

Void 1201

Chapter 1201 Mysteries [3]

It was hard for Damien to feel uncomfortable in the Abyss.

The first half an hour was no more than a period of adjustment, so he couldn't trust his feelings as he felt them, but as time passed and these emotions and sensations became more tangible, he could no longer deny his familiarity with the Abyss.

However, Damien wasn't the only human in the blackness.

No, he wasn't the only "foreigner" who explored its depths.

He was merely the only one who felt comfort doing so.

In the current instance, which could be considered a combination of an unknown number of instances in the Abyss, there were three other foreign entities scattered throughout its depths.

The first two were deep in the blackness, shackled by forces unknown, while the last...

Nevertheless, their identities or even existences were unknown to Damien.

He was currently following the path set out for him by his mana, a path leading straight to Al'Katra.

Only, he couldn't sense its end. He could only mindlessly follow it through the swirling blackness while admiring the sights around him.

Months passed like that.

The best way to describe the surroundings really was "chaotic."

Damien didn't know anything about the universes that once existed in this space, but he felt like he could sense their vestiges as he moved.

The random dilations in time weren't random at all, but the result of terrifying collisions that took place in a time long past. The dead zones empty of even space itself were the same, remnants of ancient battlefields.

As Damien moved, he tried to perceive these to the best of his ability.

At first, he couldn't do much but see the shadows of their existence, small pieces of reality that were lost in the void.

However, with the passing of time, his ability naturally increased.

He currently stood in yet another piece of the blackness.

Below him, if such a description even fit, was a dark galaxy of rubble. It was nothing more than an optical illusion, but the more he stared at it, the more its form changed.

From a random ruin in the middle of nowhere to a glorious ancient civilization with technologies the current universe simply couldn't fathom.

Faceless shadows populated that civilization. Some went about their daily lives unaware of danger, while others desperately fought to protect their fates and loved ones.

However, the enemy they faced was too terrifying.

Manifested in this vestige as a tsunami of darkness, the enemy overcame them before they could even properly prepare.

It was as if they had no conscious understanding of the threat.

Damien couldn't understand it.

The destruction of this place was surely due to Nox interference, but why were these people so...weak?

'I thought Grand Heavens Boundary's situation was desperate, but it seems I was wrong. There's a reason for its survival after all.'

To be the last remaining piece of the wider universe, Grand Heavens Boundary was definitely special.

But this kind of difference was far too exaggerated.

"Are you curious?"

Damien jumped in shock and rapidly teleported away, however, the Abyss limited his range of motion severely.

When he turned around, he was only a few tens of feet away from the speaker, nowhere near the distance he wanted to retreat.

'I didn't sense a thing.'

Damien's eyes narrowed.

It wasn't present before, he could be certain of that.

But at some point while he was observing the vestiges of the ancient civilization, an abode appeared behind him.

It was an old rickety shack that seemed extremely out of place in the Abyss.

It sat on a small piece of land no bigger than enough to support its structure. It was a humble structure that looked like the abode of a hermit far disconnected from society.

Yet, it carried a strange homey feeling that Damien couldn't comprehend.

Sitting on the porch, at a small wooden coffee table with two chairs, was an old man who fit perfectly into the shack's ambiance.

He was the one who spoke just now.

"Who are you?" Damien asked cautiously.

In this place where he knew nothing, he couldn't act rashly even with his current strength.

"Me? My identity is meaningless now. It has long withered away in the rivers of time. However, you, young man, are quite an interesting character. I never expected to see someone like you again in my life."

Damien frowned. Every time the old man spoke, his heart panged with a sense of familiarity of unknown origin.

The old man gazed at him with a smile, his eyes scrunched.

"Young man, this old man is quite thirsty after eons of wandering. Do you mind offering a drink?"

"Hm? In a place like this, that's your first request? I thought I was supposed to be the strange one, old man."

Against his conscious will, Damien responded with the same familiarity,

The old man's smile widened.

"Hahaha, indeed it is. For me, there is no longer any benefit in obtaining too much knowledge. This old man only wishes to taste the beauties of this world before passing."

Damien raised his brow.

"Odd phrasing, but I get it."

He swam through the few feet of blackness that separated them and landed on the rock, walking up to the old man and taking a seat next to him.

Something was pulling him towards this interaction, as if he'd dearly regret missing it.

And following that pull, Damien wordlessly pulled several herbs out of his subspace and began crafting his latest miracle.

"This is No. 105: Heaven's Blessing. It isn't perfect yet, but it's the peak of my current abilities."

Two cups appeared on the table and were soon filled with a glistening golden nectar.

The old man picked it up and took a whiff before sighing contentedly.

"Indeed, you have talent in this field."

He took a sip and smiled as he savored its taste.

"Don't kid me. Even after experimenting for years, I haven't been able to make a single drink that's affected me how I desired," Damien responded wryly, joining him in this drink.

"Haha, you are too hasty, child. In pursuits like this, don't you think patience is just as important as skill?" The old man remarked slowly.

"Yeah, I also realized it recently, and that's what helped me create this one. However, just patience and skill aren't enough. If they were, the peak I desire would've already been reached."

"So you are facing inevitability."

Damien's eyes widened.

The old man's words didn't mean much, but to Damien, they meant everything.

Because the problem that plagued him more than anything else ever since he started trying to fuse Elemental and Samsara was precisely inevitability.

It filled his thoughts and corrupted his ambition, forcing him to marvel at it and lose hope.

He refused, but the most he could do was refuse.

There was no way past this wall.

Not that he'd found, at least.

"Old man, what're you talking about?" Damien replied, correcting his expression.

"There's no such thing in my books."

The old man gave him a sideways glance.

"Whether you choose to accept it or not, inevitability exists in all things. However, it is also true that practitioners exist on the basis of overcoming such concepts."

"So, young man, what is standing in your way? Inevitability is only a word, but it can come from anywhere. Is your inevitability a product of your environment, or have you placed it on yourself?"

Damien stared into his cup. He stared into his reflection in the golden dew, pondering the question.

This old man...

Was he still talking about spirit liquor?

Or...

'No, I don't even need to consider such a stupid thought.'

The question may not have been as deep as he perceived it.

The old man was likely asking him if materials were the problem, or if it was his own lack of knowledge inhibiting him.

However, he had to question it seriously.

Facing this wall of inevitability, he'd always blamed the universe in his heart. He always thought he needed to surpass the universe's limits, using it as the face of inevitability.

But...

Was it really?

Was the universe the one inhibiting him?

He wasn't even inside the universe's boundaries anymore. If it truly was the case, wouldn't he have gained an epiphany the second he entered the Abyss?

Even if that was too far-fetched, the past few months were filled with insight and comprehension, yet he hadn't taken a single step forward in the fusion of laws he so desired.

So, how could he blame the universe?

What if...

What if the shackles that bound him were not a matter of external influence, but an internal demon?

'This...'

Damien looked back up at the—

"—old man...?"

His eyes widened.

There was nobody in the seat beside him.

No, there wasn't even a seat.

Somehow, the entire shack disappeared while he was immersed in thought, leaving him floating alone in the Abyss.

However, the cup of Heaven's Blessing in his hand was proof that this encounter truly happened.

It wasn't just some illusion.

That old man originally attracted his attention by asking him about the ancient civilization he was observing, but throughout their conversation, he didn't bring it up once.

Instead, they had a small talk about spirit liquor before he made himself sparse.

Yet, to Damien, that talk wasn't about spirit liquor at all.

Just slightly, he felt the watershed in his soul unclogging, showing him a chance.

Did that old man know?

But if he did, how?

Damien's mind was filled with questions about his existence, to the point where he had to force himself to stop thinking about it and return focus to the task at hand.

"In the end..." he muttered.

"...old man, just who are you?"

Chapter 1202 Mysteries [4]

Several more months passed. In total, Damien had been in the Abyss for almost a year.

He wasn't anywhere near Al'Katra yet, but his time in the Abyss hadn't been wasted at all.

He explored the vestiges of ancient civilizations everywhere he went, slowly putting together a picture of the past, and gained several comprehensions about his Laws.

Coincidentally enough, his greatest comprehension was of Universal Law.

These fractured universes were filled with fragments of their shattered Universal Laws. Usually, Damien wouldn't have been able to perceive them even with his understanding of the concept, however, he had Reva.

Reva, who'd merged with the World Core Fusion Reactor in his spiritual world and over time became the Universal Law of the Sanctuary, was originally a fragment of one of such universes.

Because of her, Damien also gained the ability to see them.

Perhaps even the vestiges were a product of her existence.

He was starting to understand just how they fell so fast. It wasn't their own fault as he'd originally thought, but a deep conspiracy that none of them realized even in their final moments.

The nature of that conspiracy was uncertain, as was the exact identity of the man behind the scenes, but its existence was certain, and Damien was getting closer and closer to unveiling the truth.

Nevertheless, this was only a part of what he'd been doing this past year. It was a bit depressing, but chasing the truths of the past was also riveting in its own way.

What delighted Damien most, however, was the loosening of his shackles.

After his conversation with the strange old man, the mental barriers holding him back from fusing Elemental and Samsara weakened considerably.

He still couldn't see the end goal, because the two laws didn't have any connection to fuse from, but the feeling that he couldn't do it disappeared.

This was an important change for him.

Without inevitability clogging his mind, his horizons broadened considerably.

Even if there wasn't a connection point, knowing his end goal made it much easier.

Life and Death, Light and Darkness, and many of the base elemental forces held the concept of duality within them, and this exact duality was what Damien now focused on.

As long as he could exploit this link to bring them closer, even if it wasn't enough to bring them together completely, it would fill his mind with comprehensions that'd be useful in finding the way forward.

That was all that mattered.

His steps were light. He swam through the blackness without worry.

And, of course, he didn't only prioritize his growth.

Every time he came across a Nox encampment, which wasn't nearly as rare of an instance as he expected, he went out of his way to destroy it.

However, his methods were lighter than they would've been.

His strategy remained consistent.

He used the Void to conceal himself and find the strongest member of the camp, then proceeded to incapacitate them and forcefully read their memories.

If he felt the camp was led by someone who would be useful for Bai Yumo, he would leave them alive and drop an imperceptible marker in their camp.

'If I'm right, Bai Yumo, or I guess I should call him Yong An now, will be able to sense it. He's smart enough to know what it means.'

Damien learned the name Yong An only after their conversation during his last visit, and he respected the Saint King's desire to change, so it was about time he changed the way he addressed the man.

Putting that aside, Yong An's connection with the Abyss was similar to Damien's connection with the Void. As long as he grew more powerful, he'd gain more control over this place, making him nigh-omnipotent within it.

'His current level is enough for something like this. The problem is whether he'll find them before an Emperor does.'

Damien trusted his power enough to maintain secrecy before a Nox Lord, but the Emperors were on another level.

They were the current end goal.

Therefore, he had to be certain they wouldn't uncover his plans too early.

'The Soul Emperor, from my understanding, hasn't left his territory in ages, so I don't have to worry about him. The Inhuman Emperor couldn't care less about something like this, so he's even less troubling.'

The Karmic and Saint Emperors, on the other hand, were too scheming and involved in the ongoing conflict. Damien couldn't predict their movements or actions.

'The Karmic Emperor...'

He was the one colluding with Immortal Blood Asura.

'Which means he's my first target among them.'

Damien furrowed his brows.

'I left enough information with Lynn to counteract his plans in the universe, but I can't help but be wary. Those two are too good at toying with others. I can't be sure if they've plotted something in the shadows.'

By now, Luciel should've received his information, so he could rest mostly assured, but that wasn't enough.

'We have to remain a step ahead.'

He came to the Abyss to solve the problems of the universe without losing too much more, but if they were able to pull something insane from under the veil, it would ruin everything he was currently working for.

His mind went back to the Soul Emperor's plans of the past.

'I was lucky back then. The timing lined up, so I was able to stop the Corrupted World Cores from going out of control. If something like that happens again...'

None of them were prepared for it.

The second the Nox became suicidal, the second someone gave them the order to sacrifice everything, the situation would become treacherous.

'All I can do is pass my doubts to them and hope they can handle it.'

Damien couldn't enter the Sanctuary personally anymore.

The Abyss' irrationality interfered with the teleportation functions of his domain. If he left his current position and came back from the Sanctuary, he wouldn't remain where he was.

No, the Abyss would change around him and displace him severely, which couldn't be allowed.

Therefore, the only way to communicate with the people within was to send a clone in his place.

'Haa...'

Comprehension was rewarding, and the scenery occupied most of his mind as he moved, but...

'It's lonely.'

It was almost unbearably lonely, and the Abyss' atmosphere naturally amplified his negative emotions while suppressing the positive ones.

'I'm free from the physical restrictions of this place, but that only means I'm more susceptible than anyone to the mental ones. I have to stay focused.'

If he lost track of his goal, he wasn't certain he could keep on his arduous journey to Al'Katra.

So, after condensing his thoughts into a clone and sending it away, he erased them all from his mind.

The path in his mind was vague. It felt like he was following a trail of smoke whose end was unknown.

However, just subtly, he understood how far away he was.

'It'll be a few more years at the very least.'

He didn't want it to be that long.

The longer it took, the more time the universe had to fall.

So he had to latch onto a single, barely viable hope.

Hope that the irregular time dilations of the Abyss were on his side.

Chapter 1203 Mysteries [5]

Whether time was passing or not was questionable. Damien felt every second of every day, but at the same time, he felt stuck in the past, as if he hadn't moved since the first second he entered the Abyss.

His days were monotonous.

He never deviated from the same activities, studying ancient civilizations, comprehending fragments of destroyed universes, massacring Nox, and trying his best to move towards his end goal.

The closer he got to Al'Katra, the further he felt.

His separation from the known universe became palpable at some point, and every step he took in the opposite direction weighed down on his heart.

Yet, he remained strong.

He pushed down the loneliness and didn't allow it to plague his mind. Once again, he focused his energy on accomplishing task after task to unveil a multitude of truths.

Though, his patience training was extremely useful.

At a time like this especially, patience was more important than anything.

If he didn't have it, there was no way he could remain in good condition by the time he reached his destination. He might've been forced to use the Mind Prison and close himself off again, which, in the long run, would only inhibit his growth.

Damien's life was boring. It was hilarious to imagine his life as something without flavor, but that's how it felt now.

But he was more aware than anyone that this was the calm before the storm. He never let himself get dragged too far into the depths by the Abyss.

He would never allow it to have its way.

On another normal day of nothingness, Damien suddenly spotted something in the distance.

'That is...'

He moved towards it and landed on the small piece of rock.

"I didn't expect to see you again," he said with a smile.

"Ah? But I have been expecting you ever since our first meeting."

The old man opened his eyes and glanced at Damien with a calm expression, inviting him to sit down.

"Your advice last time was really helpful. I didn't expect my problems to be so simple at their core."

Damien started by thanking the old man for his aid. The shackles that continued to loosen were proof enough of the impact those simple words had on him, and the only way he knew to repay that gratitude was this.

"Try this out. This is No. 106: Returning To Simplicity. I didn't really know how to name it, so I decided to go literal."

Damien poured two cups of spirit liquor as he did during his previous visit and allowed the old man to slowly savor the taste.

"Mm..." he hummed.

"It is indeed a level above the previous Heaven's Blessing, however, it seems you still have a ways to go."

"That's natural," Damien replied without much change in expression.

"I'm still lacking in many ways, but don't I have a way forward now? It's only a matter of time before I get there."

"Haha, this is the mindset of a true expert. It is a miracle to reach such maturity at your age."

"My age? In my opinion, I'm quite old now."

The old man shook his head in rejection.

"By my standards, you are no more than a baby. Time flows infinitely, so how can a mere few decades be enough to mature into your fullest potential?"

"Where I come from, people didn't have more than a few decades to do so. We struggled and fought every day, but in the end, who knows how many truly found solace in their old age? Life is an endless journey of learning, after all."

"In this aspect, I can agree wholeheartedly."

The duo sunk into silence for a moment as they savored the spirit liquor they shared, staring out into the swirling blackness.

"Why have you come to visit me this time?" The old man finally asked.

"I came to visit you? The way I see it, you showed up on your own accord."

"Haha, however, I do not make any moves actively. If you do not desire my presence, you will never feel it in your lifetime."

"Hmm..."

Damien shrugged. It was true he wanted to see the old man again, but there was no particular goal behind his actions.

He was just in need of company during his lonely journey, and this old man's knowledgeable character made him a great conversation partner.

The old man smiled, seemingly understanding his thoughts.

"It is indeed the bleakest environment in this lower world, but you are not far from what you seek. You must stay strong."

Damien rolled his eyes.

"I'm already aware of that. My mentality hasn't wavered yet, so you don't have to worry."

"Haha, then I will rest assured."

The old man glanced into his cup, his expression motionless.

"Since you are here, there is something I want to give you."

Damien raised his brow.

"And what would that be?"

"Hmm, well, that is for you to decide. It is inside the abode, so feel free to check it when you wish."

"Are you in the mood for conversation?"

"I will naturally entertain you if you have questions, but haven't I already said? There is nothing I do actively."

"I see..."

Damien furrowed his brows in thought. This mysterious old man seemed to know everything, so there were certainly questions he wanted to ask.

About the Nox, about himself, and about existence as a whole, Damien had far too many questions he needed answered.

'But I don't want them like this.'

Those questions had to be answered through his own effort, otherwise, the truths they masked would lose all meaning.

"Old man, I'll go check it out. Don't disappear before I come back."

"Haha, are you aggrieved? Unfortunately, I cannot make promises, as my movements are not under my control."

"Haa, this again."

Damien didn't question further. After all, the old man must've had his own secrets, and they weren't nearly familiar enough for those to be revealed so easily.

Instead, he opened the door to the shack and entered. There was no furniture within, the walls and floor clean yet untouched for eons.

The only thing in that place was...

"...a woman?"

Damien raised his brow in curiosity as he approached her.

The woman was unconscious on the floor of the shack and unmoving as if her body had no life, but Damien could sense the clear fluctuations of vitality emanating from her.

'There's no way he would randomly give me a woman and call her a gift. That's too strange even for him.'

He kneeled down beside her and observed her appearance.

She had long blonde hair that spread over the floor like waves of sunlight and beautiful fair skin. Her body was quite bountiful, but Damien didn't pay much attention to it.

Instead, her pointy ears, something he'd rarely seen in the universe for a long time, attracted his gaze.

'This...an elf?'

Why was there an elf in the Abyss?

'Let's find out.'

He pressed his finger to her forehead, noting her lack of movement even when he inserted his mana into her body.

Void Mana infiltrated her mind and made her memories clear to him.

Destruction.

Damien widened his eyes.

'This place is...'

Massive starships and cruisers filled the starry sky, shooting cannons that could directly destroy worlds. People died left and right, and no matter how much they fought, they were unable to fend off the invading forces.

"People of Aurora, hear me. Your trial begins now. For daring to rebel against the will of the Lords, your punishment is death."

A booming voice rang out from above.

The sky was blotted out by the star destroyer's shadow.

Everything was being rushed.

"M-mother! What are you doing?!"

The elf's confusion was clear in her mind. She could not rationalize what was happening as her mother inserted several coordinates into a panel on a nondescript wall.

She tried to cry out. She tried to scream.

However...

VOOM!

Bright blue light covered her vision.

"Mother!"

She reached her arm out, but she could only see her mother's back.

And they could no longer hear her.

Spatial fluctuations ran rampant, and as the scenery began to change...

Everything went black.

It was black from that point on.

Damien exited the elven woman's memories with eyes wide in shock.

'That...that scene was...'

He hadn't seen it personally, but it was a topic of fierce debate.

In his time, it had been almost two decades since then.

Damien looked down at the woman with solemn eyes.

The old man...what was his purpose in giving this woman to him?

He didn't know her, but he could understand her identity easily from those few memories.

She was royalty.

And that...

'That was the Elven Domain. Just moments before it was obliterated.'

Chapter 1204 Mysteries [6]

The Elf Princess Azera.

Before today, Damien didn't think there were any survivors of the Elven Domain tragedy, but her existence proved him wrong.

The mystery as to how she ended up in the Abyss wasn't too hard to figure out.

She was in the middle of a space corridor when Aurora was obliterated, and the mana forced its way into the corridor and shattered it.

Her only end was to be randomly spit out somewhere, with fatal injuries almost instantly killing her.

So she could be considered lucky to land in the Abyss.

This place with its corrupted time and space kept her alive longer than she should have been.

Afterward, the old man found her and kept her in his shack. The fact that her body had no visible injuries could only be credited to his interference.

'This further proves that the old man isn't simple, but that isn't new information.'

Damien frowned.

He didn't really have an interest in the Elven Domain's destruction, and finding a survivor didn't mean much to him.

So why did the old man call her a "gift?"

'Her memories are blank since the moment she left, so it's clear she's been comatose since then...if the answer isn't in her mind, then it must be in her body.'

Damien pulled himself out of her spiritual world and sent his mana through her physical body to observe it.

And indeed, it was a nearly incomprehensible sight.

'Her systems are all pretty much destroyed. There's hardly anything remaining that logically supports the amount of vitality emanating from her, but...'

Everything was different.

Damien hadn't devoured any elves, so he didn't know the specifics of their physiology, but he had several close to him.

Through inference, he could understand that they weren't much different than humans in their internal structure. Their organs and bodily systems were essentially mirrored.

But this woman, Azera, did not hold any of those similarities.

'There's a faint presence. It can barely be felt, but it's supporting her life force.'

It wasn't a positive presence in the slightest.

No, it was the mana of the Abyss.

'I need to dig deeper.'

Damien sat down cross-legged and closed his eyes, focusing all his senses on the current task.

The further he explored her body, the more he felt the urge to stand up and exclaim in shock.

But he held it in.

'She's being transformed.'

That was the main conclusion he made.

In the time she spent floating in the Abyss, and even now, its mana was corroding her systems in an odd way that transformed her into a being that could only be called an elf in appearance.

Her internal structure...

'...is far more like a Nox.'

"Huu..."

Damien had made many conclusions about their species in the time he spent devouring them, but many were just assumptions without proof.

Her existence practically gave him the proof he needed to justify 90% of those assumptions.

'I always wondered why the Nox were so hell-bent on creating chimeras out of universe denizens in their likeness, but maybe they were just chasing their roots.'

'Even if I had no other information, this transformation alone proves it. The Nox...are an artificially created species.'

They did not come into existence naturally. They were an invasive species in its territory, a virus that shouldn't have existed.

The entity or entities who birthed them were still unknown, but...

'...not only were they created instead of born, they were corrupted away from what their creators intended.'

He felt it clearly in her body.

The presence of the Void, that is.

'I didn't expect to find this at all.'

He had his speculations, but with this it was certain. The Abyss was truly a reflection of the Void, a diluted version of its existence.

From his understanding, the Abyss was formed from the destroyed remnants of several universes, but it couldn't have always been like that.

There was certainly a time when the universe hadn't yet faced destruction and the Abyss had no means to be created.

Yet, even in that time, it existed.

He couldn't explain that primordial form of this space. He didn't know anything about it, nor could he envision it.

But in its current form, the explanation was simple.

When reality was destroyed, it would create a Dead Zone absent of any laws.

The Abyss was a larger version of this.

The destruction of the universe created a massive Dead Zone, but because the forces present in their ruination were too plentiful, they weren't wiped out, but instead clashed against each other and further ruined the Dead Zones they resided in.

When all else was gone, what could fill that space?

Naturally, it was the Void, the entity that birthed existence itself.

The Void's energy seeped through the cracks formed by the cataclysms and allowed for the stable fusion of those rampaging elements. In the end, this reaction continued for eons upon eons until finally solidifying into what was now called the Abyss.

'Phew...'

A universal truth.

This single interaction allowed him to witness it.

And this truth, combined with everything else he'd learned from Azera's body, gave him a level of perception impossible to others.

'If the Void is the "glue" that formed the Abyss, and the Nox were formed in the Abyss itself, there's no way they'd remain unaffected.'

It was no wonder they were unable to form conscious thought until they received Universe Baptisms and were introduced to the presence of order.

It was no wonder they needed something like bloodline memories to guide them and give them purpose.

And it was no wonder their personalities skewed further and further towards disorder as they gained power.

After all, power was freedom.

And for those who knew nothing but chaos and were influenced by the Void's qualities to consume all things, it was only natural to develop such dispositions.

'...I'm starting to pity them a little.'

Damien smiled wryly to himself as he stood up.

'This can't be everything. If I can learn so much from just examining her body, actually hearing it from her will surely provide unexpected boons. I guess...I should probably save her.'

He had a population of elves in the Sanctuary as well, though the difference in hair color clearly illustrated the separation of their ancestries.

Nevertheless, Elvira was the perfect person to ask if he wanted to heal this woman, and putting her in the company of elves would help stabilize her psyche much faster than doing it himself.

'Alright. Let's take some precautions first.'

He placed his hand on her head and slowly injected Void Mana into her systems.

This mana would both assure that she wouldn't die instantly from the rapid change in environment when she was introduced to the Sanctuary, and restrict her in case she turned feral when she regained consciousness.

Without another thought, he swept his arm through the air and picked her up with his mana, sending her directly to the Sanctuary.

His mood was lighter now than it was before he came here.

'This is fun. It's a lonely journey to Al'Katra, but it's like just being here is unraveling secret after secret that's plagued me for so long.'

He felt refreshed. The Nox didn't seem as fearsome when he thought about them. People like the Saint Emperor were of course not included, since his personality was ludicrous, but the Soul Emperor and Inhuman Emperor lost a majority of their credibility here.

'If the Inhuman Emperor is a representation of what happens when the Nox are too far separated from their origins and descend into the influence of the Abyss...'

Damien's eyes hardened.

'...the Soul Emperor is a representation of a Nox utterly loyal to their original cause.'

He didn't like that at all.

Because that man was the one behind a majority of the plots that ruined the universe completely.

And he was the one plundering World Cores for reasons unknown.

Those motives that had been hidden behind a veil of mystery until now...

...they were starting to become much clearer.

Chapter 1205 Danger [1]

'I should go find the old man again. He's probably the answer to far more questions than Azera.'

Azera was a treasure trove, but not by her own design. It could be said that she was lucky and misfortunate to enter her current state.

She wasn't really an elf, nor was she really anything else. She was an unknown factor, a unique being within the universe.

However, the only reason she could become one instead of dying and being consumed by the Abyss was because of the old man, so naturally, he was the one Damien had to speak to.

He rushed out of the shack and turned his head to the table where the old man was sitting.

Luckily, he hadn't—

"Hey, hey, didn't you say you were going to stay?!" Damien suddenly exclaimed.

The old man shrugged. Well, he did something similar as his body virtualized into particles along with everything he owned.

"Did I? If I am remembering correctly, I said I couldn't make any promises. Remember...?"

"Haa, yeah, you don't do anything actively, right?"

"That's the one."

Damien was incredibly annoyed by the timing. If he wanted to disappear, why couldn't he do it a few seconds earlier?!

Nevertheless, he didn't want to hear the same phrase a sixteenth time, so he didn't say anything else.

"Until next time, old man."

The old man nodded in response, his presence completely vanishing.

Damien was left alone in the blackness once more.

"Haa..."

He scratched his head in frustration with a sigh.

"Seriously, how does something like that even work? Are you saying you're being moved by something, or...?"

Damien didn't really know what to think, but he knew he had to find the old man again.

He was the key to "something."

What was that something? Damien didn't have the slightest idea.

But it was important.

It was probably one of the most important things as of now.

"The most important thing is still Al'Katra, so I guess I should just keep going."

There was nothing more to be said.

There was nobody who could hear him anyway.

Damien shut his mouth and started moving again, reaccustoming himself to his usual routine.

Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months. Before months could turn into years, Damien stopped counting entirely.

The number of Nox he killed kept increasing, but oddly enough, he didn't gain much from them anymore.

Their memories simply held no value.

These beasts who'd never left the Abyss and only acted on orders were of no use to him.

So the only thing he had to look forward to was Al'Katra.

When his internal body clock notified him of his 5th year in this place passing, Damien finally took note of the time again, but only for a bit before returning to his regularly scheduled program.

He saw countless ancient ruins and vestiges during this time, and he'd managed to meet the old man twice more.

Each time, his seemingly regular words about life or spirit liquor gave Damien insights into the truths he'd been seeking for so long.

And with his growth, Al'Katra also became closer and closer.

It would only be a few more years now.

This unbearably lonely pilgrimage was almost at its climax.

But until then...

'There's really no need to say it.'

It had been said too many times already.

Damien's current life...really was quite boring.

BOOM!

The battle currently ongoing wasn't in the regular areas of the universe.

Not to say those battles had stopped. In the past three years, they'd only become more prevalent. There wasn't a single area of the Infernal Realm that was free of conflict, to the point where its common populace was forced to evacuate to the Divine Realm years ago.

However, the current battle was not one of those without potential, but of those filled with it.

The younger generation had become extremely absorbed in Mystic Realms since the war eclipsed the universe. Even the Judgement Order, who usually stayed on the battlefield, split their forces for this purpose.

Those within the Dimensional Leaderboard's criteria focused their attention solely on climbing its ranks and occupying the top positions, while those like Aishia and Pontius led the troops to help guide the momentum of battle how they wished it.

The present location was an independent space titled the Starry Sky Mystic Realm.

It was like a miniature version of Grand Heavens Boundary that only contained a few planets, and of the Mystic Realms that had been discovered thus far, this one had the most bountiful rewards.

Which also meant this was the place where the most fierce clashes were taking place.

Along with many of the geniuses who'd been trained by Prismatic Sun Holy Land like Pandora, the members of Judgement Order that were present were Rose, Ruyue, Elena, Long Chen, and Su Ren.

These five members made up a majority of its combat power in the younger generation, and they were also those who represented the universe's greatest hope.

The current Dimensional Leaderboard looked something along the lines of:

[1. Damien Void]

[2. Saint King]

[3. Su Ren]

[4. Xue Ruyue]

[5. A'Ku]

[6. Elena Pierce]

[7. Altaro]

[8. Rose Adelaide]

[9. Long Chen]

[10. Xirxes]

Damien and the Saint King could be ignored since they weren't present in Grand Heavens Boundary at the moment, but the rest of the spots were dominated by the Judgement Order.

As for those names that didn't belong to them, they were Nox geniuses.

With this ranking, it was evident that these five would become targets for all younger Nox beings, and that was exactly how the situation panned out.

Because if one looked at the top 20, or even the top 50, the Nox were far more prevalent than universal geniuses.

The battle became one of quality against quantity, and while the regular troops fighting in the Infernal Realm seemed to value quality based on their ever-increasing fighting spirit, Rose wasn't of the same opinion.

This would be negative for them if it continued.

The Nox had caused far more damage to the universe than they had to them, so if one looked at the overall situation, the Nox were the ones in the lead.

The Starry Sky Mystic Realm was an opportunity to change that.

To slaughter those Nox geniuses who occupied the Dimensional Leaderboard's top 100s and replace them with people loyal to the universe.

Rose brought Pandora and the rest here for that exact purpose.

She wasn't going to do all the work, nor would her people. They were here to preside over the situation and make sure none of the weaker geniuses died early.

The main players of this battle were already set.

Pandora, being one of them, and arguably the one with most potential, didn't enjoy being used like this, but she accepted it nonetheless.

Because she could no longer compete with the likes of Rose and her Judgement Order.

After countless experiences on the battlefield, they'd all grown into High Commanders with great power, while she was still stuck in the 3rd revolution.

So if this was how they wanted to do things, she couldn't complain.

She could only accept their help and try to stand equal to them once more!

Chapter 1206 Danger [2]

"Damn!"

Pandora gnashed her teeth as she cut down her enemy.

This was only the third Nox she'd met thus far. There weren't large numbers of them like normal, but every single one had a unique power that made them difficult to deal with and especially unpredictable.

"Before, we didn't really have to worry about Demonic Providence because we were only fighting the waves. Now that we're nearing the top, I guess it's unavoidable," she muttered to herself as she looked around.

She couldn't see many of her teammates. They'd split into a number of groups and taken different worlds in this Mystic Realm as their training grounds, but her...?

"Dammit!"

She cursed again. It was rare for her to do so, but in the past few weeks, she'd been unable to contain herself.

After all, Rose sent her to this world alone!

Every Mystic Realm had a condition that needed to be cleared for it to be counted as completed.

In the Storm Heavens Mystic Realm that Damien raided when he first came to the Divine Realm, the condition was simply to "survive."

This wasn't rare amongst Mystic Realms. In fact, most of them were survival conditions with a set time period that allowed the contestants to explore as much as possible to reap rewards before exiting.

Unfortunately, the Starry Sky Mystic Realm wasn't so forgiving.

Let alone a survival condition, its condition was completely hidden as if the challengers were supposed to be stuck here for an eternity.

It made sense considering the nature of the realm itself, but there was simply no way that was true!

Instead, this realm required one to unveil its mystery while they explored. There were relics buried underground and in ruins that alluded to the existence of an ancient civilization that once lived in this place, the so-called "Irason Empire."

From what Pandora learned, it existed long, long ago and never had contact with the outside world. Their specialty was flame techniques, and while their Emperor was a calm and logical man, they were an extremely warmongering civilization.

Every power, influence, race, or other group of any sort that used to reside in this realm was subjugated by them and turned into a pawn of their empire, and when there was nothing left to conquer...

"They turned their eyes to the outside world."

It sounded like the story of the Nox, a story of constant slaughter without a clear goal.

However, the Irason Empire didn't experience the same success as the ink race.

From the records, they were struck down by the "power of heaven" before they could reach their end goal and invade the true universe.

There weren't many records of that power. Pandora searched for days on end, but the ruins she found only held stories of the civilization itself, not the cause of their destruction.

"I've been looking for that stupid 'power of heaven' for over a month now, but I've only found trash!" Pandora complained.

It wasn't without reason. After all, besides some hurried writings as that power decimated them, how could they create records of it?

This prosperous and powerful empire was brought to ruin in but a single second, whatever destroyed them eradicated all life in the Mystic Realm, and...

'Maybe that "cause" is what turned this place into a Mystic Realm in the first place.'

Mystic Realms weren't like hidden realms. They were exclusively under the Dimensional Leaderboard's control, and were not inhabited by intelligent races.

The most one could find were beasts whose intelligence was forced to remain untouched, those who could at most learn a bit of human language without realizing the heights of the sky they were trapped under.

So even the existence of the Irason Empire's ruins here was confusing.

So was the fact that they were originally in a secret realm somewhere.

It was hard to say Pandora wasn't curious. Despite her annoyance, the mysteries of this ancient culture awakened her adventurous spirit and made her want to dig up its truth.

But it was hard.

These thoughts just kept creeping up and making her angrier, which naturally impeded her search.

There weren't many Nox in her world.

After all, this world was desolate and barely had traces of life in it at all. It was obviously a dead-end, so both sides ignored it.

"...so why did that bitch send me here?!"

Pandora cursed and complained, but she didn't actually hold negative feelings towards Rose.

More or less, she wanted to curse something out, and Rose was the closest target.

"Haa, never mind. Whatever the reason, it's true that this world isn't as desolate as it seems."

It was here that she learned so much about the Irason Empire and the "Power of Heaven," and from her inferences, this should've been the civilization's main world.

'For it to be this rotten, I can't really say they were wrong to assume heaven was the one who killed them.'

And it wasn't just information.

There were roughly 100 participants in this Mystic Realm. Excluding the Judgement Order group, there were 40 rising geniuses and 55 of the Nox.

Of them, Pandora only met five enemies so far.

The number made her angrier, since even those incompetent Nox devalued this world, but...

'...that strange power, it's back again.'

Every time she killed someone, a red energy filled her body and filled her with power. She didn't trust it, nor did she use it, but its presence seemed to increase her ability to excavate this place.

Ever so slightly, a link formed in her heart that guided her towards the center of the world.

'There's something there. As for whether it's positive or negative...'

She didn't know, but she had to look for it.

With that in mind, she ignored everything else and tried to suppress her rage, digging into the subterranean layers of the world.

The ground had a strange viscosity. It was like volcanic ash mixed with slime, giving one an extremely unnerving feeling as they moved deeper into its surface, but Pandora just gritted her teeth and continued.

What could she say?

She already cursed everyone she could think of and her physical anger was being taken out on the rock, so the only thing she could do was cope.

However, as she got closer to her destination, it became harder to control.

Her thoughts ran wild.

Curses turned into threats. She wanted to beat the ones who put her in this unfortunate situation until they could no longer loom above her.

And by the time she reached the pulsing red heart at the center of the world, her urge was undeniably one to slaughter.

She stared at the blood-red heart with eyes that were starting to mirror its color.

She started to understand the Irason Empire. Their desire for conquest was an undeniable urge of every human, and even she felt it to an extent.

No, she felt it wholly.

She also wanted to dominate everyone else in this place and put them under her foot.

And when she was done—

Pandora's expression crumpled.

BOOOOOOOM!

A nearby wall exploded, sending chunks of rubble flying out her.

"Who dares interrupt me?!"

She roared out, incinerating the projectiles and stepping forward.

However, at that moment, her eyes went wide.

It wasn't even a centimeter away from her eye.

She could already feel its sharpness digging into her skin.

A massive spire of twisted red and black tentacles that were pulsating like they were alive.

Its tip, sharper than any artifact, was just a moment away from turning her head into modern art.

Chapter 1207 Core [1]

Damien was in...quite the situation.

After spending nearly 8 years floating through the Abyss, he thought he'd gained a relative understanding of its functions, and through it, he'd been able to avoid the worst.

There were absolute death zones in this place that even he, with his unreasonably powerful life force and regenerative ability, would die in, and he'd been able to sneak past them without being harmed several times.

However, what got him wasn't an absolute death zone, but a natural trap he never expected to encounter.

His current location was indeed the Abyss, but at the same time, not quite.

He was in a separated dimension looking out into the Abyss.

This place was like fragments of broken glass, each one roughly 5 meters tall and 3 or 4 meters wide, and they blended into the blackness of the environment to the point where even Damien's eyes couldn't make them out.

Naturally, perception also couldn't sense them.

They were completely removed yet completely integrated with the atmosphere, and Damien only realized he'd entered one when he realized he couldn't leave!

He'd been stuck in this strange state for over a year now, and the solution he'd come up with was simple.

'I have to comprehend the fractured laws here and find a way to merge them with the chaotic Abyss.'

Not only would this require the presence of the Void, but also a level of Spacetime comprehension he hadn't reached.

It was his first major setback on his way to Al'Katra, and it wasn't just a matter of losing time. He was certain the Abyss was still changing around him, creating a situation with the same consequences as leaving for the Sanctuary.

He'd spent the last year in comprehension.

Sitting in this place that was like a small piece of existence trapped in the void, he had no choice but to meditate and merge with its laws.

In the process, he'd also hypothesized how such a phenomenon came about.

He was no stranger to the shattered universes that created the Abyss. While he hadn't found anything similar to Reva yet, he had found several fragments that held small amounts of Universal Law, which he promptly absorbed.

He felt like if he returned to Grand Heavens Boundary with his current comprehension of Universal Law, he'd surely be able to control reality in unthinkable ways.

But that was beside the point.

This wasn't like the rest of the shattered pieces he'd seen.

Those were already beyond repair. Even if he brought them all together, he'd only get a vague idea of the Universal Law of the universes they belonged to, nothing else.

But this place was whole.

Yes, it was fragmented, but these pieces were large and complete enough to be considered true legacies of those ancient universes.

So, while Damien was irked by his entrapment, he was also eager to explore the secrets of this separated space as he found his way out.

Today was just like any other day.

Damien sat with his eyes closed and his senses spread. At this point, he'd already merged his consciousness with the surrounding space and started comprehending its nature.

Overall, he sensed many similarities to Grand Heavens Boundary, which made sense since both were part of the same greater universe at some point, but there were definitely several differences in the ways the laws functioned.

'First off, space and time are out of wack. Instead of the constantly expanding space that Grand Heavens Boundary has, this one is constantly shrinking. As for time, the flow is completely ruined. There is no sense of past and present, and everything is like a single picture that one can only view comprehensively.'

The matter of space shrinking was interesting. It gave him the idea this fragmented dimension was actually the universe itself at the end of its life instead of a piece of it.

Such a truth would explain its wholeness, but if it was the answer, where was everything?

The shrinking wouldn't get rid of the worlds and celestial bodies that inhabited the universe. In fact, from what Damien understood, it was such an ingrained mechanism that it would provoke all things to shrink along with it.

However, even at a molecular level, Damien couldn't sense the existence of anything besides himself.

'As for time...'

Theoretically, any beings that viewed time from this perspective were already above the universal standard, so-called 4th-dimensional beings in Earth terms.

They would've been able to mold society in their image, altering the past and future to affect the present in ways to create the most ideal results.

But if that was true, they wouldn't have ended up in this state.

Therefore, the conclusion he came to was that these factors changed after their destruction.

Or perhaps, the extinction of all life within the universe morphed the Universal Law like this.

'It's already established that the relationship between a universe and its inhabitants is symbiotic. When the Nox invaded us, they didn't just kill the people, but also destroyed the universe, but what if...'

What if, in the earliest stages of their conquest, they aimed specifically for World Cores as they'd done with the Giant Domain instead of touching the universe?

What if they left the universe as an empty container and moved on, with no interest in its existence?

'If that's the case, I'm near the edges of the ancient greater universe. The destruction of this place happened near the beginning of time.'

The current Nox race wouldn't just leave a universe alone like this.

It wasn't a matter of their destructive nature. Damien had long since abandoned his preconceptions of the Nox and viewed them as a whole species with the same flaws as humans.

However, if this universe's life ended so long ago, knowledge would've been much sparser.

The things people knew today were plenty, but there was one thing that was still a mystery to this day, only inferred by the highest experts.

Such a fact wouldn't have even entered the imaginations of those ancient people.

'When the Nox are finished plundering all the World Cores from an existing universe, their next step would naturally be its higher variety.'

Worlds were microcosms of the universe itself.

Just like worlds had World Cores...

'...the universe had a Universal Core.'

That core was the operating system that allowed its laws to be maintained, and could be considered the physical body of Universal Law.

How could the Nox leave it be?

Reva was a fragment of a Universal Core, and the strange phantom woman he met when he bound her was its true form, or at least an image of it.

The destruction that created the Abyss naturally came about because those very Universal Cores were plundered, and the universes lost their means of staying stable.

Just blowing things up wasn't enough to cause this scene.

Just imagining the power such a mysterious construct contained sent shivers down Damien's spine.

He, as a Celestial, had an undeniable urge to explore it, but also a natural fear of its grandiosity.

And...

If this universe really became like this in the same way he assumed it to...

'...it's Universal Core might still be intact.'

And he, as the man who was dragged into this space, was the only person in existence who had a chance to find it.

Chapter 1208 Core [2]

Now that he'd made this inference, finding signs of the Universal Core's presence was his top priority.

He didn't know exactly what to look for, but his comprehension of Universal Law combined with his position as a Celestial gave him several ideas.

And more than just finding the Universal Core, which would only benefit him, he needed to find a way to merge this space with the Abyss.

'If I just take the Universal Core and let it naturally merge, I'll definitely see something interesting, but is it worth spending another decade here to find Al'Katra?

The answer was a resounding "no."

The so-called "natural merger" was the process of chaotic forces being tamed by the Void and turned into a piece of the Abyss. This process would inevitably worsen the Abyss' irregularity and push him away from his goal.

There were plenty of ways for him to see how the Abyss functioned, but his current task was already extremely delayed by the environment and couldn't be pushed back further.

Therefore, his primary focus was still split between creating an opening to leave and fulfilling his personal desires,

Luckily, they went hand in hand.

He couldn't destroy or plunder the Universal Core directly if he didn't want to ruin everything, but finding it was a key component in escaping this place.

'And even if it's the Abyss, it's impossible for me to be the first in history to stumble upon this place. The rest must've died after being stuck here for an eternity, eventually becoming a piece of this space or food to the core.'

His conjecture was feeling more factual with every passing second.

So, how was he to find the Universal Core?

'That's even simpler.'

The only reason he hadn't made progress in the past year was because he didn't have any viable leads to follow.

Now that he did, executing the process would be easier than anything.

Mana flared from his body and turned into several threads of Celestial Mana.

These threads then shot into the void of space in the fragmented dimension and formed a spiderweb that encapsulated its entire area.

'The answer is World Force.'

If the Universal Core was bent on hiding, all he needed to do was force it out.

VOOOOM!

"World Force" was a power Damien rarely used.

It was a subset of Universal Law that acted as a world's natural defense mechanism against all things. If one was on-planet, as long as one had enough World Force, one could practically act as a God even without binding it.

However, it didn't have much use for Damien.

After all, not only did he control Universal Law itself, he had several other methods to alter worlds however he pleased.

Regardless, he naturally collected World Force as he bound more and more worlds, and instead of letting it go to waste, he allowed it to strengthen Reva so the Sanctuary's laws could become more complete.

This was the first time he'd felt the true power of his World Force with his body.

And as the master of almost 500,000 worlds, it was something of wonder.

WHOOSH!

A sparkling universe formed through the spiderweb of Celestial Mana Threads. The iridescent blue mana of his World Force twisted and swirled, dancing along the threads as they spread further into the void of space.

As they came together and pushed apart, the reactions that were showcased were similar to the formation of worlds. It was almost as if, as long as they were allowed to continue, countless new worlds would be born in this space.

With this kind of power occupying all the space in the fragmented dimension, even pushing into nearby fragments and drawing them closer, how could the Universal Core stay silent?

After all, Damien represented its greatest dream.

He represented the revival of this universe!

It started small. A barely visible fleck of light, like a single star in the vastness of the cosmic, flickered indiscernibly as if trying to grab Damien's attention.

But when he paid it no mind, it rapidly expanded, becoming a sun-like force in a matter of seconds!

"There you are," Damien said with a smile.

The light was just a representation of its power. If one scaled the universe up to its true size, this light would've encompassed almost half of its entirety.

However, the current Universal Core wasn't so massive.

No, it was just that single fleck, endlessly small in this endless expanse.

Damien's perception locked onto it now that it had shown itself.

His body couldn't shrink. He didn't have that kind of control over his systems, however...

A small light ball exited his forehead and traveled towards the light, entering it and quickly reaching its center.

The small string of consciousness took form in front of the Universal Core, standing at the same height as it and marveling at its existence.

It wasn't blue like a World Core. Instead, it was pure white.

Damien couldn't tell whether this was its true form or only what could be perceived by a lower existence like himself, but that didn't matter.

"You understand what I want, right?" He said calmly.

The Universal Core shook slightly, transmitting its emotions to him.

"Hm? Rudimentary intelligence? With this age...I guess intelligence isn't permitted to your kind. The one I met was just an isolated case.'

It made sense why there wasn't even a single rumor about an existence like Reva before. They must've been exceedingly rare, if not totally unique.

"No matter what, this place will eventually fall prey to the Abyss. I respect your efforts thus far, but considering the current situation, you only have two options," he said, responding to the core's emotions.

Damien held up a finger.

"The first is death. When I escape this place, you will inevitably become exposed to the Abyss, where your only fate is to be swallowed and incorporated by it."

Looking at the core's timidity as he spoke, he smiled wryly, feeling as if he was bullying a child.

But there truly were only two options.

He wasn't going to ruin his escape plan just for its sake.

His second finger rose to accompany the first.

"The second option is survival. I will take you somewhere, and if you inhabit that place, you will be able to take a form like never before and grow past your previous limits. However, you will have to abandon this body."

He saw it in many World Cores in the past.

Their bodies meant everything to them, but...

...their desire for survival trumped all else.

The Universal Core calmed down. Its emotions slowly started taking the form Damien expected.

Damien nodded, pleased by its quick response.

"Very well. Then, I hope you enjoy your second chance at life, and don't forget. If you act unruly, I will exterminate you without hesitation."

He didn't speak anymore, directly pushing his mana into the Universal Core to bind it.

He was quite happy. Not only did he gain an unexpected boon, he found a shortcut to escaping this place, all in one.

After he bound the Universal Core and sent it to the Sanctuary, he just needed to use the Void to directly control the direction of the following merger, which could guarantee the maintenance of his position, or perhaps even push him closer to his goal!

And, in the end, he still somewhat gained the thing he was prepared to lose, the opportunity to witness the natural merger of these forces.

Overall, it was a great event for him.

And since he could sense that his destination was at most a few months away...

...his mood was truly giddy.

Chapter 1209 Core [3]

BOOOOOOOOOM!

Pandora wasn't sure what exactly happened.

It was just a second ago. No, not even that.

Just an instant ago, a period of time she couldn't even begin to comprehend, that spire was directly in front of her face.

She could still feel the blood leaking from her eye and painting her face.

But...

It was not there anymore.

It was shattered into fragments.

No, were those...flowers?

"I knew you'd be the one to find it, but I didn't expect it to be so fast. Good job, Pandora."

'Hm? That voice is...'

"...Rose?"

Pandora touched her face in confusion as she looked up, seeing the familiar pink-haired figure standing there.

Rose gently descended to the ground, waving her hand in an equally graceful manner.

The deadly spire that was now just a rain of flower petals whooshed to life and blew past her. The vibrant scent of nature filled Pandora's senses, and suddenly, her mind felt amazingly clear.

"Rose, be careful! That thing is—!"

"Yes, I know. The heart of the Irason Empire, a disgusting power that shouldn't exist in this world."

"H-huh...?"

Rose shook her head.

"You do not need to worry about being affected by it any longer. I've cleared that obstacle for you. Now, take hold of it and understand the purpose of this Mystic Realm, so you can stand out as the final winner."

Pandora shakily nodded her head and rose to her feet.

With a clear mind, she suddenly realized everything that had happened in the past few weeks.

Over time, "rage" polluted her perception.

No matter how much she pushed it down, it always came back and occupied the forefront of her mind.

In the last moments before she was almost killed by that spire, that rage had influenced her to the point of forming killing intent against her allies.

She had become a reflection of the Irason Empire.

"Irason...the name is much more literal than expected."

She originally took it as the surname of the Imperial Clan and didn't think much, but looking at it now, it was unbelievably obvious.

Irason, Son of Ira. The Imperials of this empire were the descendants of Wrath itself, something incomprehensible to her.

"Is it...is it actually possible...?" She asked in awe and fear.

"No."

However, Rose's response was clear.

"They didn't descend from the concept of wrath. That's just what they told themselves so they could act boisterously with reason."

A disdainful frown was present on her face as she spoke.

She remembered the last "Wrath" she'd met, that scum who tried to kill her husband.

Just like him, they were nothing more than imitations.

"This heart has nothing to do with the forces of evil. In fact, it's just a mana treasure that was corroded by their bloodlust over time. At some point, instead of letting them influence it, it formed its own consciousness and started influencing them until it led them to their destruction."

Pandora's eyes widened.

Wasn't that quite a story?

"But how do you know all this?"

"Ah..." Rose muttered awkwardly.

"Well, just consider it a secret for now. If you know too much, you'll probably get points deducted when we leave."

Pandora nodded and stopped hesitating, walking up to the treasure.

As Rose watched her, she turned her gaze to the glowing red heart, her eyes cold.

'Behave.'

Imperceptibly, the heart itself shivered, as if it had just met the most terrifying presence in existence.

Rose shook her head and refocused on Pandora.

The current goal was to bring her into the top 10 and replace one of the Nox geniuses, and naturally, Rose wouldn't make such a move without preparation.

In fact, unbeknownst to everyone except Ruyue and Elena, Rose entered the Starry Sky Mystic Realm almost a year ago, and she'd conquered it completely alone.

At that time, nobody else knew it existed at all, and she had to spend a considerable amount of time to clear it.

But during that time, a clone so realistic even its power was a direct representation of hers took her place, and nobody suspected otherwise.

Rose already understood the clearing strategy for this place. The reason it was still open was because she used illusions to escape instead of completing it back then, which forced it to revert to its original form and wait for new challengers.

She pushed Pandora so hard, planting the seed of rage in her heart, so that she could be drawn to this place.

And with that seed, she'd be able to claim the final treasure of this realm.

Pandora, unaware of Rose's reasons, walked up to the red heart and touched its pulsating surface curiously.

She felt its aura pushing into her body, but since Rose told her to do this, she allowed it without hesitation.

There was a certain power taking root inside her.

The power of Wrath.

And now that she'd regained her senses, that wrath wouldn't concentrate on small feelings or temporary rage.

Instead, it would remain fueled by her hatred towards her greatest enemy.

The Nox would be the ones to feel its terror.

Wasn't that perfect?

It was the exact conclusion Rose had been aiming for from the start.

However, this was just the start.

From the rest of the Mystic Realm's tasks to the events that would take place once they left, Rose would have to keep a close eye on Pandora so she wouldn't be controlled by her power.

And if she ever found that the person she chose to inherit it wasn't suitable...

'...I'll have to kill her with my own hands.'

Not only to eradicate the scourge Pandora would become, but also to punish herself for this failure.

'Haa, business as usual.'

Nobody knew how hard she'd been working besides her sisters.

As others moved at the same pace as their enemies in the open, Rose occupied the shadows and made ten moves for every one of theirs.

This was the primary reason for the current war situation, not only on the younger generation side, but also for the older generation.

Imperceptible to even the greatest Demigods, her influence spread through the universe and maintained balance, disallowing the Nox from overpowering the denizens too much.

Of course, she didn't have the power to do this consistently, nor could she control the most powerful entities of both sides, however...

"Huu..."

She exhaled deeply.

She was tired.

Because of her, the universe was still alive.

But she would never get recognition for it. Nobody would ever understand who their savior was.

Yet, to her, that didn't matter.

She didn't do this for them.

She even sacrificed her spot on the Dimensional Leaderboard to provide others with more opportunities.

This had always been her personality, and no matter how strong she became, it wouldn't change.

For the security of the small family she had, for the security of Apeiron and her father there, and for the sake of the future generations who would have to live in the world created by their predecessors, she was willing to do anything.

The overall situation could be described simply.

The younger generation of the universe was taking the lead, and would become a shadow the Nox geniuses couldn't escape with just a few more years.

However, the older generation could at best create a stalemate.

So until Damien succeeded in his personal mission, she had to hold down the fort.

That was her duty as the first wife and a supreme genius of this plane.

Chapter 1210 Al'Katra [1]

The process of binding the Universal Core wasn't any different from binding a regular World Core.

In fact, Damien barely felt a change while he was doing it.

Sure, his Universal Law comprehension increased immensely, to the point where he felt like he could directly control the universe if he went back, but that wasn't unexpected, nor was it something that gave him immense joy.

After all, Universal Law was a contained power. It only worked under certain circumstances, and overall, it didn't have much benefit for him.

Not that he didn't want it.

Since Universal Law was a concept close to the root of existence, it was an important stepping stone for him. Later, when he reached the point he was aiming for, this comprehension would make it infinitely easier for him to overcome the final barrier.

However, that was only his feeling in the moment.

The Universal Core was still an external entity at this time, so naturally, he could only feel its effects as such.

When he finally took it into his body and incorporated it into the Sanctuary...

"Ah..."

An exclamation of wonder left his mouth unknowingly.

He wasn't used to this feeling at all.

He felt elevated.

And suddenly, he realized just what he was doing.

He was binding a universe.

A fucking universe!

This wasn't some ordinary moment. It wouldn't just be a heightened version of binding a World Core. If it was just that, then how could it be considered a universe?!

He didn't get it at first. He was so used to events like this granting him something that he neglected the actual benefits he was receiving.

There was no direct increase in a piece of his strength. His mana didn't increase, his laws remained the same as they were, and the Void didn't show any reaction.

However, his "league" increased.

His "state of existence" reached another level, and the effects of that only presented themselves once he incorporated the Universal Core into his strength.

League was a strange thing that lower existences couldn't understand.

League and Legend were two concepts that defined one's self in ethereal ways, establishing one's identity in the universe.

Understanding the truth behind Legends was the key to entering the nine revolutions and beginning the path to Divinity, but league didn't have this kind of significance.

Because league was a concept intrinsically linked to the soul, the realm of higher existences.

One's league would naturally rise with practice, but there weren't many ways to unnaturally raise it. One had to do something absolutely impossible for their league to be affected by their actions.

Even when Damien made impossible achievements in gaining Elemental Law through the Void, his league didn't experience a change.

But in this moment, the entire existence that represented him was raised to a new level.

Euphoric wasn't a great enough word to describe his current emotions.

Because league, being this kind of esoteric concept, had unprecedented effects on one's strength.

Just like the Blessing of Foundation he received in the Severed World, the increase of his league would comprehensively boost his strength in every facet.

He was getting stronger exponentially.

It was truly beautiful.

Yet, Damien could only feel it for a few seconds before he was forced to divert his attention.

Now that the Universal Core was gone, the fragmented dimension would start to collapse. It was his job to make sure this collapse worked in his favor!

'Alright, let's get to work.'

He cracked his knuckles and spread his arms to the side.

'I have all the necessary comprehensions, but this is my first time doing this, so I can't let my concentration waver.'

He didn't let the seriousness affect him much, but he understood it well.

If he failed here, he'd spend another decade in the Abyss aimlessly walking towards Al'Katra.

Yong An was over 500 years old now, but when they met, he was at most 150.

What if this dilation happened in the opposite direction?

What if the ten years he spent here translated to 100 in the universe?

What if he went back and found everything he worked to protect gone?

He couldn't allow that.

Huu...

He took a deep breath and grabbed hold of his Celestial Mana web, infusing Void Mana into its structure.

'Facilitation...'

It wasn't a matter of control, but a matter of slightly altering the natural flow of events to his benefit.

He had to be incredibly precise in his tweaking, and for that purpose, he let go of all other thoughts.

The fragmented dimension's walls broke down, and the Abyss' mana flooded in.

Under Damien's Void Mana, it wasn't allowed to rampage as it pleased, but it tried its best to get out of his control.

'Guide them...slowly...'

He was like an artist. Every movement of his arms was a stroke of this cosmic brush that dictated the nature of the world.

As the forces of the now-broken universe embraced chaos, he used the Void to slowly introduce and integrate them with the Abyss itself.

The space he was standing in was shrinking.

He could feel the Abyss encroaching upon him.

He wasn't moving, but it was hard to feel like he was standing still. It felt like he was on a small boat rocking in the push and pull of the deep ocean.

But luckily for him, he wasn't an ordinary man, but the god of the sea himself!

The process was hard to describe in many words. After all, chaos was defined by disorder for a reason.

The fragmented dimension and the Abyss slowly became one under Damien's influence, until eventually, Damien was no longer trapped in space.

The Abyss was all around him before he knew it.

The question was...

Where was he now?

"Huu..."

Damien exhaled again and opened his eyes.

Slowly but surely, he removed his control from the environment and allowed it to flow naturally.

That movement...

That movement was the eruption of an underwater volcano.

A tsunami rose in a single instant, randomly pushing him through the Abyss.

'This is the most important part.'

He focused, and focused, and focused.

He pulled the strings of fate with all his power to bring about the outcome he desired.

Until finally...

'I did it.'

The world stilled.

The Abyss returned to its usual chaotic calm.

Damien didn't waste any time and directly focused on the smoke-like path leading him to Al'Katra.

How much time was left?

Every time he checked in the past, the answer was several years. The number of years obviously decreased with time, but it was never linear and never followed the amount of distance he'd covered, so he was a bit scared of the results of his last bargain.

However...

A smile lit up his face.

His eyes sparkled with happiness.

'6 months.'

It wasn't a vague estimate like usual, but a direct representation of time.

If he moved in a straight line from this point, he'd reach Al'Katra in half a year without a doubt.

But that wasn't the reason for his grin.

Because as long as he took a few shortcuts...

'...I can definitely cut that down even more.'

Finally.

The Abyss was nice, but he was tired of it by now.

This wasn't what he came for.

So now that his goal was right in front of him...

Why wouldn't he be happy?