you some of the information you're probably looking for right now." Dalia spoke convincingly.

"Impress you? Don't make me laugh. A brat like you can do nothing but spout bullshit and act high and mighty. Instead of impressing you, I think I should teach you a lesson for your parents!" Elena sneered.

"I don't know if you know this, but I don't like uncooperative people."

"And I don't like pretentious bitches, so I guess we're on the same page."

Dalia glared at Elena, clearly taking offense to her words.

"I wanted to talk a little before we started fighting, but you're just itching to be killed, aren't you?"

Elena rolled her eyes in exasperation. "Are you a practitioner or a storyteller? If you want to fight, then just fight!"

Elena no longer entertained conversation.

The aura radiating from this Dalia was far stronger than the men that'd just died. It was obvious that not only her strength, but her status and access to information were much greater than theirs.

Elena's sword came down on her head incredibly fast, moving as a blur in the air. The fluctuations of mana on the sword were intrinsically different than what Elena had shown thus far, evidently containing more profundity.

Dalia's eyes narrowed as she stepped back and avoided the strike. She waved her hand and summoned a beautiful black and gold fan, swiping it through the air and clashing it against Elena's sword.

Clang!

A dull metallic collision rang out. Despite its size, the fan was able to hold off Elena's sword with ease.

However, Dalia was well aware of the nuances of her weapon. Head-on collision wasn't it's strong suit.

Keeping her body in a mostly laid-back posture as if she had no desire to entertain the fight, Dalia scraped the edge of her closed fan across Elena's sword and pushed the latter weapon out of the way.

When Elena's guard was broken, she immediately struck out, piercing the fan into Elena's body.

Elena dodged easily, bringing her swords up to counter. However, Dalia was clearly aware of how she would move. When the fan was only a centimeter away from Elena, Dalia snapped it open, slamming her arm to the side with an extremely energetic motion.

Shing!

The sharpened fan blade cut across Elena's stomach and created a terrifying gash. Blood spurted into the air and covered Dalia's vision.

And as she waited for the counterattack to come through the blood fog...

'Yggdrasil.'

The ground under her feet rumbled.

BOOM! BANG! BANG!

A thick tree trunk burst out of the earth and encapsulated her, growing high into the sky.

Dalia's eyes narrowed as she observed her new prison. She still had minor mobility, and using that, she attempted to destroy the tree trunk entirely and escape.

Unfortunately for her, it wasn't that simple.

'Siphon.'

Elena gave a command and the divine tree Yggdrasil responded. Its branches glowed with greenish-white light and its trunk went alit with complex patterns,

Dalia immediately felt the change. Her life force, her blood vitality, was slowly being sucked away by something.

"You actually played such a dirty trick?!" Dalia yelled in fury.

"What dirty trick? Did you expect me to hold back while fighting you?" Elena replied with a smirk.

Dalia's eyes sharpened into daggers that pierced through her enemy.

"Fine, if that's how you want to play, let's play then!"

ROOOOAAAAAR!!!

Dalia opened her mouth and roared into the heavens, producing a sound that absolutely shouldn't have been possible with her small throat.

Her body expanded, wings exploded out of her spine, a tail extended itself from her lower back, and most of all...

Dalia's figure morphed into something else entirely, growing bigger and bigger until even Yggdrasil could no longer hold it.

BANG!

The manifested tree burst into a rain of splinters, and out of it emerged an enormous black dragon that looked down on the world in contempt.

Elena grinned when she saw it.

Really, she loved prideful beasts the most.

A 4th class beast's human form was a compounded version of their power, their greatest and most powerful form.

However, beasts were extremely prideful.

It genuinely wasn't rare to see them return to their beast forms in battle, even if it did make them comprehensively weaker.

And while it was true that their familiarity with their bodies would give them greater skill than they had in human form...

A bigger target was just a bigger target.

And now that Dalia had turned herself into a bigger target, how could Elena just leave her be?