

Void 1241

Chapter 1241 Plague Lord [3]

The minutes inched forward.

Everything about the Plague Lord was disgusting, including his mana.

As it latched onto Iris' body and corroded her insides, she not only felt pain, but discomfort so severe it genuinely restricted her movements.

'Not good.'

She sensed its every movement.

She sensed it as it dug into her chest and disappeared into the ethereal plane, corrupting her soul.

'Dammit!'

It was happening much faster than she expected.

The Plague Lord certainly understood what Damien was doing on the surface. Since he would be at a disadvantage once his abscesses were removed, he must've put far more power into the mana he used to attack her.

If he could kill her, he could kill Damien!

Otherwise, he would lose!

This was the situation they'd come to.

'I have at most five minutes remaining.'

She couldn't see Damien's progress directly, but the fog in the atmosphere cleared considerably, and it didn't feel like she was being continually damaged with nearly as much rapidity as before.

This was good.

After all, just as the Plague Lord put her in a bad situation, she'd done the same for him!

There were thousands of rock golems flying in the sky, being controlled by her Divine Energy, attacking the Plague Lord without an ounce of humanity.

They were not living beings.

Whether he used his locusts or plagues, he couldn't destroy them.

He had corrosive tentacles, of course, but as the battle progressed, Iris realized that only his lower body could transform in such a way.

As long as the rock giants controlled the situation and made sure those tentacles couldn't form, he was defenseless!

The Plague Lord was already gritting his teeth.

He had to trust the mana he already spread into the atmosphere to corrode Iris, only attacking her intermittently.

Though he put a great deal of his Divine Energy into those attacks, he had to focus most of his attention on her army!

They weren't powerful individually. Aside from the rock giants, the rest had mediocre power.

But they were not made to attack.

They threw themselves on his body and allowed themselves to be struck by him. It didn't matter if they were broken, because each time they touched him, they exploded into bursts of Divine Energy that tore away several layers of his sludge!

He wouldn't mind much in a usual battle.

His sludge falling would only exacerbate the situation for his enemy.

But the presence he couldn't sense that was on the surface right now was destroying his abscesses and sludge as they fell!

No, it wasn't destruction, but complete annihilation.

They didn't even have the chance to accomplish their tasks before disappearing from existence.

That person was a far greater threat to him than Iris.

If Damien was a Divinity, the Plague Lord would've died instantly because of how bad their match-up was.

And though the Plague Lord didn't know he was still a lower existence, the fact that someone with such an advantage wasn't participating in a direct confrontation meant they were weak!

He would prefer to target that person, but Iris was getting in the way.

She was too troublesome for him to ignore, and the person on the ground was useless without her, so he had no choice but to keep his attention on her!

"GRAAAAH!"

He roared.

He was annoyed, and he was panicking just slightly.

His body seemed infinitely layered, but it wasn't.

Now that hundreds or thousands of layers had already been peeled off, he only had half his original amount.

If this continued...

It became a true battle of attrition.

A battle of whether Iris' golems could strip him first, or if she would die before accomplishing it!

Neither side was actively attacking with as much force anymore.

Since Iris had to use mana to control the golems, and load them with mana to fuel their explosion, she couldn't waste what she had remaining on anything other than protecting herself.

And the Plague Lord's situation was already clear.

Instead of main fighters, the two in the air became generals watching over their armies.

And Damien, well, he was blocking the flood caused by the enemy force, making sure it couldn't sweep their side into its midst!

"Khhh...!"

Iris gritted her teeth in pain.

It was truly agonizing.

The Plague Lord's energy was extremely complex. He never just used a single strain of plague mana, as a Demigod could easily understand its components in a few seconds and counter it.

He used complex combinations of countless plagues of his own creation, ones that hadn't been encountered by others before, and made their structures so intricately packed that it was impossible to understand them before they killed the target.

Iris was currently experiencing the effects of such a complex infection.

Her blood was boiling so hot that it could be used to smelt metal. Just this alone was enough to cause severe pain, but blood was only a single factor.

Her veins were touched by a separate nerve venom that froze her movements and made her feel agony throughout her entire body.

Her bones were calcifying, her muscles were atrophying, and her skin was filled with warts that compressed and enhanced the deadly viruses before injecting them back into her body.

To make matters worse, it felt like every organ was being targeted by a specific plague designed to cause the most pain possible.

Her body was already in a state that would drive a normal person insane. Not to mention her soul, which was also being corroded and causing pain that trumped everything she received from her body.

But despite all the things that should have broken her, Iris continued exerting precise control over her golems.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

"GRAAAAAAAAAAH!"

The consistent and uniform explosions were helping her keep her mind stable.

The Plague Lord's roars were like music to her ears, easing her pain.

They were proof that she wasn't the only one suffering.

In the minutes it took for her to reach a critical state, the Plague Lord was ruined beyond belief as well.

His head and portions of his extremities were still covered by sludge, but as the rumors suggested, a malnourished, ash-colored body revealed itself in his torso and thighs.

His sludge was the source of his power. While he had Divine Energy, he had to use it to protect the exposed areas of his body, or else even the explosions of the rock golems would be able to kill him!

That was the opportunity she'd been looking for.

Iris was able to barely crack her eyes open and see it, but no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't move!

"Ghhhhh...!"

She groaned as she tried her best, but the combination of bodily pain and restrictions and soul corrosion made it completely impossible.

In fact, if the Plague Lord didn't die and she wasn't treated in the next few minutes, she would die without being able to do anything!

They were both on their final straws.

A single move from either of them would completely uproot the situation.

However, with neither of them able to make that move...

Iris' eyes widened as if she didn't have problems opening them in the first place.

It was barely visible, and it traveled so fast it didn't make a single sound, but...

She saw it clearly.

An extremely thin and extremely sharp needle stabbing into the Plague Lord's chest...

...and exploding.

Chapter 1242 Progression [1]

Damien saw it from the ground.

Once he managed to clear the majority of the infectious fog in the air, he was able to perceive it much more clearly, and despite seeing Iris' condition become worse and worse, he wasn't able to move instantly.

He had to first get rid of the plague abscesses on the ground, a task he'd almost finished at this point.

The Plague Lord couldn't control them anymore, so he didn't face as much resistance as he worked. And with his layers being mostly stripped away, Damien's workload stopped increasing as well.

He eventually finished, and when he returned his attention to the battle, he saw that situation.

Iris and the Plague Lord were standing several tens of millions of kilometers away from him, but his vision had improved during his stay in the Ancient Battlefield, allowing him to see them.

This situation was at a standstill.

But this kind of standstill was disadvantageous in every way.

Because the second Iris lost the ability to control her puppets, she'd lose.

After all, unlike her, the Plague Lord didn't have to consciously control the spread of his plagues in her body.

Damien didn't hesitate to move.

Now that the man's true body was exposed, he wasn't nearly as terrifying.

Once again, he formed a needle out of Elemental-Samsara and shot it into the air.

BOOOOOOOOOOOM!

A massive explosion rang out, and the Plague Lord's body shot backward like a comet.

Yet, Damien didn't stop with just that.

'He's protecting his body with Divine Energy. I have to kill him before he can retaliate.'

He teleported like a madman until he surpassed the Plague Lord's falling speed and arrived in his path.

Three more Elemental-Samsara needles appeared in his hand, shooting out in tandem.

They curved in different directions, creating strange swirling patterns in the air as their flight paths became untraceable before they struck the Plague Lord from the back and both sides and exploded.

BOOOOOM! BOOOOOM! BOOOOOOOM!

There was so much mana clouding the air that Damien could barely see whether or not the enemy was actually damaged, but he didn't care to know.

Once again, he teleported and arrived in the midst of the explosive force.

He spread his awareness and found the first trace of nearby Divine Energy before instantly making his way there.

The target was right in front of him.

Damien extended his hand, pushing it against the Plague Lord's exposed torso and coming in contact with the thinning layer of Divine Energy around his body.

A grin formed on his face.

"You're done."

VOOOM!

A pulse of Void Mana exited his palm.

Perhaps he couldn't use it as an all-powerful force yet, but that was its identity. Once it came in contact with Divine Energy within Damien's jurisdiction, it dissolved it into nothingness and exposed the Plague Lord's body.

The Plague Lord's eyes widened in horror.

He realized what was happening to him.

He realized that he was facing a Supreme.

He realized he could survive if he just attacked once.

But...

He also realized it was far too late.

Damien's palm shot forward and closed the centimeter gap that separated it from his skin.

And instead of needles, the compressed force of Elemental-Samsara directly pushed into his body and ravaged his systems.

He didn't have a single chance anymore.

After all, his true body was incredibly weak!

"N-no..."

He managed to get one final word out.

And Damien responded in kind.

With a smile, he flared his mana.

"Bye bye."

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Elemental-Samsara exploded through his body until it could no longer be contained, and the Plague Lord's physical form imploded, sending bits of ink flying in all directions.

At the same time, the elusive energy of the Void broke into his soul space and began its devouring.

The Plague Lord died before he realized what was happening.

Damien felt the rewards of his kill flooding his body, but he didn't have time to pay attention to them.

He rapidly made his way back to Iris and held her in his arms, teleporting until he found the nearest cave to form a new hideout.

Luckily, caves were quite common in the Ancient Battlefield. It was likely an intentional mechanic since the rest of the environment was so bland.

After setting up several walls of material defense and separating them into an isolated dimension, Damien carefully sat down, gently laying Iris' body on the ground and resting her head on his thigh.

"Nngh..."

Iris groaned in pain.

She could roughly understand what was happening, but her internal systems were too messed up for her to speak or open her eyes.

She endured the pain as silently as possible, and Damien made it easier on her with his subtle movements, but her body touching the hard rock was enough to send spikes of agony through her body, eliciting a verbal response.

"It'll be okay," Damien reassured softly.

He didn't have to imagine what kind of immeasurable pain she was experiencing. He'd felt something similar himself, so he knew how important it was for her to endure with everything she could.

He didn't try talking more, knowing exciting her emotions would only exacerbate her situation, and placed his hand on her forehead.

"Just relax. I'll have you good as new in no time."

His words were calm and warm, just like the energy that flowed into her body.

[Heal] and Void Mana worked in tandem, snaking through her and treating her similarly to how Damien removed the infectious fog.

He first separated the plague strains with Void Mana and eliminated their combined effects. Afterward, he devoured what he could and used [Heal] to fix the parts that were too far damaged.

Once the effects of his healing ability had worked for a while and separated the plagues from her organs and blood enough, the Void Mana was able to take a second sweep and devour what was left.

It was a repetitive and simple process, but it was incredibly intuitive since a single wrong move could shatter Iris' internal balance.

Nevertheless, this kind of precise control was a specialty of Damien's, so he didn't encounter much of a problem.

Once her body was healed, Iris' visible condition improved considerably.

She opened her eyes and looked at him, and tried to talk as well, but Damien shushed her before she could.

"It's not over yet. The most important part is what comes next."

She nodded slowly.

She tried to hide it, but the pain in her eyes was obvious to him.

To a Demigod, the soul was more precious than anything else.

Perhaps she regained her faculties when Damien treated her body, but the majority of her pain was still actively assaulting her.

Damien looked down at her with a bit of awkwardness.

"This next part...well, I'll just apologize in advance, but I don't really have a choice."

A reddish hue appeared on Iris' face as she realized what he was talking about, but she just closed her eyes and turned her head.

Damien steadied his breathing.

'I am a good man. I am a good man. I am a good man.'

He repeated the phrase over and over again in his mind.

His hand trailed down off Iris' forehead to a new location.

'I am a good man. I am a good—'

'...it's over for me.'

As his hand pressed forward, his fingers pushed into a pillowy softness like no other.

After all, the gateway to the soul...

...was located in one's chest.

Chapter 1243 Progression [2]

It was quite the comedic situation from an outsider's perspective.

Both of them were doing their best to act unbothered, but did either truly succeed?

Iris' case was relatively simple.

She was a woman who'd lived for over ten thousand years, but her lifetime being so long was precisely the reason why it was impossible for her to control herself now.

She'd never been in a situation like this before.

She was raised by women, and once the responsibility of Prismatic Sun Holy Land was passed to her, even those people became less frequent in her life until they disappeared altogether.

The concept of relationships between men and women was probably the only thing in the universe she was completely clueless about.

Because the men who chased her were never sincere.

They either wanted the status of "the man who conquered the universe's most beautiful woman," or "the husband of the Prismatic Sun Holy Master."

Hidden intentions could never be hidden in her eyes, so she saw their inner darkness clearly.

That was why she never made contact with men in this fashion before.

Not only had one never touched her outside of battle, where the specific area Damien was touching had never come into play, but she had never felt anything positive towards a man in her life.

Adding on top of the fact that she was a lonely existence, a person without friends and only business partners and allies, she truly could not fathom the current circumstances.

The faint hue on her face wasn't so faint anymore. She was bright red, but she kept her eyes closed and her head turned hoping Damien couldn't see it.

But how could he not?

Her breathing was so erratic that her chest forcefully made itself pronounced in his grasp. Her heart was practically a supercar in its own right, and each pulse was felt viscerally by him.

So her state was extremely evident to him.

And it only made him more conscious of what was happening!

'Stay focused, Damien. You're a good man. You're a good man.'

He continued chanting the mantra to fight back his intrusive thoughts.

It was strange for him.

As someone who hadn't thought about other women for several decades, it was incredibly strange to feel this flustered.

But he couldn't focus on that, because despite the awkward tension softening the situation, Damien was extremely aware of Iris' pain.

If he wanted to enjoy her expressions and explore this novel and long-forgotten feeling, he had to make sure she was in a position to do it with him, right?

"Huu..."

Damien took a deep breath, finally clearing away his useless thoughts.

He put his senses into his mana, losing feeling in his hand as his mind traveled into her body and escaped the physical plane, arriving at her soul.

"Hmm..."

Damien frowned.

He had no ability to view the soul properly, so Iris' soul space manifested as a sort of symbolism of its true state.

He saw countless plague bearers in a kingdom of clouds, slowly corroding its purity and blackening its light.

Without hesitation, he extended his hand and allowed Void Mana to run rampant.

The target was set.

Only the plague bearers could be touched.

That was the first step of the process.

In reality, Iris' eyes widened as she felt the changes. She also temporarily ignored the situation, focusing her attention on the mysterious energy flowing through her soul.

It wasn't targeting her soul at all. Instead, it was directly targeting the "spread" of the plague.

Slowly but surely, like a wave of fog rolling over a city, her soul was cocooned by the mysterious energy, and the plague stopped spreading.

'Good. Now...'

There were no plague bearers remaining, so the next step was purification.

'Hmm...'

Damien didn't quite know how to proceed, but it didn't matter.

As he discovered long ago, not knowing was not enough to stop him.

As long as he gave the command and had sufficient qualifications, the Void would enact his will.

'Purify.'

He gave the command and waited.

The rolling cloud of Void Mana didn't do anything at first, but after a few seconds, it submerged itself into the cloud kingdom and dyed it a different shade of black.

Iris' pain was reduced immensely in that single move, and with the passing of just a few more seconds, she felt the miraculous changes taking place.

Her soul was being purified, but that was really only one factor of what was happening.

She was being strengthened by something she couldn't sense.

It was magical.

She closed her eyes and enjoyed the feeling, like a calming massage surpassing all others.

She became aware of what was happening in the real plane again, but she didn't reject it.

When those two sensations came together, they gave her warmth and comfort she'd never experienced before.

All her worries faded away as she quietly enjoyed the feeling.

Damien's mind returned to reality at some point.

The process ended as well.

He retracted his hand from her chest, ignoring the unwillingness in his heart, and quietly sat back.

The two remained in silence for a long time, not moving an inch.

It would be a long while before they finally returned to their journey.

From there, over a year passed.

Damien and Iris started moving towards the Ancient Sovereign again at some point, and while neither said a word about what happened in the cave, their relationship dynamic had gone through a subtle change.

They didn't feel strange or awkward expressing physical closeness, like a wall between them was broken down, and that change affected them in more ways than one.

Their synergy in battle rose to a state of perfection. They could essentially read each other's thoughts in battle, allowing them to take down enemies with ultimate efficiency.

And the number of battles they went through in that year was not slight.

In total, they'd eliminated over 300 enemies, with over 15 of them being on the same level as the Plague Lord.

But through all these battles, neither of them received more than surface-level injuries.

After all, Damien didn't stay stagnant.

The more they killed, the more strength he gained, and the more support he could provide.

It got to a point where Damien no longer needed to hide and wait for the perfect moment, because he could directly enter battle with Iris and take down the enemy with his power.

Plus, Divine Energy's effect on his body became less significant with his growth.

Currently, they were already nearing their final destination, the Ancient Sovereign's location.

But they had to make a stop.

Damien stood over a river of ink.

It was the remains of the enemy he'd just slaughtered.

That man...

He was even stronger than the Plague Lord. It took him and Iris using everything they had to finally take him down.

His title was the Void Lord, and he was a Nox Demigod who practiced space to a greater level than anyone else.

Killing that man held more significance than either of them expected.

Because the second he achieved victory, Damien felt something expand in his mind and soul.

The time had come.

He understood the path.

With this victory...

He finally found the tethering point between Elemental-Samsara and Spacetime.

Chapter 1244 Progression [3]

A cave hideout didn't seem a secure enough location for a task like this, but they didn't have much choice, since there wasn't anywhere else to hide.

Unfortunately for Damien, the Ancient Battlefield's restriction of entry and exit applied to more than just the lower universe.

Actually, it should have been granted.

If it could block the connection to the lower universe, it could definitely block travel to other universes as well.

Including the Sanctuary.

The ground was too solid and didn't have a subterranean world, so there was no point in digging down. The only option was to find a relatively hidden cave and set up substantial defenses to protect themselves.

And that's what they did.

While Iris stood guard, Damien sat down and focused on his soul, repeating the process he completed when he first entered the Ancient Battlefield.

It was easy to make a single connection, but Damien had a choice to make here.

The connection between Elemental and Samsara was definite. It had a clear start and end point, which were connected by a tether.

Now that it came time to add a third force to that connection, a question arose.

Should he simply tether Spacetime to Samsara and create a one-directional connection between the three forces, or was he supposed to connect Spacetime to both fundamental laws individually to create a closed circuit?

Both had their own advantages and disadvantages, but it was obvious that a closed circuit would allow him to use more power.

Yet, that didn't matter.

It wasn't about where he would find power, but what was the "correct" path.

It wasn't time to close off all other paths yet.

He could definitely become a great entity if he did it, but if he closed off other routes, he was only limiting himself.

After all, he wasn't done yet.

Creation and Destruction still needed to be discovered, combined, and tethered for him to reach the fusion point.

One could argue that this was a simple problem.

He could just cut the closed circuit when the time came to add those laws, or he could connect their fusion to all of the other three individually like he'd done when he added Spacetime, but...

'It doesn't feel right.'

It was intuition without any real backing.

Damien felt in his chest that following that path was wrong.

He didn't know why. He needed to reach greater heights to know why.

But he understood that if he sacrificed the short-term boost, he'd gain immense benefits in the long term.

'Though, "sacrifice" might be a bit strong.'

Damien was going to trust his intuition. Disregarding the importance of a practitioner's intuition, his was backed by the Void itself, so it couldn't be wrong in matters relating to it.

He didn't hesitate any longer.

Just as before, the process was extremely simple for Damien, but extremely complicated in reality.

The tether point within Samsara in that secluded soul space extended and formed a new thread that shot into Spacetime's territory and stabbed into its figure.

How did that work?

Unlike the others, Spacetime was colorless and formless. It didn't particularly have a middle point, or anywhere for a tether to attach.

It wasn't because the tether was ethereal.

It was because there truly was a tether point.

In a sense, the tethering of these forces could be considered a reflection of the universe itself.

In reality, they maintained a similar relationship.

They were connected, but did not interfere with each other's processes.

Therefore, somewhere within that formless mass, there was a point waiting to be discovered to create this very connection.

Damien just didn't realize it until he tried.

His body and soul went through a change.

His league increased yet again.

Damien...

'...I feel like I can proudly stand on the Ancient Battlefield now.'

He had been fighting directly for several months already, but he had to be extremely careful about how he moved and which opponents he decided to show himself before.

That was different now.

At least for the majority of Demigods here...

'...I feel like I can take them.'

Not with Iris as his shield, but with his own power.

"Huu..."

It wasn't anywhere near complete.

There was still a decent amount of time before the transformation ended and Damien could properly use this power.

But he was already excited.

The possibilities in his mind, not just for fighting, but for utilization of his power in every sense, were limitless.

And he couldn't wait to test it all out.

Damien and Iris were really acting independently during their stay on the Ancient Battlefield, but their efforts definitely had an impact on the overall situation.

After all, when there were only a few thousand total enemies, killing three hundred was a feat.

Though, it did take a considerable amount of time due to their spread.

Nevertheless, they weren't the only ones working.

Alucard, Priscilla Adelaide, and the rest of the Demigods on Iris' side were following their lead and killing as much as possible.

Because there were a few hundred of them, their efforts were the ones truly making a difference.

They didn't get as many individual kills as the two, but the number they'd killed was over two thousand already, including traitors from their own side.

It was startling compared to the progress made in the first year of war.

To the point where it could not be ignored.

As Damien predicted, the Demigods in the universal home base were not able to exert control over those acting outside their jurisdiction unless they wished to lose the support of those following them.

After all, Alucard and the rest were the ones actually making a difference.

So, as their forces began to follow the other camp's lead and fight on the frontlines, they had no choice but to support it.

The Nox, of course, responded as well.

They became somewhat more organized, mostly traveling in groups when they reached the border between territories.

They also became aggressive, actively searching for enemies to slaughter, and presenting their heads as trophies of war to taunt the enemy.

Of the Nox Emperors, the Karmic Emperor started to move seriously, and the Inhuman Emperor followed as if he was refusing to be overshadowed.

While the other two remained vague in their actions, the entrance of two Emperors already put immense pressure on the universe.

And more than anything, an event that shattered the unity of the Grand Heavens Boundary side took place.

Immortal Blood Asura chose his allegiance, killing tens of friendly Demigods as he joined the Karmic Emperor on his tirade.

It was unprecedented.

For some of his power to betray the universe was totally unexpected.

After all, by the time the lower universe confirmed Blood Asura Holy Land's betrayal, the Demigods had already been transported to the Ancient Battlefield.

It was definitely a huge blow to their morale, and since the strongest of them, aside from those on Iris' side, were hiding in the base camp, there didn't seem to be a way to fix this problem immediately.

A change from the outside was necessary.

Something that wouldn't just force the strongest and most cowardly allied Demigods to act, but also dealt a huge blow to the Nox.

Something like the death of a Nox Emperor.

But...

Who could do it?

Though they didn't know it at that time, the answers to their questions and hopes would appear before their eyes soon enough.

Chapter 1245 Ancient Sovereign [1]

The rest of the journey was quite unspectacular.

The Ancient Sovereign promised Damien he wouldn't move, and after checking a second, third, fourth, and fifth time, Damien became sure that he wasn't lying.

And so, considering that their distance from the original location was only a few tens of millions of kilometers from the place they stopped for Damien to finish his comprehension, they arrived in just another day.

The only unfortunate part was the lack of enemies.

Since it was the Ancient Sovereign's vicinity, it made sense that nobody dared to invade it, but...

Damien was thirsting to try out his new power!

Nevertheless, he put aside his desires as he felt Orion from the distance, and with Iris by his side, he touched down to meet the man he'd been looking for.

The Ancient Sovereign.

He was standing right there next to Orion, looking off into the distance as if he could see something nobody else could.

For several moments after landing, Damien was speechless.

The appearance of this man was confusing.

He existed, he clearly existed right there in front of him, but it felt like he didn't.

His visage wasn't covered in a mosaic anymore, but Damien felt like he still couldn't see the man's true face.

It just didn't make sense.

He was a man, that much could be felt, but other than that, his features, his physique, all of it was strangely blurred between several different possibilities...

'...as if he's existing in several realities at once.'

Damien's mind experienced a rush of emotions.

He felt like his understanding of universal truth was expanding and crumbling at the same time purely due to this man's existence.

But he didn't allow this state to consume him.

It took a minute, but he managed to stabilize himself.

Well, that wasn't quite right.

He managed to push down his confusion and regain his focus by ignoring the problem, because it was impossible for him to understand and overcome it at his current level.

"This is also not wrong. It is admirable to possess an understanding of one's limits."

The Ancient Sovereign spoke, clearly understanding Damien's actions.

Damien cupped his fists and gave a respectful salute.

"My name is Damien Void. It is a pleasure to meet you, Ancient Sovereign," he said as he bowed.

"Hmm. This One is aware of thy existence. Mother has never paid such attention to a human."

Damien's eyes widened just slightly. This "mother" the Ancient Sovereign referred to could be none other than the Void.

It was clear his view on the esoteric concept and all things in general was far above what even someone like Orion, his closest relative in age, could see.

"Then, I'm sure you are also aware of my purpose in visiting you now," Damien said, putting away his thoughts.

At the same time, he quietly placed his hand on Iris' back and channeled Void Mana into her body, allowing it to circulate.

"Ah..."

She gave a slight exclamation as she snapped out of her confusion.

Unlike Damien, who had the Void to give him slight understanding of the Ancient Sovereign's existence, which allowed him to rid himself of the state, Iris was still trapped in the confusion his presence placed on anyone who saw him for the first time.

Though, if she wasn't Orion's descendant, someone unique even if one looked at all of existence, she likely wouldn't have been able to extricate herself regardless of Damien's help.

She quickly gathered herself and gave Damien a grateful look before repeating his previous actions and greeting the Ancient Sovereign.

It was an awkward meeting.

But, it didn't have a chance to be anything else.

The Ancient Sovereign was too enigmatic for anyone to have a normal conversation with him. Perhaps only Orion could see his true self enough to have a close relationship with him.

The Ancient Sovereign looked between his two juniors. They couldn't see his eyes moving, but they felt his gaze travel between them.

"You, child, come with This One. Orion, This One shall meet your descendant in the future."

Orion made a strange expression.

"Yes, I understand. Go easy on him. He has only recently gained the qualifications."

"This One is very clear on his situation. Your worry is unfounded."

"Haha, but when you say that, I truly cannot trust it."

The Ancient Sovereign glanced at Orion before turning around and walking away.

Damien tilted his head in confusion.

"Am I supposed to follow him?"

Orion nodded wryly.

"He is always like this. Do not mind it and attempt to understand the nuances within his words. He...well, you could say he is far separated from the reality we all experience."

Damien hummed strangely and glanced at Iris, who smiled and nodded at him.

He gave her a warm look before taking his first steps to follow the Ancient Sovereign on his trek.

As the two disappeared into the distance, Orion and Iris were left alone.

"When he said future...does the Ancient Sovereign not wish to meet me now?"

Orion shook his head.

"It is not like that, child. As I said, his perception is strange. The past, present, and future hold no meaning to him. When he says future, it is only to tell us he will return to speak with you. Perhaps, to him, that conversation is already long underway."

Iris furrowed her brows, trying to understand it.

"Then..."

"There is no need to say it."

Orion cut her off.

"He can be considered my elder brother if one looks at it objectively, but the distance between our births is extreme. He was born when time did not exist, but if one had to date his birth in relation to mine, he is perhaps trillions of years older."

Iris' eyes widened.

The Ancient Sovereign was an entity with much fame in the universe, not because he had accomplished wondrous deeds, but because of the length of his existence.

But nobody could have assumed this.

Trillions of years. Even the strongest of Demigods could never imagine such a time span. Even the Saint Emperor, who'd been living for at least hundreds of millions of years, could never understand what life meant to a man like the Ancient Sovereign.

Iris' eyes held a slight hint of worry.

Such an existence was currently guiding Damien to places unknown, to speak about topics she still did not have the qualifications to learn.

Damien's secret, the one he hid from her since their first meeting, she had seen hints of it several times since they met in the Ancient Battlefield. She'd even felt that energy in her body and soul.

The fact that she still didn't have an inkling of understanding of its nature was concerning.

For some reason, she couldn't get rid of her worry.

Her expression didn't visibly change, but Orion could perceive the turmoil in her heart clearly.

"Oho..." he muttered

Iris looked over curiously when she heard it, and Orion had to try his best to contain his smile so she didn't realize anything.

He didn't expect it.

This descendant of his, the woman he viewed as a granddaughter; he'd been with her long enough to understand her thoughts.

Had she ever had a moment like this?

It was interesting. Very interesting.

And frankly, as someone who didn't want to see his future generations cut off by the loneliness of this descendant...

He truly couldn't hold back his smile.

'...I am quite excited to see this develop.'

Chapter 1246 Ancient Sovereign [2]

Orion and Iris were surrounded by a light-hearted atmosphere, but Damien didn't experience the same with the Ancient Sovereign.

He hadn't said a word since they started walking.

Instead, he pulled Damien into a strange Spacetime without him even realizing it.

The two were moving at a normal pace, but they covered millions of kilometers with every step.

It wasn't high speed at all. Spacetime was squinching around them, changing the worth of their steps even though the steps themselves didn't change at all.

The Ancient Sovereign wasn't helping Damien either.

He was ambling as if he didn't even realize Damien was following him.

'Damn...this technique is something I learned a long time ago, but that doesn't make it easier to follow him.'

The concept of "distance" was something Damien paid a lot of attention to in the past when he was researching Horizon Break, so he understood how to compress space to change his movements.

However, adding time as a factor changed it entirely.

The compressing of Spacetime meant not only their position in space was changing, but they were truly walking through time.

As if the past, present, and future were nothing more than futile concepts that could not affect their existence.

Beads of sweat trailed down Damien's face, but his eyes were filled with excitement.

After tethering Spacetime, he didn't expect to find an opportunity to utilize its power so soon.

And he wasn't just utilizing the power, but increasing his understanding!

As he let go of the known concepts of time for the sake of copying the Ancient Sovereign's movements, he realized just how relative Spacetime truly was.

To him, nothing had changed.

But the second he allowed his perception to leave the bounds of this strange ethereal corridor the two of them were traversing, he noticed how insanity-inducing their journey was.

The seconds and minutes flew by like comets in one moment, and in the next, Damien would realize he was far beyond them, and those same seconds were leagues behind him.

They weren't moving forward or backward, nor were they stationary.

They were pacing back and forth through time as if it was nothing, and with their movement in space being completely linear, perceiving the world outside the corridor became a mind-breaking learning experience for Damien.

It was a beautiful phenomenon he never expected to experience by just following someone, but perhaps this was how the Ancient Sovereign always perceived existence.

Perhaps the time he'd lived was nothing more than the blink of an eye to him, or perhaps he was experiencing the full extent of that time every second of every day, as if every second held trillions of years in its mysteries.

"This One is thoroughly impressed. Mother's choice cannot be questioned, however, This One was still curious about what kind of human could bond with her in such a way."

The Ancient Sovereign finally spoke, halting in his tracks.

Damien stopped behind him, and in that moment, the full extent of their journey struck him.

It was like everything in existence slingshotted back to its proper position. The world curved and stretched, wobbling strangely before finally stabilizing.

Damien couldn't contain his wonder at all.

But he had to take this opportunity to converse with the man who rarely spoke.

"Do you see it as a bond?" He asked vaguely.

The Ancient Sovereign turned around to face him.

"This One cannot speak on Mother's actions. However, This One does feel something greater from you that also cannot be explained."

Damien nodded, somewhat understanding his thoughts.

"I guess I'm not there yet, but that is the end goal. In a sense, your Mother and I are one and the same."

Damien looked at the man, trying to gauge his response, but he didn't receive anything but silence.

"..."

"Thy most pressing questions do not have answers. This One can only aid you in areas you might find inconsequential."

"I don't care about that," Damien said, shaking his head.

"I want the answers you can give me. The rest, I will naturally find myself."

"Very well."

The Ancient Sovereign turned around, his attention once again focused on an unknown "something" that only he could see.

"Mother has always been lonely."

His start was...not something Damien expected.

"Mother was not always an entity, yet Mother has always existed. Existing before existence, the concept of existence was birthed from Mother, and to define her existence before existence, nonexistence was also born."

Immediately, he started speaking nonsensical words, but Damien didn't interrupt. Instead, as Orion said, he tried his best to understand the nuances within those words.

"Mother is existence, yet Mother is also nonexistence. Mother wishes to be existence, yet Mother cannot exist. When Mother influences Order, Chaos is born, and from Chaos, Order is born."

Damien frowned.

In terms of universal truth, he couldn't understand Orion's words at all.

But if he tried to apply those words to things he did know...

'Since we're in the Ancient Battlefield, let's start with the Nox.'

The history of the Nox was inconsequential to him now that he was in the Ancient Battlefield and had to slaughter them to extinction, but as the Ancient Sovereign said, perhaps the only information he'd learn was inconsequential things like this.

Still, knowing these facts that were useless in the present could help him in the future. Otherwise, the Ancient Sovereign, who didn't perceive these concepts, wouldn't be mentioning them.

'The Void wishes to interfere in existence, but its interference only creates chaos. Chaos creates Order, which is also another form of the Void's interference in existence.'

His own thoughts were making less sense, but because they belonged to him, he could define them clearly.

'The Nox are agents of Chaos. If the Void's interference in this case refers to the creation of the concepts that led to them, or maybe even the Abyss, then Order would be its direct influence.'

The Abyss was created through the destruction of existence, but it was still existence.

Yet, it was a piece of existence closest to the Void.

'Perhaps the Void is able to interfere in the Abyss because it is already fragmented away from the regular concept of existence. That interference spread through the Abyss and turned it into what it is today, and when the Nox were born from it by the design of their creators...'

...the Nox were naturally influenced by the Void.

"Mother cannot act willfully, yet Mother's every action is willful. Cause and effect are only created if Mother interferes, yet Mother's intentions cannot be perceived by us who were birthed from her thoughts."

Right, nobody could understand the Void's intentions.

Even when Damien first unlocked the potential of his physique in the First Dungeon, he only saw a single facet of its power.

'...the primal urge to consume.'

The Nox's nature was originally skewed towards evil, because that was their original purpose.

However, their original purpose was supposed to be beneficial to one party. Rather than the urge to consume, they were supposed to experience the urge to obey and destroy.

Yet, at some point, the Nox's mentality changed.

They did not act as their creators wished, and desired to devour everything for themselves instead.

This was the Void's influence.

But it wasn't the only thing the Void did.

After all, it was far more complex than just that.

'If it wasn't for the Void permeating through the Abyss, the Nox would have never gained the potential to evolve.'

The corrupted foreign material Damien saw in the Demon Abyss was meant to be a control center created by the currently termed Demon Race whose bloodline he possessed.

However, when it was fed the energy of the universe, it acted as a catalyst for their growth away from their original purpose.

It was never meant to do so.

That was also the Void's influence.

It was the Void that turned the Nox into a race that could be saved.

Yet...

It was also because of the Void that they were beyond saving.

'The Void's identity...'

Damien sighed.

His heart was filled with immense pity that he didn't know the origin of.

It was just...

'The more I think about the Void, the further I picture it as a sentient entity...the more I cannot fathom its existence, and the more I feel its existence is torturous.'

He felt immense sorrow.

And at the same time, he started to understand the terrifying loneliness that stood at the end of his path.

Unknown to him, his spiritual world and physical body were both experiencing strange changes that couldn't be explained, so subtle that they had no real effect on his existence.

But his conversation with the Ancient Sovereign was only just beginning.

It was truly unknown.

Whether or not Damien would still be the man he thought he was when this conversation ended...

He couldn't even begin to know.

Chapter 1247 Ancient Sovereign [3]

Damien and the Ancient Sovereign walked through a single second.

And they conversed.

Their conversation didn't have a true direction, just like their steps, but every word held profound meaning.

About the universe, about truth, about life, and about purpose.

The Ancient Sovereign was a man who stood above all these concepts. To him, they were all inconsequential.

So the perspective he offered was one that couldn't be found anywhere else.

There wasn't a single entity like him.

He was a being born before the universe was created, albeit just slightly. If one looked at the entirety of existence, including the Heavenly World Damien had never seen, one would never find another being like him.

Damien understood that intuitively. That's why he wanted to meet this man badly enough to spend a year traveling to speak with him.

And the gains he made were real.

As had been mentioned several times, it was all inconsequential.

Regardless of what they spoke of, Damien didn't discover anything that had to do with his past, present, or future.

These truths, these profundities, encapsulated the fundamentals of life and existence.

Damien's mind expanded.

His worldview changed.

From the point where he started, unable to understand what the Ancient Sovereign was saying or why he said it, he reached a point where he could sympathize with this man's opinions and glimpse the world he saw.

It was bland.

Nothing held value to him.

Because he couldn't see the value in those things that normal people held dear. He stood above those concepts and could only observe them indifferently.

Damien felt some pity for the man, but he also respected him immensely.

After all, the Ancient Sovereign wasn't missing anything. The things Damien valued meant nothing to him, so even if he experienced them, he wouldn't understand them.

It was better for him to live the life he was living, disconnected from all things, a mere observer drifting through reality.

This was precisely the standpoint that made him worthy of respect.

And to Damien, he was a senior in more ways than one.

This conversation helped him grow imperceptibly.

It helped him view the world differently, and understand things from the standpoint of an observer.

This allowed him to understand his actions in greater depth and create a more stable plan for the future.

It was a bit comedic.

The being who experienced time as an outsider allowed Damien to define his own time.

But, perhaps there was nobody else who could do it.

As he'd learned through countless experiences, someone directly involved in a situation could never see it from the unbiased perspective of a bystander.

He followed the Ancient Sovereign through space and time, and his questions slowly changed.

He asked purely out of curiosity, his goals and intentions disappearing.

He just wanted to see how this entity responded, and how he viewed things Damien already had a stubborn standpoint on.

It was fun.

It was intriguing like no other conversation could be.

And without realizing it, Damien spent a year going back and forth with him.

A year that lasted a single second, or a single second that lasted a year.

In the outside world, time had essentially come to a stop, yet it was still crawling forward.

And somehow, a year still passed.

As if they were truly disconnected from the concept of Spacetime.

Damien didn't realize it, but the Ancient Battlefield already shrunk several times.

The plane was compacted, and it was no longer rare to find the enemy when one was randomly perusing.

Battle became more prominent, to the point where nobody could avoid their duties, and that final moment came.

The final chance for those indecisive individuals to choose their allegiance.

Unaware of the outside world's change, Damien followed the Ancient Sovereign until they returned to their starting point, where Orion and Iris were waiting.

They stood in the strange Spacetime corridor, imperceptible to the two.

And just before they exited, the Ancient Sovereign turned around.

His eyes were different.

No, they could finally be seen.

They were clouded over like a blind man's, but they were filled with deep knowledge that couldn't be touched.

For a single second, those cloudy eyes cleared, and they stared directly into Damien's soul.

And for the first time, his words became clear.

"Live well, child. Your future will be filled with difficulty, however, it only holds as much weight as you give it. If you one day become worthy of your post, This One will become your staunchest supporter, but if you fail, This One will personally find you to strip you of your post."

Damien nodded without question.

"You don't have to worry about me. As long as the path exists, I will follow it to the end."

"And if the path disappears?"

Damien smiled.

"Then I'll create it myself."

The Ancient Sovereign nodded.

His mentality was good enough. His words sounded arrogant, but he was clearly aware of his position.

At least for now, he could trust that Damien would become the man he was supposed to be.

And perhaps...

He shook his head.

"Go, child. I shall now meet Orion's descendant."

Damien nodded and bowed once more.

"Yes, and thank you. I know it's inconsequential to you, but this conversation was extremely valuable to me. I won't forget this favor."

As Damien stepped forward and exited the Spacetime corridor, he could've sworn he saw it.

The slight curve in the Ancient Sovereign's lips, a hint of a smile.

'Nah, I must be imagining things.'

He shook his head and watched as the world around him once again rebounded, wobbling back and forth before stabilizing into the current reality.

Iris stood up from her meditative position when she sensed him, rushing over.

"How was it?" She asked curiously.

She didn't make it known, but Damien could see the worry in her eyes.

Well, she might not have realized it, but he could clearly feel her scanning his body for any injuries.

"It was nice. As expected, the Ancient Sovereign is an extremely profound man."

Iris nodded and looked at him strangely, not knowing whether she should ask what they spoke about or not.

Damien just smiled and brushed it off.

"If you're so curious, then go find out. It's your turn now."

"My turn?"

"Well, you better follow him quickly. That guy isn't easy to track."

"Ah!"

Iris finally realized that the Ancient Sovereign's figure was already disappearing into the distance.

Right, she had much to ask as well.

About her purpose, about the strange blessing she received in the Severed World, about Universal Law, and...

'...my true affinity. I must learn how to use it to its full potential.'

Damien watched her disappear in pursuit of the ancient entity, just like she'd watched him.

He was also curious about the questions she had, but he didn't ask.

After all, that was her business. They'd become much closer now, but it wasn't his right to pry into the secrets she'd hidden from the world.

Eventually, she'd tell him as well.

And when she did it of her own accord, it would be much more fulfilling than if he pressed for it.

"What are you staring at? She's already gone, you know."

Orion's voice woke him up from his trance.

"Haha, what's with you today? Did you notice something?"

"That I did," Orion responded with a sly grin.

"You brat, what are you planning to do?"

Damien raised his brow slightly. From Orion's usual character, this was a far cry.

But, imagining him as a concerned grandfather, he could understand the change.

Unfortunately, he couldn't provide the answer he wanted.

He sat down and leaned against the wall, shrugging.

"I don't know. I'll let fate take me where it wants."

"You...!"

"What? You want me to do something?"

"Khhh...!"

Orion gnashed his teeth in annoyance.

Did he want him to do something?!

As the grandfather in question, the answer was the most frustrating mixture of "yes" and "no" that he'd ever experienced!

Though, Damien's answer wasn't bad either.

From his demeanor, he didn't seem to reject the idea at all.

"Putting that aside, what did you talk about?"

Orion couldn't contain his curiosity.

He was in a position where he couldn't gain anything from the Ancient Sovereign. They knew each other too well for his profundity to still be profound.

However, what about the most talented kid he'd ever seen?

What would such a character gain?

Damien looked up at the sky, his eyes clouding over somewhat.

"Well..."

He thought about it.

What did they talk about?

What did he gain?

"Let's just say I gained everything and nothing at all."

Orion looked at Damien's mysteriously smiling face incredulously.

'This man is...'

"You're just spouting nonsense to act like him, aren't you."

"You caught me."

'...absolutely insufferable! I have to get him away from my precious granddaughter as fast as possible!'

It'd be a while before the Ancient Sovereign returned with Iris.

Damien wanted to use that time to internalize everything he'd gained in the past year-like second.

Because, for some reason, after he came out of the Spacetime corridor, the air felt different.

Dark clouds were gathering.

And they would soon converge on his head.

Chapter 1248 Ancient Sovereign [4]

She couldn't follow him.

No matter how much she tried, she couldn't trace his steps.

His back was so far away that she thought he'd disappear from her grasp, but he always stayed on the edge of her perception, just far enough ahead to make her painfully aware of the distance between them.

It wasn't her fault, but she didn't know that.

She simply didn't have the faculties to fall into his rhythm.

Eventually, she stopped and watched him walk.

His steps were unbelievably light, but each one took him an unreasonable distance away.

While her steps could only carry her as far as her body allowed.

It didn't mean much.

The reality was just a difference in affinities. Without understanding Spacetime, it was impossible for her to trace his movements.

But the feeling it gave was more inherent.

This was the difference felt by many.

The difference between a practitioner who could only rely on hard work and one who had sufficient talent to support it.

Iris was always the latter.

She was always leagues above her peers. Despite her age being over ten thousand years, the time she'd taken to reach Divinity was less than half of that.

During the rest of the time, she'd risen from a nameless Demigod to someone who stood above all else, one of the strongest Divinities in Grand Heavens Boundary.

She never felt the gap caused by her talent.

No, she never had anyone around her to be affected by that gap.

So she didn't understand it's pain.

Trying to follow his steps made her experience it.

And her mind flashed back to the man she's been traveling with for the past two and a half years.

It was hard to think of him as a mere lower existence watching him fight, but the facts didn't change.

He was still a Supreme who hadn't stepped on the road of Divinity yet.

Strangely enough, she never felt the weight of that.

Perhaps due to the special relationship they shared, his immense talent didn't frighten her, but empowered her.

The thought of him surpassing her never even came to mind, and now that it was, frankly, she didn't feel concerned about it.

If it happened, she would just work harder to keep up.

But...

That feeling was half due to her conjectures, and half due to the extent of Damien's talent.

Some talents caused people to feel envy and hopelessness, but when talent reached such a disproportionate level, one could only feel admiration.

Damien was at that level.

Now that she was here, Iris started to feel what she'd missed because of his extremity.

It was suffocating.

With everything she had, no matter how much she tried, it was impossible for her to even see his back.

Was that the future in store for her?

She couldn't accept it.

She didn't come here thinking about Damien, she came here to get answers from the Ancient Sovereign.

She couldn't stop their backs from overlapping.

And for some reason, the overlap spurred her thoughts.

What was her talent?

In truth, only Damien glimpsed it. Eyrrisea Luminus had always been a mystery to both comrades and foes, a person whose laws and affinities could not be understood.

The main reason was that she never used her true affinity.

She comprehended Universal Law based on its nature, but while she did progress it in secret, she never used it openly.

Iris never reached her full potential because of this.

No matter how much she could comprehend on her own time, unless she applied those comprehensions to real-life situations, how could she properly understand them?

It was just too esoteric.

The force that nobody else had comprehended, the force above all others that provided her the talent she held, she couldn't seem to grasp it, just like she couldn't grasp the Ancient Sovereign.

"Indecisive."

A single word.

It boomed in her ear.

She looked up, startled, but the Ancient Sovereign was still in the same place, just close enough that she could glimpse his back.

'Indecisive?'

Was that the case?

Was she hesitating?

What reason did she have to do so?

"Orion's descendant, you are a paper boat in a vast ocean. Your mind does not match your stature."

He spoke again.

Iris felt it in his words.

'He's looking down on me.'

In most cases, she would've taken insult from those words, but the man who spoke them wasn't someone who spoke without reason.

She'd learned much about the Ancient Sovereign from Orion before this moment, so she knew just how profound his every action was.

For him to directly tell her something like that...

She had to look inside herself and reflect.

'My mind was like a paper boat in a vast ocean...'

She reiterated his words.

She tried to internalize and rationalize them.

And she eventually realized their truth.

While she objectively accepted her position, considering herself one of the strongest Demigods in the universe, that was nothing but an objective view.

Her mind was truly immature.

The underdevelopment of her mind due to the lack of pure relationships in her life was already known. Adding to that the immense responsibility on her shoulders and many other factors, she realized that she undervalued herself to an extreme.

"You cannot find the answers you seek."

He spoke as if it was definite, but Iris knew it wasn't.

In her current state, it was impossible to pursue what she sought.

It was a matter of mindset.

The law she wanted to start pursuing was far too great for her to tackle with her current mindset.

Unless she could put herself in the same position as that law or stand above it, how could she ever wish to reach it?

"But...how?"

How was she to change?

Over ten thousand years she'd lived. It was an immense span of time, and something developed through it was not easy to alter.

"There is no how, and there is no what. There is no question, there is only an answer. That answer will not come from external sources, and it cannot come from inside. It does not exist."

Iris wasn't used to the Ancient Sovereign's strangeness, but just like Damien, she tried her best to understand it.

'There is no question, and there is no answer. It will not come from the outside, but it "cannot" come from the inside...'

Was he saying that she was limiting herself?

But if that was the extent of it, was there a point in him speaking?

Iris felt like a child again, listening to her elders speak about the mysteries of 4th class, completely unable to follow their words.

However, despite what the Ancient Sovereign said, she felt there was an answer.

There was an answer somewhere, she just didn't have the faculties to reach it.

She refused to allow this.

If the problem was internal, then she could fix it. If she didn't know how, then she just needed to create a "how" and make it work.

Iris never forced her way through a problem before.

She was always a rational thinker. Instead of using power where power wasn't necessary, she'd always use a roundabout method to achieve the most ideal results.

This was also the reason she became so accustomed to using Universal Law.

In the lower universe, that power was absolute. It put her in a position without competitors.

But in this place, it was useless. It barely held any weight.

After all, this was not the lower universe.

The Ancient Battlefield was a fragment that broke off the Heavenly World. That was why it could accommodate Divinities so easily.

She realized the need for growth that had long eluded her once again when she came here, and though she'd grown somewhat, it wasn't nearly what she wanted.

In her heart, a long-forgotten ambition sparked again.

The desire to see the Heavenly World and enter the grand stage.

If she wanted to do it, she couldn't stay the same.

At least this much, she'd understood clearly.

Chapter 1249 Ancient Sovereign [5]

What was Iris searching for?

The problem was that even she didn't know.

Unlike Damien who had a definite goal for meeting the Ancient Sovereign and used their conversation to take steps towards it, Iris was just looking for an "answer."

Unfortunately, the Ancient Sovereign wasn't a man who would just give people what they sought.

He would guide them there in his own special way, and whether or not they could gain anything was up to them.

So Iris struggled.

As someone who didn't know what she wanted, she struggled.

The conversation she had with the wizened entity wasn't nearly as profound and long as Damien's, but it had its own value.

The Ancient Sovereign refused to give her what she wanted, but that was good for her.

Because, for Iris, who always tried to find the best yet most complex solution to every problem, had to learn how to take things at face value and accept them.

Who was she?

What did she want?

What did she represent?

And why did she want or represent those things?

These were questions she had to answer for herself before she could even begin to answer the most pressing concern in her mind.

Just as the Ancient Sovereign said, her identity was not nearly defined enough for her to even begin to understand what she wanted to.

It sounded strange for a Demigod to encounter these problems, but it was actually relatively common.

After coming in contact with one's soul and establishing one's Divinity, a practitioner would become far more aware of themselves than ever before.

This would cement most beliefs they held beforehand, but it also gave rise to new questions that couldn't be easily answered.

Because they would realize that perhaps those fundamental thoughts they'd held since the start of their journey to power were flawed.

Those things they regarded as immutable facts might've been the very things holding them back.

And as they discovered and explored those changes, they'd grow into more complete existences.

This growth couldn't be rushed.

The Ancient Sovereign didn't entertain her the same way he did Damien. He barely spoke, and allowed her to form conclusions based on non-verbal clues more than anything else.

But for Iris, this was necessary.

She was Orion's descendant.

While he looked down on her for keeping such an immature mentality after everything she'd experienced, he didn't condemn her, because he understood that sentient beings were complex.

Everyone had their own path, and the discovery of their paths would take time regardless of how talented or intelligent they were.

Whether or not Iris could understand what he wanted to teach her was unknown, because she didn't understand it during their conversation.

However, with the ideas planted in her mind, it only took a single spark to ignite them and send her into a state of enlightenment where everything clicked.

He believed she could do it.

But she needed to face the harshness of reality first.

Despite the briefness of their conversation, it still continued for over a month.

And now that she was leaving, his gaze returned to that unknown place.

Past, present, and future.

These concepts held no meaning to him.

He understood them, but he did not experience them.

To him, they all took place at the same time. Time was not linear in his eyes.

So he could see it.

What would happen in the future, what happened in the past, and how the present was defined by and defined those instances.

Perhaps Iris didn't think she gained much.

He saw the uncertainty in her eyes, but he could not say anything to calm it.

Instead, the opportunity to do so was just around the corner.

The only question was whether it was right or wrong to let her experience it.

'An observer...'

He thought back to what Damien called him.

A mere observer.

The least significant yet most significant individual in the universe.

If that was his role, then so be it.

Whatever happened would happen.

His only job was to watch over it, like a living record of all things.

Perhaps one day, as he lived such a life, he'd see that place with his own eyes.

The place he'd been gazing at for eternity.

Iris returned to Damien and Orion with a frown on her face. She was much quieter than her usual self, but Damien didn't say anything about it.

'She must've learned something incomprehensible. I'll just have to wait for her to properly internalize it.'

It was an experience he'd had several times in the past. While Iris was a Demigod and an experienced human in her own right, in front of the Ancient Sovereign, she was nothing but a fleck in the expanse of all things.

Whatever she'd learned from him definitely held deep importance to her, so it was only natural for her to have such an expression.

"How are you feeling?" He asked, trying to bring her attention back to reality.

"Huu..."

Iris took a deep breath and shook her head listlessly.

"Confused."

"Haha, that'll happen," Damien responded, not pressing for more.

"Should we wait a bit before heading back out?"

Iris looked at him gratefully. She wasn't going to suggest it since she felt bad for holding them back, but she truly couldn't fight to her full potential with her current state of mind.

She needed to sit down and process everything. She needed to gain an understanding of herself.

Though she wanted to express her intent, the look in Damien's eyes made her realize she didn't need to.

After hesitating for a moment, she sat down nearby and closed her eyes, sinking her mind inward.

Damien glanced at her before turning to Orion.

"So, what do you plan to do?" He asked.

"Me?" Orion replied strangely.

"Who else?"

"Haha, are you truly asking me to join you right now?"

"What, you have a problem with that?"

"Not necessarily, but I assumed you would?"

"Haha, you're funny."

"What does that mean?"

"Hm? Nothing at all."

Damien shrugged noncommittally, aggravating Orion to the extreme, but the man sighed wryly and dropped the matter.

"I will stay with my elder brother. Now that three of us are gone, there is much for the two of us to do."

Damien nodded in understanding.

"Alright, but don't hide your location like before. It's annoying trying to find you without a point of reference."

"That makes me want to do it even more, though?"

"Just wait until I become a Demigod. I'm going to beat your ass."

"Hahaha, I wholeheartedly accept that challenge! Even if I have given you my loyalty, as a grandfather, it is my duty to put you in your place at least once."

"Pfft...! If you think you can, then go ahead and try."

Damien and Orion glared at each other with eyes full of fighting spirit before shaking hands and bidding farewell.

With Orion following the Ancient Sovereign to places unknown, Damien and Iris were left alone again.

It would be several months before they started acting again, and the situation would go through a myriad of changes in that time as the fighting between two sides became more severe, but that didn't have much to do with them.

After all, they were far separated from any of the main battlegrounds.

Yet...

As Iris focused on meditation and Damien rested nearby, they failed to notice the dark clouds above gathering in full.

Trouble was not just near, it was already upon them.

The only question that remained was if they were capable of facing it.

Chapter 1250 Ambush [1]

It took some time for Iris to gather herself after experiencing such an existential crisis, but she eventually got her act together.

Experience was key here.

If it weren't for the countless turmoils she'd been through as she grew to her current level, she probably would have faced much more difficulty accepting the current circumstances.

No, it was still difficult.

To recognize something so deeply ingrained in her as a problem, how could it be something she could do easily?

It wasn't as simple as the Ancient Sovereign made it sound. This problem was deeply related to her reason for refusing ascension, the decision she was most sure of yet most regretful of at the same time.

However, she was eventually able to understand her faults and make a flimsy plan for the future, which would become more defined as she learned if the path she was following was the right one.

With both Damien and Iris well-rested and in peak condition, they returned to the battlefield soon enough, but found something curious.

The Ancient Battlefield's considerable shrinking meant they should have encountered several enemies in the half-hour since they started moving, especially since the Ancient Sovereign moved away from this area, but they hadn't met even one.

At first, they assumed it was just unfortunate positioning. They were near the edge of the battlefield, and if most of the battles were focused near the center, it made sense that they couldn't see anyone.

But...

Damien frowned.

"It's too quiet."

In fact, it was extremely quiet.

Eerily so.

"Stay on guard," Damien said solemnly as he glanced around.

He couldn't see anything around them, nor did his perception pick up an enemy, but he felt the strangeness in the air viscerally.

Iris nodded silently, slowly prepping herself for battle as she also noticed the oddity.

'This environment...'

They were surrounded on all sides by mountains. Only the valley through which they came existed as an entrance and exit to this place.

It was not ideal for battle at all.

But it also wasn't a place where people could hide easily.

Damien frowned.

'There's definitely something wrong. There should be—'

"—shit!"

Damien grabbed Iris' wrist and instantly teleported several hundred kilometers away.

BOOOOOOOM!

An explosion rocked the space soon after. A massive ballista bolt landed on their previous position and launched a tsunami of debris in every direction.

Judging by the Divine Energy in that bolt, it would have instantly incapacitated at least one of them on impact.

Damien and Iris flew into the air and flared their mana.

'If the enemy continues to use assassination tactics—'

Damien's worry was unfounded.

By the time the dust cleared, they'd already revealed themselves.

After all, they weren't someone who liked to hide.

"Heyyy~ remember me?"

The familiar, disgusting voice entered Damien's ears and instantly turned his expression ugly.

A character whose gender was unknown and held a relatively unsettling appearance that constantly shifted between countless mismatched body parts revealed himself confidently, waving with a smile.

'Marionette Lord!'

Damien hadn't seen them since their last encounter on Beast Emperor Star, but this was one of the Demigods he least wanted to meet.

Their power relied on control, and as someone who despised being controlled, he held a natural repulsion for them.

"Hey, what's with that expression? I was hoping you'd miss me~!"

The Marionette Lord continued to speak casually, as if they weren't worried about Damien and Iris in the slightest.

'They're supposed to be someone weakened by the Ancient Battlefield since their personal combat power is assumed to be low, but...'

The Marionette Lord was the Marionette Lord after all.

They stood with four Demigods in front of them, clearly puppets being controlled by their strings.

'An ambush. They must've spotted us before we met the Ancient Sovereign. If it's that person, it isn't strange for them to wait so long for the sole purpose of killing us.'

Damien glanced at Iris, who was equally solemn.

But the two of them were confident in their combined abilities. The Marionette Lord was a tough opponent, especially with those Demigod Puppets protecting them, but they weren't impossible to defeat.

"Ahhh~ are you thinking you can beat me? But...I didn't come alone, though?"

BOOOOM!

Damien rapidly teleported away.

This attack was specifically aimed at him, ignoring Iris completely.

Before he could regain his senses, he felt a force approaching from behind.

He turned around and raised his arms just in time to—

BOOM!

Crack!

"Keuk...!"

His forearms shattered, but he was able to mitigate most of the damage with that.

When he regained his balance, he finally saw the man in front of him, as well as the two behind.

'These guys...'

Damien knew their identities well.

The Strength Lord, Bow Lord, and Venom Lord.

The first was one of the strongest under the Inhuman Emperor, a total beast who used his fists alone to stand above all others. The second was the one who shot the ballista from earlier, while the third was someone similar to the Poison and Plague Lords.

However, he exclusively used venoms extracted from different beasts, which he could reproduce after experiencing once. They were not mana-based, but secreted naturally by his body, so Damien couldn't get rid of them easily with the Void Physique.

'A close combat fighter to keep me occupied, a poison master to wear me down, and a ranged combatant for control and piercing attacks. They really came prepared.'

'Did we drop our guard when we were with the Ancient Sovereign? No, I even used Absolute Perception several times to be sure. The Marionette Lord must've used some kind of trick, or...there's a terrifying treasure in their hands.'

Damien's eyes were narrowed to the extreme as he silently faced the three surrounding him, but it wasn't over yet.

By the Marionette Lord's side, a man with a black cloak appeared as well.

His cloak seemed to flutter in the wind, but if one looked closely, it wasn't fluttering at all.

No, it was a massive swarm of microscopic bugs so densely packed that they created a black garment.

'The Insect Lord.'

A fully equipped squad from the Inhuman Emperor's faction.

"Do you like my gift?" The Marionette Lord said with a teasing smile.

"I prepared it just for you!"

Damien glared at them before looking back at Iris.

"Can you take them?" He asked through mental transmission.

"Unknown, but it should be manageable. You?"

Damien's frown deepened.

"Same. We don't have any choice but to fight, but this number is good. If it was any greater, it'd be impossible."

Iris nodded.

They couldn't fight together this time, not until one of them finished the enemies on their side.

It seemed the Marionette Lord did a sufficient amount of research before confronting them. Since their tandem techniques allowed them to win against any number of opponents, they disallowed them from even trying.

It was unfortunate, but it was reality.

"Awww~ why the long faces? Ah! Are you so sad that the battle hasn't started? Well then..."

The Marionette Lord smiled again. It was cruel and gruesome, as expected of the Inhuman Emperor's favorite underling.

They raised their arm in the air with great gusto, as if everything was just entertainment, a performance, as their smile turned into a wide grin.

"...let the battle begin!"