

Void 1081

Chapter 1081 Overseer [5]

RUMBLE!

The sound came from every direction.

It was easy to pick up even through the layers of rock it had to travel through to reach Damien in the first place. There were at least several thousand birds charging through the narrow tunnels, and from the chaos in the sound, it was clear they weren't opposed to making new paths of their own!

The question surfaced once again.

Were they to fight, or to run?

Having to continuously ponder escape was extremely annoying. The fact that it was impossible to be at least near the top of the food chain in this environment was not something Damien could accept!

It had been a very long time since he felt this way. Even when he was weak, he was always above his peers, and his interactions with those who could step all over him were not prominent.

Now, he was experiencing what it was like to be "normal."

He wasn't at the bottom of the pack, but there were too many restrictions he was forced to endure because of his lacking strength, and there were too many external factors that could lead him to inevitable death.

Damien's long-standing wish was to be unrestrained. At his core, this was his main reason for getting stronger.

This was the reason why.

This was the life he'd always worked to avoid, a life of mediocrity.

Even if it was temporary, the feeling of weakness that Damien abhorred to the very depths of his soul was something he would never forget.

It was the same feeling from back then.

Back when—

He gritted his teeth and threw away the thought.

None of this mattered, because without killing the Jade Heart Worm, they no longer had an escape route!

Damien jumped back and slammed his hand forward, using Vector Control to halt the creature's movements.

Ruyue went on offense while he focused on control, a battle strategy that would produce the best results in the current situation.

The only problem was getting the Fallen Heart Jade out of the poison lake that had formed in the worm's mouth.

Damien gritted his teeth. The rumbling underground was only getting louder. At this rate, the Messenger Birds would be upon them within the minute.

'There's no choice.' he realized, clicking his tongue.

"Ruyue, fall back and keep its mouth open. We're going to have to sacrifice a bit."

He rushed past her and raised his foot in the air, slamming it down on the bottom of the worm's mouth and pinning it to the ground.

Voom!

Mana spread in every direction and formed a sphere of spatial influence around the front of the worm's head. Damien used this bubble to take away its ability to control its mouth and reached his arms out to grab onto the massive chunk of jade, only half visible within the poison lake.

KIIIIIIK!

It screeched, sending air through its throat. The poison lake burst open, splashing on Damien's body.

"Khkh!" He hissed in pain as his skin began to melt, but he didn't lose his grip on the jade.

From a few meters away, Ruyue slashed her arm, using the pure mana of yin to attack.

'Contain.'

Her mana pushed through Damien's space bubble without resistance and attached to all parts of the worm's mouth.

Freezing air filled the space, withering the worm's muscles.

In the next moment, several tens of icicles spawned, impaling the worm's mouth to the walls and roof of the cave.

Damien's eyes hardened.

Now was the time!

He pushed Vector Control and essentially fused himself with the jade, making his grip impervious. His muscles bulged and veins surfaced on his skin as he drew out every ounce of his physical strength.

Poison splashed around, unfrozen by Ruyue's attempts, and wrapped around Damien's hands and arms, melting his skin and muscles and causing him to experience extreme pain.

But compared to some of the torture he'd experienced, this was nothing!

Haaaaah!

He let out a fierce war cry and tore the stone free, closing his mouth rapidly as the worm's green blood spurted onto his body.

Hel appeared in reality.

Bang!

A clean shot straight into the worm's throat. It was fired as Damien jumped back and made distance.

The hard part was over now.

Because the defensive power of these worms, no matter how big or strong they were, was always weak!

Such was the consequence of evolving while relying on the regeneration of Fallen Heart Jade.

Damien and Ruyue didn't need to exchange a single word to understand each other's intentions.

They worked in perfect tandem, restricting the worm's movements and swiftly killing it while it was defenseless.

Damien split its corpse without hesitation, and without paying any mind to the treasures that could be within, they ran!

They were only a few tens of meters away from their hole, and once they reached it, they jumped, flying up to the surface at their fastest speed!

SKREEEEEE!

BOOOOOOM!

The Messenger Birds broke through the tunnel, following the scent of their prey and slamming their way up the path in chase!

"This is good for us. They have no movement room while we can run whenever we need to. Prepare to kill as many as possible without attracting attention, but as soon as we hear anything from outside, we go."

Ruyue nodded in agreement. Rather than being attacked from both sides when they left, it was better to take care of the smaller threat!

With the enclosed space of the sinkhole, the situation became less like the endless pursuit they faced on the first night and more like their journey through Ghost King's Valley.

Damien used Freya and Hel in conjunction, wincing every time he pulled the trigger, but using as much mana as he could.

In this case, using Devour to recharge was too flashy. He also had to resort to elixirs, which meant he had to be conscious of how much those elixirs could fill him!

There were indeed thousands of Messenger Birds charging at them, but it wasn't nearly as bad as the swarm they faced before!

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

XIU! XIU! XIU! XIU!

Damien and Ruyue supercharged their mana, attacking relentlessly. Groups of tens and hundreds of birds fell to the bottom of the hole, their blood painting rivers in the underground tunnel.

It was taxing, but it wasn't nearly the worst it could've been.

A minute passed under siege.

But a minute was all it took.

The extremely loud nature of their race combined with their ungodly ability to know when their kin were dying made it impossible to commit this massacre quietly.

SKREEEEEEEE!

SKREEEEEEEE!

SKREEEEEEEE!

Their screeches echoed from over ten kilometers away, yet they were already ear-piercing.

Ruyue glanced at Damien, who swiftly nodded.

They didn't kill them all, but they'd lowered the number to just a few hundred. It was more than enough.

Ruyue took Damien's hand and his mana covered their bodies. In the next second, they vanished, reappearing in the rainforest a kilometer or so away.

Now came the hardest part.

A continuation of last night's chase, except this time, there were only two of them, and...

SKREEEEEEEEEEEE!

...the Messenger Birds were far, far more furious!

Chapter 1082 Overseer [6]

Meanwhile, a much more peaceful scene was taking place in the Perilous Sanctuary.

Once one became accustomed to its dangers, it wasn't too hard to maneuver the area, which was the reason why so many miners were able to set up camp in this area and excavate for ores and minerals.

The Impulse Wave always blew away their progress when the world was reshaped, but in the same event, the resources they mined would reappear in the same place like magic!

No matter how many people the Impulse Wave and the Severed World's ecosystem killed, more would always be willing to enter this kind of paradisiacal landscape.

Especially since the most dangerous beasts and environments lay further than this place!

Rose and Elena rode Zara all the way back to the Perilous Sanctuary, fighting off a few beasts on their way.

Their journey was mostly smooth, and upon arriving, they immediately went to work looking for the best materials to collect.

With Damien's idea, metals would likely be the best investment. There wasn't enough time nor information to make some kind of definitive difference in the Overseer's base strength, but enhancing it through external methods was more than possible.

The mines of the Perilous Sanctuary presented themselves as an orderly tunnel system that had been thoroughly planned out over several repetitions and perfected.

Rose and Elena weren't part of any group that took place in the creation of the mine, so entering was a bit difficult.

In the end, they had to pay a hefty sum to gain access, but it didn't mean anything to them.

After all, with Rose's abilities, they were sure to make a harvest far outstripping the money they spent!

With this mentality, they entered the mines and began exploring.

It was relatively peaceful.

There weren't any beasts in the area since it was maintained by several influences jointly, and the only real trouble was men who didn't know their place.

Teaching them where they belonged, though, was great fun for these women.

Nevertheless, their expedition proceeded smoothly. Using Rose's Eyes of Fate and Zara's shadow abilities, they were able to sift through trash and find treasure at a rate none could match.

The metals they focused their attention on were called Cold Yin Iron and Starfire Iron.

They were directly opposite each other, but both formed within the bounds of the mine system.

The Cold Yin Iron was influenced by Ghost King's Valley and was present mainly in areas near the cliffside.

Not only did it possess extreme yin properties, but it also had a natural flexibility unlike metal that would be perfect for crafting.

As for Starfire Iron, it was a hot metal that naturally absorbed energy from the sun to contain extreme yang.

Starfire Iron wasn't as special as Cold Yin Iron, but when used in tandem, the effects of both materials would be amplified, and if Rose was correct, the effect would be even greater than that.

Their goal was to bribe the Overseer, not to kiss the bird's feet. They weren't trying to make it the absolute best armor possible, so they finished the immediate task in roughly 8 hours.

However, they made the decision not to return to the third layer.

Because deeper in the mine, there were even greater treasures!

They moved secretly and stole as many precious resources as they could find, feeling not a shred of remorse for those they were robbing.

If anything, it was their fault for underestimating the girls.

They finally exited the mines around halfway through the night.

And immediately, their ears picked up the cacophony taking place far, far away:

"Those birds are insane," Elena said, clicking her tongue.

"Mm. It's annoying that we can't just kill them," Rose replied in agreement.

"Can't we?"

Zara's mental transmission entered their heads, making them turn to her with inquisitive gazes.

"The birds can't leave the 3rd layer, right? Why can't we just stay in the 2nd layer and kill them with ranged attacks?"

Rose and Elena's eyes widened.

Was there such a method?

They immediately had to try it.

If they failed, then the others in the Perilous Sanctuary would just have to help them deal with the birds. Since they didn't know the race's habits, they were sure to accidentally get involved!

With no risks to worry about, the girls rushed to the border of the third layer.

There were Messenger Birds there.

They'd followed the scent of Rose's group and waited for their return, but even though the trio was standing right in front of them, they didn't move forward!

SKREEEEEEEE!

SKREEEEEEEEEEEE!!!

Enraged shrieks filled the air. The birds flapped their wings angrily, as if telling the girls to stop being cowards and fight them on their side of the boundary!

But why would they do that?

Since when did Messenger Birds ever do anything fairly?

Annoying creatures like this didn't need to do anything but die!

SHIIING!

Yggdrasil's Branch swept through the air, sending an arc of light flying.

It cut through every Messenger Bird in its path, dropping their corpses to the ground.

SKREEEEEEEE!

Their compatriots screeched, but still refused to move!

Rose, Elena, and Zara grinned collectively.

Tonight, they were going to get payback on these damn birds!

Surprisingly, night passed quickly on both fronts.

Damien and Ruyue found that the massive number of Messenger Birds got cut down without them having to do anything, leaving them with around ten thousand pursuers, which they could handle using the Aegis Tree method.

Little did they know, the reason for this ease was Rose's group, who killed so many birds that they became a target for a majority of the race!

They were able to survive the night due to this along with their experience from the previous day, and once again, the Overseer's massive body surfaced above the third layer.

At this time, Rose, Elena, and Zara had already reunited with Damien and Ruyue.

They watched the Messenger Birds attack the Overseer again, this time with more fervor, unwilling to put down their grudge.

Yet, once again, they were thrown away and suppressed, unable to act as they pleased.

It was like the clicking of a rooster in the morning, a routine to start the day.

But what mattered now was what happened after.

The Overseer turned around after finishing its task and made its way back to its perch.

And on the ground below, a group of five chased his shadow.

They rushed all the way through the rainforest until they reached a massive jungle tree, its trunk several tens of meters thick and its height piercing the canopy of the forest and making itself known to the world.

At its peak, the Overseer rested, unbothered by the activities of the world.

Its current focus was saving its power and growing stronger in preparation for the ceremony less than a week away.

However...

"Yo!"

The Overseer's eyes opened barely, sending an indifferent glance at the ground, where a group of humans stood smiling at it.

"I know you're probably busy right now, but I have a proposition you're guaranteed to be interested in. How about hearing us out?"

Words one would expect from a scamming door-to-door salesman came out of the man among them's mouth.

The Overseer would've usually ignored such things, but today, it was feeling a bit odd.

Didn't this human...sound strangely convincing?

Chapter 1083 Overseer [7]

The Overseer was a massive creature whose gait couldn't be properly described when one saw him in the sky.

His shadow was massive enough, and with the way his body covered the sun itself, one could only get a picture of the size, not a true measure of it.

However, it wasn't a question that there was no bigger beast than him thus far in the Severed World. Even the Ghost King would look like an ant in front of him.

But perched in the great tree he chose as his home, even his size was dwarfed.

Honestly, it made him far more approachable, but who would dare?

The Overseer was notorious for his bad temper and utter disdain for the beings below him.

If anyone approached him and tried to hug his thigh, they would inevitably die.

But Damien had no such intention.

What he'd come to propose was a trade.

"Overseer, I'm aware that you aren't someone who can be bothered lightly, but I've come with a proposition that will be beneficial for both of us," Damien said, projecting his voice up the tree.

The Overseer glanced at him without a word.

It was rare to see humans in this place, but it wasn't impossible. He'd been approached by several humans before, many of them holding similar expressions and auras.

"Leave now or die."

His words were absolute. The only thing he'd learned about humans is that they were avaricious creatures who would do anything for personal gain.

He was already being nice giving them a warning!

"I'm afraid I can't do that," Damien replied, shaking his head.

"I don't know what the cause of your hostility is, but it has nothing to do with me, and I have nothing to do with it. Let's have a civil discussion without any needless violence, alright?"

"Civil conversation?"

The Overseer almost scoffed, his beak clacking humorously.

"Human, you are prey to the Messenger Birds and wish for my aid, no? I will not help you solve the problems you have caused for yourself. If you cannot accept this, then die by my claws instead."

Damien's eyes narrowed.

The Overseer's attitude was incredibly unwelcoming, but despite his words, he'd yet to attack.

Was he showing them mercy?

No, that couldn't be it. Why would he show mercy on a random group of humans?

If so, was this his regular demeanor?

The interaction was short, but Damien could inherently feel something from the bird, a sort of connection.

It wasn't something as grand as the connections he felt through the Void, but something more emotional.

They said the Overseer was arrogant and domineering, not willing to entertain anyone or anything that didn't amuse him.

In Damien's opinion, though, he was just annoyed.

And his reasoning was the same as everyone else's.

He was annoyed he had to stay in this place where all beings were weaker than him. He was annoyed that the space he ruled was dominated by weak pests who used cheap tricks to bully all others.

He originally had no obligation to suppress the Messenger Birds when dawn arose.

He made that decision because of his dislike for their methods.

As someone who'd been struggling with a similar feeling in the past few days, Damien immediately sympathized with the desire to push everything away and live in silence, surviving with only the goal of becoming stronger and achieving one's everything left unaccomplished.

Damien's sympathy aside, this emotional state was perfect for his plan.

"I'm here to talk to you about the Ascension Ceremony."

The Overseer's head shot up at the mention of those two sacred words. His eyes widened in interest and wariness.

"How does a human know those words?" He asked cautiously.

"That's not important right now. Didn't I say I wanted to make a deal? If you can help us suppress the Messenger Birds and get rid of their hostility, we can provide you with something that'll provide you great help in the ceremony," Damien responded with a smile.

"You? What can you possibly provide me?"

Damien's smile widened into a grin.

With that, the Overseer was hooked.

"I'm not sure how much you know about the races outside this world, but we have many specialties that can't be found here, mainly in terms of crafting and creation."

Damien dug through his spatial storage and found a pristine platinum chestplate, an artifact he'd stolen from Holy Light Star, and threw it up the tree for the Overseer to observe.

It was impossible for races without humanoid forms to forge or concoct. Beasts and Spirits usually fell under this category, but in the true universe, both had the ability to assume humanoid form upon reaching a certain level, thus these restrictions were removed.

The Severed World, as a sub-universe, had no such mechanic.

Beasts would remain in their beast forms regardless of their level.

Therefore, where would they find a means to obtain crafted items?

The Overseer curiously sent his perception into the armor, feeling the metal and understanding the complex workings of mana within.

This treasure was Chaos-rank, so it was already powerful enough to draw extreme interest from a being who didn't know it was possible to form external defenses in this way.

A few memories flashed through the Overseer's mind.

In the past, there were several humans he'd killed who left behind strange rings that he couldn't maneuver, while others offered him mixtures of plants that they claimed would aid his cultivation.

Back then, killing them was enough to get what he wanted, but—

"Keep in mind, the item I am promising does not exist right now. After we have made an agreement, I will begin the crafting process. Please don't think that killing us will achieve anything."

—Damien beat him to it.

The Overseer furrowed his eyes and glanced down at the group.

He would've liked to pass up the offer like he'd always done, but that didn't seem realistic.

The group had come at a time when he couldn't refuse them, and their knowledge of that fact made them even more elusive in his eyes.

"I cannot remove their hostility for you, for they are hostile to me as well. Those insects serve under a king from the central region, my sworn enemy. As long as he lives, I can at most suppress his underlings."

The Overseer stated a fact to gauge the group's reactions.

Damien's brow raised slightly.

"Didn't the Messenger Birds serve the Cloud Emperor?"

"Rubbish!" The creature suddenly roared, enraged.

"That damn beast dared to stain the holy name of Sir Cloud Emperor with his lies! Even he is not a lackey, even he is not known by the Cloud Emperor! The false claim that they operate under is an absolute travesty to the face of all beings under the glorious Emperor's reign!"

"Eh?" Damien uttered.

"So...they're not envoys, they're just scammers?"

"Yes!"

Boom!

It was an explosion in their minds.

These beings they were being so cautious of, they were nothing but dirty cheats!

"How strong is their ruler?" Damien asked, his eyes cold.

"I do not know, however, he is only somewhat more powerful than me. Though I am not his opponent, my flying skills far surpass his!"

The Overseer began bragging, but Damien was no longer listening.

'The Overseer is strong, at least at the peak of 3rd class like the Ghost King. If he's faster and more flexible, but can't match up in power, there's a possibility the Messenger Birds' ruler has already entered 4th class.'

What the Overseer described seemed to be a racial advantage, while he lost in terms of true power.

If it was a 4th class being...

'It might not be possible now, but entry-level 4th class isn't daunting to someone who far surpassed it already. If we plan well, we should be able to do something about it.'

It was a done deal.

The matter of the Wind Spirit King, as the Overseer referred to the Messenger Birds' ruler, didn't have any standing in their agreement.

"If you can suppress the Messenger Birds for us until the ceremony begins, I promise I will have a personalized artifact ready for you in 3 days."

The Overseer stopped ranting and scoffed.

"3 days? Human, are you trying to pull the wool over my eyes?"

Damien shook his head with a smile.

"No. If you agree to these terms, we can declare a Mana Oath right away. This way, we can both be assured that the other side will deliver, right?"

The Overseer's eyes narrowed.

He looked over Damien and the group behind him.

They were just humans and a beast, but they held an aura that other humans didn't possess.

Inherently, the Overseer believed their words.

Closing his eyes for a second as he firmed his will, the Overseer spoke.

"Then, I agree to this deal!"

Chapter 1084 Fight [1]

Talks proceeded smoothly from there.

Damien coordinated with the Overseer to understand what kind of artifact he wanted, putting in a little more effort to form a positive relationship with the bird that'd come in handy later.

And while this transaction took place, somewhere at the boundary between the Perilous Sanctuary and the third layer...

"Hot damn! We finally made it!"

The voice of a large bald man resounded through the forest.

"Calm down, Marcus! We're still too far from the goal to be celebrating!"

Another man calmed his excitement soon after.

This group was none other than Virgil's party that Damien met in Ghost King's Valley.

They had much more trouble escaping than Damien and his group, and faced the brunt of the Ghost King's hatred, but they were somehow able to survive and make their way up the cliffside.

After spending a few days in the Perilous Sanctuary, they were ready to continue on.

"Virgil, are you sure about this? We don't know anything about this place. Why would we..."

"Haha, it's about being a good person, Diana! Besides, don't you remember what we were promised?"

"That's true..."

The mage named Diana glanced to the side.

There, a woman who wasn't originally part of their party stood without a word, apathetically staring into the third layer.

They found this woman being attacked by a beast while exploring the second layer, and because Virgil thought himself a hero, they ended up saving her.

Unexpectedly, she was someone from some rich influence, because she rewarded their help with an amount of resources they never could've imagined.

Afterward, the woman recruited them for a quest.

She said she wanted to go to the central region where Skyrend Mountain was located.

And if their group was able to take her there, she'd give them ten times the reward for saving her!

With that amount of resources, not just them, but everyone they knew would be set for a very long time.

They'd be able to raise their families into practitioners with longer lifespans so they didn't have to part, and they'd be able to gain high status in their sects for the contributions they could bring.

With such a tempting offer, how could they refuse?

Only, Virgil's reasoning seemed astray.

The way he looked at this woman was not like a contractor addressing their client, but a servant addressing their lord!

He was utterly infatuated from the first glance!

'What does she have that I don't?'

Diana had this thought, but she couldn't really dispute that she didn't compare to this woman.

She had unassuming black hair and eyes, and a cute appearance, but more than anything, her aura that melded in with nature was extremely alluring for some reason.

'And those honkers!'

...her chest was quite voluptuous as well, but that was beside the point.

Diana was definitely nonplussed by this woman's presence, but she couldn't win over the temptation of rewards.

"By the way, we never got your name," Marcus said, turning to the woman.

Unlike Virgil, he didn't seem subservient to her, but he was far more respectful than usual.

The woman glanced at him for a second before turning away.

"You may call me Sia."

"Hehe, what a pretty name..."

The woman named Sia ignored Virgil's quiet yet extremely loud remark and turned to the rest of the group.

"We should move now. We must arrive in the central region in three days at most."

They nodded in agreement and entered the third layer, moving similarly to Damien and the rest when they first entered the area.

But Diana couldn't get her mind off that woman named Sia.

She could've sworn she saw it.

Whenever that woman looked at them, there was an almost indiscernible glint in her eyes, not from emotion, but from something else entirely.

Whatever that thing was, it didn't make her feel good at all!

Sia continued on as if she was unaware of the woman's feelings.

Truly, she didn't care at all.

This group only served one purpose, and that was to shuttle her to where she wanted to go.

Because in this rainforest, there was currently someone she was very much looking forward to seeing!

In another part of the third layer...

Damien and his group were currently taking rest.

Now that they had assurance they wouldn't be attacked through the night, they took time for themselves and explored the third layer to the fullest, not worrying about battle or threats.

Other than the Messenger Birds, there weren't many immediately hostile beasts in the third layer.

It was an ecosystem formed by collective hatred for their tormentors.

This time might've seemed wasted to the observing eye, but it was more important than anything they'd done so far to Damien.

All he was doing was sitting still.

He was at the base of the great tree on which the Overseer rested, seated in meditative posture with his eyes closed.

Their deal was established several hours ago and Damien already sent the materials to the Sanctuary along with a rough blueprint of what he wanted.

He trusted Elvira to get it done when he needed it and paid it no more mind.

The reason he came to the Severed World was mainly for the mission Iris gave him, but his personal goal was something else.

He wanted to understand the laws of this place so he could improve himself.

His Law Controller trait was currently sealed, but its effects on his connection with nature hadn't faded.

Now that he had the time to calmly perceive the environment, how could he waste it?

His perception was no longer tethered to his body at this point.

The Void acted as a medium, connecting him to the world at a fundamental level and giving him the ability to spread his senses through the world's natural pathways.

He saw the Perilous Sanctuary, he saw Ghost King's valley, he saw Rose and the rest exploring the third layer, and he saw Virgil's group making their entrance.

He noticed the odd woman traveling with them but didn't pay too much attention to her.

Instead, Damien's vision was filled with the sight of a heaven-piercing mountain.

It was an incredibly steep formation, almost comparable to a cliff if one was willing to exaggerate.

It made sense why flying up the side was such a difficult task. Vertical flight was far more taxing than ascending gradually, and when this effect was combined with the area's natural suppression, reaching its peak felt nigh impossible.

But the central region was more than just Skyrend Mountain. It was beautiful and luscious, with great vibrant green trees everywhere one looked and a plethora of beasts far outstripping anything the third layer could produce.

Damien smiled. Somewhat understanding the ecosystem before charging in was an advantage he was very happy to possess.

And more than that, the longer his senses remained in the air, the more clearly he could feel the world itself.

It was suffocating, these laws so complete yet so unfinished. To someone who pursued them, it was one of the most painful feelings in existence.

Damien had the unquenchable urge to influence these laws and try to complete them, but he neither had the ability nor the fundamentals to accomplish such a daunting task.

'For now, I'm content with just comprehending their nature. If I do that and create a foundation for Law Controller, I have confidence I can bring more out of the trait than Hassan ever could.'

It was a bold ambition, but he wasn't afraid to hold it.

Nowadays, huge ambition was exactly what he needed.

He couldn't keep being a passerby anymore.

When the 2-year ceasefire ended, Damien was going to become the definition of purgatory to the Nox.

This was his conviction!

Chapter 1085 Fight [2]

What was the universal law?

Damien had been chasing it for so long, but had he ever truly dissected it?

It was common knowledge that universal law was the foundation of all things. It governed the way the universe functioned. Every little mechanism that the universe held was governed by this mystical law, from the greatest Cosmic Rebirths to the smallest life cycle of an ant.

Earth's science defined the function of the universe as the product of interactions between several forces, four in particular holding the most weight. With the introduction of mana, this science was skewed, but it wasn't entirely wrong.

After all, humanity managed to get themselves in space with these laws as a foundation. Earth's human race achieved great feats using technology alone, something that wasn't mentioned often enough.

What they'd done was observe a portion of universal law. They defined these concepts using equations and math, an approach lost with the esoteric nature of practice.

They were correct about one thing. Universal Law was indeed the result of interactions between countless forces, however, the process reached an ethereal level earthlings couldn't perceive before the World Awakening.

The universe was birthed from nothingness, bearing its own children in that moment who took the form of planets and stars.

There were many things determined at the moment of genesis.

The function of World Cores and the worlds surrounding them, the foundational laws Damien had slowly been accumulating, and a few other things.

But without the first instances of life, without the first instances of death, without the "first instances" of everything that had ever occurred, those laws didn't hold much power.

Universal Law was what kept the universe alive, and every time a new situation occurred, the law would evolve to accommodate it.

Uncountable eons passed since that time, and the law that governed the universe now was far more complete, almost airtight and impenetrable by the senses of those residing within it.

Because of this, universal law was regarded as the Heavens, an untouchable existence, by most.

Damien was an outlier.

The Void pushed him in a direction even he couldn't imagine and made him pursue it as if it were normal without him even realizing it.

He was already close to the universal law, holding an inherent familiarity with the concept, but that wasn't what he needed right now.

If he wanted to gain control over such gargantuan concepts and utilize them for his own purposes, he needed to dissect them and thoroughly digest their parts.

Inherent familiarity could only support this goal!

So, what was Universal Law?

'Universal Law is a manifestation of the interactions between all things. As long as it has happened, Universal Law has accommodated and governed it.'

Why did Universal Law exist?

'For the maintenance and protection of the universe. Without Universal Law, chaos will reign and Grand Heavens Boundary will meet its doom.'

Then, was Universal Law another term for the concept of Order?

'No. Order and Chaos both have a place in the grand scheme of things. Universal Law can be considered the force above these two concepts, maintaining the harmony between them.'

What would happen if the Universal Law shattered?

'...'

Damien had to ponder for a moment about this question. If it completely broke down, the answer was obviously destruction, but what if it shattered, with some pieces still in motion and others broken beyond repair?

'Isn't that somewhat similar to the situation of the sub-universe? An incomplete Universal Law leaves room for anomalies and restricts the beings within in various ways. Overall, the world becomes less complete.'

The Ghost King was a prime example. His range of action was limited, therefore, he felt more like a game boss than an enemy to Damien.

The Impulse Wave was the same.

The world had a complete destruction and rebirth cycle that included the living beings within. Such a mechanism would be considered a "glitch" or a "bug" in a complete universe.

If the Severed World had proper laws, the first Impulse Wave would've destroyed all things living and nonliving, and the world that appeared after rebirth would be a completely new entity possessing the same core.

So then, what laws did the Severed World have in place?

'I can't say for certain, but there is one thing I'm sure of. The foundational elements of this place mirror the true universe. This isn't something that can be accomplished naturally, unless...'

Damien's eyes shot open.

'...they were designed by a being that witnessed the formation of the universe.'

Flash!

A memory surfaced in Damien's mind, swallowing his perception.

The formation of a world; he'd seen it before.

Long ago, he'd been graced with a vision where he watched from start to finish in great detail as a stray World Core birthed its world.

Back then, he didn't have enough knowledge to gain much from the experience, but the current him was incomparable.

This memory finally found its place.

The creation of a world could be considered a microcosm of the Universal Law. It gave Damien a more digestible perspective to start from before he continued on to greater concepts.

And he realized it.

'All of these processes are not only supported by governing laws, but something greater as well.'

There was a trace of the Void in everything.

Even the very greatest mechanisms of the universe couldn't escape it.

'In the end, it leads to the Void again. The more I learn, the more I realize just what kind of force is residing in my body.'

Damien's eyes suddenly widened.

'Wait...'

The Universal Law was a measure of interactions between everything, while the Void, in Damien's own perception, was the mother of everything.

By this reasoning, couldn't Universal Law be considered a record of the Void's actions?

If so, why?

Was it birthed by the universe not for such simple reasons like maintenance, but to try to find traces of its origin?

The conclusion formed in Damien's mind was downright nonsensical. Even he, as the one who had the thought, absolutely could not believe it.

'Does the Universal Law...' he thought, his body trembling.

'...have sentience?'

"ARGH!"

A splitting pain enveloped Damien's head and forced him out of his enlightened state.

'Damn, this is...!'

It wasn't the first time he'd faced it, but it was the first time he was aware of it happening!

A strange force was trying to invade his mind and wipe the memories of his understanding.

'It's pushing me away from the Universal Law!'

Was this also a mechanism of the universe?

Damien couldn't accept it!

If something like this was happening, then he was definitely on the right path to finding out secrets he wasn't meant to know!

'But what kind of secret is worth knowing more than the ones that were never supposed to come out?!'

VOOM!

Mana raged around him in a flurry. Damien encompassed himself in a thick cocoon of mana and got to work.

Black threads of Void Mana spread over his body and into his spiritual world.

He'd been trying so hard to figure it out moments ago, but now, he faced a far, far greater challenge.

Now, rather than comprehending it, he had to directly fight the Universal Law!

Chapter 1086 Fight [3]

What did it mean to fight the Universal Law?

The strangeness of the concept had already been made so obvious. Regardless of its closeness, it still wasn't something that could be fully perceived.

When Damien entered his spiritual world and scanned it for any signs of foreign forces, he found nothing. He rushed to his memory stream and thoroughly checked it, but he still couldn't see anything.

Yet, he could feel the force. He could feel it trying to access his most recent memories and wipe them out of existence!

'Tch! How am I supposed to deal with this?'

He pushed Void Mana through the space and lined the sides of the starlit river-like stream of memories.

Against this invisible enemy, the only thing he could do was build an impenetrable defense!

Damien swiped his arms before him and summoned his mana, shaping it into a sphere made of connected hexagons that was then infused with Void Mana to become more ethereal.

It was a second, more contained form of Mind Prison.

The new structure flew into the memory stream and enveloped the portion representing the last several hours of comprehension, containing it closely.

Damien instantly felt a pang in his head as the memories became blurry, but luckily, this structure wasn't nearly as airtight as its main body, and he was able to maintain an understanding of his current goal.

'Cover it.'

The order he gave was received by the pitch-black mana wisps filling the air. They rushed around the miniature Mind Prison and wove themselves into a secondary layer of protection that was far more impenetrable than its predecessor.

'Is there anything else I can do?'

Whoosh!

Damien barely had time to wonder before he got his answer.

A strange wind blew past him and brushed against his defenses.

Instantly and unequivocally, a fourth of the barrier vanished.

'Completely disassembled?!'

Damien panicked and hurriedly recreated the defenses, but his mind was shaken.

He knew fighting this enemy would be nigh impossible, but the feeling was more palpable after that.

Whoosh!

Whoosh!

Whoosh!

Light winds whipped from all directions, swirling from high to low and gathering into a small tornado.

VOOM!

It drilled down, piercing the Void Mana defense and directly crushing towards the hidden memories without an ounce of resistance!

"Dammit!"

Was it over already?

Was this all he could do?!

'No!'

He'd tasted too many defeats in recent days. He wouldn't accept another one at a time like this!

"Come out! NOW!"

He roared with every bit of his being.

Time froze in the spiritual world.

The tornado was only a few centimeters from reaching its target.

Even in this frozen time, it continued moving at a snail's pace, unwilling to give up on its target.

However, Damien was done being passive.

He reached out and gripped his fist in the air, grabbing something incorporeal.

Rumble!

The borders of his spiritual world shook. Hairline cracks spread in all directions from his fist, rapidly overtaking every boundary that existed.

"Mere incomplete laws like these cannot contain you! I order you to obey my will!"

VOOOOOM!

Void Mana conflagrated from his body, rolling through the space like a tsunami. The tremors in space became louder and louder. The cracks expanded until they couldn't be contained anymore, and—!

CRASH!

The boundaries of Damien's spiritual world shattered into mirror fragments.

It was like an apocalypse.

Like a protective wall breaking and revealing those within to the desolation they'd been blissfully unaware of, a deep blackness, a true Void seeped through the cracks.

"Void Breathing!"

Damien slammed his arm downward, exerting his will on the Void above and dragging it down.

The descending Calamity was reigned in. The blackness twisted around itself like a swirling mass of shadows and formed a drill point similar to the Universal Law's wind.

It all happened in less than a fraction of a second, an amount of time indescribable in words.

In that time, Damien broke through the sub-universe's laws.

"GO!"

He didn't spare an instant.

The Void tornado crashed down and impaled into the Universal Law tornado.

Bzzt!

Sparks flew through the air. The force so elusive to Damien was forced out of the shadows in order to clash with one of the very few things that could match it.

Damien's sight took in the rainbow-like yet totally colorless appearance of the force. Every time it clashed with the Void, two reactions took place as one.

The Universal Law weakened, unable to stand the strength of its originator, but at the same time, it became more complete, as if it was taking something from the Void.

Damien's previous assertions about Universal Law being a record of the Void were partially proven with this.

But the Void's support wasn't enough to confirm his victory.

Perhaps the entity itself could wipe this enemy with a single thought, but the portion Damien could access could at most hold it back!

'I need to think of something else. If I can get one more push, I'll be able to avoid this calamity.'

It was a fine thought, but the Void was his greatest weapon.

In a situation like this, where would he find another path?

A being's eyelids twitched.

Its eyes were like two moons, slowly unveiling themselves to the world.

Everything shook with their movement. It was almost like everything would be eradicated the second they fully opened.

Fortunately, the being's eyelids stopped moving halfway through their arc.

Huu...

A slight breath from its mouth created tornadoes that could raze mountains into valleys.

It gazed out, half-lidded, into the scenery below.

Something had caught its interest, an almost impossible scenario.

'Hmm...'

Its thoughts swirled to life just barely for the first time in eons.

'Do not...interfere in this place.'

Whoosh!

Its thoughts traveled through the endless skies, and "something" received its words.

A presence within the realm wobbled slightly, as if considering something, and then darkened.

'Good. You cannot...prevent this.'

A second thought spread, and the being's thoughts stilled again.

Its massive eyelids dropped, and it inhaled, drawing back the hazardous entities created by its exhale.

Its job was done.

That was the turning point.

The situation in Damien's spiritual world met a sudden shift.

The wisps of Universal Law darkened and faded, weakening severely.

Damien's eyes widened in shock when he saw it, but he had no time to ponder the reason. He rapidly controlled the Void tornado and spread it to every corner of his mental space, eradicating any part of the Universal Law that remained.

And while he was at it...

'Let's be a little bold.'

A tiny portion, no more than the size of a fingernail, of Universal Law vanished from space, "devoured" by the Void.

Damien was certain that he was only able to triumph this time because someone or something helped him. He took mental note to search for his benefactor and focused on the actions he'd just taken.

Regardless of what saved him, he was currently protected. He could feel that the Universal Law's will had retreated and all that was left were nondescript pieces of energy without direction.

This entire scenario was a blessing in disguise.

Because with the remaining energy uncontrolled...

...Damien was going to receive great benefits.

He grinned to himself and got started, uttering the very phrase that carried him to this point.

'Devour'

Chapter 1087 Movement [1]

Three days passed while Damien sat in meditation, and the day of promise came.

The girls had returned to the great tree and the Overseer was waiting patiently as well, but Damien still hadn't woken up.

His deep slumber was not caused by the battle he faced, but by its aftermath!

Not only did he destroy a portion of his spiritual world to break the Void out of his shackles, he'd devoured a tiny piece of Universal Law that he had to work hard to digest.

Three days was a very long time, especially in this place where every day accounted for weeks in Grand Heavens Boundary.

Many things happened during this time.

Of course, Damien's group experienced peace, as they were reaching for nothing else. The girls were able to explore the Severed World's ecosystems without worry, learning from its roots and strengthening their foundations along the way.

The truly interesting events took place elsewhere.

On the first day Virgil and his group entered the third layer, they came across an injured beast that they ended up saving. It was just a small sparrow when they met it, and after healing it, they sent it on its way.

Never would they have expected that the mother of this sparrow was quite the powerful beast who currently held the ambition to earn a place in the central region during the Ascension Ceremony!

However, she was sure she didn't have much of a chance and enlisted their group to help.

They set off to the central region with her on the second day, prepared to defend her flight and aid her with their artifacts!

It was almost as if Virgil had the so-called "protagonist's luck." To survive a night in the third layer without killing a single Messenger Bird and even find a free ride to the most important event of his sub-universe; could there be any better explanation?

The woman named Sia, on the other hand, split from their group at this point, her destination unknown. She soon disappeared into the vibrant rainforest and erased herself from any perception that could have followed her.

With the coming of the third day, there were only two remaining until the Ascension Ceremony officially began.

And every being near Skyrend Mountain was preparing for its arrival.

Such a substantial time difference was jarring.

Damien and his group entered the Severed World roughly a week ago, but in Grand Heavens Boundary, it had been over three months already.

The internal cleansing operation began in full a long time ago, and along with traitors being constantly forced out and killed, an Infected Source World raid had already taken place.

Heaven's Army began in Soul World. The domain of spirits always had a strange atmosphere that was perfect for the existence of spirits, but almost haunting to all others. The Infected Source World in their sector was considered the weakest because the Nox had to endure this disadvantage.

Meanwhile, the allied forces had protection from the spirits that allowed them to act while bypassing it!

Infected Source Worlds were all different, but their base purpose was to act as farms. They bred Lesser Nox and were supervised by Higher Nox, but the strength of the enemies couldn't match the denizens; not without support from their main force outside the universe.

The Infected Source World fell in 2 months. Heaven's Army sent elites to completely destroy it without a single hope for reconstruction, and they did exactly that.

The world crumbled. The shattered pieces of rock that floated through the starry sky were incinerated to nothingness, and every Nox on its surface was eliminated.

The only trace of its existence left in the universe was the wriggling black Corrupted World Core that supported the world's actions.

To this day, even the universe's Demigods had been unable to find a way to get rid of it.

Even if it was corrupted, it still existed as part of the universe's core system and couldn't simply be destroyed. The only method to deal with it was to purify the filth and let it rebirth as a normal world.

It was safe to say no expert with such capabilities existed among their forces.

Space for several million kilometers around the Corrupted World Core was evacuated, and experts filed into the area to constantly monitor the structure.

If there were any signs of movement, these experts instantly moved to cut the roots.

This world wouldn't be allowed to cause any more trouble!

With the experience gained from the first raid, a second one began just half a month later.

The next target was Hephaestus.

The Soul World raid was a measure of caution meant to feel the strength of an average Infected Source World.

Having this information, which was interpolated by the greatest of Seers and scholars, the allied forces chose not to waste any time.

Hephaestus was the most important strategic point as it was where the headquarters of Heaven's Army was located.

When the universe came together as one, they created two strongholds from which the core of their forces acted.

These were Sky Castle Luxurion and the Heaven's Army main base.

The former handled logistics while the latter was the headquarters for all things related to combat.

Luxurion already had a nigh-impervious defense, as long as someone at the Saint Emperor's level didn't intervene at least. Therefore, Hephaestus took priority over the Divine Realm.

This raid was far more important than the last and it had to be guaranteed there would be no mistakes.

For the past half month, Heaven's Army had been sending scouting parties to the Infected Source World and fighting small skirmishes against the Nox stationed there, but they hadn't entered true combat yet.

However, the day wasn't too far away.

Grand Heavens Boundary was enveloped in war regardless of the ongoing ceasefire, and while this meant their forces would be depleted and exhausted, those who survived would be refined into diamonds before they had to carry the universe's very fate on their shoulders.

The only question was...how were the Nox using this time?

The answer was truly unknown.

The four Nox Emperors didn't have any sort of alliance with each other. They had their own goals, and as long as they didn't interfere with each other, they rarely maintained contact.

However, the Saint Emperor's actions this time forced them to come together.

He was always stronger than them, and in the depths of their hearts, they understood just how mysterious and terrifying this being who lived through uncountable eons was.

Any expression or sense of personality he showed was fake. There was no such thing as a personality that could survive hundreds of millions of years without shattering.

Every step he took was calculated. Every loss he took was taken on purpose.

Even the Saint King, Bai Yumo, who he called his own son, was—

This ceasefire was no different; a loss he knew he would take.

And the terms he suggested affected their entire race. The only ones safe from his Mana Oath were the three other Emperors, but how could they easily show their heads?

This display wasn't just for the denizens of Grand Heavens Boundary, but for his fellow Nox as well.

Four Nox Emperors gathered in one place and hadn't moved since the ceasefire began.

Their forces also remained still, awaiting orders.

Whether it be the most common entry-level 4th class who just gained sentience, or a Lord-level character like the Marionette Lord, none of them dared to act recklessly.

Because the establishment of the ceasefire meant only one thing to them:

The Saint Emperor was declaring himself their Sovereign.

Chapter 1088 Movement [2]

Back in the Severed World, the third day of Damien's intense meditation was coming to an end.

And finally, his eyes fluttered open.

He glanced around, noticing the number of people gathered around him, and smiled awkwardly.

"Well...hi?"

"Mhm, good morning," Elena replied.

"You must've had a great time the past few days, huh."

He scratched his head and stood up, stretching his body.

"It was okay. I gained a bit, so I guess it's a plus, right?"

"You could say that, but now isn't really the time, is it?" Ruyue chimed in.

"Hm? How long has it been?"

"3 days," Rose said, rolling her eyes.

"Ah, 3 days...oh wait, 3 days means..."

Damien's eyes went to the top of the great tree to see the Overseer was watching him with an annoyed look on his face.

"Umm..."

"No need to speak. I understand your delay, but I won't tolerate further delays."

The Overseer scoffed, but didn't have any actual negative feelings about it.

The group had been gathered here for over a day waiting for Damien to wake up, so their expressions were justified, but unlike the girls, who thought Damien was just being a training freak, the Overseer had a bit more knowledge.

'Something amazing happened to that human.'

He didn't know what it was, but for a second, he felt a fluctuation from Damien's body that made him want to kneel and submit himself to the human.

It was an instinctual response, which made it all the more surprising!

The Overseer gained an interest in Damien at that time, but for now, their business relationship took priority.

Damien glanced into his spatial storage, hoping Elvira was able to get the task done on time, and as expected, she didn't fail to deliver.

He swept his hand through the air and summoned a metallic pendant with a jade crystal in its center hung on a glossy black chain and presented it to the Overseer.

"As promised, your treasure," he said with a smile.

Swoosh!

The Overseer's body flashed down the tree and appeared before Damien, shrinking his body to face the man eye to eye.

"This is the treasure? This is not what we agreed upon," he frowned, scrutinizing the necklace.

"Don't worry about that," Damien responded instantly.

"Just put it on first and you'll understand."

The Overseer nodded and followed his words. They were under Mana Oath, so he couldn't be lying, right?

The necklace fit surprisingly well on the strangely shaped neck of the Overseer. It rested with the pendant at the top center of his chest, and as he gazed at it, the Overseer couldn't deny that it was appealing.

'It kind of looks like a dog collar when he puts it on...'

Damien chose not to voice that thought and instructed the creature to stream its mana into the pendant.

A mystical scene took place at that moment. The green jade shined and the metallic casing it resides in expanded, consuming the Overseer's body.

When the transformation ended, he was draped in a domineering set of battle armor, and the aura fluctuations he emitted had gone up several levels.

"Very good!" The Overseer croaked, flapping his wings.

"My movement is not limited, but I can feel power coursing through me! Human, your means are truly impressive!"

Damien smiled wryly. It wasn't even that great of an armor, just low Chaos rank, but in this place, it was treated like a heavenly treasure.

Though, it didn't matter as long as it worked, right?

"Since three days have passed, the Ascension Ceremony should be starting soon. When do we leave?" Damien asked.

"We've been waiting for you," Rose responded.

"Now that you're up, we should rush over. I have a feeling we'll be late if we don't hurry."

Damien nodded and glanced at the Overseer.

"Since we're already here, do you mind giving us a ride?"

The Overseer raised his brow, a strange motion from a bird, and considered it.

He definitely felt a bit offended at the request, but Damien was someone he wanted to befriend, so he put down his feelings and accepted.

His body returned to its original size, tearing apart some of the surrounding trees. Damien and the girl hopped on without hesitation, and in the next moment—

WHOOOSH!

A single powerful flap of his wings shot them into the sky with such velocity they almost fell off!

Damien used Vector Control to stabilize them and stared down into the canopy below.

The usual travel time to Skyrend Mountain was around a day, but with the traffic caused by the mass migration of aerial creatures to the mountain, it was inevitable there would be many clashes along the way.

The Overseer's flying altitude was around 8000 meters, not bad yet not good. It was a level that was inhabited by many beasts, as the lowest level of the central region wasn't far from the highest level of the third layer.

But the Overseer had status due to his position and beasts in this altitude didn't try to do anything to him.

It was those above that were concerning.

As they got closer and closer to their destination, the eyes on them grew more numerous.

'The Overseer has a lot of enemies...' Damien thought to himself, separately wondering if the central region also had an Overseer.

'Well, we're participating separately anyway, so it should be fine.'

Damien's curiosity was drawn by another topic after a short bout of pondering.

'I remember seeing those kids making their way over when I first spread my perception. I wonder where they went...?'

Damien closed his eyes and connected his awareness to the world again.

After entering the state for the first time and breaking the sub-universe's laws for a brief moment, he learned how to do so on command.

'Eh? They're here?'

He suddenly glanced just a bit below, around 10 kilometers in front of them.

The sparrow creature Virgil befriended and his group were flying there, quietly making their way forward.

'Interesting. I should remember that guy. His luck will probably get him places.' Damien noted.

'Besides that, didn't they have another companion?'

That strange woman who hadn't been a part of the group when they first met, Damien didn't pay her much mind but he still remembered her.

The strange part wasn't her existence, rather, it was the complete opposite!

'I can't sense her presence anywhere. What kind of concealment skill is this, to be able to literally hide from the world?'

Damien's interest was piqued by the skill.

He kept that woman in mind too, noting to find her and get to the bottom of her anomaly.

But it seemed...he wouldn't have to do that at all!

Bang!

A small explosion rang out on the ground below, and a projectile suddenly shot past Damien's group.

His eyes widened as his gaze followed it. It made a narrow arc and descended slowly, landing on the Overseer's back.

The creature didn't even notice her presence as it kept flying.

It was only Damien and the girls who were graced with this surprise.

'Hah, that's not just good concealment, that's fucking godly!'

That strange woman had appeared, and in such a grand fashion!

The remaining question was...

Who was she, and what was she doing here?

Chapter 1089 Ascension Ceremony [1]

The scene was utterly silent.

Damien and the girls lowered their stances in preparation for combat, staring at the woman who'd decided to join them on the Overseer's back.

The strength she showcased to arrive here and conceal her presence from the very being she was standing on already made them more than wary.

In a sense, it surpassed the restrictions set on outsiders exploring the realm.

Damien frowned.

He had no interest in starting a conversation with this stranger, nor did he want to recklessly engage. Yet, this person also seemed to have no intention of initiating.

She panned her gaze over their group expressionlessly, cracking a slight smile when her eyes landed on Damien.

"Hello."

She offered a single greeting and a nod, raising her hands in the air to proclaim her innocence.

She frowned slightly upon gaining no reaction from the group and continued.

"I did not come here to fight. I want to join your group."

"Hm?"

Damien let out an unintentional sound of confusion.

Of all things, this definitely wasn't what he expected.

"You want to...join us?" He echoed, making sure he heard her properly.

"Yes, this is my wish," the woman responded confidently.

"I refuse."

Damien's answer came without hesitation.

In what world would he be stupid enough to accept some random stranger into their party?

Besides, they were already so close to the goal. Was there a point in having a new travel companion at this time?

The woman raised her brow, clearly surprised by Damien's rapid refusal.

"Hmm, this won't do..."

Damien's eyes widened.

"...you swallowed the Universal Law, didn't you?"

Her lips were brushing against his ear before he realized what was happening.

"Tsk!"

He clicked his tongue and stepped back, narrowing his eyes and glaring at her.

Her movement ability was one thing, but how did she know about his interaction with the Universal Law?

He hadn't even told the girls yet since an in-depth explanation would take quite some time. There shouldn't have been anyone except him and the mysterious being who aided him who knew that the Universal Law invaded this sub-universe.

'Unless...she's that person?'

'Impossible.'

Damien shook the thought off without hesitation. She had special characteristics in her aura and existence, but she was not the presence from that time.

Damien's killing intent was nearly palpable.

A stranger who was able to learn such things and evade his perception with such efficiency...was an enemy to be killed!

The woman's expression turned wry.

"Did I not say I came here peacefully? I am not just asking you to let me join your party. I will provide sufficient compensation to ensure you don't regret your decision."

"Compensation?"

"Mm. I cannot tell you its specific nature at the moment, however..."

Her words trailed off as she traced her finger through the air.

A formless fluctuation presented itself, hardening Damien's expression instantly.

'She's dangerous.'

Whatever the force she used was, it bore similarities to Universal Law that would be impossible to achieve without seeing it for oneself.

If this woman followed the same path as him, it truly wouldn't be a bad idea to have her join the party, but...

He turned to the girls for their opinion.

"What? You're considering it?" Elena asked first in bafflement.

"She offered something I pretty much can't refuse. The problem is that only an idiot would trust her."

"What is the offer?" Ruyue asked next.

"This..." Damien hesitated for a second, trying to find a way to concisely explain.

But then he realized: he had no need to do that at all.

"...she offered me comprehension of the Universal Law."

The concept of the universe's ruling power was well known, and the girls' changing expressions made it obvious that they understood the implications of those words.

"Is it possible for her to have something like that?" Rose questioned, glancing at the woman.

"It is. She personally..."

Damien's brow twitched slightly.

'Ah, so that's how it is.'

"What happened?"

The trio questioned his sudden halt, making him scratch his head.

"I've more or less figured out the situation. Let's trust her for now. If anything happens, we can handle ourselves, no?"

They nodded at his words, albeit in confusion.

There was something about this matter that Damien wasn't revealing, but they didn't ask.

After all, if he didn't want to say anything, it wasn't something for them to know!

Damien had become far more open after their relationships were solidified, and even secrets about the Void had been shared with this point.

Nowadays, there was no reason to doubt his sincerity.

Their conversation took place over sound transmission, hidden from outside perception, but the woman was already smiling like she knew the outcome.

Damien turned to her, a frown still painted on his face, and outstretched his hand.

"Then, we will work together for now. I hope you can pull your weight," he said sternly.

The woman, Sia, nodded and shook his hand.

"That is natural. Should we discuss the terms of our cooperation?"

Damien voiced his agreement.

From there, the process was mundane.

Sia wanted to participate in the Ascension Ceremony with them, but their goal was too high for them to bring outsiders along.

Luckily, Sis's goals differed from there.

She mentioned two landmarks, the Blessing Shrine and the Lunar River, which she wished for them to accompany her to.

After this was accomplished, she promised to separate from their group and not bother them.

The more they conversed, the more it seemed like Sia just switched from the weaker Virgil Group to the stronger Damien Group to better accomplish her goals, which ended up building a modicum of trust between her and the group.

But Damien had other ideas.

'If this is how we're playing, then let's play for now.' He thought to himself with a smile.

This Sia's identity...was definitely more mysterious than she let on.

Nevertheless, a new member of their group was added at this sudden juncture, and it was unknown whether it was positive or negative.

The slopes of Skyrend Mountain became clearer and clearer in the misty skies. They were only a few hours away at this point.

The number of aerial beasts around them was monstrous.

The airspace was crowded with tens of thousands, maybe even hundreds of thousands of bodies, yet, they never clashed unintentionally, their hierarchy providing a clear order to their flight.

Damien expected more preliminary competition, but the journey was quite smooth.

He underestimated how important this ceremony was to the beasts of this realm.

Status was something he never cared about, but he was only allowed to possess such a mentality because he had power.

To these beasts, the only way to gain power was status and vice versa.

For some, failing meant becoming prey, an inevitable death.

The Ascension Ceremony was known as a grand and sacred occasion, but it only felt that way for the ones at the top.

For those in the third layer, even if it was the Overseer, this event was a battle of survival, a struggle to earn the right to life.

There was absolutely no room to fool around here.

Hours passed in this solemn atmosphere, and the time finally came.

They'd arrived at their destination.

Chapter 1090 Ascension Ceremony [2]

It was like a scene out of a movie.

Their view was hindered by mist, but it cleared away once they got close.

The true surface of Skyrend Mountain.

In terms of appearance, it wasn't the most extravagant mountain Damien had seen.

It was steep and rocky, without much vitality on its surface. It was, for lack of better phrasing, a lanky mountain.

It didn't have much width, but its height was amazing. Roughly a thousand kilometers of its body were revealed under the cloud layer, and one could only imagine what was hidden above it.

What stood out about Skyrend Mountain wasn't its actual surface, but its existence.

It was a mountain forged by the Cloud Emperor as his perch, and it held such an aura that made the natives of this realm instinctually lower their heads.

To climb it was a sacred privilege regardless of one's personal circumstances.

There were many who knew this would be their day of death, but they had no intention to hide away because of this fact.

Any being with the capability of flight had arrived here, with the last groups making their way to the location now.

The sky was filled with them, but as this was a ceremony, they did not push their hierarchy into their positioning.

They formed a ring around Skyrend Mountain that spanned several kilometers, beasts of all orders hovering side by side in this formation without moving an inch out of their personal space.

When could one see a sight like this in their life?

In Grand Heavens Boundary, with such a widespread environment, many norms had been established, including the fact that beasts never showed their beast form after 4th class unless it was necessary.

They viewed it as a matter of pride, and with that pride, rituals and ceremonies deeply entrenched in their culture were slowly removed and replaced with more humanoid traditions.

The Severed World's isolated environment provided a glimpse into the time before conformity, when beasts existed as nothing more than beasts.

Perhaps their society was developed, but it was rich in a lovely atmosphere of history and tradition that couldn't be replicated in places where it wasn't cultivated naturally.

Damien found himself consumed by this environment.

He forgot everything, even the stranger who was now accompanying him, and got lost in the feeling.

The beating of wings around him, it sounded chaotic, but there was a rhythm to it.

A rhythm of excitement, anticipation, rivalry, and determination.

The winds carried a certain smell, as if the world itself was preparing for the arrival of something great.

Even the mana itself seemed to jump in joy, dancing around Damien's body like little spirits who'd found a new toy.

His blood boiled just being in the presence of this atmosphere.

He almost wanted to stand there forever and bask in the feeling.

But such a thing was stupid.

Why merely feel this atmosphere from the outside when he could experience it for himself?

"Overseer, it's time for us to part ways. I wish you luck in your climb," he said, placing his hand on the large bird's back.

"As to you," the Overseer responded.

"Regardless of the results, I hope we can maintain our friendship."

"That's natural," Damien smiled.

He looked at the girls and nodded.

"Zara, you ready?"

"I've been waiting for this since we got here. I'm more than just ready."

Damien's shadow expanded, and Zara's form appeared in reality.

She didn't waste time and jumped off the Overseer's back, expanding to her full size.

She was bigger than some of the strongest birds they saw, a fact that quickly drew attention to her.

But competition was competition. If they were going to do this, they had to do it right!

Damien, the girls, and Sia jumped into Zara's back and bid a final farewell to the Overseer, moving to a different part of the ring.

After all, they didn't want to come into conflict with him when the time came!

Hours passed.

More and more beasts arrived as night fell and the moon made its way through the sky.

When it changed places with the sun, the event would begin.

Damien took this time to observe the competition, but more importantly...

'Found you.'

There was a large eagle flying around a kilometer away. Its body was surrounded by smaller birds, a race very familiar to Damien's group.

'The Wind Spirit King.'

Damien memorized his general location for future use and sat down in meditation.

The night passed like that.

The silence was jarring. The utmost seriousness with which this ceremony was treated became obvious.

Those who tried to act arrogant or gain an advantage through tricks were killed before they could try to ruin the sanctity of the moment, and Damien rejoiced at the fact that their grudge hadn't affected them quite yet.

The cycle of night and day held great importance in the culture of these beasts.

And when the sun rose this time, something descended from the cloud layer.

It was a pure white Pegasus with the head of an eagle. It wore ornate armor of white and gold, and its arrogance was strong enough to be felt despite the distance between it and the crowd.

Its appearance caused a stir.

Huu...

It was an exhale that came from many directions as those participating in the ceremony steadied their breaths.

The Pegasus looked at them, indifference painting its eyes, and raised its head into the air.

Whoosh!

The wind that whipped in that moment could be heard for kilometers.

Wings furled and unfurled, positions were taken, final preparations were made.

This was the final second.

The final second before—

ROOOOOAAAAAAAAR!

The Pegasus roared with all its power, spreading mana through the heavens.

The horns of battle were sounded...

...and the troops began to move.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

So many wings slammed against the air at the same time that a sonic boom spread from one side of the ring to the other, absolutely obliterating the wind for tens of kilometers outside its radius.

The aerial beasts charged forward, moving towards Skyrend Mountain so they could climb to its peak!

"Zara, let's go!"

"Yes!"

Bang!

Zara shot forward with the crowd, ducking and weaving through the beasts around her with total precision and using her shadow abilities to keep her stably in the middle of it.

They arrived at the mountainside within seconds, and then...!

WHOOSH!

Zara flapped her wings and pushed her mana, steeply arcing into an almost totally vertical ascent!

"Woah!"

Damien and the rest stumbled for a moment before he spread Vector Control to keep them anchored to her back.

He was honestly expecting some kind of grand entrance, but he was totally wrong.

Beasts were simple creatures that didn't engage in sophistry. Once the time came, they did what they needed to do without a single word!

Countless aerial beasts shot up the side of the mountain from all directions, creating a blanket that hid its surface from the outside world.

Many observers watched from the ground, enamored by the ceremony they could only dream of, while those participating could focus on nothing else!

There were already battles starting. The weakest beasts started to drop out, and in their final attempts, they tried to bring everyone around them down as well!

BANG!

Zara swerved to the side, avoiding a bird that exploded itself upon realizing its failure.

In consequence, she bumped into the beast flying to her right, angering it and starting a fight!

They'd only been on the mountain for a few seconds, and its pressure hadn't even started affecting them yet, but the competition was already so fierce.

The Ascension Ceremony had truly begun.