

Void 101

Chapter 101 - Core [3]

Any thoughts Damien had were blown away and his mind became clear. The clarity he felt was exhilaratingly pleasurable.

He watched as the two unique types of magic power fused into one before infusing into the link that connected them. As more and more mana entered the link, it slowly solidified.

Although the connection was still ethereal in its nature, Damien had the feeling that no matter where he went in the universe, no matter how far he went from earth, he'd always be able to feel this connection.

It wasn't just a link anymore, it was more apt to call it a bond.

Damien was so caught up in the sensation that he didn't even notice that his concealment had been blown away. He was standing in plain view of the scientists, who panicked about his presence.

"Who is he and how did he get here?!"

"Someone call backup!"

Meanwhile Lynn looked at Damien with interest. 'They might have missed it, but I saw that burst of magic power. He must be the source of the connection.'

Lynn thought for a minute about what to do, before a sly smile crept onto her face.

“Everyone! Run away! He’s trying to destroy the bunker!”

After her words registered in everyone’s heads, the scientists immediately bolted for the exit. They no longer cared about the experiment nor did they care to alert anyone. They just wanted to preserve their lives.

Looking back at Damien one last time, a strange glint appeared in Lynn’s eyes. And then, without another word, she left as well.

At this time, Damien was still basking in the sensation of this new connection. He felt he could exert his will on this planet with ease and things would get accomplished. The scale was unknown, but he felt that he could even create natural disasters if he so felt like it.

[Congratulations. You have become a Star Master. You have taken the first step towards truly becoming a Celestial.]

[A Celestial cannot be titled as such if they simply gained a connection to celestial bodies. They receive this title due to their ability to bind and become the master of these celestial bodies. Each and every Celestial walks a path towards domination. Your legends have been enhanced.]

Damien read through the system window with wide eyes. He knew that it would be important when he bound the earth, but he didn’t think it’d be anything this major. From the simple act of binding the world, he felt that his mana capacity had drastically increased.

He wasn't aware of what other benefits he received, but that was something he'd need to find out in the future. He was just a fledgling Celestial and the earth was just a fledgling world.

In the first place, the reason the earth's will requested to be bound was out of sheer instinct. As a world's will, the most important thing to it was survival. And something attracted it to Damien, telling it that he was the key.

Damien also knew that he wouldn't get answers from the world's will, so he figured he needed to try something else.

'Would Apeiron's will accept this? And is it old enough to have proper sentence?'

Even if it wasn't, Damien wouldn't fret. There were countless worlds in the universe waiting for him to conquer them.

'I don't even want to be an emperor though. That's way too much responsibility. But since I have to conquer worlds anyway, can't I just leave all the political stuff to the people in those worlds who already know the political stuff?'

He liked that idea. What was the point in replacing the emperors that already ruled those worlds? Damien had no interest in upsetting the power balance due to his pursuit of power.

Damien tried to summon his magic power, only to realize that he had used it all to bind the earth. However, this wasn't a problem. Now that he had become the star master of earth, he felt there were certain perks he could use.

Raising his hand, Damien made a cutting motion through the air. And following that motion, the atmospheric mana became a massive blade and destroyed the equipment that was drilling into the earth's core.

He didn't even need his own mana reserves while he was on earth.

'Is this what it feels like to have infinite mana?'

But he quickly shook off this thought. His mana was nowhere near infinite, nor was it immeasurably vast. The privileges he had on earth would stay on earth, so he couldn't get too conceited. Not to mention, the earth still needed to grow.

He couldn't go wantonly using its mana as if it would immediately regenerate it. A world's mana capacity might be leagues higher than any other existence, but since earth was still in its early stages of development, he needed to be more careful.

Especially because those old fogeys from the Cloud Plane were going to be stealing some of the atmospheric mana.

At this time, another change began to occur. Within Damien's body, his mana heart began to thump wildly.

Ba-dum! Ba-dum!

Damien clutched his chest. Every last bit of the mana surrounding him was absorbed into his body as if by a starving beast. And this mana was directly from the world core, containing the mystical properties Damien had sensed previously.

He had a gut feeling that this mana wasn't supposed to be used by humans, lest they kill themselves.

But his body wouldn't listen to him. The mana kept rushing towards him as if it had been waiting for this moment. The usually formless energy took shape and drilled into his mana circuits, injecting itself into his bloodstream.

“AGH!”

Damien let out a strange grunt as he tried to hold himself back from screaming. The mana raged through his body like a wild beast, attempting to destroy him, but also rebuild him.

And then, something that hadn't happened in ages happened once more. Damien's void physique acted, sucking in every last bit of the mana within Damien's body.

Damien heard an audible crunching sound from within his body that continued for a minute before the mana re-emerged. Rather than the gaseous energy or the solidified pieces the mana became earlier, it was now a stream of liquid.

This liquid poured into Damien's mana heart before revolving through the circuits he had created. It was almost like he gained a second type of amethyst colored blood.

Damien didn't know exactly what this meant, but when he summoned his raw magic power, it felt denser and heavier. He felt that the destruction he could cause with a simple mana infused punch was much greater than what it was before.

[Your Mana Circuits have evolved.]

A single line of text appeared in his line of sight. It was then that Damien finally remembered his specific goal when creating his mana circuits.

‘They evolve when I evolve. It’s a system I’ll never need to replace.’

The evolving mana circuits he’d created had even become a trait acknowledged by the system. It was just that since it didn’t have any active uses, he had nearly forgotten about it. If he took this into consideration, it made sense for something like this to happen.

The evolution of his mana circuits did indeed increase his power. It wasn’t a boost, but more of a fundamental change. The density and purity of mana running through one’s body had a direct correlation to the damage output one could produce.

Shaking off his thoughts, Damien used his power as a star master to locate Rose and Elena. They were currently on the 90th floor, pretty close to reaching him.

‘I don’t know if the commotion I caused has alerted those 3rd classes yet. I guess I should summon those old men so we can properly destroy this place.’

Damien directly teleported outside of the Niflheim headquarters and summoned Rose and Elena before also summoning the old men from the Cloud Plane.

This kind of teleportation wasn’t too taxing for the world core, and Damien could even use his own magic power to perform it. He simply used the world core as a medium to expand his range to cover the area he needed.

All 5 of those who were summoned wore confused expressions on their faces, but Damien didn't give them time to think.

Even though the immediate threat to the world core had been removed, the entire thing wouldn't end until Niflheim was destroyed.

Xiao Zhen was currently in an extremely wary state. He felt the spatial fluctuations surround him, but he was unable to resist them. He didn't know how it was possible, but he didn't like what it insinuated.

The other two old men were the same. It was only when Damien's voice rung out that they were snapped back to reality.

"Alright, since everyone's here, let's talk about Niflheim. First, we'll discuss what we found inside, and then we can start the important part of the plan. It's time to destroy this annoying pest of an organization."

Chapter 102 - Destruction [1]

It didn't take long for the others to get swept up in Damien's momentum. His current attitude combined with the mysterious ability he had used to gather them was enough to lead the flow of conversation.

Damien started first, describing the scenes of the 90th floor as well as the topics he heard the researchers discussing. He also mentioned their plans for the world core but left out information on its location and his newfound bond to it.

Even if he had established that the old men from the Cloud Plane were allies, it didn't mean he'd place his full trust in them. He'd wait until later to explain these things to his companions.

But the lack of crucial information didn't make his discoveries any less shocking. To the girls, it was the sheer scale of the plan and the madness of it all, but to the old men, it was something more.

These were the enemies they were facing on their own planet as well, and seeing the depths of their schemes left a sense of foreboding within them.

After Damien, the girls also shared their findings. Even though they had stayed within the bunker for the same amount of time, they had seen much more. It couldn't be helped since they descended almost 30 floors while Damien went directly to floor 90.

They spoke about the lumps of flesh they saw being researched, the tubes filled with deformed beings, and the experiments that turned these beings into abominations.

After that, they spoke about the 80th floor down to the 90th, which functioned as a prison area for those who would eventually become test subjects.

Damien could sense how uncomfortable the girls were with what they witnessed, so he moved to cut them off, but he also noticed Rose hesitating as if she wanted to add something. He lightly grabbed her hand, hoping to give her some small form of assurance.

Rose looked at him gratefully before opening her mouth to speak. "Those syringes filled with that mysterious substance...it looked awfully similar to the body of the Nox."

A solemn atmosphere descended. Not only was Damien serious, but also the old men. The Nox was a common enemy that all of them had, they very well may be the common enemy of many worlds.

Damien already had an inkling that the Nox would be involved, but even this slight confirmation was still incredibly serious.

“Looks like we need to move as soon as possible.”

He looked at the 3 old men before continuing. “I hope you three can help us fight against the three from Niflheim.”

Xiao Zhen nodded, and with his approval, the other two didn't disagree.

“Alright, we don't need to destroy every single one of those villains in there, since that'd be overkill. As long as we kill the 3rd classes, the rest is light work. After their deaths, I'll destroy the facility.”

Everyone nodded once more. To be honest, this was enough planning. The fight may have been delayed a bit, but it was their inevitable victory.

Without another word, all 7 of them, including Zara, released their full auras.

Within the 3rd floor of the Niflheim bunker, Haldir and the other two were alerted by the sudden influx of aura from the peripherals of their base. Gathering, the three looked at each other solemnly.

“Let’s go. The three of them don’t have a chance against us anyway, and nothing can be allowed to stand in the way of our plans. Let’s eradicate them before we finish this world.”

The other two nodded before they all left the base, arriving before Damien’s group.

Looking at the new players arriving, Damien’s first feeling was disgust. Rather than the manly forms they showed outwardly, Damien was seeing their true bodies.

They were grotesque black goblin-like creatures with bat-like wings. Their pointy noses and beady eyes filled with greedy resolve served to send a chill down the back of anyone they made contact with. These were the dark imp race of Niflheim.

Without any words, Damien drew his sword and charged.

‘Void Sword Art First Step: Bladeless’

The air was cut in two as a massive crack formed in earth’s atmosphere, gushing with the deathly aura of the void.

The three dark imps were forced to dodge hurriedly to avoid being cut. Damien charged directly for the one on the right, who went by the name of Isaiah.

While the two began their battle, similar scenes took place in the different areas of the large marshy land.

Elena and Rose charged together towards the other weaker one named Weiss while the three old men from the Cloud Plane ganged up on the leader.

There was a reason for this. Although they weren't aware of it before, they were now. This man named Haldir was at the peak of 3rd class. Even if they were powerful, none of them could take him individually.

The three old men directly surrounded the dark imp and decided to hold nothing back. They had no desire to lose their lives in this battle.

“Sacred Eye Formation!”

Lines of mana erupted and connected the three old men, forming a closed triangle around Haldir. However, the dark imp simply watched everything with a calm gaze. From within the triangular formation, tens of attacks were launched. Wind from two sides, and flames from the other. The elements combined into a massive fire tornado that threatened to swallow Haldir whole. Yet, he didn't move. Opening his mouth, he let out a guttural screech like a beast.

“KREEE!”

The wind was blasted apart and the flame tornado was put in a disordered state. Haldir's fingers elongated into claws as he began his assault on his opponents.

The other two battles were much more favorable to Damien's side. He and Zara worked together to easily overpower Isaiah, while Rose and Elena somehow had great teamwork that did the same with Weiss.

The two dark imps were already on their final leg. From across the battlefield, the two locked eyes. It was clear that they had the same thoughts.

‘We can’t let anything get in the way of our mission!’

Simultaneously, the imps distanced themselves from their enemies. Before either team could catch up, they put their sharp claws up to their chests and ripped massive gashes in their skin.

“I offer my body as sacrifice to the Venerable One!”

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They said one after another. Immediately, black beams of light left their bodies, encasing them in massive cocoons.

Crack!

It didn’t take long for them to emerge. However, they were no longer the same as the ones who entered. Their previously 1-meter tall bodies had doubled in size and their eyes were hollow. If before they still attempted to maintain their human appearance, that was no longer the case.

Their grotesque forms were plain to see, but they had become much worse. The inky traits of the Nox were prevalent in their bodies now, and it didn’t seem like they possessed conscious thought.

Damien charged once more, hoping it was just a physical change, but how could that be the case. As he relentlessly slashed and stabbed at the new Isaiah, he found that his body was eerily similar to the Nox they had met before. No matter how much he cut, the injuries would become ink and reattach to his body.

But Damien wasn't the same as he was in the temple, and he also had the empowerment of the earth. Raising his arm, he spoke a single word.

“Incinerate.”

A beam of light fell from the sky like a shooting star and pierced Isaiah's body. The dark imp roared with pride as if something like this couldn't hurt it, but that was just hubris. The second the beam made contact, the imp's entire body was turned to ash.

Glancing at the aftermath for a second, Damien turned to watch Elena and Rose's battle as well.

The girls were doing great, and Elena's first combat against a Nox seemed to be even better than his. Her light element was specialized in purification and speed, directly countering the Nox elements of Weiss' transformation.

The light burned its body, similar to the beam Damien used, and slowly chipped away at its health. Meanwhile, Rose stayed at range, using her wind and illusions to keep it occupied.

She hasn't used her Illusory Throne yet, but Damien didn't think much about it. Perhaps she was just training for situations where it was unavailable.

The main problem was the three old men from the Cloud Plane. Even with their combined might, they were barely able to push Haldir back. The final dark imp was leagues stronger than the other two.

He shot dark projectiles that corroded the old men's flesh and tissue while using his terrifying claws to aggravate the wounds. There seemed to be some sort of poison at work too.

Yet, the old men still had the numbers advantage. Over the course of the past half hour, they had managed to corner the dark imp.

Haldir was fed up. Gritting his teeth, he made the same move as his underlings.

"I offer my body as sacrifice to the Venerable One."

Chapter 103 - Destruction [2]

Immediately, Haldir's body began its transformation. The dark imp shed his disguise and revealed the abomination he truly was, uncaring about the consequences.

Even when the cocoon broke and revealed his figure, Haldir didn't move. Unlike the other two, it was clear that he retained his sense of self after gaining the unnatural power boost.

Coldly glaring at the three old men around him, Haldir raised his hand. A stream of black energy coalesced and shot out like a beam. Yin Jian's face paled as he narrowly dodged. If he had gotten hit by that attack, he definitely would have been severely injured.

Haldir's aura continued to rise. Even though it was clear his level was still at the peak of 3rd class, his aura was far above that. It might have been comparable to some entry-level 4th class beings.

Damien's face turned solemn. The strength boost Haldir received was much more than that of the other two. Not to mention, Haldir seemed like he could perfectly adapt to his newfound power.

Before his eyes, Haldir began to dominate the three old men from the Cloud Plane. Just like they had done to him before, he backed them into a corner with them barely able to put up a defense.

His claws were faster than their eyes could follow, black beams of energy charged toward them with the goal of obliterating their existence, and even Haldir's bat-like wings seemed to have razor sharp edges that attempted to raze them.

As Damien watched, Rose and Elena arrived at his side. They were stained with pitch-black blood, but their enemy was nowhere in sight. Damien raised his eyebrow as if asking what happened, but he didn't get any proper response. The two only smiled at him before watching the ongoing battle.

"Heaven-Collapsing Strike!"

"Wind Sunders the Sky!"

"Flame Emperor's dominion!"

The three old men let out a barrage of attacks, not wanting to fall behind their enemy. Yet, they weren't able to do significant damage to the opponent whose body now contained properties of Nox.

“Should we help them?” Elena asked with a worried look on her face. She had already been told their identities as otherworld invaders, but she still didn’t wish to see them die. At the end of the day, they still helped protect the human race through Asgard.

Rose also looked at Damien. She had figured out by now that Damien had made some sort of deal with them, possibly involving him going to their world, but hadn’t said anything about it. She didn’t know why he did so, but she didn’t question it. There would be time for that later.

Watching the battle, Damien slowly nodded his head. “Alright, I just wanted to make sure that monster’s strength wasn’t too great for us. Let’s go help out.”

The first to charge was Elena, followed by Rose and Damien. They entered a small formation around the dark imp, not giving him a path for escape.

Zara had concealed herself within the shadows. She was waiting for the perfect opportunity to freeze him to death.

‘Girls, it’s probably the wrong time to say this, but this guy will be great to give us battle experience. Let’s not go all out for a while.’

A transmission entered their heads, causing the girls to smile. Even against an opponent that seemed disproportionately stronger than them, Damien still considered it as a training opportunity.

Rose drew her scythe while Elena did the same with her sword. The girls then began attacking the dark imp relentlessly. From the front, Elena let out constant slashes imbued with the purifying properties of light element, burning the dark imp’s skin. She also used her superior speed to dodge the oncoming attacks.

However, the dark imp was also extremely fast. Elena was barraged with razor-sharp claws at every turn, being forced to parry continuously. Yet, her light element was still able to seep into the dark imp's body.

From range, Rose swung her scythe in a beautiful yet deadly dance. The winds around her kicked into the air before smashing into the dark imp's body. This attack was a new one she'd created, but its main goal wasn't to damage.

The wind moved rapidly and created a vortex of crushing pressure that crashed down onto the dark imp's body. He tried his best to subvert it, but his movements were slowed all the same. No matter which direction he moved, Rose would always accumulate and release her attacks to increase the pressure he was feeling.

Within this pressure, Rose would occasionally send sharp blades of wind, chopping off small pieces of the imp's skin. Each time any slight damage was done, Zara would freeze that fallen area to inhibit the imp's regeneration.

Damien watched this scene with pride. He didn't know how they had grown to work so well as a team, but he didn't care about that. He was just glad that their teamwork was enough to fight on generally equal grounds with such a powerful existence.

Still, they weren't able to make any serious wounds. Damien flicked his finger, causing a small burst of flames to gather at its tip. Then, he pulled his arm back as if aiming a bow.

Lightning coalesced in the space between his arms, superheating and forming a line of plasma that functioned as an arrow with that small flame as the tip.

Damien focused on the vectors that made up this arrow's composition. Its speed, velocity, acceleration, direction, and even the force it would create on impact.

Damien altered it all. Since he had first become a vector controller, this was probably the most effort he had put into controlling multiple factors at once.

Once the arrow had been given the specs he wanted, Damien released it. Without needing to be told, the girls dodged out of the way and the arrow struck true in the dark imp's chest.

If it was a human in his place, they would have immediately combusted, and if they didn't they would die from their heart being pierced, but these didn't apply to Haldir. His body structure was completely different.

Still, the arrow had its intended effect. Haldir was about to resume his attack when his internal body began to heat up. Scanning himself, he found a small almost imperceptible flame within his chest, growing bigger with every second.

His face turned serious. He tried to put the flame out, but he didn't have the ability to do so. Perhaps if his elemental affinities were a better counter, he'd be fine. But this wasn't the case.

Haldir was well aware of what this meant. If he wasn't able to kill them before this flame expanded, he'd die a meaningless death.

There was a famous saying that a cornered animal was the most dangerous, and Haldir proved it true.

He disregarded everything else as he aimed solely to kill. His body was torn to shreds since he didn't care to block, but he kept going.

His first target was the three old men from the Cloud Plane. They were in the distance recuperating their mana and injuries, but they were suddenly barraged with tens of black lasers.

One of them drilled directly through Qin Huo's shoulder, with him being unable to evade it in time.

“AGH!”

He let out a grunt of pain as he tried to revolve his mana and close the wound, but to his horror, he was unable to. The wound was charred black as if he had been burnt, but it didn't have the same properties as a burn wound.

Instead, it corroded his skin like darkness. The wound was steady in its proliferation, not leaving him the ability to deal with it. In the end, he chose to ignore it and continue fighting.

With the 3 from the Cloud Plane and the 4 on Damien's side working together, they were able to quickly deal with Haldir. Especially since he was already being burnt from the inside, the task wasn't difficult.

But it didn't come without a cost. Almost everyone was covered in bruises and bleeding profusely. Gashes covered their skin, ruining their powerful images.

Damien was able to quickly heal through his regeneration, while Elena healed herself and the other two girls through life magic.

As for the old men from the Cloud Plane, they took out small round objects that looked similar to balls of bubble gum and swallowed them. Their wounds began healing directly after this.

The only problem was Qin Huo. No matter what he did, he was unable to stop the spread of that vicious corrosion that started from his shoulder. At this point, his entire arm had already become withered and black, no different from a corpse.

Qin Huo had been inspecting his internal body this entire time. In reality, it wasn't just his arm that had been corroded. His organs were already starting to wither, and he felt the corrosion encroaching on his heart.

Suddenly, a foreign mana shot from the black mass of energy that was corroding him and entered his brain. Qin Huo's eyes widened, but he was unable to even scream in pain.

His eyes glossed over, becoming entirely black in color, with no pupils or irises to be seen. He began to let out bestial growls as he ravenously eyed the rest of the people around him.

And then, he fell to the ground, dead.

Behind him, Damien stood with his arm outstretched, covered in Qin Huo's blood.

Chapter 104 - Emotions [1]

Damien's abrupt action shocked every single person there.

"What do you think you're doing?!" Shouted Yin Jian. He and Qin Huo had a relationship akin to brothers, and seeing him die without suspense like this threw his logical thinking out the window.

“A foreign mana invaded his mind. He was already gone before I killed him,” Damien replied indifferently.

Just before Yin Jian could charge at Damien, Xiao Zhen stepped in. “Stop. I would have made the same call.”

“But...!”

“Don’t say anything and think clearly. You saw his eyes and you heard the guttural sounds that came out of his mouth. It’s clear that Qin Huo wasn’t himself anymore.”

“But we could have saved him!”

“No. You are aware of the kind of enemy we are facing. And this isn’t the first time this has happened. Recall the last time someone insisted on saving the person instead of killing them and then try to convince me.”

Yin Jian was immediately silenced. He knew exactly what Xiao Zhen was referring to. In truth, this kind of incident had happened more than once in the past, but it was always dealt with before any substantial damage could occur.

Besides a single instance. An instance where a benevolent person insisted on saving the person who had been infected by the Nox

And the result? A massacre that still sends shivers down the spines of those who heard of it; even hundreds of years after it happened.

Yin Jian couldn't find the words to rebuke Damien's decision. He knew that it was correct, but that didn't change the fact that he had just lost a brother. Without another word, he flew away from the area.

Xiao Zhen watched him leave with a complicated look in his eyes before he sighed. "I will be going after him. Let us meet again in a few days time to discuss things further."

Cupping his fist towards Damien in a show of respect, Xiao Zhen left as well. Now, all that was left in the area was Damien's group.

Even the people within the Niflheim headquarters had fled in every direction. This had happened near the beginning of the fight.

Even if they didn't cause much large-scale damage since most of the fight took place in the air, the shockwaves from their clash alone could wipe out those weaker beings.

Looking at the empty nearly empty headquarters in front of him, Damien made a decision. Those who stayed did so because they wanted to fight. Anyone innocent was already gone.

Utilizing his new bond with the earth, Damien took drastic action. He sent his awareness deep into the ground and first raised the earth to fill any passage leading to the world's core. The most essential thing he could do was to make sure nobody could reach it.

After finishing, Damien decided to raze the Niflheim bunker. At this thought, the ground began to rumble. Damien took to the sky and even the girls were forced to follow after him. There was no stability in the tens of kilometers surrounding them.

The earthquake intensified, and Damien directly targeted the support beams holding the bunker in one piece. With them gone, it was simple to destroy things. The bunker collapsed in on itself as the earth swallowed it back into itself.

The dome-like structure above the ground cracked and shattered, while the floors of the bunker fell into each other. The abyss in the middle of the area was slowly filled with debris. Even the locked research areas were destroyed completely.

Damien made sure to be extra thorough with these, granting death to the ones who were unjustly kept alive and tortured in Niflheim's experiments.

As for those who stayed to fight, they had either been crushed by the fallen pieces of the bunker or the earthquake that had just passed.

The marshy land slowly regained its peace.

"So, what now?" Rose questioned. There wasn't anything left to do on earth now that Niflheim was no longer a threat.

"Hmm, how about we head back to Apeiron for a bit? I want to migrate my mother there and we can also get Elena a better weapon while we're at it"

Elena's ears perked up at the mention. She had long noticed the disparity between the artifacts Damien and Rose used compared to her own. Even in the battle they had just fought, her sword had cracked slightly and its edge had dulled.

"I don't know if your mother will be okay with moving, though." Elena suddenly said.

Damien's brows furrowed slightly. It was true that the task of convincing his mother would be immense. She was basically still a normal human, not to mention that she actually cared about earth.

Damien could speculate that it had something to do with his father, but that was as far as he could get. No matter how he tried, there was no way for him to understand her thoughts on the matter.

He could only shake his head and rid himself of those thoughts. It's not like his mother would ever tell him honestly. Ever since he was a child, she'd avoided the topic of his father. Even after she woke up from her coma she was the same.

'How does she remain loyal to someone who disappeared on her and left her alone as a single mother?'

He truly couldn't understand. Is that how love worked? It was scary to think about.

While on the topic of love, Damien couldn't help but glance at Rose. He was still hesitant about their relationship even if they had already confirmed it.

Well, he wasn't hesitant about having a relationship with Rose, rather he was hesitant about having such a bond with someone else. He didn't understand the concept of love and seeing the way his mother was, he didn't want to.

He felt that love could truly blind someone. It could turn people into different beings entirely. He didn't want to become like this, but he didn't want to end his relationship with Rose.

The problem was with him entirely. They hadn't advanced past those small kisses they had shared, but just the slightest shows of intimacy when she cuddled into his chest or held his hand gave him endless satisfaction.

And this was his problem. He felt like he could drown in that feeling. He felt that he could submerge himself into it and never leave. And he didn't like that one bit.

He felt confused about his inner thoughts. After all, who would dislike the fact that they were happy? Even he found it absurd, but it wasn't something he could change.

As they flew back to Damien's house, he stayed within his thoughts. He realized that it was worse than he originally expected. It only took some slight introspection to reach this conclusion.

The thing that worried him was simple. It wasn't the old men rejecting him bringing companions that made him want to go to the Cloud Plane alone, it was himself. Maybe it was a defense mechanism, but he felt rejection towards this.

He felt that if he stayed with Rose during every moment and every adventure, he'd lose his capability to function without her by his side.

He had to admit it. He was scared.

He was someone who would show no fear even in the face of the strongest adversaries, but he was afraid of emotional intimacy.

‘What a joke. I was entertaining thoughts of a harem but I’m too scared to be intimate with the single girl I already care about.’

Maybe it was his inner weeb that drove his thoughts in the direction of a harem, or maybe it was his inherent desire for freedom. He didn’t know.

There was only one thing he was sure of. Whether it was a harem or only Rose, the key thing he needed to focus on was communication.

He decided that he’d sit down with Rose and have a proper talk about everything he was feeling right now.

Watching Damien, Rose felt a rush of complicated emotions. After spending years together as the best of friends and as the one he’d crossed that boundary with, she was the one who could understand his emotional state the best.

His hesitation in their relationship was clear to her. He hadn’t even tried to lay a hand on her yet. It was a weird feeling for her to be the one prepared to take the next step while her man was lagging behind, but at the same time, it was refreshing.

In the culture she had grown up in, women were always meant to submit to their men. They were supposed to support from behind, while some were just trophies.

She never felt like this with Damien. When they interacted, he's always treated her as an equal, and even if she supported him, she did so by his side while he did the same for her.

She liked this kind of thing better. She wondered if they would stay this way if he ever added more women to their relationship, but she tried her best to suppress that thought.

She had seen both harem life and monogamous life in her travels through Apeiron, and she didn't have a strong opinion towards either. In the first place, she never expected to fall in love before meeting Damien.

The unwittingly looked over at him to find him doing the same towards her. With both of them thinking about their relationship, their gazes ended up melting as they stared into each other's eyes.

Only Elena was left watching from the side, her thoughts known only to her.

Chapter 105 - Emotions [2]

The group reached Damien's house and separated into their own rooms, with Rose following Damien to his. It wasn't abnormal for this to happen, so nobody questioned it.

Entering the room, Rose went directly to the bed, patting the spot next to her as if asking Damien to sit.

He was a bit flabbergasted by her actions but did as she said anyway. It was strange to him that she would act like this before he even said anything.

“So? It was pretty obvious on the way here, what did you want to talk about?”

Damien’s eyes widened. He was sure he had kept his facial expressions as deadpan as possible so as to avoid dropping any hints, but it seemed he didn’t do as well as he originally thought.

Although he had built up the resolve to communicate with Rose about what he was feeling, it was different when they actually got to the point. Damien was feeling incredibly nervous for no real reason.

Thinking he should communicate and actually bringing himself to do so were two different things entirely. When it came to introspection, he considered himself well versed. He could figure out his problems quickly if he just immersed himself in thought.

But sharing them was something he had never done before. On earth, he hadn’t shared with his mother about the bullying he endured at school because he didn’t want to burden her. Even when he used to share with Elena, he would only vent and didn’t take any of her advice seriously.

He was simply too preoccupied at the time to listen to anyone else, even if it was his best friend. It was incredibly selfish of him, but that didn’t change the fact that it was how he acted.

Still, he collected his thoughts and steeled himself, telling Rose about his concerns. About how he felt constricted when he felt intimacy, about his fears when it came to relationships, and everything else.

Throughout the whole ordeal, Rose’s face didn’t change. She kept watching him with a warm smile as he poured out the complex feelings he had pent up since they had begun their relationship, maybe even before.

When he finally finished talking, an hour had passed and he felt truly relieved. Even if she hadn't said anything to him yet, he felt like just talking to her about it lifted a massive weight off of his shoulders.

'Why was I so scared to do this?'

Looking at Rose whose gaze was gentler than a calming spring, he wondered where his hesitation came from. He didn't know, but he was glad he decided to take a step forward. And Rose didn't wait for him to get anxious for her answer.

"I already knew." Her smile never faded as she answered. "Well, I'm not a psychic who can know everything, but I could clearly see your hesitation a long time ago."

Damien's eyes widened, but Rose didn't allow him to speak. Instead, she grabbed him and gently brought his head to her lap.

Damien was in a slight panic from her earlier words and didn't resist her at all. Before he knew it, he was using her lap as a pillow as she calmly brushed her fingers through his hair. He had already frozen long ago, silently accepting her actions.

"You know, I grew up in a generally awkward family situation. After all, my father has over 100 wives."

"100?!"

Damien's eyes practically bulged at this. He wasn't even able to pay attention to her story anymore because of this ridiculous number.

Rose lightly smacked his head, regaining his attention. "Pay attention, silly. As I was saying, the sheer number of women in my father's harem made life confusing for me.

"As a child, I always wondered if I was truly loved by my parents, or if I should feel disgusted at the thought of 100 women sharing a single man. This thought was only amplified when I learned about the existence of monogamous families.

"At that time, my father was rarely able to spend time with me due to his duties as an emperor and some issues that were taking place within the empire, so my doubts were even more exemplified.

"And so, I started becoming scared. I was scared that one day I'd end up in a situation where I found a husband and he ignored me like I saw my father doing with his wives. I was just like every other little girl, dreaming about a Prince Charming who would swoop me off my feet, but it felt like my dreams were being shattered.

"It got to the point where even when he came to visit me and my mother, I would hide from him, unable to look at his face.

"And then, my childhood was robbed from me. There was a small coup that was planned by some old ministers of the empire and due to their jealousy, some of my father's wives joined their cause.

"My mother was his favorite, his first wife, and one of the few he truly loved. That night, they poisoned her and killed her while she was sleeping."

Reaching this point, Rose's face became pained. Still, she endured her sadness and continued talking.

“After that night, I lost my ability to trust anyone. I secluded myself in my mother's room and cried myself to sleep every night. I would lash out at anyone who tried to get near me and cause trouble wherever I could.

“And you know the part that hurt the most? It was the fact that my mother was still smiling when she died. She smiled as if she knew this would happen, yet didn't move to stop it. And her final words? She told me to never blame my father for what happened. But that didn't stop me. Who else was I supposed to blame?

“I hated her for that for a few years of my life. I was disgusted by the fact that she loved such a man who caused her death. I abhorred the concept of a harem because if my father had stayed loyal to only my mother, she wouldn't have died.

“And the family situation at the time didn't help in the slightest. Even if the coup was stopped, its aftermath still lingered. One of my half-sisters thought that it would be the best time to get rid of me as well.

“Even at a young age, we were still aware of the fight for the throne. One day, this sister I thought was my biggest support pillar took me to a secluded place and attempted to have me killed by a beast. I didn't know at the time, but if not for a shadow guard that my father had assigned to protect me, I wouldn't be standing here today.

“Time passed like this but I never got better. I turned 15, the marriageable age in Apeiron, and countless sons of noble families came to court me. But that's also when I began seeing these threads and colors that connected every single being.

“I was able to clearly see their feelings. The fact that they were either there to increase the standing of their families or out of pure lust, I rarely saw one who truly loved or even liked me.

“And since I had been surrounded by filth, I even pushed away the ones that truly cared. I was never able to get rid of the nagging thought that they would someday betray me as those women did with my father and how my sister did to me.

“I ran away from the castle, wanting to get fresh air and escape my responsibilities, but even that was disallowed. Within a few hours time, my father found me and promptly took me back to the castle. It was that day when he first showed how much he truly cared.

Rose began reminiscing. She remembered her father’s words from that night clearly. Instead of taking her back to the castle, he had taken her to the highest peak on Apeiron to watch the stars.

“You know,” he said, “Agata always had a knack for predicting the future. It was almost like she was performing divinations.”

The emperor stared at the stars, his gaze melancholic and filled with pain. “I felt there was something wrong in the weeks before her death, but regardless of any persuasion, she wouldn’t tell me.

“I found out what was going on too late. She had already reached the point of no return. But she sent me one final mental transmission. Do you want to know what she said?”

James looked at his daughter with a loving gaze, hiding his sadness. “She simply told me to look after you. To make sure that the two of us never drift apart and to make sure we live our lives filled with love. I truly don’t understand how such a caring woman ever fell for me.”

Rose remembered looking at her father. She could feel his pain in his words, and through her eyes, she could see the endlessly red string that connected him to the ground. Even after her death, Rose's mother still retained her father's deepest affection.

Rose looked at Damien, who was intently listening to her story, with a similar yet entirely different loving gaze.

“We talked for hours after that. About his love story with my mother, her countless quirks, and what made her the powerful woman she used to be. It was that day that I finally began to heal.”

Chapter 106 - Emotions [3]

Damien simply lay in her lap as he listened to her story. It got to the point where he even forgot about his own problems while he immersed himself in hers.

As it turns out, Rose had similar issues as him. The only difference was that she had been on the path to fixing them much longer than he was.

Rose continued telling Damien about her past in the final 6 years before they met each other. It was definitely heartwarming.

After their conversation on the mountain peak, James took his daughter back to the castle. The two of them became much closer after that. Rose wasn't able to immediately set aside her prejudices and doubts, but she was now open to the idea.

Any arrangements for her marriage were canceled, much to the chagrin of those noble families, but James didn't care. He only thought of the well-being of his daughter in this matter.

It was then that his favoritism for Rose started to show. She disdained most of her father's other women, who were simply there due to political marriage, so she started to explore the lands of Apeiron.

And in those explorations, she discovered her love for adventure. Rose began training as much as she could, quickly showing her talent and stunning those in the upper echelon of the empire.

In just 6 years, she had reached 2nd class. She had joined the adventurers guild and taken on quests, evaded many assassination and kidnapping attempts with her own prowess, and made achievements that set her apart from the crowd.

She far surpassed her other siblings, but she held no desire for the throne. This left them to wallow in their jealousy without an outlet to remove it. In consequence, the battle for the throne became fiercer, but Rose didn't care about this.

She ignored everything else and focused on what she wanted to do, only returning to the palace a few times a year to meet with her father. And on her most recent trip back, she met Damien. The rest was history.

It was a true coming-of-age story that made Damien feel like Rose was the protagonist of some anime. She overcame trials both physically and emotionally until she could stand before him as her powerful and unbridled self today.

Frankly, he was amazed. His respect for Rose was already high before this, but it felt like it had peaked after knowing her full story. He felt ashamed to face the same issues with much less strenuous circumstances.

But who could blame him? Even if trauma came into being on a mortal earth without the same strife as it had after mana was introduced, and even if the problems could now be considered mundane, that didn't mean it would suddenly fix everything.

Mana was miraculous in every sense of the word, but it wasn't omnipotent and it wasn't biased. Even with such a drastic lifestyle change, it was impossible to just throw away old trauma.

His father leaving him while he was still a child impacted him heavily even though he was in his twenties now.

Regardless of the circumstances or how much Damien knew it was for his own good, the fact that he didn't feel any familial love from his mother due to her busy schedule also left a deep impact on him.

The bullying he endured at school and the way people would lead him on simply to push him down later left him with trust issues. And these were only further amplified by the fact that he was betrayed and thrown into the dungeon to die.

And those two years he lived as a beast messed with his mental psyche. No matter how fine he may seem at the moment, it was simply because he didn't have an outlet or a situation where he snapped.

The closest thing to this would be when he basically bombed downtown LA because he couldn't hold back his thirst to kill Jin.

Damien and Rose spent the whole night talking. Their intimacy had reached an entirely new level as they threw away their inhibitions and opened up to each other about everything. It was a cathartic feeling for the two of them.

They ended up getting immersed in each other's warmth, sharing some physical intimacy as well before the night ended. And finally, they fell asleep hugging each other close. The wholesomeness of the time they spent let them enter their dreams with happiness and ease.

In another part of the house, Claire was sleeping in her bed alone. However, she wasn't able to maintain the same peace as the previous two.

She hadn't told the kids yet because she didn't want to worry them, but every night when she fell asleep, she'd have strange dreams.

These dreams varied from simple life experiences of her own to fantastical scenes she could never even imagine. It took her an entire month to even have an inkling of what was going on.

Tonight, she was having another strange dream. Yet, this one was leagues worse than the rest. She was in a place filled with darkness, the only reason she could see was that she had adapted to this environment.

She walked through a dense forest alone, but she could feel something following her.

She arrived at an abyss and was confronted by a wolf. She tried to run, but it tore into her legs, preventing her movement.

Luckily, this was a dream so she couldn't feel the pain. There was one thing that was clear to her, however, and that was fear.

Pure, unadulterated fear.

She looked down at her body, which was currently that of a boy's, and saw two swords in her hands. when she looked back up, she was already attempting to fight the wolf.

But it was futile. The wolf was simply that much more powerful than her. It tore into her body, leaving her hanging on the precipice between life and death.

And then, she charged once more. But this time it was more crazed, it was the move of an insane person. She watched as the body she occupied tore into the wolf, and she watched as one of its arms was torn off and eaten in front of it.

She watched as it climbed onto the wolf and used its single remaining arm to claw and scrape, and she watched as it tore its jaws into the wolf's flesh.

The battle reached its climax as the human won, but the wolf charged into the abyss and fell, dragging the human along with it.

Within this abyss, Claire saw a small bit of light that reflected off of the short sword still in her hand. It was then that she finally saw the appearance of the body she possessed.

Short midnight black hair caked in mud, a face covered in blood, and a pair of piercing amethyst eyes. She knew who's face this was.

“Damien!”

Claire woke up from her sleep in a panic, her back drenched in a cold sweat. Tears streamed down her face uncontrollably as she realized what she had just witnessed.

“My boy,” she sobbed, “just what did you have to go through?”

When Damien woke up, he couldn’t hide the smile on his face. The soft sunlight that entered his room through his window, the chirping of birds, and the girl sleeping by his side all brought him immense joy.

Seeing how Rose was using his arm as his pillow, Damien decided to stay in bed a bit longer. He simply enjoyed the scenery outside the house as he waited for her to wake up.

He wanted to look at her face a bit more, but he had no idea if he could suppress the urge to kiss her if he did so.

Unbeknownst to him though, she was already up, but thinking that his efforts to play it cool were cute, she pretended to be asleep. Within the hour, Rose finally opened her eyes. She similarly ended up smiling at the tranquil atmosphere that had enveloped them.

There were a few more days that the two of them could spend calmly before they had to start moving again, so they planned to enjoy it.

They left their room and headed downstairs to be greeted by Claire Elena and Zara, who had stayed with Elena during the previous night. She knew Damien and Rose were having an important conversation, so she didn't want to bother them.

The group had a cheerful dinner as they talked about mundane things. They turned on the news, only to see stories of Niflheim's destruction, but they paid it no mind.

A week ended up passing idly while the group relaxed. But there was no way to keep this atmosphere forever.

Damien and the girls sat on one side of the couch while Claire sat opposite them. The air around them seemed tense. Not being able to handle the tension, Damien finally spoke.

"Mom, please move to Apeiron."

Chapter 107 - Brief Return [1]

"Mom, please move to Apeiron."

The words were simple, but Damien still felt nervous saying them. It was an unknown sensation for him, but it was something akin to disobeying your parents as a child.

Claire looked into her son's earnest eyes as she pondered. After a few long minutes, she decided to speak.

"Why do you want me to move?"

If she spoke simply from her emotions, she would have immediately rejected the idea, but things were different now. Thinking back to the dream she saw last night, she couldn't help but see things from a more logical perspective.

The Damien she saw in her dream was still a boy, but the Damien in front of her now was a man. Either this meant that her dream was false or that it took place at the beginning of his journey.

She was more inclined to believe the latter. Especially with her system window saying her affinity was 'dream', she was sure it wasn't an illusion or anything.

'If that was just the beginning, then what did he go through after that?'

The single experience was harrowing to her. Not only was he left within an inch of his life, but he also watched his arm be torn off and eaten in front of him and he was cast into that gnawing abyss by the dying wolf.

She had some mild trauma from the dream, and she hadn't even felt the pain that came with all those injuries. She had, however, felt the emotions.

Fear, unwillingness, anxiety, and near the end, insanity.

She felt it all and questioned how her son was able to sit in front of her with the demeanor of a normal person. She could only commend his efforts, and out of respect for that, listen to his suggestions.

Damien, on the other hand, was mildly shocked that his mother didn't immediately protest. He had originally expected this to be a long conversation filled with begging, but it seemed it would be much easier than that. Relaxing a bit, he answered her question.

"I have a feeling that earth will be subjected to many catastrophes in the future. And if there is any risk of something bad happening, I don't want you to get caught up in it."

Although he knew she would have a hard time understanding, Damien proceeded to tell her about the happenings at Niflheim.

He explained what Rose and Elena found and also what he had found about the world core. He also talked briefly about the battle with the dark imps and their abilities.

While on this subject, he also had to mention the Nox, albeit only slightly, so she could get a better idea of the bigger picture.

And finally, Damien told her about what happened between him and the world core. This was the first time he was telling the girls about it as well, so he gave more details on this particular matter.

"When I first achieved 3rd class and became a Celestial, I received the ability to use starlight as an energy source or an element. An example of this is how I can harness the flames of the sun."

Damien flicked his finger, creating a small wisp of flame. But the power of this tiny flame was immense, letting the group understand his point.

"I thought this was it, with the rest of the class being an extension on my spatial element, increasing the possibilities. But I was wrong.

“When I was there next to the earth’s core, I ended up forming a bond with it. Well, I don’t know if bond is the right word, but I essentially became the Star Master of earth.”

Both Elena and Claire were aware of the term Star Master. Damien was heavily into cultivation novels as a teen, so he had ranted to both of them about various concepts he found interesting.

Rose was confused by the term, being from another world, but it was quickly explained to her by the rest. Since the concept was generally straightforward, she didn’t take much time to catch on.

“Son, does that mean you are the master of earth or something?” Claire asked curiously.

But Damien shook his head. “I don’t think it’s that simple, and I also don’t believe that I have the power to claim myself to be the master of an entire world.

“But what I do know is that I have the potential to become one. And not just for earth, but for countless worlds. This is the path that has been laid out for me.”

Claire’s eyes slightly widened in realization. Only now did she figure out that her son would be leaving on a journey soon.

“And why do you believe Apeiron is better than earth? Didn’t they get invaded long before earth did?”

This time, Rose was the one to answer her. “Auntie, Apeiron is a world filled with peace. Even the beasts stay within their territories and don’t rampage and slaughter needlessly. My father is the emperor of the largest human empire on the continent, so your safety can be guaranteed.

“Not to mention, it’s been 1000 years since the Nox invaded, and they haven’t returned even once.”

“I have a theory about this.” Damien chimed in, “The Nox faced heavy losses on Apeiron during their last invasion attempt, to the point where they were forced to retreat and recuperate for hundreds of years before they could move again.

“If I’m not mistaken, I believe the Nox will not attack Apeiron again until they have completed the conquest of various other worlds. Perhaps it’s a safety precaution, or maybe it’s just instinct. But at least for now, Apeiron is safe.

“However, earth doesn’t share the same security. It’s a small and new world that anyone can use for their own machinations. Just like how Niflheim came, others will too.

“And if the force from the Cloud Plane didn’t arrive as well, earth would have fallen long ago.”

Claire was beginning to understand why Damien wanted her to leave. She was slightly distressed that he would be putting himself in danger again, but she couldn’t do anything about that.

She had been back in this changed world for long enough to gain a basic understanding of how things worked. Strength was king within this vast universe, and Damien needed to gain it.

Even if Damien glossed over it, Elena made sure she knew how hard he worked for her sake. She wanted Claire to be proud of her son's achievements. And indeed, she was proud. Yet, she was also aware of how much of a burden she was.

She was saddened by the fact that she would be a burden to him even after she had woken up, but she couldn't do anything about it. She could only suppress her negative feelings and comply.

'What would you do in this situation?'

She thought about the only man she had ever fallen in love with. A man who was as mysterious as the boundless cosmos and had more charisma than anyone else.

"Claire, our son is destined for greatness," he once said to her. "No matter what, we must support him in his journey. We just raise him to be strong enough to fend off anything that could bar his path."

Sighing, Claire slowly nodded her head. "Alright, I'll move to Apeiron. However, you must come visit me once in a while, or I'll find some way to leave and come spank you like I did when I was little!"

Damien shivered a bit thinking about those childhood days. He knew what his mother was like when she was angry, and he didn't want to see that side of her again.

Damien nodded hurriedly in compliance. Now that he had convinced her, he didn't have any more reservations to move forward on his path.

The group stayed on earth for another day, with Claire lacking her necessities as if she was going on vacation before they gathered in the backyard.

Once again, Damien used the connection he felt with Apeiron to open a portal. The difference was, this time the portal was only big enough for their group to enter together.

‘It seems like the portal size depends on us. So Zara’s extravagance was the cause last time.’

Damien smiled wryly at this. At least he could be discreet when he used the skill normally. He was a bit flustered last time when they made such a grand entrance.

The group stood in a line, while Zara stayed in Damien’s shadow. Although their safety was guaranteed, they still made sure to hold each other so they didn’t get separated.

Claire watched the portal in trepidation, but feeling the firm hands of her son and Elena, she steeled herself.

‘I can’t show them such a weak side, now can I?’

With one final look at the house she had spent so many years of her life in, and with one last reminiscence of the old days, Claire stepped into the portal.

Chapter 108 - Brief Return [2]

After spending what felt like hours in the void, the group was finally able to exit the portal. Damien’s mana capacity wasn’t completely dry, but this was only because he already had some connection to Apeiron.

He didn't know when this connection began to strengthen, but it was second only to earth, much stronger than those he had with the random celestial bodies floating through the void.

Claire looked around with awe as she witnessed the sight of a new world. They had teleported directly into Damien's house within Aurora, so she was able to get a clear view of the city and the area beyond it.

The bustling atmosphere that filled the city, and its sheer size were enough to amaze her, yet this was only the tip of the iceberg. When Claire looked around, she was able to see the majestic castle that occupied the center of the city, being larger than some towns on earth.

Her body seemed to rejoice at the mana density of the area, being at least ten times denser than that of earth. And with the enhanced eyesight of someone with her stats, she was able to make out the scenery in the distance past the city.

The titanous mountains that stood tall in the background and the lush green plains helped her realize she was truly in another world.

The entire experience calmed her, as a peaceful atmosphere pervaded the very air she breathed.

"Welcome to Apeiron!" Rose said with a smile on her face.

Claire could only nod her head absentmindedly as she stayed dazed by the sights. It was only around 10 minutes later that she snapped back to reality.

“This place is breathtaking.” Claire sighed with praise. She wondered if earth would become like this after a prolonged period of time, but she knew she wouldn’t be alive to witness it. After all, that was tens of thousands of years!

“Mom, I’ll give you some time to accustom yourself to this house and the surrounding city,” Damien said as he pulled out a spatial ring.

“This ring is filled with as much gold and silver as you’ll ever need, and this house belongs solely to me. So you can do as you please. Also, this city is one of the safest places you could possibly be, even considering how peaceful this world is.

“I’m going to take Elena somewhere to get a new sword, and after we return, we can go meet Rose’s father.”

Claire nodded as she looked at the house. It was much bigger than the one she previously lived in, and she couldn’t imagine living in it alone. Without another word, she went inside to explore.

As she turned away, her expression hardened. The dreams she had seen even the day before they left earth had gotten much worse than what she saw previously.

She had seen a maniacal scene of seas of blood and endless slaughter.

Walking through the house she would be living in for the foreseeable future, Claire only had a single thought in her head.

‘I must adapt to the new world and become strong. As long as I’m strong, I won’t be a burden to anyone for even a single second longer.’

She wasn't just thinking about Damien. The figure of a certain man popped into her head as she gazed at the bright blue sky.

Meanwhile, Damien turned to Elena whose excitement had almost reached the point of manifesting physically.

"Why don't we fly there so you can enjoy the sights of this world a bit?" Damien suggested.

He was greeted with a quick refusal before Elena immediately nodded.

"So, which is it? Yes or no?" Damien teased.

"Yes!" Elena responded. She was admittedly filled with too much anticipation to even listen to what he was saying.

Damien wryly shook his head as he called Zara out of his shadow. Then, the three of them mounted her and took off.

'Well, let's go visit an old friend then, shall we?'

It only took an hour for the group to reach Archdale with Zara's improved speed, and Damien looked at the city with a smile.

“It hasn’t changed at all since the last time I came here.”

It had only been 2 years since he last stepped into the city, so the line was a bit cliché, but he said it anyway. It brought a slight smile to Rose’s face so he felt it was worth it.

Zara returned to Damien’s shadow, once again adopting her previous behavior now that they were back around crowds, and Damien led the group to a familiar old building that smelled like melting metals.

Without suspense, they entered the shop. Elena’s eyes were immediately drawn to the lines of weapons that occupied it.

There was still nobody at the desk, but sounds of metal clanging could be heard from the back room. Damien simply stood as he watched Elena browse the weapons like a child in the toy section.

It was the first time Elena had seen weapons so pristine. Not only their design and sharpness but also the aura they gave off. If she had to compare her old sword, it was like trash in front of a pile of gold.

As she looked through the sword section, Elena was surprised by the many different designs. There were spiral swords, broadswords, and even things that looked oddly similar to katanas.

Some of the swords were shaped in ways she had never seen before, but that made sense since they were no longer on earth.

“Damien, I want this one!” Elena said as she tugged on his sleeve, pointing to a specific katana.

He hadn't seen her drop all pretenses like this in a long time. It seemed her love for swords was on a whole different level.

Looking at the sword she wanted, Damien saw a sleek katana whose blade was almost translucent. But no matter how fragile it looked, its power couldn't be underestimated.

Damien nodded his head, understanding her choice. As someone who specialized in the light element, her greatest strength was her speed. A heavy sword would only be detrimental to her.

"Alright, just give me a second," Damien said as he hopped over the counter. He pushed open the thick metal door to the back room and directly entered.

"Yo, old man! You in here?" Damien's entire manner of speaking seemed to relax to a new level when he entered the backroom.

"Oi, who the hell is comin' in 'ere without knockin'?!" A grumpy voice shouted.

Vormec grabbed his hammer and waddled to the door, wanting to pound the head of the fool who interrupted him. However, when he got there, he saw a familiar yet unfamiliar man.

Although it had only been 2 years since their last meeting, Damien had grown up a lot. The silver streaks in his hair had become more prevalent, his height had grown slightly, and his overall look had become more mature.

Not to mention the expensive clothing he was wearing, a complete turn from the sweatpants and shirt he wore when they first met.

“Eh? What’re ya doin’ ‘ere boy? Don’t tell me ya already broke the sword I made ya!” Vormec chastised, yet the smile on his face wasn’t hard to spot.

Damien smiled as well, “what, you won’t believe me if I said I just missed you?”

Vormec rolled his eyes but got straight to business. “Alright alright, let me get a look at your sword and start fixin’ it.”

“Nah, I’m actually not here for myself today. I brought a friend whose weapon I want you to craft.”

Still, Damien pulled out his sword. “But, you can consider this as your payment. Trust me, you’ll be interested in what happened to it.”

Vormec raised his brow in clear interest as he grabbed the sword. Just from a glance, it was clear how the sword had changed.

Its blade had elongated to be around 1 meter long, and its edge had considerably sharpened. Its entirely black surface gained a more glossy finish and the purple lines that patterned it was now conjoined with a pristine gold.

“Hm?”

It was only when he took a deeper look that he realized the significance of these changes.

“Boy, who reforged this sword for ya?” Vormec asked. It was sheer curiosity, not even caring that Damien broke their contract. Whoever reforged the sword was clearly better than him.

“Nobody did, old man. The sword did that to itself.”

Damien then proceeded to explain the process where the sword devoured an SSS rank artifact in the legacy tomb and evolved to the same rank.

Vormec’s eyes widened, but as he continued inspecting he realized the truth in Damien’s words. There were no signs of tampering as if the blade had evolved rather than being reforged.

And as Vormec did before, he saw every change within the blade, using it to improve his own understanding of his profession. He saw the records of the countless battles the blade had gone through, leaving him excited at the prospects.

After around half an hour, Vormec finally spoke. “Alright boy, this was definitely a great payment. Bring ya friend back ‘ere so I can get the specs they want.”

Chapter 109 - Brief Return [3]

Damien promptly called Elena, who was still admiring the katanas in the front, and Rose to the back of the shop. When they entered, both of them wore similar expressions to Damien when he entered for the first time.

Their noses scrunched up from the intense smell of smoke and metal, and they felt slightly uncomfortable due to the extreme heat.

It wasn't the heat itself that was uncomfortable, since their bodies were long past being affected by drastic temperature changes, rather it was the atmosphere brought by the heat that irked them.

Looking at the two girls that entered the shop, Vormec's eyes showed an understanding light. Nudging Damien slightly, he teased, "you've been busy these last few years, haven't ya?"

Inwardly, Vormec was genuinely surprised. The blue-haired beauty was one thing, but the other one had pink hair and ruby eyes, a trait that was possessed by only a single family within the entire human domain.

'Two years ago when we met, the boy was just another traveler in scrappy clothes. How did he end up seducin' a princess in that short time?'

Still, he was a professional so he didn't voice out his thoughts, just subtly teasing Damien about it instead.

Looking at Elena, Vormec then asked the important question. "So? What can I do for ya, young lady?"

Elena's eyes brightened as she nodded. "Yes, sir. I'd like a blade similar to this one, but I want it to be lighter and slightly longer."

She pulled out the sword she took from the front room for Vormec to see. He only took a glance before nodding. "Alright, I can do that for ya, but I'mma need ya to show me somethin' first."

Turning to Damien, he continued. “Boy, you remember what I had ya do last time, no? Take us to that field again.”

Damien wryly shook his head at the fact that Vormec was using him as a taxi driver, but still complied. The group was covered by Damien’s spatial mana and taken to a familiar grassy plain.

Looking around, Damien was still able to see the scars and destruction he had made in this area when he was first practicing his sword art. Back then, he barely understood bladeless, and his dance of the void was in its rudimentary phases.

He smiled thinking about how far he’d come

“Alright, young lady. Take the sword ya took from the shop and show me some of ya moves.”

Elena nodded with complete seriousness. Seeing the weapons in the shop that transcended her understanding had made her view Vormec as some sort of respectable elder. She made sure to be extra polite with him.

And Vormec seemed to enjoy this feeling. Well, until he got a smack to the back of the head.

“Calm down, old man. If you keep that creepy grin on your face, people will think you’re a perv.”

“Oi, you brat! Who you callin’ a perv?! If you want a taste of my fists, I’ll give it to ya!”

“Oh? And how are you planning to do that? Can you even reach my face if you get on your tiptoes?”

“Brat! Don’t go too far!” Vormec was at best half of Damien’s height, as it seemed he possessed some dwarves bloodline, and his height had always been a sore spot for him.

Seeing the two argue as if they were quarreling siblings, Rose ended up having a good laugh, before Elena cut them off.

“Ehem!” She let out a clearly fake cough. Damien and Vormec quieted down shortly after as they watched her prepare. Not wanting to disappoint or underwhelm, Elena let out her strongest move.

[Judgement]

Judgment was a more versatile skill than Elena had previously shown. A blinding yellow light covered her sword blade, letting off a suffocating pressure before Elena swung it with her full power.

Swoosh! Bang!

The light covering the sword became a massive beam that subsequently split into five parts that zoomed through the air. Even the wind was cut by their blinding speed.

And then, each of the five impacted a separate area of the massive plains, creating a large explosion of dazzling light.

A dust cloud was kicked up by the force of the explosions, and small craters were formed in the ground. Elena was only a 2nd class, but the full power of her skill would be enough to contend against many early and mid-stage 3rd class beings.

Vormec approvingly nodded his head as he watched on. ‘None of the people next to this kid will ever be normal.’

“Alright,” he said, “let me get a look at that sword.”

Elena promptly handed it over and Vormec inspected it in full. Every once in a while he would nod his head or mutter some sort of blacksmith jargon that Damien couldn’t understand.

“Good, I can do this for ya, but it’ll take more time than the other sword. The materials I’ll need for this will take a bit of work to get.”

“Don’t worry about that, old man. I didn’t tell you this yet, but I’m pretty rich now.”

“Yeah yeah, I don’t think you could court a princess of the biggest empire in the human domain if you were still the bum you were when we first met.”

This time, Damien was the one who received the critical hit. The two resumed their earlier squabble as Damien teleported the group back to the workshop.

After a few hours, the trio left Vormec to his work. The new sword cost Damien a few white gold coins, especially considering that its rank would be higher and the materials were rare, but Damien still got the feeling that Vormec had cheated him.

But he just shrugged it off. It wasn't like he needed the money on Apeiron. If he ever ran out, he'd just take a few SS rank quests to make some more.

Since it would take around a month for the sword to be complete, Damien and Rose took Elena on a small tour of the Adelaire empire. Since Claire was safe within Aurora, they spent 2 weeks flying around and looking at the various sceneries of the empire.

From its expansive mountain ranges to the beautiful forests it contained, they saw it all. They also took a brief trip to the academy and spoke with Malcolm for a bit before visiting the seas.

Overall, they had a nice relaxing vacation before heading back to Aurora to meet with Claire.

Claire had been living a comfortable life for the past 2 weeks, and she had been fitting in quite well among the denizens of the city.

Claire had always been a very sociable person, and most of the jobs she worked dealt with customer service. Even when she was working corporate jobs, she always handled interpersonal relations.

She would take weekly trips down to the shopping district and interacted with the locals, forming some connections and making friends.

Even some of the nobles on the hill had come to greet her after seeing that she was living in the house belonging to Damien, who was widely known as the winner of the previous Nexus Event.

There were originally some hiccups due to her lack of strength, but once it was learned that she was Damien's mother, she didn't encounter many problems. Some even decided to curry favor with her.

Though she didn't care much for their attempts, she was glad to learn more about Damien's feats within this world. She was told dazzling stories about his domineering performance and how he had won a legendary medicine called Elixir.

It was then that she finally understood the amount of effort he had put into healing her. She almost teared up on the spot but made sure to hold herself back. With the way everyone adored her son, she couldn't show her weakness. The only thing she showed was the pure unadulterated pride that she felt.

And so, Claire had been living nicely for two weeks before she heard a sudden knock on her door. Opening it, she was greeted by a man in full plated armor with a stern expression on his face.

"Miss, you have been invited to the palace as a guest. Please follow me."

Claire was frozen in place for a bit, processing the man's words, but when they clicked, her surprise ended up vanishing entirely.

'That's right! Little Rose is a princess in this world.'

With the emperor being her future in-law, Claire felt it was her obligation to meet him. It wouldn't be a talk between an emperor and his subject, but rather one between fellow parents.

Claire went back into the house and got dressed for the occasion, wearing a beautiful black dress that exuded formality, but not to the point that it was rigid. She then followed the guard to the palace.

Entering the massive entrance hall, Claire couldn't help but be fascinated. Even the castles on earth held no comparison to this one. It was another dimension.

As she marveled at the sight, she followed the guard to the massive set of double doors that stood at the end of the hall.

'I wonder what kind of demeanor a real-life emperor would have?'

Chapter 110 - Brief Return [4]

When Claire entered the throne room, she was further introduced to the extravagance of a true ruler of men. From the ornate decorations to the glimmering thrones, all of it seemed like something fantastical.

Truthfully, Claire had been slightly infected by Damien's interests when he was growing up, so she knew a thing or two about those novels and animes, but seeing it in person was very different than it's animated counterparts.

'I wonder how he felt when he first came here.' She smiled at the thought.

Walking through the hall, her gaze landed on the large pink haired man on the throne. Although his eyes were serious, they contained a hint of strangeness she couldn't quite pinpoint.

James had been able to sense her as she entered the castle, so he knew her measly strength. He had made sure to conceal his entire aura so as to not create any problems.

“Nice to meet you. My name is James Adelaire, Rose’s father.” His introduction was unbecoming of an emperor, but he still went forward with it without qualms.

He was approaching Claire as an equal, since in a sense of the word, they were. And Claire responded in kind. She felt slightly suffocated by his presence, even if he wasn’t exuding aura, but she powered through.

“Yes, I’ve heard so much about you. My name is Claire Watson. I’m sorry if my son has caused you any trouble.”

“None at all,” James smiled as he said, “in fact, the boy has brought my daughter a joy she has been missing since her mother’s passing. I can only say that you fostered a great child.”

Claire smiled at the compliment, but felt a little conflicted. After all, had she even done anything to raise him? Damien wasn’t the only one who felt regretful about the way their family was in the past.

James stood up from his throne and invited Claire into a separate dining hall where they both took their seats. Since the formalities were already out of the way, they went straight to conversation.

Being parents must bring some sort of change to people’s mentalities, since these two spent the majority of their time solely talking about their kids. Claire also spoke about earth a bit while James introduced her to more of Apreiron.

Only half an hour had passed before Damien’s group arrived at the castle. They were a bit confused when they were led by the servants to the dining hall, only to see a puzzling sight.

James was roaring with laughter while Claire was doing her best to stop her giggles, albeit unsuccessfully.

“That’s right, he would always go into our yard and start yelling these crazy phrases even before we had mana on earth. You wouldn’t believe the kinds of things the neighbors were saying!”

“Hahaha, this doesn’t compare at all to Rose, though. The way she used to run around the palace and cause mischief would always bring me loads of complaints!”

Damien and Rose could only stand there with their jaws agape while Elena tried her best to not laugh audibly.

The scene of the emperor laughing so happily was a surprise in itself, but when the two realized the topic of conversation, they immediately rushed into the room.

“Mom!”

“Dad!”

They yelled in unison, causing the two to look over.

“Oh Damien, you’ve arrived? We were just talking about the past a bit.”

“The past, my ass! Did you have to go revealing my black history to others?!”

On the other side, Rose was having a similar conversation with her father. Yet, both parents simply smiled at their children’s antics.

It took many minutes for the scene to become less chaotic before Damien’s group also sat around the table.

Food was quickly brought in and everyone ate and laughed happily. Even Elena, who wasn’t a part of the family, was included wholeheartedly.

The group enjoyed their time like this until night fell and everyone retired to their respective rooms. Since they would be leaving soon, they opted to stay within the castle instead of returning to Damien’s, or rather Claire’s, house.

Within their room, Damien and Rose laid in bed peacefully. Neither of them said a word, but it was clear that they were both awake.

“I’ve haven’t seen my dad laugh so happily in a long time.” Rose said, breaking the silence.

“Mhm, it’s the same with my mom. It seemed like a large weight had been lifted from her shoulders.”

“It was a good idea to bring auntie here. I feel like our parents will be much happier in each other’s company.”

Rose had another thought when she said this, but she didn't voice it. Truthfully, her father had never been the same with his harem ever since his mother's death. There were only a few left that he loved sincerely, but even they were pushed away.

Now, she didn't expect her dad and Damien's mother to get together, or for Damien's mother to fill the void in her father's heart, but she figured that a good friendship would help him regain his smile like what she saw today.

Damien and Rose spoke for a bit more before they headed to sleep. It became something of a routine to get proper rest every night even if they didn't need it, since they had been living a mundane life for the past few months.

And their mundane life continued for another week before it was time to leave Apeiron. Damien was happy to live peacefully for a bit, but his entire being craved excitement. He couldn't withhold that urge for much longer.

And so, the second he received word that Vormec had finished Elena's blade, he got prepared to leave.

"Boy, here's the sword for ya lady friend. Make sure she doesn't scratch it up too much, since I doubt it'll work out the same as the one I gave ya."

He was naturally referring to the evolving feature of Damien's sword. As it turns out, Vormec wasn't the one who added that feature, so he had no confidence in creating another blade that could replicate Damien's.

But, Elena was extremely satisfied with the sword she received. Similar to the one she picked from the front of the shop, the blade was almost translucent, looking like it was made from glass.

It's length was just short of a meter, and it was single edged like a katana. It's hilt was an intricately designed material that looked like wood, but had hardness far surpassing it. And it's guard was patterned like a flowing river.

The sword weighed next to nothing, which Vormec explained was a quality of the material. It was a perfect supplement for Elena's speed based fighting style.

And after that was finished, it was finally time to leave. Their first destination would be a brief return to earth, and then they would follow the old men to the Cloud Plane.

As for that matter, it had been mostly settled after Damien's talk with Rose on that fateful day after Niflheim's destruction. She knew his worries, but didn't want to separate for him, so she came up with a solution.

They would all go to the Cloud Plane together, but they'd have their own separate adventures. Rose would take Elena while Damien and Zara would go together.

As for Elena's part, it was her own decision to follow them. Just like Rose, she had also guessed that Damien would be leaving soon. Even Claire had been able to reach this conclusion with her limited knowledge.

And so, in the two weeks the group had been traveling Apeiron, Elena made it her personal goal to convince the two to allow her to accompany them.

It almost took the whole two weeks to do so. Unlike Damien and Rose, Elena didn't have experience living in a place where powerful beings were prevalent. She was essentially a frog at the bottom of the well.

The only way she would be allowed to accompany them is if either Damien or Rose was by her side at all times. And for this situation, it would be Rose.

Currently, Damien and the rest stood in front of Claire, who could barely withhold the tears in her eyes.

"Damien, I know I don't have any right to say this since I left you alone for so long, but please be careful out there."

Damien smiled. "Of course, mom. Do you think I have the nerve to die? If I don't come back, wouldn't you drag my soul from the afterlife just to beat me up?"

Claire chuckled a little at his words. "Yes, that's exactly right. And I'll make sure to become strong while you're gone, so it'll be the fiercest beating you ever received."

There was a certain glint in her eyes as she spoke that almost made Damien shudder in fear. Still, her intent was well received.

Damien strongly hugged his mother, inwardly grateful that he could be berated by her in such a manner, before opening a portal back to earth.

It was finally time for his adventure to continue.