

Void 1091

Chapter 1091 Ascension Ceremony [3]

The rushing wind, the sound of chaos, the bloody skirmishes...

It could only be described as exhilarating.

It was hard to imagine such a moment, enveloped in an atmosphere like war without truly having to fight a war.

This was the purpose of the Ascension Ceremony!

It was impossible to hear anything over the winds and the screeching and roaring of beasts. In all directions, one could see impressive displays of both combat and nonaggressive climbing.

It really depended on where one's abilities lay.

The stronger beasts that didn't have as much maneuverability climbed higher by tearing others down and using them as stepping stools, while their opposites ducked and weaved through the crowded mountainside with utter precision.

There was no such thing as pacing in an event like this. Even if one reached a high level, if they reached it slowly they wouldn't truly earn their status.

All those participating used everything they had from the start, not hesitating to show cards they'd been hiding for years to gain an advantage!

There were a few specific parts of the mountainside where interesting things were happening.

The strongest beasts separated themselves from the crowd quickly and started their own cold war at a higher altitude, but within the main pack, there were two groups that didn't quite fit in.

The first was atop the back of a large sparrow. They surrounded her with shields and attacked when needed as she swerved through the masses and charged up.

Meanwhile, the second group rode a winged wolf, a rare beast among the crowd, and didn't carry the same care for caution.

Zara also used dexterous means to ascend, but there was no way newcomers like them wouldn't be targeted.

Any time they got close to another beast, it would turn hostile and try to bring them down.

Of course, none of these small fry had that kind of capability!

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Freya and Hel showed their might again, emitting furious waves of spatial mana, combined with something much subtler and more deadly.

Damien focused on the largest beasts around them, not necessarily causing damage, but forcing their paths to diverge and sometimes even regress away from Zara.

The girls also did their roles.

Rose's illusions were extremely useful in a large area filled with enemies like this one. She was able to mimic the appearances of some surrounding beasts and clone them with illusions, drawing others into combat with their main bodies and establishing grudges between the enemies.

This was perhaps the most effective strategy. With everyone enveloped by the competitive atmosphere, their emotions were at an all-time high.

Any slight provocation was enough to send them over the edge!

Once they realized how effective Rose's illusions were, Elena and Ruyue stopped acting independently and supported her.

Arrows of ice and light spread through the opposition randomly, their routes so convoluted that none could find where they came from.

Especially since Damien and Rose worked together to shield Zara, creating a mirage that blurred her visage in the eyes of others!

He couldn't speak for anyone else, but Damien was having a ton of fun!

"Hahaha! Higher, higher, higher! This isn't the best you can do, is it?!" He roared like a madman, slinging his twin guns like a cowboy.

"You want to see my best? Then I'll happily show you!" Zara responded, her sharp teeth glistening in the sunlight as she grinned.

After all, her personality was heavily influenced by him.

Even if she was more refined now, there was no way she wasn't enjoying something like this!

She flew freely at a level she'd never been able to fly before. Her wings flapped gracefully yet with clear purpose and her bodily adjustments were made with utter precision.

The shadow that reflected her appearance on the mountainside stretched out and connected with those of her opponents. Whenever she found a perfect opportunity...

Whoosh!

Her body sunk into the cliffside and reappeared almost a hundred meters higher.

"Nice!"

Damien slammed his arm through the air, sending a wave of mana at the beast Zara had just overtaken.

'Severance!'

Shiiing!

It was like incorporeal sword light that flew through the air. The beast in question had no chance of survival and was directly bisected.

The greater part was...the attack didn't disperse!

It kept traveling down and cutting through any beast in its way until it reached the point they'd just teleported from, crippling several competitors.

Damien's eyes turned to the last person in their group, a stranger who'd just been recruited.

Her actions weren't as grand as the rest of theirs, but as promised, she was also doing her part.

Damien could feel it in the air; that strange mana she showed him.

It didn't have many offensive capabilities, but it put a layer of formless protection around Zara that made other beasts inherently avoid her.

It was surprising that she had room to move her wings with such freedom, and Damien could only credit this to Sia.

'It'd be nice if I could see how she attacks, but we can save that for another time.'

Their current height was at least 300 kilometers off the ground.

The mountain's total height was estimated to be around 1500 kilometers, while the milestones Sia wanted to reach were 1000 kilometers and 1200 kilometers high respectively.

If they made it to the 500-kilometer mark, they'd gain the right to enter the central region, while anything higher than that determined one's position in the central region itself.

The mountain's pressure had begun showing its fangs.

It pushed against the group's protective barriers and tried to drag them down, but this wasn't nearly enough to contain Zara.

She'd grown as someone aiming for the Divine.

Some small pressure from a mere mountain?

If she let it get to her, then she wasn't worthy of her ambitions!

Of course, Zara could only hold this thought because she wasn't a native of the area.

The Overseer's eyes were completely different as he inched closer to the 500-kilometer mark.

A domineering armor covered his entire body and a radiant green light seeped into his bones, constantly allowing him to surpass his limits.

It was difficult. Even at the 400-kilometer mark, he had to push himself to an extent he'd only exerted a few times. When external threats were added, it became more trying than ever!

The armor gave him the chance to do what he'd never done before; to push past the 500-kilometer mark, the 700-kilometer mark, and even higher.

He couldn't allow his own weakness to take away this heavenly blessed opportunity!

SWOOSH!

425 kilometers...450 kilometers...

He could see the first landmark, the first step to achieving his goal, right in front of him.

But nothing was ever that easy.

In a situation like this, even if one had the power to achieve something, they had to first ask if their enemies would let them!

A shadow covered the Overseer's vision.

A giant eagle glided directly above him, looking down with a smirk on its face.

"Wind Spirit King!" He yelled through a gritted beak.

"Haha!" The Wind Spirit King laughed.

"My little ones say you've been tormenting them in recent days. Since we're here, let them have their revenge!"

Whoosh!

The Wind Spirit King unfurled its wings to their greatest length.

Attached to its underbelly and hiding under its fur were thousands of Messenger Birds, their eyes glowing red in anger and mockery.

They'd been suppressed before, but with their ruler's protection, such a thing would happen no longer.

The second their eyes found the Overseer, they frenzied into attack!

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Never in a million years would anyone have expected Messenger Birds to show themselves here.

They were the weakest of the weak and could only rely on mob mentality and tricks to defeat their enemies. In this ceremony, it wasn't possible for such a race to achieve results!

But it was different for the Wind Spirit King. If he was able to ascend, the Messenger Birds would ascend with him and take their tyranny to even greater heights.

It was an unspoken fact that the Messenger Birds were scammers, and it remained unsaid for good reason.

Regardless of their cowardice or trickery, they still had the capability to maim and kill!

The Overseer's eyes widened as the sudden swarm enveloped him.

From all sides, Messenger Birds stabbed themselves into his body and used their beaks to penetrate his armor.

He swerved, trying to shake them off, but they were relentless. The skills that allowed them to reign over the creatures of the third layer were put on full display.

'Dammit!' The Overseer roared inwardly.

He spread his mana, throwing the birds off him and charging upward to meet the Wind Spirit King, but it was like they'd gained invincibility.

Somehow, they were completely unaffected by his attack and chased him, intent on not letting him go!

Xiu! Xiu! Xiu! Xiu!

Messenger Birds whizzed through the air and forced the Overseer into a defensive position.

Killing them would just waste his mana and make him a target for other beasts, but escaping from them was also impossible!

If there was a downside to being born in the Severed World, it was that the concept of laws was vague.

The laws weren't complete in the first place, and the underdeveloped society didn't have enough education in place for the denizens to come in contact with these fragmented laws.

Their power was mostly physical, and they only used mana to support this strength or put pressure on their enemies.

Damien and the rest already had to use all their power to fight against these physical attacks, so they couldn't be looked down on, but in a situation like this one, it was an absolute negative.

If it was just Messenger Birds, there wouldn't be a problem, but the Wind Spirit King was actively using the distractions they created to attack the Overseer and chip away at his defenses.

They weren't even that different in strength.

The Overseer could be considered something of a coward.

He could've made it to the central region years ago, but he refused to be under others again after experiencing kingship in the third layer. His real strength was at not weak among the beasts of the central region.

The Wind Spirit King had a territory of his own and experienced the bliss of power as well, but the environment of the central region allowed him growth impossible for his counterpart, which always put him a level above.

Still, the Overseer wasn't slacking in his training.

The duo began a splendorous battle as they climbed the slope. They flew around each other, using their talons and wings to slash at each other and even getting petty enough to bite each other and tear chunks of meat off with their beaks!

It was a brutal battle that didn't seem like it would have a winner any time soon, but if others intervened, the result would be obvious.

There was nobody willing to offend the Wind Spirit King for no reason, precisely because of how annoying the Messenger Birds were.

So in this situation where the Overseer was being harassed, did he even have a way out?

Unbeknownst to him, a pair of eyes was watching as the events unfolded.

Damien's eyes were narrow. He could clearly see the underhanded tactics being used by the Wind Spirit King, and he could feel the vein popping out of his forehead.

Those annoying little bitch birds were already bad enough, but they were being controlled by an even bigger scumbag?

He'd accumulated a great deal of grudges against those sky rats in the past days, and all of that hatred concentrated on the one who allowed them to act out, the big tree that shielded the monkeys.

He turned to Sia, his face twisted in an absolutely evil expression.

The grin on his face would immediately scare away any woman in the vicinity, and the cold and bloody killing intent in his eyes would do the same to men.

But the words that he voiced were utterly calm.

"Use your mana. Plant some of it in that fatass eagle and make sure it's pure enough to give off fluctuations. I don't want some bullshit only I can sense this time."

His words were not the tone of someone asking for a favor at all, but right now, Sia couldn't really care about it.

After all, his face clearly said, "If you don't do it, I'm going to push you off this cliff!"

She glanced at him and rolled her eyes, accepting her fate.

Since she joined this party, she had to pull her weight, right?

Otherwise, she couldn't expect them to fulfill their side of the deal.

These people clearly weren't as naive as Virgil's group.

And...

'As expected, my eyes don't work on him.'

Sia stepped forward and raised her arm into the air, gently flicking her finger.

An imperceptible wisp of mana shot through the air, rising and curving until it directly penetrated the Wind Spirit King's head!

"This is quite the gift you're giving them," Sia said.

"Whatever. It's worth it."

Damien's eyes turned crazier as he watched in anticipation.

Nothing happened to the Wind Spirit King when the mana entered his body, but a trace of its aura leaked into his mana fluctuations.

The surrounding beasts couldn't sense it, but...they weren't the ones it was meant for.

The Overseer and the Wind Spirit King continued their fight ignorantly.

The Overseer was massive, and the suppression he could exert was enough to floor countless beasts below him, but the Wind Spirit King was different.

His ability to read and move with the flow of the wind made him an enemy that couldn't be caught with effort alone.

The Overseer's talons swept through the air, slashing at nothing in an attempt to hit him.

Meanwhile, the Wind Spirit King himself made much more progress.

The Overseer's armor was already shattered and had reverted back to its necklace form. His body was covered in bloody wounds that were constantly emancipated before they were allowed to regenerate.

"You've become weak in your little nest!" The Wind Spirit King roared mockingly.

Slash!

"Khhh...!"

The Overseer gritted his beak, ignoring the pain of the new gash that appeared on his chest and counterattacking.

It was a losing battle from the start.

The Overseer already accepted this. The Wind Spirit King's tactics and speed were too much for him to win against.

But he'd never accept that he lost because he was weak!

"Dammit! I will kill you!" He roared.

His blood was leaking like a waterfall cascading down the mountainside.

It was unknown whether or not he'd be able to reach the Wind Spirit King again before he died.

But at least once...

At least once, he'd—!

WHOOOOOOSH!

A truly gargantuan shadow raced down the slope.

ROOOOOOOAAAAAAAAR!

The visceral and utterly terrifying roar of a beast was heard.

In that moment...

"What...?!"

The Overseer's shocked cry resounded.

...the Wind Spirit King had been devoured.

Chapter 1093 Ascension Ceremony [5]

Universal Law was incredibly appealing to all living beings.

They couldn't necessarily understand what it was with perception that didn't match Damien's or power like Sia, but they could inherently feel the benefits it represented.

Because Universal Law was the greatest form of law and held the essence of truth within, regardless of what one practiced, swallowing a piece of it would boost their comprehension severalfold.

It was basically a cheat item!

Then, what would happen if even the slightest trace of this golden finger was emitted into the world?

Naturally, those who could sense it would go crazy for it.

It all happened in a single second.

A massive shadow swooped down from above the cloud layer and traversed several hundred kilometers in a single second.

It had no care for the Ascension Ceremony, nor did it bother with the beings around it at all.

It swooped down and swallowed the trace of aura it sensed from its perch in the heavens, its massive body causing ripples in the very space of the Severed World with every movement!

This beast had similar characteristics to a griffin, but rather than the head of an eagle, it had the gaping maw of a crocodile.

The Overseer and every beast around him froze, watching in horror as the Wind Spirit King's blood showered down on them.

That griffin-like beast made an arc in the air, casting an indifferent gaze at the lowly beings climbing the mountain before rushing back up to its perch.

It was an event so jarring that the Ascension Ceremony almost stalled, but the beasts further away from the area made sure this didn't happen!

"Haha! Fuck you, stupid eagle!"

He felt a little strange saying it since he was American on earth, but Damien couldn't suppress his joy seeing such a scourge be dealt with quickly and easily.

"Good work!" He said to Sia, complementing her without reservation.

"Was it necessary to go to such lengths?" She asked, glancing into the cloud layer.

"Of course," Damien responded.

"It's not just a matter of killing that bitch in the grandest fashion possible. Though that's the main reason, do you think the beasts up there will let that creature happily enjoy its reward?"

Naturally, there couldn't be only a single beast who sensed the leaking aura. The griffin might've been the first to come down, but the reason it wasn't followed was because the rest were lying in wait for his return to fight for the treasure!

"It doesn't matter if he eats it or not. As long as they can tear it out of his stomach, they can still obtain the benefits," Sia murmured, the look in her eyes changing.

She didn't expect Damien to be a scheming person. It was surprising to see him make such an informed move.

She managed to ignore the fact that this strategy was only an afterthought, though.

The Wind Spirit King's death came fast and didn't give anyone time to rationalize it.

The Messenger Birds were still trying to attack, unaware that their support system had been devoured.

A light suddenly appeared in the eyes of many beasts.

Messenger Birds, they were a scourge among scourges. There wasn't a single beast in Skyrend Mountain that appreciated their presence, only those that wished them dead!

The Wind Spirit King protected them, but he wasn't enough to scare away all the beasts in the central region.

The truth, the reason why they could claim themselves envoys of the Cloud Emperor, was because the Wind Spirit King had a connection above the cloud layer protecting him.

Therefore, killing him became impossible, and the Messenger Birds gained amnesty as a byproduct.

The Wind Spirit King was now dead at the hands of an upper-level being, and the Messenger Birds...

Well, the Wind Spirit King's backer never cared about them in the first place!

A change occurred.

Much of the fighting at lower altitudes came to a halt. The beasts that were previously making an effort to drag their peers down with them threw away their petty desires and descended the mountain, accepting their final results.

Or rather, they conceded in order to accomplish something greater!

To relieve the grudges and stress of so many years, to slaughter Messenger Birds until the species went extinct!

Anyone who reached their limit left to participate in this great event.

And with that, the brutal environment of the Ascension Ceremony also calmed somewhat.

The Overseer managed to reach the 800-kilometer mark before his armor's regeneration could no longer support him.

He looked over to see a blur of black light, still in hot competition with its peers.

He couldn't say how, but he knew. He knew it was that group who led the Wind Spirit King to such a humiliating fate.

As he resigned to his current position and proudly accepted his place in the central region, he silently thanked his luck that he was accommodating when he first met them!

WHOOOSH!

Winds whipped up a storm as the crowd made its way further up the mountain.

The number of competitors had decreased massively, leaving only a few hundred still ascending, but the overall skill level of these competitors far exceeded the pack they'd begun with!

Zara still used the same tactics to climb higher and higher, but it soon became clear that she was being targeted by her peers.

On the right, a raven beast and a hawk beast used joint maneuvers to blitz them, while on the left, a fat bird whose flight ability looked questionable was easily following them and slamming into their barriers, knocking them off course and leaving them vulnerable to the slope's dangers!

"Khh...!"

Damien gritted his teeth and maintained the barrier with all his mana.

At this point, the atmospheric suppression had reached an insane level.

It bore down on their bodies, compacting their bones and forcing them to experience great pain.

But this level of harm couldn't sway them.

They had goals to achieve, and they wouldn't be satisfied until they achieved them!

"Zara, how are you holding up?" Damien yelled.

"I'm fine! My body can still take this much!" She responded.

Zara's beast body was much stronger than even Damien's current human body. She could tell that she wouldn't feel any problems until they surpassed the cloud layer.

The problem right now was external!

"Tsk!"

Zara clicked her tongue and swerved, dodging the fat bird's charge.

She did a strange loop in the air, circling the attackers on the left and leading the fat bird over.

She wanted to lure them into combat with each other, but they were clearly too in sync to fall for such tactics.

If so, the only thing to do was attack directly!

AWOOOOOO!

A fierce howl left her maw, and waves of dark and deadly mana spread into the atmosphere.

Bang!

Bang! Bang!

The attacking beasts were hit and pushed back, shadow mana seeping into their bodies.

Whoosh!

Zara flapped her wings and shot up without waiting for them to recover.

Beasts from the Severed World still weren't familiar with elemental mana in this manner, so the best strategy to use against them was exactly this!

The attack didn't cause much damage, but the mana invading their systems wasn't healthy at all.

Especially when it compounded!

Zara swerved and looped through the sky in formations that would put professional pilots to shame.

She barraged the enemy with small attacks that wouldn't alert them but slowly poisoned them, putting them under control.

And in the midst of this fierce chase—!

BOOM!

The atmosphere exploded, sending shockwaves in all directions.

Zara and her opponents had broken through the cloud layer!

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It really was a different world above the cloud layer.

Instead of continuing into a peak, Skyrend Mountain expanded outward again, almost as if forming a secondary base.

Above the cloud layer was essentially a second mountain stacked on top of the first, a little over 500 kilometers tall.

Rushing through the cloud layer meant two things.

Firstly, the suppressive force in the air calmed to the point of being mostly bearable, and the atmosphere of the Ascension Ceremony went through a total change.

Because there were several opportunities present on the slope of this more expansive part of Skyrend Mountain, the rapid sprint to the top halted here.

From here, what mattered was how high one could get, not how quickly one did it.

Because even if one took months to do it, making it to the peak was an absolute achievement!

The cloud layer was inhabited by the strongest beasts in the entire sub-universe, and none of them were willing to easily give up their spots at the top.

If one wanted to get past them, they'd either need to fight or pass a test, neither of which was an easy thing to do!

One had to be far more careful after reaching this point.

Any mistakes could lead to failure which meant certain death.

There were plenty of beasts who ascended past the cloud layer years ago yet were still challenging their way up its side.

In a sense, it could be said that the Ascension Ceremony never ended in this area.

Whoosh!

Zara pushed up the slopes and did donuts around her pursuers, evening her flight path to match the slope's angle.

Damien and the rest wanted to take a moment to admire the scenery, but they didn't have the time!

"The Blessing Shrine is not far from here. It's best for us to take the rest of the journey on the ground," Sia said, spreading her mana to reinforce Zara's barrier.

Damien nodded, patting Zara's back and transmitting the order.

His eyes never left the three beasts that still hadn't dropped their pursuit.

'From the looks of it, they also know about the Blessing Shrine. I'm not sure exactly what it is, but with a name like that, it has to be a benefit.'

"Good, let's land. Everyone, get ready for combat!"

Fighting from Zara's back was difficult because their mobility was limited, and their current abilities didn't allow them to fly freely at such an altitude.

Perhaps they'd be disadvantaged facing flying beasts on the ground, but it wouldn't be as much of a disadvantage as what they were currently facing.

After all, all of them had extreme control over their mana.

Boom!

Zara's paws heavily landed on the ground.

Damien and his group jumped off, and she didn't waste time to get back in the air.

She didn't mind carrying them, but objectively, they were a burden.

Without having to worry about their safety, she could maneuver as freely as she wished!

"Fat bird, you're dead!"

She gnashed her teeth and shot through the air like a comet on a straight path towards the fat bird.

It was the most annoying of the bunch and the one that she wanted to kill the most!

Her mana flared, blackness filling the blue sky.

The fat bird didn't know what hit it.

Zara turned into a beam of light and arrived behind it in an instant, slashing her claws without mercy.

Shing!

The sound was like a sword cutting the wind. Blood spurted out of the bird's back, and it screeched in pain, turning to her in anger.

Their battle began there, a battle of speed versus strength.

The fat bird's strength was what caused Zara the most trouble on the ascent here. If it wasn't for that bird, the other two wouldn't have been able to harm her.

It was their fault she couldn't get rid of it then, but she could trust that they couldn't interfere in this battle.

She was determined to torture this bird to death!

Meanwhile, Damien and the girls retrieved their weapons and occupied the other two, making sure they couldn't interrupt her battle.

The Darklight Raven was also a beast of extreme speed and had an ability similar to teleportation. If it was able to learn its element properly, it likely would've had power similar to Zara in her early years.

The Sword Hawk, on the other hand, had feathers as sharp as blades, which it used as projectiles to pierce its target.

The Darklight Raven took the forefront, using its speed to harass its enemies and agitate their emotions. It moved using the strangest patterns, making it almost impossible to hit.

The Sword Hawk was more astounding, though, as it was able to fire its feathers with such precision that they never interrupted the raven's path!

Damien and the girls took their battle formation.

Damien used Freya and Hel for crowd control and Rose also helped him from the back. Their role was similar to the raven, but their firepower far surpassed it.

Ruyue and Elena were in charge of attacking. Beams of light and icicles lined with dark evil energy filled the sky with explosions, limiting the area the beasts could occupy.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

'Nice. The mechanics of this realm make this a lot easier.' Damien thought to himself as he fulfilled his role.

'It feels strange not fighting at the front, but this has its own charms.'

He'd forgotten in the heat of the moment, but there were very strict restrictions on the altitude a beast could fly at in this sub-universe.

They had plenty of horizontal space now that they'd ascended to this part of the mountain, but they couldn't move up out of Damien's range!

His cover fire was extremely helpful for Ruyue and Elena.

They stood in the air, closing as much distance as possible without wasting mana.

'This power is not enough. I need to find the flexibility of yin.' Ruyue thought to herself.

Her attacks were far too rigid. The nature of ice did not bend for anyone, and death was inviolable. Power output couldn't help her in the current situation.

She didn't let up, but she divided her attention for one reason.

She was going to unlock her potential!

The main problem was that the beasts were more powerful than them.

They didn't reach the Ghost King's level, but they were definitely past the beginning of 3rd class.

Everyone in this group had killed people of this level when they were at the peak of 3rd class, but never did their opponent have the ability to outmaneuver them so swiftly.

It was a new challenge, but not an unwelcome one.

Because even in the Severed World, growth was possible.

As long as it remained within the bounds of 2nd class, one could absolutely grow their abilities.

This was part of the allure that drew so many experts here.

It was a place to strengthen one's foundation, to limit one's strength and gain a better understanding of their strength.

Perhaps this was a battle, but nobody in the group viewed it as life-threatening.

For them, this was just another opportunity to train, and a precursor to the reward they were soon to receive!

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Xiu! Xiu! Xiu!

Bullets streaked through the air, forming fierce speed lines that engraved themselves in the space, which was already shimmering strangely.

The incorporeal walls of a domain set themselves up several kilometers around the ongoing battle and interfered with the environment, shifting it to match the owner's preference.

A new form of attack overtook the airspace once it solidified. Swords almost invisible to the naked eye whizzed around, only becoming visible when they clashed against the razor-sharp feathers aimed at their allies.

Damien and Rose's control ability rapidly increased with the continuation of the battle. The Darklight Raven and Sword Hawk found themselves unable to use their usual tactics. Their only choice was direct combat.

Ruyue and Elena's frontline action became less cluttered as well. With the beasts corralled, they split off and focused on them individually.

Ruyue took the Sword Hawk, while Elena fought the raven. Their elements were opposed to the features of each beast, which made it much more convenient for them to act alone.

Rose's sword phantoms cut off the hawk's main attack method and freed Ruyue from the bombardment of feathers, which gave her the opportunity to get close to the bird and let her power loose!

The spear in her hands was like a heat-seeking missile. Regardless of how the hawk moved, she chased it and used impossible movements to strike its weak points.

CAWWW!

The hawk called out in humiliation.

It never believed a minuscule creature that used others to ascend to this height could hold such power!

Ruyue didn't focus on her enemy's actions.

The perfect defense was being provided to her in full, and she was on a full offensive. Her thoughts were directed inward as she tried to unlock the core of her power.

'Flexibility...flexibility...'

She tried to think back to her time as a 2nd class being. What could she relate to flexibility? How could she ground this concept so she could properly perceive it?

When she was weak, Ruyue was still under the control of the Xue Clan. She escaped to Tian Yang around this time, but the memories that defined that portion of her life had no sense of flexibility whatsoever.

Her father was as rigid as could be, and her siblings hardly paid her any mind. Most of the Xue Clan genuinely despised her existence, a product of rumors spread by the patriarch.

Xue Yebai's goal was to break Ruyue's spirit and turn her into a tool he could use however he pleased, and even now, his twisted ambition was affecting her.

It was likely that this very rigidity was the reason the Xue Clan could never improve past the limits of their Yin affinities.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Every swing of her spear was backed by more and more power as she subconsciously vented her emotions.

She was hardly paying attention to the battle, but she wasn't fighting alone. Her inconsistencies and openings could still be guarded while she was in this state, and her relationship with Rose assured her trust.

After all, aside from Damien, Rose was the closest person she had. Even now, she didn't doubt the woman understood what she was trying to do.

Therefore, she left herself in her care and acted recklessly.

Though, Ruyue's definition of reckless was perhaps a bit extreme.

Even fighting instinctually, her years of battle experience made her a machine. Her every movement was precise and filled with killing intent, and the weight of and mana in her spear was terrifying for anyone facing it!

The only reason the Sword Hawk could avoid heavy injuries was because its flying ability outstripped her maneuverability.

If it was just a little less cautious, it didn't doubt it'd find a bloody gash torn into its body!

Ruyue's head remained in the clouds as she searched for that single defining moment she needed to grasp the concept of flexibility.

From past to present, she couldn't see herself exhibiting such behavior.

Perhaps it was a result of her upbringing, but Ruyue was just as rigid as her father in terms of personality. If he wasn't a villainous man but a good one, one could even say they were alike.

She didn't show emotion to the outside world, she followed her path without allowing herself to err or stray from it, and she lived an overall stoic life...

'...unless I'm with him.'

A light sparked in her mind.

One truly couldn't underestimate the love Ruyue had for Damien.

To her, he was a light in the darkness. He was the one who pulled her out of her cocoon and showed her the beautiful world she'd been missing.

The only time she was ever able to break away from her inflexible ways was any time with him.

He was her answer, the anchor for flexibility she'd been looking for.

Back then, if it wasn't for his presence, would she have learned such an important lesson in that nameless forest? Would she have survived the Hidden Convention, or entered the 3000 Beast Mountain Range to grow as she did?

The answer was a flat no. If he never joined Celestial Star Palace, she would've never left the sect to experience things outside of Tian Yang's protection.

Instead of focusing on herself, and without restricting herself to only memories from her 2nd class days, Ruyue found what she was looking for.

A man who yearned to be free and unrestrained, and a man who was rigid in his values yet flexible in his outlook and actions, Damien reflected this aspect of Yin quite well.

The path of Ruyue's spear started to change. Her dexterity allowed her to perform hard and powerful strikes from impossible angles in a manner that mimicked flexibility, but it was, at the end of the day, forced to adhere to the limits of her body.

The addition of this new element changed these movements. They lost some of their power, but it was replaced by strikes like flowing water, never breaking their rhythm even once.

The Sword Hawk was instantly thrown into confusion. Just as it gained an understanding of Ruyue's patterns, she completely rid herself of them!

Her actions now carried an air of chaos. There was no visible rhythm, nor was she aiming for specific points of the hawk's body. From an outside perspective, Ruyue had devolved rather than improving!

However, how could that be true?

There was no order in her attacks? That was a wholly incorrect notion.

Her attacks absolutely followed the laws of order. The never-ending rhythm of her spear might've seemed random, but every bit of it carried clear intention!

Ruyue's eyes were closed at this point.

Her senses felt connected to nature, able to perceive the outside world perfectly without sight.

She stepped through the air in a strange pattern, small ripples spreading below her soles as if she were stepping on shallow water. Her spear was closer to a living entity than a weapon at this point. It was a fearsome snake with its fangs aimed at the Sword Hawk's throat!

Rose's eyes narrowed.

It was time to end this battle.

She raised her arm into the air and summoned a rain of sword phantoms that barraged the Sword Hawk. They forced themselves into the minute gaps between the hawk's feathers and immobilized its ability.

Bind.'

The remaining sword phantoms swirled together to form a thick heavenly chain, which didn't waste any time coiling around the bird's body and tightening until it could no longer move at all.

Ruyue's eyes shot open.

She lowered her body, holding her spear in position.

'Twin Serpents' Dance.'

Her body became a blur.

She moved with such speed that she split into two, a true and phantom version.

And strangely enough, their movements didn't match.

The two spears they held snaked through the air in mystifying patterns, crossing each other and twisting up and down in a way that made one question if their shafts were made of jelly.

In the Sword Hawk's eyes, Ruyue's form disappeared entirely. She was replaced by twin dragons, azure in color and emitting auras domineering like emperors.

They charged at it from both sides, leaving it no possible escape route even if it wasn't restricted, and—!

That was the last sight it saw.

Ruyue's visage flickered, and in the next instant, she was behind it.

Blood spurted into the air.

The Sword Hawk's head flew in an arc, landing on the ground below.

At that moment...

Chapter 1096 Ascension Ceremony [8]

BOOM!

A massive body slammed against the ground and crushed the Sword Hawk's head into bits.

However, the hawk's bones were thicker than one would expect. The Darklight Raven that was thrown onto it felt the bones in its back cracking upon impact, making it screech in pain.

Elena wasn't simply going to let it recover, though.

She was a streak of light, nothing more nothing less. Her body crashed to the ground like a nuke, Yggdrasil's Branch shining powerfully in her grasp.

Bang!

She stabbed the sword into the raven's exposed underbelly, allowing her mana to penetrate its muscles.

She didn't wait to see the effects of her attack before jumping off.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

A rain of bullets fell, centered around the wound Elena just made.

Space exploded and ruptured, tearing gashes in the raven's skin and eviscerating the existing injuries, causing blood to splatter over the grassy area.

Damien and Elena both rushed in, aiming for a killing blow.

Their battle had been going on alongside Ruyue and Rose's, so they obviously weren't far away from killing it.

In the first place, Elena's match-up against the Darklight Raven was far more in her favor than the other side. Light and darkness were diametrically opposed, and while the beast was stronger in terms of pure strength, Elena's light surpassed what her opponent could wield a thousand times.

Yet another advantage of being from the outside world presented itself, and seeing how Ruyue moved, Damien didn't want to sit still either.

His interference with the Severed World's laws allowed him to understand a loophole, or rather, a chink in its defenses that he'd created in that moment.

Perhaps he couldn't outsmart the power cap, but he could definitely use this opening to benefit himself.

Ruyue was the one who gave him the idea. He was thinking so much about improving his current abilities that he forgot about the original goal of strengthening his foundation.

To understand vectors properly was to massively increase his firepower and flexibility in battle.

Therefore, that's exactly what he did.

Since Elena was able to manage pretty well on her own, he could divide his attention and experiment during the battle.

That's how he found out.

Vectors, in a sense, were similar to Universal Law in that they were representations of the interactions between forces.

If Universal Law was the ethereal representation of this concept, vectors were the physical one.

As someone who'd been comprehending Universal Law so fiercely that he'd been forced to fight it for the right to retain what he learned, Damien was able to make quick progress once he made this connection.

The main problem was defining forces.

Gravity, weight, direction, speed, acceleration, and many more forces contained their own vectors. In fact, anything with physical presence that moved had vectors that defined each movement.

When a concept was so vast, it was hard to find ways to properly express it.

This was an issue Damien had been dealing with since the start.

Whether it be Space, Time, Universal Law, or even the Void, they were all concepts that held such vagueness and vastness.

But somehow, he'd managed to gain a grip on them, right?

Damien decided to start with what he knew.

He focused on speed, direction, and weight, attempting to bring his ability to manipulate them to its peak.

Of course, he couldn't do it in a single battle, but his growth was astounding, to say the least.

He tormented the Darklight Raven with his power. When it tried to move out of range or do any sort of maneuvering to evade Elena, its weight was increased and the air around it solidified, making it hard to move.

Even its mana was moving slowly. It didn't know why, but none of its facilities were functioning as they should have!

Meanwhile, Elena got absolute support just as Ruyue did.

Her speed and acceleration were pushed to the limit, making her a true embodiment of light, her attacks became more powerful, her mana moved smoother, and even her head felt light and able to process information faster!

The last effect was likely a placebo caused by the combination of the others, but it didn't matter.

What mattered was that Elena had a fighting capacity that entered the 3rd class range, and the enemy had been brought down to match her!

Unlike Ruyue and Rose, their battle was much more streamlined, but it wasn't any less grand.

The Darklight Raven had no chance to retaliate.

By the time Damien's bullet rain ended, Elena and Damien were already at its sides.

They slashed their swords together, and their sword lights intersected as they tore through the raven's body.

The only battle left ongoing was—

BANG!

A mangled corpse fell to the ground, splattering into a pancake of meat chunks on impact.

Zara landed next to it gracefully, but the blood covering her mouth and claws made her appearance anything but.

She grinned as she looked at the fat bird's corpse.

As she said from the beginning, it never had a chance.

Watching it get corroded by Shadow Mana as she tormented it mentally was something Zara enjoyed to the maximum, otherwise, she would've finished long ago.

It hurt her pride a little to be the last one done!

"What a fun battle," Damien remarked with a grin.

"It was likely the most entertaining event we have experienced thus far," Ruyue continued.

"Really? Climbing was the most fun part for me," Elena chimed in.

"She didn't mean it like that. The word she was looking for was rewarding," Rose said, shaking her head.

Ruyue nodded in agreement, while the rest followed suit.

Indeed, they'd had plenty of dangerous encounters and exhilarating encounters, but they'd never been able to gain so much with so little effort since coming to this place.

'Or maybe it feels like less effort because we've improved?'

Nowadays, improvement was so vague that Damien forgot the feeling of growing when he was still weak.

At this level, every small step felt like a major leap.

In the 9 revolutions, every small step was truly a major leap, but it felt like one was barely moving their feet!

"There's no need to keep waiting, right? Let's head to the Blessing Shrine!"

Damien and the girls looked towards Sia, who gazed back at them with a raised eyebrow.

"What? Did you think I knew where it was? I've never been here before."

Her response was quite lackluster, and elicited deadpan gazes from everyone who was listening.

Damien shook his head wryly, while Elena rolled her eyes and flicked out her hand.

"Come out, Isla."

A flash of light appeared on her chest, and an entity jumped into the Real Plane.

It was...

"...a cat?!"

Damien's eyes widened.

"Why didn't you tell me you got a cat?!"

He teleported over and swooped Isla into his arms before she knew what was happening, grinning the whole time.

Elena smiled wryly.

"You can pet her later. Isla has an uncanny ability to find treasure. That's why I brought her out."

"Oh..."

Damien put the cat down unwillingly and backed off.

His love for cats...couldn't be underestimated!

But for now, they had things to do.

'Not that there's anything more important than cats, but...haa, whatever.'

Damien shook his head and cleared away his sorrow.

"To the Blessing Shrine!"

Chapter 1097 Blessing Shrine [1]

Isla's ability, as Elena claimed, was uncanny.

The moment she was given a task, she sniffed the air a few times and set off, dashing into the environment without giving the group any time to rest!

It was at this time when Damien and the girls also had time to look at the scenery around them.

From the outside, flying against its slope, the upper part of Skyrend Mountain didn't look much different from the bottom portion, aside from its size.

It was a rocky surface that didn't seem to contain any life, and one would question why they couldn't see the enemies they were expecting when they ascended it.

However, it wasn't such a simple surface.

Hidden within the rock were plains of green, an ascending landscape that was filled with lush and vibrant flora, along with its own ecosystem of animals.

Animals, not beasts.

For the first time since he fell into the First Dungeon, Damien saw regular animals that weren't influenced by mana.

Deer, rabbits, goats, small birds, and many other harmless creatures populated these plains, creating a sense of peace and true nature in these hidden spaces.

But at the same time, their existence was an oddity.

After all, every living being would be affected by mana in some way. Even mortals had lifespans over 150 years because of its effects.

Seeing untransformed animals wasn't impossible, but it was almost as rare as...

Well, there was no need to say more.

As Damien and the girls followed Isla, they were welcomed into what was like a second world in the clouds.

They crossed over hills and through valleys, they traveled peaceful plains and even thunderous rivers on their way to the Blessing Shrine.

Roughly an hour later, Isla finally stopped.

Her nose went into the air, her front paw rising slightly off the ground.

Sniff!

Sniff!

Her eyes shot open, sparkling like gems.

Meow!

She mewled excitedly, rushed forward, and leaped into the air!

"Isla!" Elena yelled out in panic.

After all, the cat just jumped off a cliff!

She and the rest rushed to the cliffside and looked over its edge, but all they could see was darkness!

"I guess we're jumping again," Ruyue sighed.

"Of course we're jumping!"

Damien raised his foot off the ground and calmly fell off the cliff.

"I'll see you at the bottom!"

The cat just fell into an abyss! There was no time to waste!

Ruyue sighed again, accepting her fate of always ending up in the underground, and followed suit with Elena and Rose.

Sia looked over the edge with a raised brow, watching the group fall and shaking her head.

'There is no fear of danger in their bones.'

Shrugging to herself, she gracefully walked off the edge, using mana to slow her fall and maintain this grace.

Considering their past experiences, Damien was expecting a long fall and a dark cave, but he was entirely wrong.

Just a few hundred meters into the fall, winds picked up around them.

Winds filled with the mana of space!

'Aha, so that's what happened!' Damien thought as he grinned to himself.

It wasn't an abyss, but a gateway!

The swirling winds were like silver rivers flowing through the air. They wrapped around the group, and in the next instant, they vanished.

Shining sunlight forced them to avert their gazes, making them aware of the change of scenery.

The space was just as flourishing as the world outside, a small and nondescript plain filled with flowers, grasses, and a myriad of harmless fauna.

The only thing adding some spice to the area was their very goal, the Blessing Shrine.

It was a square platform roughly 30 meters in length made out of a cream-white marbled material, raised 1 meter off the ground with steps lining its sides leading up to its surface.

Each corner was decorated with a statue made of the same material, representing the figures of warrior-like beings from antiquity.

And of course, the main shrine graced the center of the platform. A small structure made of glossy wood, it was almost unworthy of the atmosphere created around it with how plain it was.

But that was its charm.

For some reason, it's subtleness made it all the more sacred, as if it didn't need a grand appearance to convey its worth.

"The base was created by man, while the shrine's existence remains unknown. The dichotomy is meant to represent humanity's perception of the shrine against its perception of man."

Sia spoke up, slowly making her way towards the structure.

"It is called the Blessing Shrine because of its heavenly ability: to grant one the blessing they need the most. It was said to have disappeared from existence long ago, but in reality, it relocated to this Severed World."

As her explanation continued, more than the shrine, the mysteries around her grew.

But it was clear she had no desire to share.

After all, the relationship they'd established remained one of business, never crossing that boundary.

"There is no specific method to receive a blessing. It is said that one will only be blessed when the shrine deems them ready."

She got on her knees and adopted a praying posture, closing her eyes.

"Then what do we do until it makes that decision?" Damien asked.

Sia opened her eyes and glanced at him stoically.

"Pray."

She went back to her activities after that, leaving the group to figure out the rest themselves.

"Well, I guess it's that easy?" Damien muttered.

"It seems so, but we can't be sure," Ruyue replied.

"True, but we have time right now. Shouldn't we take the chance?"

"Do we have time? I thought you..." Rose said, her voice trailing off.

But Damien shook his head.

"Regardless of my personal feelings, our growth comes first. Even if I answer the questions in my mind, it won't matter unless we can survive the coming war, right?"

Damien wanted to return to the Human Domain because he had several questions to ask his mother, but the question of his existence was something he could infer about.

What he desired was confirmation.

But as he said, confirmation meant nothing if he lost his chance to go to the Heavenly World by dying in this war.

He had enemies both inside the universe and out, with a large number of them being Demigods.

It wouldn't be possible before his battle with the Saint King, but Damien's current goal was simple.

To ascend to Divinity as swiftly as possible with enough qualifications to possess extreme strength able to match those who'd been in the realm for decamillenniums.

And naturally, he refused to do it alone.

He smiled as he led the girls up the stairs, taking his place on the shrine with them to his sides.

Zara and Isla also did the same, laying down behind the group.

'The Blessing Shrine will give you the blessing you need most.'

That's what Sia said, but Damien had to wonder.

Could it really give him what he needed?

As someone who'd been forced to introspect and gain an understanding of himself for so long, Damien had long known what his greatest weakness was.

But he didn't know any way to fix that weakness but time.

Damien was curious if the Blessing Shrine was really a heavenly-descended entity that could read through the veil of the Void and understand him.

'All you have to do is pray, huh...'

It seemed simple, but...

'How...do I do that...?'

Chapter 1098 Blessing Shrine [2]

Damien...was not a faith-driven person.

It started as a somewhat childish hatred for the world, where he rejected the existence of a higher power because of the situation he was in.

But later, it changed.

Why worship something he was aiming to surpass?

When higher powers became tangible and Damien realized that it was possible for him to join their ranks, that became his goal.

And with the Void and Universal Law around him, he believed in natural law more than anything else.

Damien understood faith and even had respect for it. It wasn't as if he didn't know how to make the motions of prayer.

What he didn't know how to do was pray with intention.

What was he supposed to pray to?

To the Blessing Shrine?

To the Cloud Emperor?

Or maybe to something even greater?

The problem with a mind so independent was that it came with deep pride in one's values.

Damien always refused to bow his head to anyone except his mother. A bow from him was worth more than the world itself.

For someone like that, a ritual like this was uncomfortable, to say the least.

Still, he made the motions and closed his eyes, entertaining these idle thoughts.

He never took the time to ponder on things like this. After all, faith meant something different to everyone.

It may have been a bleak thing to him, but it might've been the hope that allowed someone else to keep living.

Therefore, he never condemned nor supported the concept, following his same ideology to provide respect to those who provided respect.

What he questioned now was his aversion to it.

Was it just pride? Or was it something greater?

In usual cases, a topic like this would've been ignored by him before his thoughts could even manifest, so why was it being thought in such detail right now?

There had to be a reason, and that reason was likely the Blessing Shrine.

'What does it want me to do?'

Why didn't he just pray?

Regardless of whether he was praying to anything in particular or not, why didn't he just suck it up and pray for the sake of the reward?

The answer was simpler than he expected.

'It's because I'm selfish.'

The things he wanted to achieve, the future he wanted to see, he wanted to grasp it with his own hands.

He wasn't a man without faith, he was a man whose faith lay only in himself.

Therefore, what was the point of praying?

Or rather, perhaps understanding this side of his nature and setting goals for the future was his form of prayer.

Damien felt his mind becoming hazy.

Worship was only deserved by those higher than oneself, whether that be in the sense of faith or loyalty.

As someone aiming to be absolute, there should be no such entity in Damien's mind.

Whether it was the Universal Law, the gods in the Heavenly World, or even the Void itself, they could only be stepping stones for him to surpass!

This was his realization.

And this was the moment his mind left his body.

He arrived in a plain white space that expanded endlessly.

There was nothing for him to do here, nor was there any sort of spirit or being that came to speak with him.

He merely floated in this endlessness with no direction or thought.

Maybe he was supposed to use this time to think about other things, contemplate his existence, or maybe even comprehend something, but for some reason, Damien didn't feel the need to do any of this.

He let his mind rest itself in this uncanny silence.

In the past, this would've been a challenge for him. He might've collapsed from spending too long in this lonely space with nothing but his thoughts.

But the current him was as solid as a heavenly stone.

Thanks to the Blessing Shrine, he was able to establish an absolute belief in himself that he had never voiced before.

What was there left to ponder?

Unbeknownst to Damien, time passed.

Ruyue and Elena were granted their blessings on the very same day they arrived at the shrine.

Respectively, they received the Blessing of Yin and the Blessing of Life.

They sounded common and merely based on the affinities of the two women, but they were far greater than that.

These were the paths they chose to follow to reach the peak of the universe. A simple blessing related to them was already a great boon, but these blessings weren't simple at all!

They could feel their comprehensive ability was majorly enhanced, and they felt an inherent closeness with their Laws they'd never experienced before.

It was a state similar to embodiment, yet not quite at that level.

Zara and Isla awoke not long after them, each having received a blessing related to them despite them not praying at all, but instead merely sleeping at the base of the shrine.

Rose came off the shrine two days later with a more elusive reward.

She was given the Blessing of Truth.

The power of her Eyes of Fate increased severalfold, and more importantly, she could almost feel the fabric of reality against her skin.

Unlike Ruyue and Elena, she didn't get something that boosted her, but something that defined her.

The path she'd only been half-sure was possible to traverse was suddenly open to her, and the doubts in her heart faded.

She even felt her strength subtly increase with this realization!

Sia was next, leaving one week after their arrival.

She had a deep frown on her face and a complicated expression in her eyes. She refused to share the nature of her blessing and didn't speak much to the girls, instead finding a corner to rest alone and contemplate what had occurred.

The only one left was Damien.

Even after a week passed, even a day after that, he remained unmoving, sitting cross-legged on the shrine platform.

There were no changes in his serene expression, nor did any grand manifestations appear as he continued to pray.

Rather, his aura became weaker and weaker until it was nearly on the verge of disappearing.

If Elena didn't have a strong perception of life that allowed her to sense his powerful vitality, the girls would've thought he was dying!

But he was alive. More alive than ever, in fact.

His blessing was currently being applied, and his mind remained trapped in infinity.

It was on the 9th day that he finally showed a reaction.

His aura completely vanished. If one checked the shrine platform with their perception, they'd find it empty.

His physical presence was the only thing that remained unhidden to watching eyes.

His mind, which had reached a state of inner peace in its retreat, was pulled back into his body.

His eyes fluttered open.

He looked down at his hands, clenching and unclenching his fists over and over again.

'I understand. So this is my blessing.'

He smiled.

The Blessing Shrine really didn't disappoint.

His blessing didn't offer him any sort of boost, nor did it open up new pathways for him.

No, it merely "made available to him what he already had."

This blessing, Damien's blessing...

...was the "Blessing of Foundation."

Chapter 1099 Lunar River [1]

There was only one thing Damien had never been able to overcome in the decade and a half since he began training.

It was his foundation.

From his days struggling in the dungeon to when he was a peak powerhouse in Hidden Death Valley, the problem followed him.

Damien grew extremely fast. He gained more and more power and achieved a feat nobody had ever achieved with his progression.

However, his growth waited for no man, including himself.

Vector Control was a great example.

When Damien reached 2nd class, he was too focused on escaping through the path Kurt Galloway left in the First Dungeon.

Afterwards on Apeiron, while he did use Vector Control, he never focused on its main ability, mainly using it to create plasma and boost his firepower.

By the time he reached 3rd class, he'd barely uncovered the surface of the Vector Control talent. Becoming a Celestial took up all his attention and he neglected his previous talent as a result.

The next time he utilized Vector Control was when Tian Yang taught him how to hide his traces while teleporting.

There were a few cases later on, but this was the extent of his journey with Vector Control.

Yet, it was a part of his strength that could've helped him through many situations.

If he was able to slow his opponents down, even by a minuscule amount, wouldn't he have been able to take victory in many close battles that ended in draws?

Of the examples that could be provided, Vector Control was one of the smallest.

Damien had a well of strength in his body that he wasn't able to tap into because of how he rushed through his training.

Hell, even some abilities that he put work into in the past became irrelevant for the same reasons.

He was a jack of all trades yet a master of none.

Some said such a state would make one better than a master of one, and Damien had seen the effects of this countless times.

But that only applied when the master of one was at the same level.

For someone like Damien whose enemies were able to kill him with a single slap, an excess was not a good thing.

If only he could become a master of all trades, someone who couldn't be compared to a master or a jack in any fashion...

That was always his goal. When he got older, he tried to narrow down the abilities he focused on so he didn't end up in a situation where he was disadvantaged again.

The problem wasn't one that could be solved so easily.

The further he grew, the more he threw away.

At this point, his arsenal consisted of only Spacetime, Samsara, and the Void.

Even these couldn't be used to their full potential because of the mistakes he made in the past.

The "Blessing of Foundation."

It did not boost him nor did it open up new pathways, but it gave him everything.

It gave him access to that well of strength he'd been seeking for so long.

He was currently restricted to 2nd class, but he could feel it.

The utter completeness he felt in his body.

It was beautiful. There was no other way to explain it.

Perhaps nobody else in existence knew what it felt like to be this complete.

Damien stood up from the shrine platform.

His appearance hadn't changed, but for some reason, he looked more handsome than usual.

"Is there anything else to do here?" He asked, turning to Sia who still sat in the corner.

"...nothing," Sia responded.

"Then let's get going to the Lunar River."

Damien was feeling energized right now.

He wanted nothing more than to go out and fight, to feel the significance of his blessing firsthand!

The girls smiled without a word, letting him enjoy his moment.

Zara and Isla stood up and stretched their bodies.

And together with fresh minds and rested bodies, they charged up the mountain!

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Explosions blasted clouds of dust into the atmosphere as a fierce battle continued.

The group made it 100 kilometers up the mountain in the past two days. The Lunar River was 1,200 kilometers up the mountain, which meant they were halfway to their goal.

Ascending the mountain above the cloud layer was much more like a path of challenge than a ceremony.

Every few tens of kilometers, a new powerful beast resided, waiting for those who trespassed on its territory.

There wasn't a true order to it, but the further they went, the more space there was between territories.

The rules to the challenge were simple.

If the challengers won, they had the two options.

They could spare the territory lord and continue on, or they could kill the territory lord and declare the end of their challenge.

And if the challenged beast won, there was no choice for the challengers but death.

Luckily, the strength of these beasts wasn't too monstrous.

The three beasts Damien's group defeated earlier had the strength to join the ranks above the cloud layer.

Those right outside the Blessing Shrine's area were even weaker than those three, while the beasts the group currently faced were roughly at the same level.

Though, this progression alluded to extremely strong beasts at the higher altitudes, a fact the group was forced to stay wary of.

Nevertheless, they wouldn't have any problems getting to the Lunar River.

Damien was actually having a blast right now!

His body swerved through the air like a fish in water. He flashed back and forth like his body had no material form, and his attacks were absolutely deadly.

Teleportation felt amazing. He'd been doing it for so long that he forgot how amazing it felt, but right now, it was like he'd just done it for the first time again.

And his power...his power flowed so easily.

It was like the connection between his thoughts and actions was absolute. The flow of his mana followed his instincts perfectly, and as long as it was in his power, he felt like he could do anything!

It was almost ironic to feel this way in a realm with such a strict restriction, so he could only imagine what it'd feel like when he was back to normal!

Mirage was in his right and Freya was gripped in his left.

The current enemy was a winged crocodile, a strange-looking reptilian beast with feathered wings.

And Damien was toying with it to his heart's content.

The beast had an extremely hard outer defense that Damien couldn't pierce through, but it also had a soft underbelly and inside that he could exploit to assassinate it.

But he was still enjoying his power, so he focused on the armor, intent on breaking it apart!

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Three more shots from Freya slammed into a single spot on the crocodile's back perfectly.

Damien's body descended through the air with the velocity of a comet. His arm pulled back and gathered strength, pushing out to pierce the cracked area he'd created!

'Void Sword Art Second Form: Horizon Break'

BOOOOOOOM!

Pieces of flesh and thick armor flew into the air.

Blood flowed to the ground in rivers.

A hole ten times the size of the impact point blew open in the crocodile's body, creating a tunnel between its back and the ground below.

Damien grinned.

Even the most simple moves...

'...make me feel like a king!'

Chapter 1100 Lunar River [2]

Now, it had been a long time since Damien felt this kind of excitement, so he may have gone a bit overboard, but he didn't lose his head.

He was elated, but he was still aware that this blessing only brought him to where he should've been in the first place. If he wanted to reach his goal, he needed to continue working on himself.

What made him feel so elated was the fact that the blessing wasn't a one-and-done situation. It would continue aiding him, allowing his foundation to remain sturdy and supporting him even as he grew.

Which meant from now on, he didn't have to worry about being bogged down by his surplus of powers!

It was a relief more than anything else. He no longer had a backlog to worry about.

His emotions and mentality, and now his body and power, had all caught up.

It could be considered something like a "perfect martial state."

Nevertheless, Damien let loose his rampant emotions on the beasts they encountered, hardly asking for help from the girls.

The path to the Lunar River wasn't nearly as convoluted as the one to the Blessing Shrine, a simple climb past these challenges to reach where it ran.

'We're 1200 kilometers high now, and the average strength of beasts is approaching the peak of 3rd class. We may not be able to progress so smoothly from this point.' Damien thought to himself as the group reached the riverside.

'We'll also be losing Sia's help, so taking up every challenge might not be the best idea.'

Damien looked at the woman who'd formed a business relationship with them.

This was the last stop of their journey, and also where Damien was to take his promised reward.

The Lunar River was deep black in color, its flow barely noticeable due to this. The only color seen in its waters was the slight lunar white glow emanating from the riverbed.

"Unlike the Blessing Shrine, this river's effects will not always be magisterial. It has the simple ability to provide one absolute comprehensive power for as long as they can remain submerged in its waters."

"However, it's not easy to stay inside, huh," Damien finished.

Sia nodded.

"I cannot speak on its exact effects, but I have heard that it is impossible for most to last more than 30 seconds inside."

"What happens if they overstay their welcome?"

"Those who did not know their limits have all exited this river with their minds crippled, driven to insanity."

Damien frowned and looked at the strange body of water.

'If the mental strain is that bad, this "absolute comprehensive ability" must be way more intense than what she's letting on.'

Damien's brow suddenly raised.

'Perhaps...'

"Within the river, you will be able to sense my mana as if it were your own. You will naturally obtain what you desire."

Sia spoke again, confirming his thoughts.

It was exactly what he wanted. Now that he'd gained the benefit of wholeness, the best course of action was to improve his understanding of Universal Law again.

After all, controlling Universal Law meant bringing everything else he had up with it. There was no such thing as a universal law without the components that formed it.

"There's no need to wait, right? Does anyone have questions?"

Damien looked to the girls, who shook their heads with eagerness in their eyes, and back to Sia one more time before shrugging.

"Alright then. Good luck, and be careful!"

He stepped over the river, slowly submerging himself in its waters.

When his head went under, his senses exploded.

Everything became perceivable with the slightest intention, the laws of the Severed World that remained completely hidden displayed themselves, a sight enough to drive anyone mad.

Damien kept his eyes closed and focused his senses. He didn't feel the suppression as much because of his path, but he could absolutely understand why people left this place insane.

'This isn't absolute comprehension. This is true embodiment.'

Damien could feel his soul being torn in several different directions as the Laws he controlled tried to swallow him. If he allowed it, he had no doubt he could become a true master in controlling his chosen law, but that wasn't the goal!

Damien concentrated and felt for any other physical presences around him.

He found Rose, Ruyue, and Elena soon enough, each with a multitude of expressions flashing across their faces as they saw the full complexity of the partial universal law.

But no matter how he searched, he still couldn't find Sia, just like when they'd first met.

Wisp!

Damien caught something in the corner of his perception, the slightest trace of a strange yet familiar mana.

'Does she have to make it so complicated?'

He complained, but he still faithfully followed the mana and surrounded it with his perception.

He found himself in what felt like a school of fish, yet each fish was a wisp of mana that wriggled and moved like it was alive.

'She won't help me; I just have to do it.'

Blind comprehension was definitely something Damien was looking forward to.

Definitely...

'Not like I have any other choice.'

He sighed inwardly and shut up, focusing on what he had to do.

The combination of the Severed World's Universal Law's clarity, Sia's mana, and the amplificatory effects of the Lunar River provided him a perfect environment to comprehend the elusive concept.

Plus, with his new perspective on Vector Control, he had a foothold to rely on unlike when he first tried.

He already defined Universal Law internally, so all he had left to do was pick it apart and study its pieces.

And these pieces were...

'I see, so I'll have to do something like that in the future.'

A scene flashed through Damien's mind, allowing him to realize his path forward in comprehending this specific law.

'But the future is the future. Is the universe telling me not to get in over my head?'

At the end of the day, he wasn't even a Divinity yet and he was trying to control something even they couldn't grasp the hem of.

Perhaps the reason he'd never been able to turn this law tangible was because he wasn't strong enough yet?

'And perhaps Sia knew about that from the start.'

Damien sighed and shrugged.

'There's an order to all things. You can't expect pizza to come out of the oven if you don't assemble it and put it in first.'

He was confident that as long as he was able to bring the rest of his laws to their respective peaks, Universal Law would naturally reveal itself to him.

At that time, he would be able to use it as a basis to—

'That's too much forward thinking. I can withstand the river, but the Severed World's laws clearly want to force me out. Let's not get caught up on needless thoughts and waste this opportunity.'

He encountered a setback, but he was not planning to leave it until he gained something from Sia.

He refused to work for free!

'If I can't get the main entree, should I monopolize the appetizers and desserts?'

He grinned to himself.

'The sub-universe really isn't going to like this one.'

'Devour.'