

# Void 1171

Chapter 1171 In The Shadows [5]

The universal focus on the Beast Domain didn't mean they left other avenues untouched.

Hephaestus was always under maximum security, and Soul World and the Beast Domain both took a portion of Heaven's Army's deployable forces.

There was only one benefit to the destruction that had taken place thus far.

With less land to protect, the thinly spread armies could be distributed better. There weren't nearly as many holes in the general defense scheme of each Sector.

At least, not unintentional ones.

"What do you think you're doing?! Are you trying to help our homeland fall faster?!"

Luciel's angered voice boomed through the conference room.

"We have more than enough forces stationed in Hephaestus and the periphery Sectors. Why should we bring so many experts into the Divine Realm that is already secure with geographical advantages?! Aren't you just trying to weaken our forces even more?!"

"Calm down. Isn't it obvious why we have to station our people here? If Luxurion is compromised, what will happen to the army? We are rightfully the division that deserves extensive protection."

The one who spoke was a man named David Joyce. With no particular influence backing him, it was unknown how he made it to the top of the logistical sector, but his position was generally solid.

Notes of mockery and sarcasm, barely noticeable, laced his tone as he addressed Luciel.

"You are overestimating them. They only took the Giant Domain because we were unprepared. Since they're using a frontal assault on the Beast Domain, we can just fight them with force. Why should we be scared?"

"Ha!"

Luciel couldn't contain himself. How could someone say something so preposterous with a straight face?!

"If a full-force assault is what we need, then we should send you directly to the frontlines. What's the point of being warmongering if you can't even back up your claims? Come, show us what you can do!"

"Haha, do not joke around. I am not a frontline soldier, but the backing they rely on to move. In this place, I can be put to greatest use. Don't you know that as well?"

Luciel curled his lips.

This was a man clear of his position, yet with no problem being a tool for others. In fact, he even took pride in it!

"Is everyone in agreement with his views?"

He glanced at the faces of each of the 30 men and women who were present. Of them, some looked away in shame, some stared at him confidently, and some merely shook their heads.

Regardless of their standing, none of them were willing to oppose that man's ruling.

"I understand," Luciel sneered.

"You asked what would happen to the army of Luxurion was compromised, right? I guess we'll find out sooner than expected."

He slammed his fist on the table and stormed out, unwilling to interact with those people any longer.

They watched him leave with a variety of expressions, most showing condemnation.

That man who was once respected by all, how did he reach such a low in just a year and a half? It was embarrassing to watch.

Luciel didn't care for their opinions in the slightest.

He walked through the halls of the Sky Castle with a ruthless and unchanging expression. His eyes didn't move from their position, but his awareness took in everything around him.

For every proper member their group had, there was a corrupt counterpart ruining every effort made.

It was a situation that deteriorated far too quickly.

It took five minutes for Luciel to reach his personal office, where he sat down in his chair and sighed.

His unwelcoming expression faded, replaced by a pair of furrowed brows.

'It's worse than expected. Did something happen?'

They'd been phasing him out subtly for a while now, but they'd never blatantly disrespected him like this.

David wasn't just proposing to move a large number of Supremes and Executioners into the Divine Realm to "protect" them, he had decided on a wide variety of radical changes in the army's deployment that would, without a doubt, leave room for countless ways for the Nox to usurp them.

This kind of planning wasn't meant to save the universe anymore, but to build an ivory tower where the highest level could live in ignorance as if they were still at the top of the world once the universe died.

Luciel wasn't even "sir" anymore, just an average member of the council.

They did not address him or treat him with respect, and his suggestions, regardless of their value, would be rejected verbatim.

'He was right. This cannot go on.'

Luciel was calm. His mood was never as extreme as others assumed of him.

He had to make them think that way.

If they understood he was moving against them in the dark, they would make sure he lost all power in this place, and that absolutely couldn't be allowed.

He stood up, approaching a nearby wall.

He placed his palm on its surface and infused his mana, allowing Luxurion to read his unique mana signature.

The wall vanished, making way for him to enter a long corridor before rematerializing behind him.

Luciel walked the corridor until he reached the small room at its end.

"How much time is remaining?" He asked into the air.

"The preparation time for an operation of this scale is extensive. We will need at least five years to be completely stable."

A response came as a figure of blue light appeared before him.

"Five years is too long. At this rate, we will not even last three."

"If it could be shortened, it would have been shortened. At most, it can be done a year early, but no more than that."

Luciel frowned. If that was the case...

"Sacrifices need to be made."

He obviously didn't want to do it, but there was no other choice. If they wanted to regain momentum somehow, they absolutely needed this plan to succeed.

"Send news to the rest. Slowly retreat to the Divine Realm. We will begin our offensive soon."

"You are..."

"Do not say it. They will understand. If they do not understand, they are free to make their own choices."

The blue figure nodded silently and did as they were told. A message was transmitted through completely untraceable frequencies that even Demigods wouldn't detect easily, reaching a decent number of people in time.

Luciel collapsed into a nearby chair, his head in his hands.

"Tell me, what choice would you make?"

"Would you like an emotional answer, or my base instinct?"

"You know."

"I would make the same choice. However, you are still too kind."

"Hmm..."

A frown formed on Luciel's face, but he was somewhat thankful that they didn't tell him the rest.

He knew what it was.

The most effective move to gain back the momentum, he understood it well.

"Tell me one more thing."

"What would you like to know?"

"Who is the ruler here?"

"..."

The blue entity was silent for a second before responding on protocol.

"According to the traditions of the Heavenly Clan, full control over Sky Castle Luxurion has been granted to The First Angel, Luciel."

The room was silent.

Both parties were already aware of this information.

So the reason Luciel asked at all...

"Brother, you were right," he sighed.

"Sometimes, it really is easier to just be the demon."

Chapter 1172 In The Shadows [6]

At the top of the social ladder, the power one or two people could hold was so immense they could control the flow of the entire war, but under that place of status, one or two people were a speck of dust in the expansive universe.

Zara and Alea started traveling together when Damien left Apeiron, and with him practically plundering the entire Human Domain of its worlds and population, they weren't really able to stay there.

The two were, in essence, on a journey of discovery.

They wanted to find out who they were, who the Divine Emperor was, and what connected them so perfectly.

But how was one to do that?

They had no clues.

Unfortunately, Apeiron didn't hold any secrets to their birth. Their mothers were not natives of this planet and merely stayed here to avoid trouble during the war, and they left no trace of their existence when they died.

So, how were these two supposed to find out the forgotten history that led to their creation?

The only option was to grow themselves.

They, as beasts, and as possessors of Nox lineage, had an extreme propensity for ancestral memories.

Their blood and souls provided them the answers they sought as long as they continued to grow.

Therefore, they left the Human Domain with confidence and started attacking the Dimensional Leaderboard.

After all, there was no better growth supplement than this magical system.

Alea was already at an age where the Dimensional Leaderboard didn't mark her achievements, however, she was able to access its Mystic Realms and Challenge Gates all the same.

Surprisingly, they had yet to encounter much trouble.

It was a grueling journey, but their enemies were mainly in the environment rather than other people. Those who chose to become their enemies did so due to grudges they formed here, not unrelated incidents.

Essentially, Zara's identity remained hidden all this time even though she'd been so blatantly exposed by Immortal Blood Asura and the rest.

A part of it was because of her and Alea's connection. As the duo grew, their strength became more entwined, their synergy exploded, and the Nox lineage in their blood was concealed underneath its splendor.

Luck could definitely be attributed to a portion as well, but it couldn't be done with that alone.

Someone was surely helping them from the shadows, allowing them to do as they pleased without being discriminated against and targeted for their lineage.

It was extremely fortunate.

And thus far, they had yet to come in contact with the war.

The duo remained mainly in the Divine and Infernal Realms because the concentration of experts also meant the hidden realms in these Sectors were far more difficult and rewarding, while occasionally visiting Soul World to reflect on the ethereal side of things in a better environment.

They heard of the Giant Domain's collapse, of the Beast Domain invasion, and of the Soul World being saved by the Judgement Order's machinations, but they hadn't reached a point where they could join the fun.

"You're being too stuck up. We should fight if we can fight. Secret realms are good, but without the atmosphere of war, we won't be able to reveal the biggest secrets. You know that."

Alea spoke convincingly. She was an advocate for their joining the war effort, but Zara never let it happen.

"I do know that, but we aren't stable enough. Do you think I haven't noticed? Your Demonic Providence has been surfacing recently."

"That..."

"There's nothing else to say. I'm also struggling to contain it as of late. If we enter war in this state, it is hard to say whether we will retain control of our minds."

That was the main problem.

They couldn't tell whether their Nox bloodline was trying to bring them closer or push them away, but the more time they spent together, the more forward their Providences were in trying to seize control.

"Are you sure we have to suppress them? Trying to connect might be the answer."

Alea suggested something insane, but not unheard of.

"I've been having the same thought, but how? We don't have anywhere to sit and let our bloodlines loose. And if something goes wrong? Who is there to bring us back?"

"Isn't that obvious? Let's do it in the Sanctuary!"

"That's even more impossible. I refuse to lose control in front of Damien. If he gets involved in our problem, it will only hinder his path. If there is one thing I will never be, it's a burden."

"You're so stubborn! Why can't you just accept help when it's so readily available?!"

"If we rely on help to get over the most important step, aren't we just weaklings who can only hug other people's thighs? I thought you were a Beast Empress, but were you really just the Emperor's woman?"

Alea's eyes went cold.

"Never call me that man's woman."

"You understand what I mean."

Alea frowned, but she really couldn't say anything back.

The two of them could practically sense each other's emotions, and they shared their pain in this time. Their Demonic Providences bounced off each other to strengthen, so what one of them knew, the other one did as well.

If they couldn't maintain control, they'd become killing machines for the Nox until someone put them down.

The only man who could control their lineage couldn't be contacted at all, and if they lost control, they'd only hurt him and others they cared about.

There really was no logic supporting Alea's words.

However, she still wanted to do it.

She understood the consequences, but they didn't scare her away.

"Zara, it'll come to us no matter what."

Zara glanced at her sister in confusion, but Alea kept going.

"You've sensed it too, right? I know what you're running from, but we can't avoid it. We can only try to make sure we don't lose too much when the time comes."

"You..." Zara said, her eyes widening in surprise.

"Did you think you could keep it to yourself?" Alea smiled.

"Our minds are connected, remember?"

"Haa..."

Zara had no choice but to sigh.

When did she find out?

This sister of hers liked to play dumb, but she was really too perceptive for her own good.

"The Beast Domain..." she muttered.

"Hm?"

Zara looked up with a frown.

"The Beast Domain, 'that thing' is there, isn't it?"

Alea smiled.

"It is indeed. Are we finally going to have some fun?"

"If you lose control, I'll kill you myself."

"I couldn't ask for anything else."

Zara stood up. Her height was many inches above her sister's, and despite their age difference, she was the one who took the "older sibling" role.

"Fine. I hate you, but find."

"Hehe, I love you too."

Alea wrapped her arm around Zara's as the woman rolled her eyes.

Together, they set off.

At this time, more than nine months had passed since the Nox started invading the Beast Domain.

Their strategy never changed, using surprise movements from hidden forces to overwhelm the enemy and gain rapid victory.

Heaven's Army was still unable to respond properly. No matter how much time passed, accurate information about the Nox's locations and plans never seemed to exist.

However, there was something they'd noticed.

As of late, the Nox stopped aiming for the people with as much animosity.

Their target had changed.

Instead of people...

...they were targeting the very worlds they resided on.

## Chapter 1173 Contemplation [1]

Their class changed again.

It wasn't just the mindless variants anymore. 4th class Nox invaded No Return Pass like their numbers were infinite.

But was there really a difference anymore?

The current Damien viewed the average 4th class the same way he viewed the rest: enemies that would die with a single sweep of his hand.

The only reason there wasn't a truly infinite stream of Higher Nox coming after him was because an infinite stream simply didn't exist, but that didn't mean they didn't try their best to put pressure on him.

His growth was severely underestimated.

In two years Damien already became someone no number of 4th classes could match up to, and as the third year progressed, he became even greater, an existence that could only be revered by those below him.

No, even those at his level could only look up in wonder.

During the third year in No Return Pass, Damien advanced again to his 7th revolution, a product of continuous effort towards his Void comprehension.

The nature of his Divinity was slowly becoming more obvious.

And the nature of Divinity itself was already unraveling.

Divinity.

An intrinsic and esoteric concept, any definition mortals tried to give it had no fate but untruth.

At the end of the day, most people decided to regard Divinity as a "higher state of existence" and leave it there.

What point was there in trying to understand something out of reach?

However, practitioners never gave up. One could even consider the path through the first 4 classes and 9 revolutions a practitioner's attempt to give definition to Divinity before reaching it.

Damien never really gave thought to the Divine.

the shattering of his mind.

That was one of the only instances in which Damien saw a Demigod unaffected by the Divinities couldn't interfere with the universe's affairs unless they were dealing with those at the same level. Because of this, it was hard to see the power of a Divinity up close.

There were only a few times when he got a glimpse.

When the Nox Demigod in the Trial World used its True Voice on him, he experienced the shattering of his mind.

That was one of the only instances in which Damien saw a Demigod unaffected by the universal restriction.

He never thought about why, but the answer became clear later.

That Demigod was not full.

He was a fragmented Divinity, and naturally, he no longer qualified to be restricted by those laws.

The thing was, when he took this train of thought to its end, he came to a tragic realization.

'Didn't the old man also fight Xue Yebai back then?'

It was only for show, to give Damien and Ruyue a glimpse at his power, but he'd definitely made a move that should've been illegal for him.

Tian Yang was, without a doubt, a Demigod.

Then, the only conclusion was that his Divinity was also fractured.

Damien frowned as it hit him. He went off track thinking about his encounters with Divinity, but he didn't expect to come across such an uncomfortable truth in the process.

Nevertheless—

'It's not something I can worry about now. I'll talk to him about it when I get out.'

Damien erased his thoughts about his encounters with Divinity. That wasn't something he needed to focus on now.

What made him curious was: why did they stay?

The Divinities in this universe were powerful, but they'd cut off their path to power. They abandoned their claims to Godhood to remain here for unknown reasons.

Some merely wanted power, while others were actually righteous people. Some had personal desires they had yet to fulfill, but the majority...

It didn't make sense why there were so many of them.

The Heavenly World was the true stage for Demigods.

Damien didn't consider those in this universe true Demigods. He considered them incomplete, whether by their own design or some cruel fate.

Therefore, he refused to use them as a model for what he saw as Divinity.

He waited patiently until he came across the concept on his own, so he could understand its essence without the swaying of biased opinions.

So then, as a 7th revolution master, someone already on the cusp of reaching that level, what did he see Divinity as?

'It is nothing more than proof.'

One's Divinity was the universe's way of acknowledging their achievements. Nothing more, nothing less.

At 4th class, practitioners underwent Universe Baptisms, and when the time came to ascend to 5th, they underwent Cosmic Rebirth.

What was the difference between these two processes?

'There isn't one.'

They were, in essence, the same thing. The elevation of a practitioner's body and skills to match the ascending quality of their souls.

Universe Baptism put one on the path towards discovering their soul, and Cosmic Rebirth finally gave them the direct connection with it they'd been seeking.

The "Legend" all practitioners sought to grow as a lower existence, that concept merely morphed into a Divinity when the time came.

Divinity, a reflection of oneself, proof of one's existence.

Why was it important to realize this?

'In fact, it'll never not be important.'

For most, this realization was one that allowed them to realize their wholeness. The realization that Divinity was just another step in the path to power allowed people's minds to grow and their horizons to broaden, so that they could become the best versions of themselves for the future.

However, to Damien, it was simpler than that.

He always had the desire to explain things.

He thought rationalizing his power was the best way to understand it and utilize it to its greatest capabilities, and to an extent, he was correct.

For powers like Universal Law, such deep, literal understanding was the most perfect way to seize control.

But Damien was a controller of the Void.

He was its Apostle.

He always thought he needed to give the Void definition. He assumed this was his only path towards Divinity.

Yet, he was incredibly wrong.

After forming the five elements, he learned everything he needed to as a lower existence.

In the next year, he exclusively used those elements. Every single day, during every single wave of hundreds of millions of enemies, he refined those elements into a force that could support him even without his greater comprehensions.

He brought them to the level they needed to reach.

And with that, he completed everything he needed to do as a lower existence.

It was a simple truth.

If Damien was willing to limit himself and lock his potential, he could ascend to Divinity right now. The last two revolutions were unnecessary.

'But they exist for a reason, right?'

There wouldn't be two steps remaining if it was the right path to ascend immediately.

If he was a regular lower existence, then maybe. Maybe what he already had would outshine every other Demigod in this universe and he could be content with that.

But his path was never normal.

"Fusion."

This was his next goal.

To fuse the elements into a single force, and then to fuse Spacetime, Samsara, and Elemental force into a singular energy.

The day he accomplished that, he would become a Supreme.

He was around half a year into the third year now.

Did the number reach three hundred billion? It was somewhere around there, but he didn't care to keep more than a rough estimate.

After all, it was fun to see the number go up so unreasonably.

Though...

'No matter how things look here, I think it's a shit show outside.'

Chapter 1174 Contemplation [2]

Damien didn't have much of a perspective on the outside world.

He didn't have much contact with it, after all.

In truth, he could solve this problem by going to the Sanctuary, but he didn't do so for a myriad of reasons.

First and foremost, he didn't know how his mentality would be affected by comfort.

He wouldn't break down, he knew he was secure enough to confirm that, but comfort was still the primary cause of contentment.

He wasn't allowed to be content right now. The second he felt comfortable, his motivation would take a hit whether he liked it or not.

The people he loved were the main providers of his motivation, but they also made him want to put everything down and rest.

The Sanctuary was simply too comfortable.

If he wanted to, he could take all his people there and be safe from the current conflict.

The Nox could not reach the Sanctuary.

Why else would it be called that?

The haven he was building was not for himself, but for others. That was why he always stayed away from its development and allowed its people to decide their direction for themselves.

The second reason was more logical.

Universal Law was never able to bind the Sanctuary, but the current Oath required him to remain in a specific area.

He couldn't be sure if leaving for the Sanctuary would break this Oath or not.

He would be safe from its consequences, but what about everyone else? If his Oath was broken, everything he'd been fighting for would go down the drain.

The final most important reason was the simplest.

It was fear.

He didn't want to know the reality of the situation. He didn't want his hopes crushed by what was happening. He didn't want to see his people harmed and desolated by the situation.

It was selfish, but selfishness was necessary at a time like this.

When he needed to know, he would allow himself the privilege, but until then, it was banned from him.

The rational mind unhindered by his emotions locked in the Mind Prison made this decision, and he stuck by it.

There were plenty of other factors, smaller things that didn't have any value without the three main reasons, but the end conclusion was that Damien couldn't make contact with the outside world.

His knowledge of its situation was solely being provided by the worlds entering his authority.

The Soul Emperor wasn't finished after the Giant Domain.

Considering the amount of worlds that came from that place over time, the Sector was guaranteed to not exist anymore.

The Giant Race was exterminated, which was a huge blow to the universe.

Afterward came worlds from the Beast Domain, but there were far fewer of these than the previous.

More often, the worlds he bound in the Beast Domain...

...were directly destroyed.

It wasn't a daily occurrence, but while he was spending his second year learning the clone technique, it wasn't rare for him to experience sudden bouts of extreme pain.

This was caused by the destruction of World Cores he was connected to. It was similar to the torture Hassan experienced but far worse.

'Honestly, I don't know what the Beast Domain's fate is. I can't be certain if the Sector is alive or dead, but the situation shouldn't have reached its worst.'

There was no news from Galantis, who controlled the Black Dragon Clan in the Sanctuary, which meant the remnants in the outside world hadn't been exterminated.

Those guys would've absolutely made a fuss otherwise.

On top of that, he could still feel Astoria's existence. Their bond of master and disciple, supported by the Void when it titled her, made certain he knew her fate.

She was still growing steadily, but there was no shortage of times she almost fell beyond the boundary of death.

Finally...

'It's looking terrible. What are they doing out there?'

Was it ever this fast?

The previous wars raged for tens or hundreds of years before finally coming to an end, usually with a pyrrhic victory as their conclusion.

Yet, in a mere two or three years, the remaining universe had lost so much.

'No, in reality, the war started a long time ago, before the Elven Domain's destruction. It's just been so slight that nobody considered it apocalyptic until now. Frankly, we were fooled.'

His knowledge of Nox history and power became more complete as he devoured more and more of them, and when combined with his existing knowledge of the universe's forgotten history, he came to a frightening conclusion.

'We never had a chance to begin with.'

The Nox had been a force of opposition since a time when the universe was a hundred times its current size.

With time and constant pressure, they reduced the existing universe to its current size and allowed the Abyss to expand.

How could the little piece of the universe, the last piece, put up any resistance?

'Should I alter my ideal path?'

The situation, from a logical standpoint, was utterly hopeless.

Yet, Damien didn't give up hope.

He remembered what the Second Primal Sovereign told him.

It could very well be considered an end, but every end was also a new beginning.

'The key...'

Damien suddenly had a wild thought.

'Am I the key?'

The universe could not be saved.

...at least, not in its current form.

'Okay.'

Damien ended his train of thought.

There was no need to ponder any longer.

'I don't have the power to do anything yet, but I already know the way forward. All I need to do is walk faithfully, and the answer will come on its own.'

It wasn't idealistic, it was the truth. A truth so idealistic it almost seemed like fiction.

'Haha, it's always like this with me, isn't it?'

Recently, a larger number of nine revolutions Nox were visiting him. Their Demonic Providences were quite interesting to study, but they were also annoying pests his clones couldn't deal with, so he had mixed feelings about them.

But their level had been increasing.

'If they start sending Supremes soon...'

Damien grinned.

Looking at his current level, he was no longer afraid of confronting those once-high-and-mighty existences.

No, he was actually waiting for them to arrive so he could test the limits of his power.

'Even if it's the Nox, Supremes are hard to come by.'

His grin widened as he tuned into his clones' vision and presided over the battle situation.

'Send as many as you want.'

WHOOOOOOOOSH!

With a single thought and the height of his main body's power, Damien eradicated every living being in No Return Pass in a single instant.

'Let's see how long it takes before you can't hold it anymore.'

His words were directed at the Saint Emperor, the other Nox Emperors who stood below him, and the entire race they controlled like pawns.

His heart felt light. Unbothered by the universe for now, he glanced out into the Abyss.

'I'm working hard on this side, but what's happening out there?'

He was curious. It had been a while now.

It was easy to forget, but the Nox weren't the only ones making use of traitors.

Damien also had a hole card.

A hole card in the shape of a once-revered Nox genius.

## Chapter 1175 Ruined [1]

It was dark in the Abyss.

The concept of light was drowned in the blackness. It existed, but it didn't exist in its full form. There was a brightness that allowed one to see the path ahead, but there was no path ahead to see.

Unless one had lived here for enough time to become accustomed or was born here and knew nothing else, its scenery alone was suffocating enough to drive one to insanity.

However, to the Nox, this was home.

The Abyss was always perceived by those in Grand Heavens Boundary as a vast emptiness, but this definition was flawed.

The majority of the Abyss was created after the destruction of universes, the tiny trace of the blackness that existed in the past devoured and grew into its current form.

Therefore, while there was only a single complete structure in this place, Al'Katra, it was scattered with debris from those previously existing universes.

Some of this debris was small enough to go unnoticed, while some were enough to form continents of their own.

Those Nox bases that existed outside Al'Katra were all situated on such debris fields, and recently, a new one popped up so far outside the bounds of the known Abyss that it went unnoticed.

Bai Yumo started moving seriously the second he accepted his situation.

Since he got a new life, he wasn't planning to waste it.

The problem was his enemy, a Demigod above Demigods who couldn't be challenged.

How could he face such a being?

He definitely couldn't do it alone, and the Nox were not a people who'd be willing to follow him in his path of destruction.

At least, not normally.

There was a supreme truth that all Nox learned upon inheriting their bloodline memories. It was a truth shattering enough to split the Nox into multiple factions, but mere 4th class beings didn't have the power to escape the shackles placed on them by that truth.

They could only move according to its will.

But Demigods were different.

Demigods who ascended past their mortal coil couldn't be restricted by anything other than universal law.

And though most of those who stayed in the lower universe were those who succumbed to this truth and accepted it, there were still a few who maintained their defiance secretly.

They were the ones he had to reach first. The rest would only follow if he could convince them to join him.

They were not unified, and most of the time, they didn't know each other's identities, but Bai Yumo was different.

His "father" was a supreme being. Nothing could escape his eyes.

He was extremely clear of where the allegiances of every noteworthy Nox lay, yet, he didn't make a move on any of them.

Bai Yumo still couldn't understand why.

That man was willing to do anything for his goals. He was even willing to sacrifice Bai Yumo the second he had opposing thoughts.

So why did he keep them alive to do as they pleased?

Maybe they were still useful chess pieces, or maybe he just didn't know his "father" as he thought he did.

Nevertheless, Bai Yumo knew who those people were, and he started making contact with them as soon as he could.

Years passed in Grand Heavens Boundary. The war raged on. Yet, even longer passed in the Abyss.

Bai Yumo had experienced over a decade since his battle with Damien.

And in that time, he'd built up a considerable force of his own.

The Blade Lord and the Purgatory Lord. He was able to contact these two Demigods and earn their trust, recruiting them into his group.

In the process, he gained their followers as well.

He'd been exchanging words with the Royal Lord and Gluttonous Lord for a while now and didn't think it would take long to recruit them, while the Bow Lord, Frost Lord, and Poison Lord were still hovering on the fence, unsure of what to think of him.

'Everything is moving as planned, however...'

His thoughts went back to the Saint Emperor.

With Bai Yumo poaching the subordinated Lords under him, there was no way he didn't notice.

However, he'd yet to make a move. No, he had yet to even acknowledge Bai Yumo's survival.

'It cannot be because we are too well concealed. This place is hidden, but if he wished for it, he could scour the entire Abyss for my traces without lifting a finger. There must be something else.'

Bai Yumo's ultimate goal was freedom.

At least for now, the Saint Emperor was the greatest symbol of oppression he faced, and thus was the highest priority target for elimination.

But he wasn't an idiot.

'I am still too far away from him. Recruiting Lords is enough to build a force to use elsewhere, but against him, any of those I can make contact with will die in an instant.'

He sighed to himself.

'Is there really no way?'

He didn't know how Damien did it.

The Saint Emperor was such an invincible existence in his mind that he couldn't even begin to imagine defeating him.

How was someone younger than him able to be so confident in front of impossibility?

'I need to know.'

It had been a very long time since they'd seen each other, but he felt they needed to talk.

'I can only continue acting as I have if I wish to make an impact, but this plan is far too long-term. By the time it can be put into action, will the Saint Emperor still be within reach?'

He was uncertain. He didn't believe in himself.

So he had to speak to the man who represented everything he started yearning to be.

'I have heard many rumors. Not one who has gone to challenge him has returned.'

Bai Yumo knew less about Grand Heavens Boundary's situation than even Damien himself, but the tales of No Return Pass spread too far for him to be unaware.

'I wonder...'

In ten years, Bai Yumo regained a piece of himself that had been missing for a long time.

He wasn't going to deny that he lost because Damien was stronger than him, but a large part of his defeat was also owed to his lack of mental stability.

The overlapping impossibilities presented by Damien and the Saint Emperor broke his will to fight, and what could have been a much more equal fight was turned into Damien's complete win.

'I wonder how I would fare now?'

He was going to visit No Return Pass regardless.

His goal was answers. He wanted advice from the only human he'd ever acknowledged.

But it wouldn't be bad, right?

'He must be bored of the rabble as well.'

It had been a long time since he had a proper fight. Such things weren't privy to lords who ruled over others from the back.

He had to make sure his skills weren't rusty, and—

'—I want to find the way to destroy the poison infesting our race.'

There were countless restrictions that forced his mouth shut, however, he wondered:

'Should I tell him?'

Perhaps it was time for that man to know...

'...about the curse that enslaves our race.'

Chapter 1176 Ruined [2]

Time passed.

Was it proper to say such a thing?

No, it wasn't.

It had been roughly 10 months, which was an extremely short amount of time. Even for mortals, it could pass in but an instant.

Yet, far too much happened for it to be glossed over as just "some time passing."

The Nox stopped targeting the opposing armies with as much vigor and instead targeted worlds themselves.

Their movements became confusing.

It was hard to predict where and when they'd attack already, but it became even worse during this period.

As previously mentioned, the Beast Domain didn't have the forces to spread a net through their Sector that could remain active at all times. They could, at most, crush the enemy once they showed themselves.

They'd mostly been relying on Heaven's Army's support to gain information and strike fast enough to make an impact, but how could they do so properly anymore?

Elyssa Bloodlock was tasked to stay in the Beast Domain after her original task, and in this time, she'd lured a large portion of the army's generals to her side.

With information under her control, while it still reached the places it was supposed to, it was massively delayed.

Who was going to call her out?

There wasn't a single person with the ability and desire to stand on the side of justice and make a difference.

The situation deteriorated by the day.

Worlds would disappear without notice. Experts were sent to confirm, but it soon became clear that this case was different from the Giant Domain's tragedy.

This destruction was merely a matter of slow information flow.

The Nox were able to completely destroy worlds and plunder their World Cores before news of their movement reached anyone!

With months passing in a flash and wars raging all around, worlds kept vanishing from Grand Heavens Boundary, and their absence became the only way to track the war situation.

After all, in places where the universe's armies were doing their jobs as they should have, the war was quite even.

Both sides lost millions, but in terms of higher experts, the universe still came out on top.

New technologies were developed along with new strategies. Many research projects that had remained hidden thus far were brought into the light as their results came out and showed success.

One of such was a device that could temporarily lock a Higher Nox's connection to their Demonic Providence.

Those Nox who weren't given a chance to activate their greatest trump cards could only fall to their foes, and as the death toll stacked up, the universe's ferocity became clear.

Unfortunately, as if the war itself was a macrocosm of the Beast Domain's circumstances, these positive results concentrated in small areas didn't have much impact on the grand scheme of things.

Regardless of their success, the universe was still crumbling.

It was actually mind-numbing how much Heaven's Army broke down in a short period of time.

There was no way to understand the thoughts of traitors.

Well, perhaps even they didn't understand their own thoughts.

Obviously, in a situation where one turned traitor, there wasn't much thought involved, but it was impossible to stay naive for an eternity afterward.

Any rational person would've been able to understand the mistakes in their reasoning and regret.

However, rationality was absent from their minds.

For average traitors without enough status to be named, the Nox lineage forced into their bodies would corrupt their reasoning and make it impossible for them to have such thoughts.

And for those at higher levels...

At least 60% of them were being controlled as puppets. They didn't have such things as free will and choice.

And the other 40%...well, they also lacked the ability to think things through.

Not due to any fault of their own, but because they were subtly guided along such a path.

"What a fool."

The Karmic Emperor watched Immortal Blood Asura's back as he left.

Their conversations had been plenty in this time, and their movements towards the corruption of the universe were progressing more than properly.

What was the reason he said he turned traitor again?

"Ah, yes. Strength."

A man who only cared for himself. Such a man was easiest to control.

One might think these people were harder to rein in since they had no attachments keeping them in line, but for the Karmic Emperor, such limitations didn't exist.

If a man had family, the Karmic Emperor would make that man turn against them and slaughter them with his own hands.

It was harder to control those with strong emotions towards a cause or entity. These people were able to resist his coercion even if they were pure mortals, solely because of the depth of their feelings.

It was quite the esoteric concept to others, but emotions were the Karmic Emperor's specialty. He gained his title from toying with them until he gained full control over their output.

Immortal Blood Asura was a man who lacked emotions.

He was an empty slate.

In usual cases, drawing on this slate would be noticed and stopped immediately, but the usually heartless man had been spiking in emotion recently.

Those who ruined his good things, those who stood up to his power, these people became ever more prominent, and with their continued existence that he couldn't cull, Immortal Blood Asura lost control over his emotions.

It wasn't a constant thing, but it happened often enough for the Karmic Emperor to find an opening.

That man thought he was acting on his own free will. He thought he joined the winning side so he could become even more powerful than before.

The Karmic Emperor didn't doubt that even the completely rational Immortal Blood Asura would have eventually turned Nox. If it meant he could succeed, he'd willingly change his race and even the nature of his soul.

"Hahaha, there has not been a human who could entertain me like this in a very long time."

People often called the Inhuman Emperor the cruelest of the Nox Emperors, but that was merely because he was most forward with it.

Not one of them was sane.

The Karmic Emperor loved playing with people. He loved turning people against their original intentions and seeing their reactions when they realized what they'd done.

For Immortal Blood Asura, his plans didn't end so simply.

No, a man like that would explode when he was broken.

And the Karmic Emperor wanted to make that explosion as big and beautiful as possible.

He smiled to himself.

There only remained one living world in the Beast Domain.

The Fate Star was difficult to destroy so easily.

However, it would only be a matter of time.

'Will the Lord be pleased when we show him our success?'

The Karmic Emperor wondered about a higher being.

The only being he ever revered, and the only being he would never be able to control.

Not only the Fate Star, but the entire universe, it was only a matter of time before it fell.

The Beast Domain was no longer his main focus. It would be destroyed by those under him soon enough.

His focus shifted elsewhere.

The domain that once caused the Nox a severe amount of problems, the one that naturally repelled their presence...

"It is about time to start pushing the domain of Spirits."

The final periphery domain. Once it fell, there was nothing saving the remaining universe from their advent.

Its destruction would give the Nox an absolute advantage.

He couldn't wait to see.

Just how would those foolish beings act when they finally accepted hopelessness?

#### Chapter 1177 New Direction [1]

By the time the third year of Damien's imprisonment began, Soul World was subjected to the Nox's invasion.

The Beast Domain was not completely destroyed, but it might as well have been. Only Beast Emperor Star remained, while everything else was gone.

Most of Heaven's Army was pulled out, with those in high positions choosing to abandon the Sector.

And at that moment, the Nox added a second prong to their attack,

Or was it a third?

From the territories of Eien, an unending wave reminiscent of No Return Pass surfaced. The forces stationed there were forced to combat them and lost their mobility.

It wasn't a matter of Lesser Nox. If so, only numbers were needed rather than experts. However, the Nox were smart. They sent several hundred Supremes and even more Executioners and High Commanders to put pressure on the frontline so they genuinely lost the ability to help.

And that's when they launched their true invasion of Soul World.

Eden, unlike the Giant Domain, did not get swallowed by the Abyss. The reason was a confusing mixture of factors, including the Plant Demigoddess who still resides there and Damien's control of Calypto, but regardless, Eden was still a place that belonged to the universe.

Though, it was uninhabitable. The destruction that wrought it left no room for life to repopulate, and Calypto, the only remaining living world, had to remain under the guise of corruption so nobody realized its survival.

Thus far, nobody looked at Eden for a multitude of reasons. There was a small army sent there to secure the border of Soul World, but that was it.

Nobody expected the Nox to use that opening.

In the end, they did exactly that.

With terrifying numbers, they obliterated the border army and invaded the Sector.

The river of time continued to move like so.

Every month, more bad news piled up about Soul World's situation, and the people practically forgot about the lone-standing Fate Star.

However, some viewed that star with much more meaning.

Currently, Beast Emperor Star was being maintained through heavy war by the Golden and Black Dragon Clans, the Judgement Order, and their supporters.

This world was their main base.

It functioned as the main connection point between all those who genuinely fought for justice.

And frankly, even they had to abandon some things.

It was Luciel's decision.

Once the Soul World was breached, he sent a secret communication to all those who believed in him.

"Retreat to the Divine Realm. All further activities will be continued from here."

His intent was clear.

He wanted to sacrifice the Beast Domain and Soul World and focus on protecting what hadn't been touched yet.

Why?

That was even simpler. There was no hope left for these domains.

The traitorous venom that spread through the higher authorities of the universe continued to spread and grip onto anything it could. For the forces of justice, it was already impossible to regain control over the current situation.

If they wanted to win, they needed to switch their focus to the future and create an opening to seize control while the enemies focused elsewhere.

It was a controversial decision, but not an incomprehensible one.

Most of his allies followed his words and secretly entered the Divine Realm, hidden from all eyes, to bide their time.

However, while the Beast Domain was sacrificed, Beast Emperor Star couldn't be the same.

During Astoria's awakening, the mystical power of this world had already been seen. It had such a deep connection to fate and the Golden Dragon Clan that, when combined with Astoria's existence, it could even affect the flow of destiny itself.

Beast Emperor Star had to live.

And that was the war they fought for.

In a sense, they were lucky.

The Nox attacking weren't weak, but they weren't the best the other side could offer. Those troops were all in the domain of Spirits taking care of their tasks there.

"How long can we hold out?"

The question was asked by Su Ren.

Currently, there was a meeting taking place against the greatest experts protecting the star. It concerned the future, not only of this place, but of the entire universe.

"Realistically speaking, with the opposition's current level, we can last at least 2 years, but that is too optimistic. The longer we survive, the stronger our enemies will become," Hedrick, the Golden Dragon Clan's 2nd Prince answered.

"The question was wrong from the beginning. How long do we need to last before we can put 'that' into motion?"

Everyone present had the look in their eyes change.

But none of them could answer the question.

"Have those two returned yet?" Rose asked.

Several months ago, Zara and Alea came to the Beast Domain to join the war effort, but by that point, the war effort had already moved.

Considering their allegiance, it wasn't strange for them to stay in the Beast Domain regardless, and even disregarding that, they had a reason to stay.

When they told the others of that reason, a hope for survival appeared.

"They are yet to return. There has been no news from the gate since they entered, but this also means they are still alive inside."

The "item" in that gate, if it was what they described, would help them turn the tables not just in the Beast Domain, but in the entire situation.

It was one of the very things Luciel needed most to stabilize the situation once his counterattack plan began.

"Astoria, is there anything from you?"

The young dragon princess was also in the room. In the past several years since she met Damien, her power increased explosively, and her status on Beast Emperor Star was similar to that of a Star Master.

Her connection to the world allowed them to make it this far, because their combined ability to read fate gave those around them the ability to move confidently and predict the otherwise chaotic situation.

With her current power as a 4th revolution master, the things she could see were still vague, but it was enough.

The flame in her golden eyes was as strong as ever. She was a completely different person than the immature princess Damien met.

"It's almost time. They will return soon, and when that happens, we can enact the new beginning."

There was no way to save the Beast Domain. This was a universally accepted fact.

However, there was a way to save Beast Emperor Star.

There was a way to save the Golden Dragon Emperor.

Those in this meeting were not Demigods.

The Demigods that usually supported them had already left for a far more important task that needed completion.

Tian Yang...

Well, Tian Yang was not in a state where he could help at the moment.

Currently, he and the Golden Dragon Emperor were entwined in a strange balance.

Tian Yang stayed with the Emperor during every hour of every day, maintaining the sliver of life force keeping his comatose body alive.

And the Golden Dragon Emperor...

He was currently connected to Beast Emperor Star itself, acting as its heart.

Because it's true heart, it's World Core...

...had already been plundered long ago.

## Chapter 1178 New Direction [2]

When the fourth year in No Return Pass dawned on Damien, he received an interesting visitor.

The clones he left to take care of the battlefield found themselves unable to fight at all, because the forces that had been forming an unending stream for the past 3 years suddenly stopped coming at all.

It was only for a single day, and it was not by choice.

"Higher Nox have the ability to control Lesser Nox completely. Until someone higher than me breaks control, they won't attack."

This was the explanation given by that eccentric visitor.

And Damien...

Well, to be frank, he'd been expecting this one for a while now.

"You finally showed up, huh?" He said with a smile, summoning a table and two chairs onto the desolate plain.

"You knew?"

"Of course. You were left with nothing, after all. Even if you're smart enough to move forward on your own, you still started with nothing. You were bound to come here to find me eventually."

"Hmm..."

The Saint King, Bai Yumo, shrugged with a sigh as he took his seat across from Damien.

"Putting that aside, I thought I'd be able to put up a better fight now that it's been so long, but I was severely mistaken. How in the world did you get so strong in this time?"

Damien glanced at him. The current Bai Yumo was incredibly different from the one he used to know.

It was clear that the facade bogging him down was gone now. He seemed refreshed, as if he could process events from a proper standpoint now, instead of being overwhelmed by his situation.

This Bai Yumo was the one Damien hoped to see when they met again, so his current mood was quite jovial.

He pulled a gourd of spirit liquor out of his subspace along with a cup for himself and his guest.

When he poured it, a sweet smell and unbelievably clear color that didn't match its "liquor" identity at all presented itself, practically begging one to taste its majesty.

"My strength...well, let's just say I've had a lot of time on my hands. I even picked up some new hobbies along the way."

"You are truly an unreasonable existence."

"Why would you say something like that? I consider myself quite accommodating."

"Ha, to joke at a time like this, you must be insane."

Damien smiled again and held up his cup before taking a sip.

He wasn't lying.

In No Return Pass, Damien had so much time he didn't know what to do with it all. His training was progressing steadily, and he was getting closer to the "impossibility" of the Void.

His current abilities were almost at the peak of reasonability. The power he could possibly possess while still under the universe's umbrella was already in his hands.

For the most part.

He still had a ways to go before becoming a Supreme, but even that was just a matter of time, time he had far too much of.

Crafting and spirit liquor were two hobbies he'd been entertaining recently. Since he didn't have to use as many clones to deal with the horde anymore, he used some of them to gain proficiency in these things instead.

Using his hands was fun, so crafting was an obvious hobby. While Damien didn't use weapons as much anymore, he still had a deep connection to the ones he had and wished to bring them with him as he continued his journey.

His study in that field was mainly for this purpose, to enhance his current armaments.

Meanwhile, spirit liquor was more for fun than anything else.

Getting drunk was a privilege Damien didn't have anymore. His power was too strong for anything to hinder his perception.

So, he took up the challenge of creating the liquor that could get him drunk,

This one, No. 95: Blessed Immortal Dew, was his most recent creation and the closest to hitting his goal, but it wasn't there yet.

"Nevertheless, that's just my personal stuff. I'm sure you didn't come here just to catch up, right?"

Bai Yumo shook his head wryly.

Really, his thoughts of matching this kind of man were never more than a wild dream. How was he able to talk so casually about mastering other crafts while still increasing his power so ruthlessly in a far shorter period of time than Bai Yumo had?

It was insane.

However, he was right about that.

Bai Yumo didn't come here just for idle conversation.

"I've hit a bottleneck. I've been doing everything I can think of to create a force worthy of facing that man, but I can't reasonably believe that it's possible to do so."

He explained his movements. About gathering forces, about increasing his own power and becoming closer to his Demonic Providence, and...

"There is a chain."

...about the "curse" that bound the Nox.

"I cannot speak on it without being punished by the restriction, but I wish for you to know about it. This chain is not a natural limiter, but a leash. A leash held by—"

"Stop."

Damien stopped him before he could continue.

"If you say anymore, you'll really die."

Bai Yumo's eyes widened.

"You know?"

Damien looked at him, all traces of emotion in his eyes gone.

"Mm, I figured it out recently. It's hard not to after eating so many of them. But, this isn't something to worry about now. That problem isn't something the likes of us can deal with...yet."

"Yet?! You have confidence in facing it in the future?!"

"Hahahaha!"

Damien laughed.

"Confidence? Why wouldn't I? After I slaughter the Saint Emperor, isn't that the next logical step?"

"You...!"

"Alright, let's stop joking around."

Damien returned to the topic at hand, the doubts that had been bothering the man across from him.

"You shouldn't be trying to face that guy directly at all. I know it sucks to hear, but it's fruitless to believe that clash will ever happen."

"Why is that?"

"Isn't it obvious? Do you think you'll be able to reach Divinity before the war moves to the Ancient Battlefield?"

"Ah..."

The Ancient Battlefield, the Cemetery of Demigods, was the only place for their kind to fall.

They didn't fight in this plane for a variety of reasons, but to put it simply, they would only be able to unleash themselves properly in that place.

"The Saint Emperor's fate will be determined there. Regardless of what any of us feel, that fact won't change."

"Then, what?" Bai Yumo asked again.

What he received was not the confirmation he wished, but an even greater inevitability that separated him from his goal.

His confusion was even worse now.

If killing the Saint Emperor was not the answer, then what was?

Damien sighed to himself.

"Bai Yumo," he started seriously.

"Why are you fixated on that man? Do you think your obsession will cause him any harm? Him? That guy who has no care for anyone as long as things are going his way? Do you think attacking him directly will mean anything?"

"In the first place, a small character like him isn't worthy of your attention."

Bai Yumo's jaw practically hit the floor.

What was this?

This was definitely not what he expected to hear.

"You are a talent. You have the ability to go beyond him, to touch the sky he rejected, the Heavenly World. Why should you limit your ambition to him?"

A bomb went off in Bai Yumo's head.

These words, while they were simple, were words he'd never been told before.

The fact that he had value, that he had a purpose outside the Saint Emperor, was something that had never crossed his mind.

Damien didn't need to say much. Bai Yumo was smart enough to put the pieces together himself.

But as he said, he'd hit a bottleneck. His thoughts were still constrained by that man's shadow.

Damien got up and stood next to Bai Yumo, looking out into the blackness as he put his hand on the man's shoulder.

"Build yourself and build your people. When the time comes, get your revenge the right way."

"The right way, huh..."

Bai Yumo grinned slightly and picked up his cup, chugging the contents until it was empty.

The Saint Emperor, that shadow that loomed over his sky and forced him to stay in the well, cowering in fear...

Was that man just a stepping stone to this one?

The horizons he saw were not those of the Abyss, but something so high Bai Yumo never even tried to rationalize it.

If he started now...

"Do you think it's possible?"

Damien smiled confidently. It was the smile of a ruler, of a higher existence that saw everything as below him.

"Impossibility is a matter of perception. As long as you force it into the realm of possibility, who can stop you?"

The thoughts of a man who was currently making impossibility one of the many cards in his hand, the words of a man who didn't view that word as inevitably as the rest of existence.

"Hahahahaha!"

Those words were a spark that lit Bai Yumo's heart aflame.

"Right, as long as I want it to be, anything will be possible. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks, even if that someone is Fate itself."

He stood up, a new air surrounding his body, and outstretched his hand.

"Thank you for this. I never met a true ally before you, so this is quite the experience for me."

"No problem," Damien said happily.

"You're someone worth investing in, so you can be confident in support from this side as long as it can be provided."

"Mm," Bai Yumo said with a smile.

"I guess I should leave you alone now, but before I go..."

BOOM!

His aura exploded. The blackness of the Abyss became even thicker in this space.

Damien was already several hundred meters away by the time it reached his previous position.

Bai Yumo watched him with a wide grin.

"Before I go, I want to see how wide the gap actually is."

Chapter 1179 New Direction [3]

BOOM!

"Before I go, I want to see how wide the gap actually is."

Damien smiled.

Bai Yumo's enthusiasm was infectious. For him who'd been stuck in No Return Pass without any good opponent, the thirst for a good fight was undeniable.

However, what Bai Yumo wanted wasn't a good fight, but a measure of their difference.

'Should I show him?'

If Damien used his clones it would be over in but a second.

But where was the fun in that?

'Let's go with the other method.'

Casualness.

Wasn't that the easiest way to tell the gap?

Damien watched Bai Yumo move. The man was cautious to the point of cowardice, not attacking even once after calling the battle.

Though, it wasn't his fault.

Damien was just standing still, his arms to his side and his poise relaxed, but he had no openings.

No matter what Bai Yumo could try, he was certain it wouldn't hit.

Honestly, this was enough to show Damien's strength, but Bai Yumo wanted more.

Haa!

He let out a fierce battle cry and rushed the enemy. Murky black Abyssal Mana filled the air and controlled the sky.

This place, No Return Pass, gave Bai Yumo a severe environmental advantage.

Because the entire sky was made up of Abyssal Mana!

WHOOOOSH!

He pulled his arms together like a certain web-slinger, and the sky followed his movements. A large wave of corrupted mana encroached on Damien's position without mercy, carrying enough force to instantly slaughter the Damien that existed before No Return Pass!

"You've really grown like crazy," Damien said, watching it.

Yeah, this wave was intense. It looked like a regular and low-effort controlling of mana, but that was a misconception that would kill anyone who faced it.

The laws laced in this wave, as Damien saw from the Saint King of the past, were a mixture of Spacetime, Samsara, and something more vile, a representation of the Abyss.

"You were raised to be my opposite, but you've taken these laws in a completely different direction than I did. It's respectable, really."

Unfortunately, it was too late for something like this to affect him.

And this time, he didn't have to hide the Void.

Whoosh!

Damien raised his arm, facing the wave head-on.

The rushing winds like a roaring tsunami filled his ears, and Bai Yumo's eyes pierced reality itself to watch his every movement.

"Break."

A single word flowed like clear water, banishing the impurities that polluted the world.

A sliver of Void Mana no bigger than a finger exited Damien's palm and entered the Abyssal tidal wave.

It happened in a single instant. No, it happened in a fragment of that time, so quickly it was hardly perceptible.

The Void Mana sunk into the tidal wave, and suddenly, the mana began to change.

The corruption was corrupted, turned into the Void's property, and because Damien willed it...

It froze into a massive iceberg and shattered.

Physical fragments of mana like crystals of snow rained down from the air, along with a shattering sound that was oddly pleasing to the ears.

"Would you like to see more?" Damien asked.

"Please," Bai Yumo responded with a strained grin.

The mental impact of such a scene was intense, but it only riled him up more.

He wanted to see what Damien could do!

Bai Yumo charged in again. This time, instead of focusing on a large area attack, he concentrated mana into his body and entered a peak form for physical combat.

"Ooh, fun."

Damien smiled and watched him approach without dodging or joining him.

As Bai Yumo's fist came flying towards him, he chose a more unconventional method of dodging.

Flash!

He teleported.

However, his body was not several hundred meters away.

He only moved slightly, just enough to completely avoid the punch.

"You...!" Bai Yumo exclaimed.

His eyes hardened. He tightened his fists and let off a true barrage of attacks.

Fists and kicks went flying through the air. His form was impossible to predict, and with the way he spread his attacks, he created a field in front of him that left no openings to survive through.

The key was that he wasn't always aiming for Damien.

He figured his opponent would continue dodging through teleportation as he'd done the first time, because this wasn't a real battle, but a showcase.

In that case, instead of aiming for the body, he needed to focus on the field that forced Damien to retreat instead of showing off!

"It was a good try, but we're beyond that now."

Damien's words were a bucket of cold water.

No matter how refined the attack technique was, his control was more precise.

His body was like a flickering mirage. He existed in reality, but why did it feel like he didn't?

His body would always move perfectly. Angular turns requiring a slight amount of movement that could be classified in the single digits of degrees were necessary to dodge both the fists and legs that came at him, but he was able to make them without trouble.

As this continued, Bai Yumo was able to understand the advantages of such a method.

Damien could move his entire body impossibly. More than position, it was about "orientation."

If he could manage that perfectly and switch from one angle to a completely opposing one in less than an instant, he could control his movements in a way impossible for a human body even after transcendence.

It was a beautiful maneuver.

Bai Yumo almost wanted to stop the battle there.

But...

...his opponent didn't seem to want that?

"Let me attack this time," Damien said with a grin, teleporting out of Bai Yumo's absolute field.

"Let's test your improvement."

Bai Yumo's eyes narrowed.

These were words a master would usually say to an apprentice, not words said by a man to his equal.

A wry smile appeared on his face.

"It's that bad, huh?"

However, Damien shook his head.

"It doesn't count. I have cheats."

"That sounds like a human term. You should be mindful of the other side before you speak."

"Ah, I figured you'd know something like this. Uh...well, let's just say I'm heaven-defying and leave it at that."

"Arrogant bastard."

"In the flesh."

The two grinned at each other and rushed.

No Return Pass was filled with a flurry of flashing lights and explosions that rocked its surface.

It became the floor for a beautiful yet deadly dance performed by the greatest talents of the universe and the Nox, a duo that should not have ever had friendly contact.

Yet, perhaps this very friendly contact was what would push them above others.

Perhaps, the destruction of boundaries to confront an enemy who surpassed them all was the answer all along.

It was a philosophical thought, one that neither of the two were entertaining in the moment yet both held in the back of their minds,

For now, they just smiled.

They smiled as they released the stress and exhaustion that had been piling up for so long as they fought their lonely battles.

BOOOOOOOM!

The sound of an explosion.

It was frightening. Most of the time, it was a terrifying sound that meant countless lives were being lost.

But this time...

Maybe just this time, it was okay to call it art.

Chapter 1180 New Direction [4]

"Haa...haa...haa..."

Heavy breathing filled the air, but only from one side.

"You...haa...how are you fine?!"

Bai Yumo's exclamation was incredibly valid.

They'd fought for over an hour, and the final result...?

Currently, Damien sat happily at the small table he'd summoned earlier, which, by the way, was completely unharmed by their battle, and sipped his spirit liquor without a care in the world.

Meanwhile, Bai Yumo was laid out on the ground, unable to move a muscle from how sore he was, and unable to even catch his breath because he'd used every ounce of mana contained in his body.

There were several bruises covering his body, and his face was swelled up like a pufferfish, but, well, this didn't need to be mentioned for the sake of his pride.

"So what'd you think? Is this difference good enough?" Damien teased.

"Good enough? You really did get arrogant over the years. It's a shame I can't punch your face in."

"Haha, you'll always have a chance in the future if you keep training hard."

"Don't just lie. You know as well as I do that's never happening."

"Hahahaha!"

Damien laughed heartily and shrugged.

"I mean, it's always good to dream, right?"

"Tch, bastard."

Despite their banter, they were all smiles. It was a good battle, if that was even enough to describe it.

Whatever it was, this battle allowed Bai Yumo to reach the answers he'd been seeking with confidence.

"I guess it's about time for me to go," he sighed, straining himself to stand up.

"Already? I think you could use some more rest," Damien replied.

"Alright, stop rubbing it in already. I really have to go, or else news of my visit will spread. We can't have that yet, can we?"

"I guess you've finally started using your head. Should I send you back, or are you leaving on your own?"

"Ha! Send me back? You mean you'll teleport me into some random part of the Abyss again? I think I'll pass on that."

"Hey, I was just offering."

Bai Yumo shook his head wryly.

"Those grunts outside shouldn't move for another two days unless someone overwrites my control. Make good use of your free time."

"Mm, thanks for the gift. It almost makes me regret not preparing anything for you."

"Shut up, bastard. The day you give me a gift is the day I realize you've been possessed by someone's ghost."

"Hahaha, I'm not that bad, am I?"

"Do you really want an answer?"

"No. Get out of here."

"Fair enough."

Bai Yumo glanced out into the sky.

From now on, he would be moving a lot more seriously.

No, his plan of action could be considered insane.

He smiled to himself as he flew into the air to take his leave.

"Next time you see me, maybe I'll be the one you have to call Saint Emperor."

Damien smiled.

'I'm glad you've finally made up your mind.'

"Choose a better title. That one is a little lame, don't you think?"

"I agree. Only a dumbass would name himself something like that."

"Hahahaha!"

Amidst Damien's raucous laughter, Bai Yumo's figure disappeared into the horizon.

Their meeting was short, but it was more than fruitful.

'A curse...'

Damien brushed over the topic when Bai Yumo brought it up, but it was a much bigger deal than he made it out to be.

Damien figured it out not long ago. Other than personal training and hobbies, Damien had spent most of his time piecing together the memories he devoured from the Nox.

Through them, he managed to come to several conclusions, one of which was the identity of that curse.

'Though I'm not limited by its effects, even I cannot say anything out loud, lest it detect me.'

He couldn't speak of it, nor could he mention it at all, so it was hard to call it useful information, but it did confirm something.

The Nox didn't have to be the enemy.

As a denizen of the universe, it was normal to generalize the Nox and view them as targets for elimination and nothing more, but Damien never did so.

Because, honestly speaking, besides those Demigods at the top, the rest were just tools.

When did they ever act on free will?

They were sad souls plagued by their vices and incapable of free thought.

When Damien came to know of the "curse," this mindset became stronger.

Even if they had a choice, some of them might not change, but he didn't believe in making that assumption before giving them the freedom to choose.

Bai Yumo was enough of an example.

And somewhere in the universe, there was another Nox being who could barely be regarded as one anymore. He was slowly being molded into someone with free will by the woman who gave him a chance.

Damien didn't expect to save the entire Nox race.

All their Demigods had to be exterminated, at least that much was certain.

But what if Bai Yumo became their leader?

If he was able to usurp the thrones that hadn't changed hands in so long and take control of those worthy of salvation, if he could create a divide in the Nox, the war situation would improve immensely.

And more than anything...

'When "that" time finally arrives, I'll have another card in my hands.'

It wasn't like he could read the future, but as he learned more, the order of events naturally became clear to him.

There were things he didn't want to see yet couldn't prevent, and there were things he would prevent even if it cost him everything.

No matter what it was, the future was a complex web filled with "ifs," "ands," and "buts," that never allowed it trustworthy consistency.

'For another two years, my time will be stalled.'

He was more than halfway through his punishment, but it felt like he had stopped moving,

He was disconnected from the timeline, an existence that could be felt but never seen.

When the time came for him to return...

'Haha, who am I kidding? It'll be a long time before I can do that.'

He shook his head and wiped that thought from his mind.

Whatever happened would happen. For now, he just needed to grow faithfully until he reached the point he wanted to see.

'I'm already in my eighth revolution, yet my Divinity is still too vague. Bai Yumo said I've grown too much, but I don't think this is enough at all.'

The fusion of laws he'd been attempting since he finalized his Elemental comprehension was still unsuccessful to this day.

Until he was able to enact that impossible combination, he would not be able to reach Divinity no matter how far he climbed.

'But...in another sense, that isn't a bad thing.'

If Damien reached the peak of what he could achieve as a lower existence, yet was refused the right to ascension, what would happen?

He already knew the answer.

'I'll become a human who can kill Gods.'

His blood boiled just thinking about it.

'But that's a story for the future. Right now, I have a two-day vacation I want to enjoy to my heart's content.'

He summoned a variety of herbs from thin air. It wasn't hard to gather materials when he was the owner of a miniature universe of over 300,000 worlds.

'Should I try that technique this time?'

No. 101: Abyssal Nectar.

He got the inspiration for this one from Bai Yumo's visit.

'I have a good feeling this time...'

Maybe, just maybe, this would be the one to give him what he desired.