

# Void 1311

Chapter 1311 Saint Emperor [9]

What did it mean to destroy a concept?

It was different for everyone, but to Damien, it meant breaking a shackle.

He was prone to destruction, but he wasn't a slave to it. He never destroyed anything meaningless, and even when he did cause mass destruction, it was always purposeful.

Intent mattered more than the action to him.

The things he wanted to see broken were inhibitions. Whether those were physical in the form of enemies or barriers, or ethereal in the form of emotions or bottlenecks.

What shackles did he have to break now?

Not obvious ones like the Saint Emperor, but ones hidden deep within the recesses of his mind, ones he thought were long exterminated.

There were a few answers, but they weren't easy to find.

Damien had broken through most of his mental bottlenecks long ago. It could be said that his psyche was perfected to a level it should have never reached in such a short span of time due to his countless experiences.

But some of those feelings lingered.

They didn't affect him outwardly or have any real presence in his thought process, but they still lingered.

He remembered those times of the past, and no matter how strong he grew, he always held the worry that he'd return to that pathetic person he used to be.

He had an amazing support system. His wives grounded him in a way he could never achieve by himself, and because of them, he always had the motivation to continue improving even if everything else abandoned him.

However, he sometimes wondered what would happen without them.

He always wondered if, in a situation where his support system disappeared, he would become a monster who couldn't differentiate between friend and foe, someone who lived for the purpose of destruction.

It was an unreasonable worry. Damien was never someone who caved on his values so easily, even if he was left alone for millennia or eons.

Still, he couldn't stop himself from questioning it, because despite his stalwart nature, he did have that nature hidden within him. He had the capabilities to become a monster if he was put in the right circumstances.

He couldn't allow that.

He was a man with impossible abilities. Even if everything was taken from him, as long as he stayed true to himself and reached the heights of his potential, he could regain it all.

So straying from that path and becoming an avatar of destruction was something he both feared and absolutely disallowed himself from doing.

The will Damien put into his mana reflected this. It reflected both the monster within him and the determination to make sure it never appeared in reality, to slay it and completely make its power his own.

It contained all the doubts he once held, and everything he used to overcome them.

In short, it contained his will to cut off weakness and become Absolute.

He swung a sword of Destruction that perfectly embodied this desire, and clashed against the Saint Emperor who did the same.

VooooooooooooOOOOOOM!

The spatial tears around them grew worse. It was impossible to see any semblance of the Ancient Battlefield anymore.

The duo was thrown into the chaotic void, unable to find ground to stand on anymore, but the rampant Destruction Law emanating from their collision pushed away any crushing force the space had, creating an oasis for their battle.

It was enlightening.

When they used Creation, they destroyed, and when they used Destruction, they created.

Their wills were too strong to overpower each other, allowing both Creation and Destruction to showcase their duality without being overshadowed.

Damien pushed his sword forward with all his strength.

His determination wasn't something anyone could compare with. That flimsy and weak man he used to be no longer existed. That man grew into someone who would do anything and sacrifice even his own life for the sake of success.

But for some reason, he couldn't overpower the Saint Emperor.

"What do you want to destroy?" He asked, his voice quiet yet traveling perfectly into the opponent's ears.

"Are you curious?" The Saint Emperor asked in return.

It was a question he was fond of.

There was no way he just wanted to sever fate.

Yes, this desire was powerful. It was an almost impossible task for most, so the absolute desire to crush that ruling force and come out on top was indomitable.

However, the Saint Emperor wasn't like them.

He might not have been able to gain the Void's acknowledgment, but that was by no fault of his own. Even Damien didn't know what conditions made the Void choose him as its apostle.

The Saint Emperor was both powerful and influential enough to challenge fate with what he had. As long as he didn't covet the Void, he could have anything he wanted.

And no matter how much he tried to portray himself as a lunatic, he wasn't one at all.

He wasn't someone who would single-mindedly focus on the Void knowing it was an impossible goal.

After all, when he tried to kill Damien and failed, he didn't fall deeper into lunacy. He didn't continue trying to slaughter Damien as if he was his worst enemy.

He engaged in a battle like this, proving the depth of his thought process, something a villain like Immortal Blood Asura wholly lacked.

So what was he trying to destroy?

And why was his will to destroy it so utterly powerful?

Damien had to admit. He was definitely more skilled with wielding Destruction, and as someone chosen by the law since birth, he was able to control it to an extent the Saint Emperor could never dream of.

But in terms of will alone, he lost out.

His unshakeable will to become Absolute, the will he thought was greater than anything anyone else could produce, ησυνελθουλκ.ζοm was just barely overshadowed by what the Saint Emperor infused into his mana.

"What do I want to destroy, you ask...?" The Saint Emperor continued, pushing his sword forward.

The waves of Destruction Law were already tearing apart the devouring force of the chaotic void. If it continued, even this layer of reality would be ripped to shreds, revealing them to the true Void.

But the Saint Emperor didn't stop.

He didn't care if the Void would kill him.

His will was too strong for him to give up in the face of something as meager as death.

"I have never wanted much. I have never wished for much. Whenever I dream, I dream of a future that I have no place in," the Saint Emperor began.

"However, I once had a goal."

In unison, he and Damien kicked away from each other and pushed back, clashing swords again.

They swung, stabbed, and parried in a beautiful dance of blades with no witnesses.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

"The truths that you learned on Al'Katra, I once learned them as well. As I told you earlier, I spent countless years wondering how to carry myself after learning how pointless my own existence was." His voice carried through the explosions.

It didn't have much power behind it, but it was impossible to ignore despite all the sound blanketing the atmosphere and drowning it out.

It was infused with the Saint Emperor's undying spirit, the result of his eons of existence.

"In those years, watching how my fellows reacted to the truth or chose to ignore it, watching how restrictions were put in place so our growing freedom could not inhibit the loyalty instilled in us at birth, a question arose in my mind."

BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Two Laws of Destruction blazed in reddish-black splendor, tearing a gash in the chaotic void and revealing the true Void beyond.

Damien and the Saint Emperor immediately retreated.

Instead of taking their battle further, they used Creation Law in tandem to forcefully mend the damage they'd done to the environment until they were back on the outskirts of the Ancient Battlefield as if nothing happened.

Only then did they pull their swords of Destruction out once more to clash.

"I asked myself, I asked my people, I asked your people, and I asked the universe."

The Saint Emperor continued speaking, the will infused in his sword becoming stronger and stronger with every passing second.

"Why do we exist? Why is our existence wrapped in suffering? Why can't we escape fate? Why must we fight?"

Just...why?"

His words were oddly melancholic, making Damien feel a pang in his chest.

"The answer did not exist. No matter who I asked, I would only receive answers in the form of excuses. Nobody could tell me why we were forced into such tragic states of existence."

"So, instead of asking others, I looked for the answer within me."

BOOOOOOOOOOOM!

It didn't take long for the Ancient Battlefield to return to its broken state. Hundreds of millions of kilometers meant nothing in the collision of these two great forces.

"There was no right answer. There was no rhyme or reason behind it. We were forced to live like this because this is how we were forced to live. It was even more frustrating because the answer was

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BOOM!

Another explosion rang out. At this point, explosions had just become white noise to the two of them. Their battle had been going on for too long for them to pay any mind to the effects of their collisions.

After all, neither of them was going to be hurt by these eruptions of mana. Their Divine Energy was equal in strength, and their laws directly neutralized each other or harmonized and heightened the effect, never truly overpowering one another.

Therefore, most of their focus went into their conversation as they continued to fight through it.

"..."

Damien processed the Saint Emperor's answer slowly.

"Frankly, I can't accept that. How are you going to say you're trying to destroy suffering after everything you've done? And...what happened to your quest for entertainment? Those two goals directly clash with each other, don't they?" Damien asked.

He felt like the Saint Emperor was singing a completely different tune than he was in the beginning.

It wasn't that Damien didn't believe him. He could see deep enough into the Saint Emperor's existence to know he was being wholly truthful.

The problem was that he was being truthful before as well. These contradictory aspects were both part of him, and that only made him more confusing.

"You say it is contradictory, but is it truly?" The Saint Emperor questioned back, parrying Damien's sword and slashing at his chest.

Damien twisted his body to the side, refusing to lose his momentum. He forcefully swung his sword back down to counter, intentionally snapping his arm in the process.

BANG!

"It is. Despite saying you want to destroy suffering, your quest for entertainment was a large part of the reason it's proliferated to this extent over the years."



The Saint Emperor nodded.

"In a sense, that is true. To put it simply, our generation has no hope."

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The two went back and forth countless times, clashing blades thousands of times every fraction of a second. They healed and destroyed the Ancient Battlefield over and over again, making sure their stage never disappeared before they could finish.

"As long as 'those people' keep interfering in the lower universe, there is no chance for its people to live a life without suffering. Just as they birthed the Nox Race into existence, they have sown great discord within the ranks of the universe even before I exacerbated the problem for my own amusement."

"Yes, it is true that I have caused immense suffering to survive the trials of time. I have followed my own selfish desire and manipulated the universe into a state nearing Nonexistence because I had to live. But..."

BANG!

"...have I also not created this situation?"

Damien's eyes narrowed.

The Saint Emperor was half the reason the universe was now only Grand Heavens Boundary and not its magnificent form of the past. That was true.

But it was also true that because of the Saint Emperor's actions, Damien reached Al'Katra and eliminated the corrupted foreign material and came to the Ancient Battlefield to slaughter their Demigods.

Because of the Saint Emperor, the Nox had fallen to a point where they could no longer harm the universe once their rotten parts were cut off.

And from there, the universe would finally have a chance to heal.

"Has that been your goal this entire time?" Damien questioned again.

"Who knows? Perhaps I truly only wish to entertain myself," the Saint Emperor responded with a grin.

"But you...are not so simple of a person."

"That, I am not."

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Their collision ruptured the atmosphere again. The hundred million-kilometer-wide gash consumed the Ancient Battlefield, and rather than plunging it into the chaotic void, it ripped through the chaotic void as well and opened a passage directly to the true Void.

Once again, Damien and the Saint Emperor worked together to heal it.

But Damien's mind was elsewhere.

The Saint Emperor's end goal was to bring peace to the lower universe. No, it could be said that he wanted to rid this cosmos of the terror brought about by those who wished it harm.

He wanted to end suffering altogether, and to do that, he needed to create a plot that allowed such an ending.

However, there was no way for him to do so.

There wasn't someone who existed to take the place of the main character in that plot, so he did it himself. There wasn't a world that could support it, so he made one himself.

He led countless quintillions of existences, both denizen and Nox, to their deaths without blinking an eye. He ruined universes, ruined families, and destroyed hope for the sake of creating an ideal world.

He believed his actions were justified.

If the future generations could live on in a world free of suffering, if he could prevent another "Saint Emperor" from being born and facing the same tragedies he did...

He didn't care about what happened to those sacrificed in his pursuit of that goal.

That was how much he didn't want to see another version of himself recreated by fate and circumstance.

"Do you hate yourself?" Damien asked.

"I do," the Saint Emperor answered without hesitation.

"I believe I am an integral part of the plot I've created, however, I abhor what I have become. Rather, I abhor what I have been forced to become. I do not wish this fate on anyone else."

"And for that purpose..." Damien muttered.

"...even if it means ending all life and birthing a new universe, I shall do so without hesitation."

The Saint Emperor finished his sentence.

The difference in their moral standpoints couldn't be overcome, but Damien also couldn't say anything about the Saint Emperor's motivations.

How much did he have to suffer?

How far did one have to plunge into the depths of despair to feel such animosity towards their own twisted existence that they'd be willing to end the world itself so future generations wouldn't suffer the same fate?

Yes, the Saint Emperor was irredeemable. Yes, he had committed atrocities by his own will.

But who could say it was completely his fault, and who could say he was completely wrong?

In a game of chess where victory against a masterful opponent seemed impossible, there were still several options to avoid defeat.

The first was to crush the opposing pieces to dust, making sure the opponent could no longer play.

The second was to flip the board, forcing the opponent to spend a great deal of time reorganizing the pieces before the game could be played again.

And the third, the option the Saint Emperor chose, and the only option left when the opponent, the opponent's pieces, one's own pieces, and even the board itself were working their hardest to make sure one couldn't succeed...

...was to incinerate the board and all the pieces on it.

Later, one could buy a new board and start a new game, but that game would not be influenced by the first in any way.

It was extreme to an incomprehensible level, but when one had been playing the game for hundreds of millions of years with no chance of success, it would eventually start feeling more and more reasonable as an option.

The Saint Emperor kept trying and kept failing, and thus, the only solution he found was this.

And Damien could only grit his teeth without any proper way to deny his choice.

Because even he was playing on the board the Saint Emperor created.

Even he was fully utilizing the time the Saint Emperor bought by incinerating the board over and over again.

"...but I won't let the board be destroyed again."

He was resolved regardless.

"At this point, we can at most consider the board flipped. Half of our pieces have been taken, but the opponent still has all of theirs."

"Still, we have a wild card, and that is me."

Damien's eyes were firm with a newfound light of determination.

"So I will choose the first option. I will save this board and find the opponent. I will reduce his pieces to ash and then sever his hands and rip his throat out so he has no chance of playing ever again."

"I will not let you destroy this board, because while it may just be a board to you..."

"...it is my home, and those pieces are my people. Until the day I, Damien Void, no longer exist, nobody can touch them."

The Saint Emperor smiled.

"That is a worthy mindset to hold."

He raised his sword once more.

The fight had gone on for almost 4 years now.

No matter how large his mana capacity had grown, 4 years of constant usage without any attempts to replenish it led to an obvious depletion.

He was almost out of energy.

"Show me, Damien Void," he said, his back straight as if the problem of mana never existed at all.

"Show me that you are worthy of those words. Show me that I can leave this world in your hands. Otherwise..."

"...even if it is the worst possible decision, I will end you here and take your place, so that the world at least stands a chance against the threat from beyond the border."

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Fighting with Destruction any longer would be pointless.

Instead of focusing on a single law, since they'd come to the end of this battle, it was time to stop placing such restrictions on themselves.

"I will now use everything in my power," the Saint Emperor said.

"Survive until the end, or there is only one fate awaiting you."

Damien's eyes narrowed.

He was clear on what was happening.

'He's running out of steam.'

The Saint Emperor had an enormous mana capacity, enough for him to use it almost continuously for years without reaching its bottom.

However, he couldn't match Damien.

Damien, who not only had the Ananta Matrix, but also the Void supporting him, wasn't someone who could ever run out of mana.

It didn't matter if he never replenished himself. His capacity itself was an infinite source.

But the Saint Emperor didn't need to know that.

'Plus, he can still kill me if he tries.'

Damien couldn't explain how. He wasn't knowledgeable enough to understand it, but his intuition told him if the Saint Emperor really used everything he had, he could still kill the nigh immortal Damien.

'An enemy like that...I can't let my guard down.'

He prepared himself, silently circulating his mana in preparation for a—

BOOOOOOM!

The Saint Emperor was already upon him.

Space and time constricted, and creation formed a space with unique rules that suppressed Damien's laws.

Destruction ran rampant as the Saint Emperor landed a punch on Damien's chest, pushing through his body and soul to force him into pain.

The Saint Emperor already understood that he couldn't kill Damien with Destruction. Instead, he used the law to "destroy" Damien's senses.

His perception was cut off, nearly blinding him, and in that moment, the Saint Emperor continued his attack.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Lightning struck down from the heavens. It was wrapped in flames from the sun, and when it struck the earth, rather than dispersing, it arced along the ground as if the earth itself was a conductor.

Damien was barraged with the elemental forces, and his movements were slowed by the laws of Ice. As he tried to dodge and avoid everything coming at him, he slammed into the electrically charged earth and experienced the shock of his lifetime.

"Khhhh...!"

Damien gritted his teeth and flipped back to his feet, rapidly counterattacking.

He was severely inhibited. He could still use his physical senses, but his awareness had been completely disconnected.

Without it, he could only rely on physical reactions to respond to stimuli, which was a huge problem.



'There's a solution to this.'

Just as the Saint Emperor intuitively used his laws to attack, Damien could do the same to defend.

He spread mana into the surroundings, infusing his will into Space and Time.

Those two forces that maintained reality became his eyes and ears. The shadowed environment became clear once more, just in time for the Saint Emperor's approaching fist to come into view.

BANG!

Damien leaned his body to the side, barely avoiding the attack. In the same movement, he swung his leg around and kicked into the Saint Emperor's side.

BOOOOOOM!

The attack was infused with laws of Samsara. Taking a page out of Yong An's book, Damien tried to create a field that suppressed the Saint Emperor's connection to the two laws and cut off his regeneration.

"You adapted fast!" The Saint Emperor praised.

"If I couldn't even do this much, we wouldn't be fighting right now!"

Damien grinned and kicked backward, making distance between them.

'He's far superior in the usage of fundamental laws. No matter how fast I learn, I can't close a billion-year gap with just 3 years of battle.'

Damien wasn't arrogant.

As he continued to dodge the Saint Emperor's attacks by a hair's width, it wasn't hard to see the difference between them.

The Saint Emperor could wield his laws with such proficiency that they could only be described as beautiful.

Space and Time could function as Life and Death, the elements themselves could become Creation and Destruction, it didn't matter what he used, as long as his intent was there, the laws would become whatever he wanted them to be.

Meanwhile, Damien was definitely skilled, but he didn't have that level of comprehension. That was a level one could only reach through strenuous training over an unholy amount of time.

'I wanted to keep it at this level, but that's impossible.'

If he wanted to come out on top here, he had to stop using the base components alone. He could only win with Existence Law.

And so, he rapidly switched his strategy.

Honor was a fake concept. It could only exist in times of peace. When one's life was on the line, what was honor? What was pride?

Damien wanted to match the Saint Emperor's pace for the sake of the connection they'd built through this battle, but victory was more important than anything.

His moves changed.

Instead of wielding the individual forces like the Saint Emperor did, Damien brought Existence itself under his control.

He formed illusions that superimposed on reality and became reality through his power to counter the Saint Emperor's domain skills.

He took hold of the fabric of reality and toyed with it as if it were just some regular cloth, forcefully changing the rules of this world to his advantage.

If he couldn't win through normal means, he would just cheat.

Because even that was a part of his power!

"Hahaha, as expected, there is no one else like you, Damien Void!"

The Saint Emperor roared out gleefully, ignoring the line of blood trailing down his chin.

"Come, come at me with everything you have!"

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Damien obliged.

He used the entire weight of existence itself to bear down on the Saint Emperor, forcing him to the ground.

He could feel it.

The Saint Emperor's Divine Energy was weening. Its potency wasn't nearly as it was when they started, and if one looked at the amount alone, he was practically on death's door already.

'When did he become like this...?'

Damien gritted his teeth and continued attacking. The Saint Emperor didn't stop just because of his thoughts, after all.

He continued onward.

The more he fought, the faster his mana depleted, but the closer he got to the true meaning of Existence.

It became impossible to track the battle.

They moved too fast, and as the forces they controlled became vaguer and vaguer, trusting the battle one saw to be the battle that was ongoing became a fool's dream.

Reality became a lie under their control. Fate became a joke, and power became trivial.

The Saint Emperor reached the heights of existence where Damien stood, and above the concept itself, they fought for supremacy,

There was no light, no sound, and no wondrous imagery.

They were fighting a battle only they were privy to, a battle far above the level they should have ever been able to reach.

They weren't even fighting each other anymore.

They were fighting themselves.

Because as they grew closer to the base of existence, their own mana left their control.

Damien seized control over the Saint Emperor's mana and attacked him from within, while the Saint Emperor did the same and attacked Damien's mind and body.

Damien felt the blood leaking from his pores, and he saw the blood leaking from the Saint Emperor.

Bloody tears dripped down his face.

It was a beautiful battle.

It was a beautiful battle with an opponent he did not wish to die so early.

"You bastard, stay alive! Stay alive and watch me accomplish everything you dreamed of!"

He roared as he rushed forward with his light of existence, attacking once more.

"Me? Stay alive? Hahahaha, you delusional brat! The one you should be worried about is yourself!"

He talked big.

If anything, he was good at talking big.

But...

What did it matter if he talked big?

He didn't have mana left.

Even now, he was fighting with his life force as collateral.

There was no way for him to avoid death.

There was no way for him to continue fighting.

The wounds on Damien's body piled up as he refused to let himself heal, but the Saint Emperor's body withered away even faster.

No matter what he did, he couldn't save that man.

No matter how terrible of an idea it might've been to save that man, he couldn't get rid of the desire to save him.

But his body didn't listen to his desires.

His mind roared and thrashed, begging him to stop. His heart beat wildly as it pleaded with him to halt his movements.

However, nothing could stop the wheel of fate that the two of them rolled down the hill.

The only way for it to stop...

SHIK!

A sword of existence stabbed through the withered Saint Emperor's chest.

The only way to stop this twisted fate was to see it through to the end.

Tears of blood dripped down Damien's face and onto the Saint Emperor's shoulder as the two stood in silence.

The Saint Emperor rested his head on Damien's chest as it became difficult for him to keep his eyes open.

"It was an honorable battle, child..."

The Saint Emperor spoke weakly.

He hardly had the energy to speak.

His existence was being swallowed by the sword in his chest, and his remaining life force was already exhausted after he used it as a medium to control existence itself.

"As expected, you were the one..." he said, forcing out his last words.

"...you were the protagonist of my story, Damien Void."

Damien gritted his teeth. He clenched his fists hard enough to dig holes through his palm.

"...just a little more," he said, forcing the energy of [Heal] and Life Laws into the Saint Emperor's body.

It was impossible to save him.

There was no meaning in this action at all, but...

"...please, let's just talk a little more before you go."

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It was quiet.

The pieces of existence slowly put themselves back together, and the Ancient Battlefield returned to its dull and dreary appearance.

It was beautiful.

That scene, where reality itself was pieced together like glass shattering in reverse, where mountains rose and valleys grew, where the sky itself found its place in the world, was beautiful.

However, nobody was there to see it.

There were two figures in the midst of the great restructuring, but neither of them paid it any mind.

It was lonely.

Damien felt the Saint Emperor's body turning colder in his grasp. Unlike other Nox, he didn't liquefy upon death.

The energy of [Heal] kept flowing into his body. Damien was doing everything he could to give the Saint Emperor even one more moment of life.

He already knew.

It was impossible.

"Please," he said, his words reaching no ears but his own, "let's just talk a little more before you go."

The Saint Emperor smiled slightly, his expression hidden as he had no way to raise his head.

He wanted to speak, to say some words to this child who was acting unlike himself, but he couldn't.



No matter what Damien did, he wouldn't live.

It was not a matter of fate.

He resented fate to his very core, and he had no intention of letting fate take his life.

So he chose this place as his grave.

He chose to die here, and with that decision, he made absolutely sure he wouldn't live no matter what was done.

But how was he supposed to tell Damien? He didn't even have mana left to transmit his thoughts, let alone a mouth that could speak.

No, in the first place, there was no need for him to say anything.

Damien already knew.

He just didn't want to accept it.

He was a man who experienced a lot of death. Whether he was the one spreading death or being forced to see it, he'd been around it since he was young.

Several seniors he respected, several young people who could've been the future of this universe, and several others who might not have had any real value at all, had died before him.

But none of them really had any connection to them.

None of them made him feel this way.

Because while he respected those seniors, he didn't spend enough time with them to truly become close.

The only time Damien truly experienced death so viscerally was when Iris shattered her soul, but even then, he had a solution.

This time, there was nothing.

There was no title, no magical effect, no impossibility that could change the Saint Emperor's fate.

So he sat there, trying fruitlessly to breathe life into that man's dying body.

The Saint Emperor...well, he didn't feel bad about it.

It had been a long time since he was born. In that time, he'd lived so many lives that even he'd forgotten his true name.

The name that was given to him, his emperor title, was the only thing he could use to define himself.

And what did that give him?

Frankly, it gave him nothing.

He never expected to die surrounded by people.

He knew what kind of life he'd lived. He knew that those who visited his grave would do so to celebrate his passing, to spit on his tombstone.

So the fact that there was a man here who mourned him, that was enough for him.

It was a warmth he'd never felt before.

It was a warmth he didn't know he was capable of feeling.

'This child...'

Damien Void.

There was a lot he wanted to say to this man.

Damien was the successor he'd been eagerly awaiting for so long.

The "protagonist" position he tried to take for himself, he got extremely caught up in its nuances. At some point, he started to believe that the position was truly made for him.

However, it never was.

The Saint Emperor was just a "dreamer." He was there to set up the plot, to create a world that could support it, and to watch as the protagonist was born into it and fulfilled his glorious destiny.

His lunacy caught up to him.

When he saw the protagonist, he saw him as a source of entertainment. He toyed with his life for the sake of that measly desire, and when the time came, he tried to steal his position.

Naturally, he failed.

When he arrived on the Ancient Battlefield and realized nothing had changed, he felt a devastating impact like no other.

It made him lose all will to continue living. He sat in the corner of the battlefield and drowned in his own thoughts, trying his best to find a path forward.

He killed the protagonist with his own hands, and he didn't have the capabilities to fill the hole he'd left.

What would happen in the future?

Didn't he ruin everything he spent a billion years setting up in a single move?

When Damien reappeared on the Ancient Battlefield, the Saint Emperor realized what it truly meant to be a protagonist.

And the light Damien cast over the darkness cleared away his chaotic thoughts.

He understood his role.

He understood what he had to do.

He had to become a catalyst for his hero's growth.

He saw the ending of this plot.

There was a beautiful ending, a beautifully twisted story that would take place as a result of his actions.

That ending would be a battle against fate, a battle against suffering, a battle that would achieve everything he wished to see achieved.

But for that ending to take place, he had to die.

He had to become fuel for his protagonist, so the outcome he wanted to see would come to fruition.

He smiled sadly.

It was just a shame that he wouldn't be there to see it.

At least his will wouldn't go unknown.

At least all these thoughts would reach that man, everything that represented him, not the Saint Emperor, but his true self hidden underneath all the walls he put up around his heart, would be understood by the one person he wanted to understand it.

Those thoughts gave him closure. He could leave this world in peace, and he could close his eyes without regretting the end of his life.

It was a long life, it was a torturous life, it was a life better off not living...

...but it was his life.

It was a life he used to do what he wanted to do without being dragged around by the wills of others.

It was a shameful life, but he was a shameless man.

It was a life he took pride in.

Therefore, in the arms of the man who would continue his legacy and make sure he never truly died, he took his last breath.

The Saint Emperor existed no longer.

However—

"-Arahan..."

A word Damien learned as the Saint Emperor's existence became part of his own.

A word that meant "freedom" in an ancient language that had long been eroded in the rivers of time.

A word that was once the name of the man who became the Saint Emperor.

"...rest well," he said.

"That world you envisioned..."

"...I will create the world you wished to see."

Chapter 1315 Finale [1]

The Saint Emperor grew in that way.

As he based his growth path on the Void and tried to reach it through his own power, his entire being turned into something that would be the perfect fuel for Damien.

Damien held respect for the man, but that didn't stop him from using Devour.

No, it was precisely because of that respect that he chose to devour him.

Because the Saint Emperor couldn't die here.

If his existence became a part of Damien, he would forever live on.

And as Damien would gain everything the Saint Emperor had, he'd finally be able to understand the man without any gaps in his perception.

So he used the Authority.

Unlike the usual scene that took place, the wisps of pitch-black mana manifested by the Void gently wrapped around the Saint Emperor's body.

As it cocooned him in its embrace, he became a cluster of light particles that drifted into the heavens.

It was a beautiful, almost ceremonious, death for a man who wouldn't be mourned.

In terms of power, the Saint Emperor's comprehension becoming Damien's was extremely beneficial.

His fundamental law Authorities all rose to 90% completion, and his Authority of Existence rose a whopping 10% to reach 60%.

It was unbelievable. Considering the amount of time and effort it took Damien to tether all the fundamental laws and raise the Authority of Existence to 50%, an instant 10% boost was practically nonsensical.

It was a testament to the Saint Emperor's hard work. In his final moments, he reached the level of Existence Law that should've been impossible for him.

Damien's mind expanded as his perception of the world changed, and his body and soul were enhanced an extreme amount by the achievements the Saint Emperor made throughout his life.

However, Damien himself paid little attention to his growth.

He was focused on the memories and Legends that entered his being.

He was focused on the Saint Emperor himself, not the benefits the man gave him.

And through that focus, Damien learned of the Saint Emperor's final thoughts.

He watched and experienced the billion-year journey he took. He witnessed both the benevolence and ruthlessness the Saint Emperor held in his core.

He saw it all.

That man was a contradictory existence. Nothing about him would make sense to anyone else. Nobody could possibly sympathize with his motivations or actions.

He could only be viewed as a villain.

But Damien refused to see him that way.

Because, at the end of the day, the Saint Emperor's actions, no matter how extreme they were, created the chance the current generation had to stand up to their oppressors.

It didn't matter if he was right or wrong, because he achieved results nobody else could.

"Huu..."

Damien took a deep breath.

He sat on his knees outside the Ancient Battlefield, alone in this place where time didn't flow.

It would be a while before he could return to normalcy.

But he had to come back.



He made a promise, and he intended to keep it.

So he would remain in this place, outside the flow of time, and reach a state of peace.

When he emerged, he would be a different man.

He would be the protagonist the Saint Emperor wanted to see.

'Never again.'

Damien swore on his heart.

'Never again will anyone have to suffer a fate like yours.'

\*\*\*

Damien and the Saint Emperor had their battle outside the bounds of the Ancient Battlefield, in a place that technically didn't exist in reality.

Due to that, the time flow was completely different for them than it was for everyone else.

Years passed as they fought. They felt every fraction of every second of every year they spent there, but for those on the true Ancient Battlefield, only half an hour went by.

But they all felt the change.

Somewhere far away from where the masses were congregated, Tiamat and Iris stood over the dead body of a man who was once known as the Soul Emperor.

Tiamat's gamble paid off.

She targeted the instilled faith the Soul Emperor considered his true feelings, and when she found the seed of corruption planted in his soul, he stood no chance.

Under the collapse of everything he stood for, the Soul Emperor's Divinity crumbled.

Killing him after that wasn't even a task. It was as easy as stealing candy from a baby.

However, Tiamat didn't leave their Sacred Combat without enduring any scars.

Just as she'd found her target, he did too.

Tiamat's powerful Divinity was chipped because of the inherent "flaw" in her reasoning, and though the damage wasn't severe enough to cripple her, it definitely affected her strength to great degrees.

Her battle finished almost instantly. It was different from the genuine differentiated time flow that Damien and the Saint Emperor experienced, but the nuances of Sacred Combat which took place in the ethereal world would culminate into results rapidly.

The Soul Emperor fell within five minutes.

As of now, Iris was helping Tiamat mend her fractured Divinity with the help of Creation Laws.

Still, the two of them felt it before anyone else.

The entire atmosphere of the Ancient Battlefield changed.

Vibrations rippled through the air, and subtly, one could hear the sound of an ancient bell ringing.

That symbolized the end.

The end of this war.

There was not a single Nox being left in existence on this plane.

Their war, the brutal struggle they'd endured for the past several years to secure their futures, had reached its finale.

VOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

It was in the very center of the battlefield, above the river of clouded lily pads. There, positioned in such a way that it could be viewed from any part of the battlefield, two portals formed.

All of the Divinities who saw them instinctually knew what they were.

The one on the left was dark. It was a swirling heap of blackness with no end.

That was the portal back to the lower universe. If one walked through it, they'd be able to return to their peaceful lives as they remained ignorant to the grand sights of the beyond.

As for the portal on the right, its center was filled with the same blackness, but its border was lined in gold.

That was a portal that contained an aura all of these Demigods had felt at least once in the past.

It contained the aura of the Heavenly World.

Walking through it would signify a new beginning, an eternal race for power, and the opening of a new world for them to explore.

The choice was theirs to make whether they wished to aim higher or settle for what they had.

Countless Divinities made their way to the portals, including Iris and Tiamat.

There was nothing more to be said, after all.

Everything could be solved once they left this place.

These Divinities worked together until now because they were facing a greater enemy, but in reality, many of them didn't have the best of relationships in the lower universe.

With the threat exterminated, there was no need for them to remain friendly.

Or at least, that was what they assumed.

It took less than five minutes for the closest of them to reach the portals.

Those in the central area already assumed they'd be able to leave instantly, but the space around the portals was surprisingly chaotic, so it took a decent amount of time to fly to them.

However, when they did reach...

...they found that they weren't the first ones to arrive.

There was already a man waiting for them.

And he had set up a wall that was impossible for them to cross.

After all, they weren't allowed to leave yet.

Yes, a culling had taken place prior to make sure only those with the universe's best interests in mind would return, however...

He didn't trust others to do his job for him.

So when he returned to the Ancient Battlefield after half a year in the timeless area, he went straight to the portals.

It was time for him to see for himself whether these people were worthy of his trust.

Chapter 1316 Finale [2]

It took half a year for him to readjust his mental state, but Damien returned to the Ancient Battlefield eventually.

He, of course, wanted to see Iris before anything else, but time wasn't on his side.

The portals opened before he even arrived back on the battlefield, and if he didn't immediately teleport over, he wouldn't have made it before the first batch arrived.

As for Iris and Tiamat, his awareness spanned a large enough distance for him to see their situation as he moved, so he was already assured of their safety.

Nevertheless, he came here with one purpose only.

To subjugate those who couldn't be killed.

The universe was severely lacking in forces at the moment.

Of their originally large number of Demigods, only a little over 1500 still remained alive. When one took into account the losses to lower existence forces as well, it was a severe blow that couldn't be easily healed from.

Naturally, once the Demigods returned victorious, the universe would enter a period of restructuring before it went on to grow.

And for the sake of that, there couldn't be any more rot inhibiting them.

Nobody could say how long the lower universe would remain safe from external threats. Just because the Nox were gone didn't mean nobody else would try to lay claim to their land.

These Demigods were the start of the problem. They allowed the rot to fester as they were the ones spreading it personally.

As long as they weren't brought under his control, the problems that tore the universe apart from the inside would continue to persist until it was pointless to even dream of it becoming whole again.

Damien couldn't allow that.

Disregarding any sort of desire for justice or righteous intentions, the lower universe would be his as soon as he got the opportunity to claim it, and he wouldn't allow these kinds of people to pollute his property.

However, he also couldn't kill them, because the universe was already lacking Divinities as it was.

The solution was simple.

Damien waited as more and more Demigods arrived before him.

Some had complaints, but most saw what he did when he came out of Cosmic Rebirth and shut their mouths when they recognized him.

It didn't matter if others complained anyway. Damien already set up a barrier of existence between him and them, making it absolutely impossible for them to break through to the portals.

When the crowd reached its full capacity and all the Demigods had gathered, Damien acted quickly.

He didn't explain himself nor did he listen to them.

He used his new eyes to completely perceive each and every one of their existences.

Once again showcasing his indomitable power, he forcefully separated them into two batches.

People who were worthy, like Alucard, Tang Lingzi, Tiamat, or Iris, were shifted to one side, while others who didn't have as much presence as those four whom Damien deemed unworthy were shifted to the other side.

After this was finished, Damien finally said his first words to the crowd of Divinities who'd already been subdued by his actions.

"I will not tolerate another case like the Immortal Blood Asura," he said, panning his gaze over them.

"From this point forth, our Grand Heavens Boundary will only experience prosperity. If you wish to cause discord or pursue personal gain by damaging the universe's foundation, I have unfortunate news for you..."

He looked to the side where the nameless Demigods were.

There were roughly 500 of them. It was a far smaller number than the other side, which was good, but it was still a number far too large.

"...I have already seen through your intentions," Damien said to them.

"What are you—"

"If you are unfortunate enough to be on this side, then it is by no fault but your own. Perhaps, in your next life, you will learn to not be overly greedy for things that aren't yours."

Damien glanced at Alucard and the rest, giving them a slight nod.

"I will not kill these people. I am not stupid enough to damage our overall combat power at a time like this. However, they will no longer move by their own will. I will put their lives in the hands of a few trusted individuals, and they will be used as the greatest labor force you could ever ask for."

"They will not doubt or complain. They will not rebel or bear grievance. They will be slaves, puppets who will follow the absolute command of anyone I deem worthy of such privilege."

Damien didn't plan to personally take part in the reconstruction efforts. He had other things to do.

So he gave them an explanation of what he was going to do, so they could both feel the severity of their responsibility and the fear for him that would make sure they never even considered acting against his will.

Damien didn't enjoy being a tyrant, but if that was the position he needed to take for the greater good, he would do so without question or guilt.

That was a lesson he learned from the Saint Emperor.

Sometimes, the villain was just as necessary as the hero.

It was time for him to take villainous action.

After he finished giving them an explanation of their roles for the future and what his next actions would entail, Damien turned back to the second group and pushed his hand out.



They were raging, of course. Their roars of indignance were loud, and their claims that he was committing heresy or betraying the universe were even louder.

But what could they do?

They were trapped in the box where Damien kept them. They were just barking dogs without any real power.

And what was the point of having a dog if it wasn't loyal?

Damien harnessed the Authority of Existence.

Using his perception as a base, he imprinted his will on the very cores of their existences.

It was a slave seal that could never be disobeyed, because it was not a matter of mind, body, or soul, but existence itself.

The process was quite easy for him, since he was already far above their level even before devouring two Nox Emperors.

And once it was over, he looked over at Alucard and the rest.

"I'll trust you with this?" He asked.

Alucard smiled and nodded.

"That, you can."

Damien nodded back and transferred control over the slave legion to the Hidden Death Valley Director.

Just like the controls for the teleportation arrays he set up, he made an assortment of keys to control the slave group and gave them to Alucard for him to hand out to the people he trusted.

That matter was brought to an end just like that.

Without blocking their paths any longer, Damien stepped aside and allowed the Demigods to make their choice.

Damien didn't treat it as much, because he already had a plan on what he was going to do from now on. He was also the only one with knowledge of the alternate ascension method, so he didn't possess the same worries as they did.

But for those that weren't duty-bound like Alucard, this was a choice heavier than any other.

It had already been several thousand years since the last of them rejected ascension.

After several millennia spent in contentment at the top of the food chain, what would they do?

Would they return to that position, to the place that would inevitably become far more prosperous than the Grand Heavens Boundary they knew?

Or would they reach for greater horizons, exploring the futures they'd disregarded in their younger days for the sake of such meager power?

For most, it was an obvious decision to return. If they were going to ascend, they would have done so from the beginning.

But...

That didn't mean there weren't any interesting choices made.

## Chapter 1317 Finale [3]

Most of the Demigods left the obvious way.

Alucard and Commander Huo, as well as the forces who followed them, went back to the lower universe after bidding their goodbyes to Damien.

They had responsibilities to uphold. Even if they wanted to ascend, they'd cemented themselves in positions they couldn't easily abandon.

The pack of slaves Damien subjugated were also taken along with them.

Those people still had their consciousness, and they could still feel whatever they wished to feel, which left Damien with several glares of hatred as they left.

However, it didn't matter. If they even had thoughts of betraying him or the universe, if they had thoughts of doing anything against the will that he'd instilled in them, they'd lose their consciousness and become true puppets without any identity of their own.

Considering that none of them had been degraded to that status yet, the fear in their hearts should've been enough to keep them on the right track for a long period of time, so Damien didn't have to worry.

Iris and Tiamat stayed by his side for the moment, and as they watched more and more of the Demigods make their choice, they only saw a select few who chose to ascend.

They were stuck in their ways. It wasn't normal to change their decisions at this juncture, especially when remembering their reason for refusing ascension in the first place.

There were less than ten who decided to take the chance. They were nameless, nothing more than followers in this war.

Perhaps that was the reason they chose to take the risk. If they were going to be in the lowest class of Divinities even in the lower universe, what would change going to the Heavenly World?

They'd likely find more opportunities to grow, and there was more potential for them to find chances to grow if they changed now.

Damien was an outlier that spurred their motivation, and the risk that was once considered far too great became manageable.

Now, left in this place, there was only one person who hadn't made their choice.

Tang Lingzi.

"What are you going to do?" Damien asked.

"I..."

Tang Lingzi hesitated.

She'd learned a lot in this war, and she'd almost lost her life. If it wasn't for Iris' interference, she would've died without accomplishing anything.

So she took some time to think as Damien and his group cleaned up the battlefield.

What was the point of staying in Grand Heavens Boundary?

Yes, she had her reasons, but were they enough to make her close her path of ascension again at this juncture?

The answer was a massive "no."

"That person" whom she was chasing, if she ever wanted to meet them, she couldn't stay the same as she was now.

She had to change.

She had to grow into someone who could stand on a battlefield like this one and be confident she couldn't be harmed.

If she followed her fear, she would stay in the lower universe. Even if she wasn't at the peak of its forces, she could still grow to that level eventually.

However, her instincts told her otherwise.

If she didn't make the leap now, she would be forever stuck in her woes without a chance of escape.

"I will be going."

She said it firmly.

And Damien nodded in approval.

"I'll see you there, then."

"You're ascending as well?" Tang Lingzi asked in surprise.

"Not yet, but I will soon enough. I still have things to do in the lower universe, you see."

Tang Lingzi nodded in understanding.

She was almost disappointed for a second. After all, Zara was once her disciple.

If Damien said he was ascending now and leaving his people behind, her heart would've become far too chaotic.

Because a man of his caliber without consideration for his relationships was dangerous to an extreme level.

Damien watched as Tang Lingzi took tentative steps towards the golden portal and finally walked through it before turning to the two women by his side.

"As you know, I'll take a while before I ascend. What are your plans?"

"You still have a way to ascend later, right?" Iris asked.

"Of course," Damien responded with a grin.

"Then there's nothing to be said. I will naturally follow you."

Iris developed her desire to go to the Heavenly World along with her love for Damien. She wasn't content with staying in Grand Heavens Boundary anymore.

If Damien was planning to take a long time to ascend, she would've preferred to go ahead of him and set up a foundation before he arrived, but they hadn't spent nearly enough time together.

The war was too distracting. Now that it was over and they could have some idle time, she decided she'd rather spend a few years with him than ascend immediately, since they would eventually do so anyway.

As for Tiamat...

"I have no path," she said.

"Now that my revenge has been accomplished, and so easily at that, I have nothing left to do. Frankly, I am lost, however, I am trusting your words. Didn't you say you would take responsibility for me?"

Damien smiled.

"Indeed I did. And, don't worry about the revenge. Your targets are still very much alive and awaiting your return."

Tiamat's heart skipped a beat.

"That means...?"

"I can't say for certain, but at least a few of those who wronged you should be alive in the Heavenly World. And...the ones behind them are still alive and well. Instead of getting rid of the weeds alone, wouldn't it be more satisfying to cut the roots as well?"

Tiamat nodded without a word.

Her heart was beating out of her chest.

The revenge she wanted to get, it wasn't satisfied at all. She felt a void in her heart when she realized only the Soul Emperor remained for her to kill.

Hearing that there was a possibility for true closure made her feel hopeful in a way she wasn't expecting.

And the path forward after she truly achieved her revenge...she was getting a vague idea of it as well.

Nevertheless, for now, she was set on following Damien. Mainly because of the debt she felt towards him, but also due to his monstrous talent.

Staying next to someone like him would always bring benefits.

With all of them in agreement, there was nothing left to say here.

Together as one, they walked through the black portal.

Damien's eyes were alight with flames.

This was the end of his saga in Grand Heavens Boundary.

He was just going through the motions from this point.

Since there wasn't anything important left to do, he was prepared to take a few years to rest and recuperate before setting off on a new journey.

After all, aside from all the conflict that needed to be put to an end, there was only one thing he wanted to do.

'It's been...far too long.'

He hated leaving them behind, but his life seemed to move in ways he never expected. He was dragged around by fate and forced to move on without them.

As long as it was possible, he wanted to stay with them as much as possible.

And since he was going to take control of his own fate from now on, he would make sure he didn't have to keep worrying them like this.

'But...if I really think about it...'



As he stepped through the portal, his body shook unnervingly.

'...I'm going to get my ass beat, aren't I?'

He forgot for a second, but he really died a while ago.

Thinking about their reactions when he came back alive...

Well, maybe it would've been better for him to not go back at all...?

#### Chapter 1318 Painting [1]

The fluctuations of the return portal contained aspects of space and time that revolved in quite the interesting fashion.

Since it was a product of the universe itself and not a practitioner's skill, it was far more complex, yet far more ingrained in nature than anything a living being could produce.

That was why Damien didn't feel strange as he stepped into it.

As usual, space and time warped around him. With his unique senses as a Spacetime practitioner, he was able to sense the corridor that was transporting him, as well as the others being transported by it.

The smooth breeze of space brushes across Damien's face. He looked around and saw the various spatial phenomena taking place outside the bounds of the corridor and marveled at them.

This sight was always something he could appreciate.

It was the true strength of space and time, that which existences within it could never reproduce.

He calmly observed the environment and felt the life auras of those around him disappearing one by one as they reached their final destination.

Only he, Iris, and Tiamat remained, but it was odd.

They should've been moving at a constant speed.

So...

Why were they accelerating ahead of him?

Why was he slowly decelerating?

'Why is it taking so long?'

It was true that he could perceive the journey in real time because of his abilities, but that didn't mean the journey would elongate.

The concept of speed should've been constant within the corridor.

Those who entered together would exit together, and the gap between the exit times of those who entered first and those who entered last should've been consistent with their entrance times.

However, this clearly wasn't the case right now.

'Is this...'

Just as Damien tried to rationalize the phenomenon, everything went silent.

The Spacetime phenomena around the corridor vanished, and then the corridor itself escaped his perception.

No, it was better to say his perception was completely cut off.

"..."

He tried to speak, but no words came out of his mouth.

Any semblance of the Spacetime corridor, the Ancient Battlefield, or even Grand Heavens Boundary disappeared from his surroundings.

All that remained was a familiar blackness.

'Where am I?' He wondered.

He never expected something to go wrong at a time like this, but he also didn't panic.

He knew his current state couldn't be the work of enemies, since there were no enemies left with enough power to do something like this.

'Let's think for a second.'

Damien calmed his mind.

He was already used to blackness like this, and since Iris and Tiamat weren't with him, it meant this wasn't a product of the portal either.

'They must've arrived safely in Grand Heavens Boundary like the rest. Why was I the only one separated?'

He tried to move his body, and found that he did indeed have the capability.

He wasn't separated in consciousness, nor was he in a state where he was completely disconnected from reality.

He waded through the darkness cautiously.

'I feel like I'm moving, but I also feel like I've been stationary this whole time. This kind of feeling...'

Damien frowned as a memory appeared in his mind.

'Yeah, this is what it was like back then. The only difference is that this time, I've retained my sense of self.'

It was back in the Space-Time River, when he was almost swallowed whole by the concepts he wasn't strong enough to control yet.

'If it's like that, then shouldn't there be something else here?'

Damien quickly adapted to his circumstances and started looking for a way out.

He was in no mood to struggle more right now.

But, strangely, it didn't feel like he was trapped.

No, he felt rather at home in this environment.

'The only thing I can do is search until I find something.'

He wasn't able to tell exactly where the familiarity came from, even after wading around like this.

He tried to spread his awareness, but he soon found that he lacked that capability.

'Is my strength inhibited?'

He raised his arm and tried to manifest Divine Energy, but that didn't work either.

'Then...'

Instead, he used his energy in its base state.

'As expected.'

The so-called Void Energy with the capability to transmute into anything could be used without a problem.

He had an inkling of what was happening.

This darkness was different from the rest.

It blocked skills that had to do with finding its identity, and it blocked skills related to reality. Anything else, anything involved with the Void, and even Existence Law, was still usable.

'I'm...'

Damien stopped moving and truly immersed himself in the surroundings.

He stopped thinking, he stopped acting, and he simply became one with it.

He allowed everything to leave him besides his identity as Damien Void.

And that was when it appeared.

A painting.

A beautiful multi-layered painting that couldn't be described with words and existed in at least ten-dimensional space.

Was it even right to call it a painting? It was massive to the point where size became irrelevant, absolutely dwarfing Damien like a universe compared to an ant.

It was ever-changing, and its content couldn't be easily distinguished. To an unlearned viewer, it would look like a chaotic mix of brush strokes made by someone with no intent or purpose whatsoever.

The nature of this painting, its existence in ten-dimensional space, would likely shatter the minds of any who tried to understand its contents.

Naturally, Damien was excluded from this.

He gazed upon it, and instead of feeling confusion, he felt his mind becoming clearer.

The individual brush strokes came to life in his eyes, each manifesting into a scene unlike any other on the canvas of blackness.

As he focused on a single brush stroke, he saw many things.

One stroke could be the life of a man, from birth to death, filled with trials and tribulations as well as moments of cherished happiness.

However, when he looked at the stroke next to it, he'd find it unraveling into a complexly structured law, an ethereal force with no material presence in reality.

Each and every stroke had its own meaning. While they looked identical at first glance, when they were deciphered, one would find a true myriad of scenes and concepts that shouldn't have been able to exist on the same canvas without conflicting with each other.

How could they be equal when they inherently were not?

Or...

'In the eyes of the painter, are they all equal?'

Damien's fractured perception started to return to normalcy.

He started to understand the nature of this painting, and as a result, the identity of this space.

That was the trigger.

The "painting" unraveled.

Contained within a sphere with no real end or beginning was that "painting."

And standing outside the sphere in the blackness was Damien.

'That painting...'

His eyes narrowed.

'...is reality.'

"Huu..."

He took a deep breath.

It was the first sound he heard since arriving here.

'And that means...'

His heart beat wildly.

His mind ran in circles in both excitement and a hint of fear.

'This place...'

He understood where he was.

He knew why the blackness felt familiar.

And as he understood it, his entire being changed.

'This place is the Void.'

Chapter 1319 Painting [2]

As the realization settled in, Damien's mind entered a completely different state of existence.

The painting of reality before him unraveled into its true form, and Damien, for the first time, saw what someone like the Ancient Sovereign saw.



The past, present, and future were meaningless. They were merely a single entity with no true distinction between them.

The lives of so many people overlapped and intertwined that it seemed impossible to single out any one person from the picture, and the laws that upheld the fabric of reality formed the spherical container in which the painting was housed.

It was amazing. Every process and mechanism that allowed reality to function was present before him, and he felt like if he just reached for it a little bit...

'...I can change it.'

Damien was baffled by his position.

He didn't think he could return to the universe like this, but if he had the capability to alter reality even in the slightest...

He had to try it out.

His perception slowly became accustomed to this new view of space and time. As it did, he focused in on various sights, finally becoming aware of the happenings of the recent past and present.

He saw them.

He saw Rose, Ruyue, and Elena from the point just moments after his death to the current day. He saw how they drowned themselves in the delusion that he was still alive and fought on the frontlines to lead the universe to victory against the Nox.

He felt their pain viscerally, and he almost couldn't stop the tears from streaming down his face.

It had been decades since they last saw each other.

Just how much pain did they have to endure?

Rose, Ruyue, and Elena rapidly ascended the ranks of the nine revolutions and reached the Supreme level within five years.

After that, they became the figureheads that led the entire army. With Luciel acting from the back line to support them, they were able to attain victory after victory, corralling the Nox in the universe so they could make sure not a single one survived.

That much was consistent no matter what part of the painting Damien looked at.

But...

'There's more.'

There wasn't just the one timeline.

He saw a myriad of potential pasts and presents, as well as the potential futures resulting from them.

He saw the entire universe shatter, he saw everyone except those with the Void's protection die, he saw how even with their advantages, the universe lost everything.

In contrast, there were other timelines where the universe was able to solve everything with minimal casualties and damages as if the heavens themselves were aiding their rise.

Which timeline was true and which was false wasn't easily discernible.

No, rather, they were all true to an extent. Besides a few factors that remained constant, each of them branched on their own paths as designated by fate.

Damien frowned.

As long as he was in the Void, all of these timelines were absolutely true, and he couldn't choose which one would be reality when he returned.

'Then...'

His eyes hardened.

'I know what I need to do.'

Damien tested it on some factors that didn't have any worth, such as the lives of a few street thugs and dead worlds without life.

He realized that he had the power to alter their fates, albeit only to an extent.

'However, I can't directly intervene.'

He was an outsider looking in.

He was nothing more than an "observer."

'Now I understand why the Ancient Sovereign is the way he is.'

Damien perused the various timelines to find a starting point.

He had to choose one that wouldn't completely ruin the universe's causality while also not choosing one that was too tragic to save at all.

As he looked over them, he allowed his instincts to show him the timeline in which he was currently residing, the one he would've experienced after leaving the Ancient Battlefield.

'Found it.'

Iris and Tiamat were a perfect anchor point. There was only a single timeline where they returned to Grand Heavens Boundary together and had Damien's influence radiating from their bodies.

Damien took a moment to look over this timeline.

There were countless deaths.

Lucifer died, Atticus and Aishia died, Fallen Star Holy Land collapsed, Tephit died, Luxurion was lost, several members of the Judgement Order fell, Priscilla Adelaide died, Rose became the inheritor of the Demon Sealing Pantheon, and the universe was forced to sustain several setbacks for the sake of victory.

However, they did experience boons as well.

These were mainly due to Yong An's presence.

He seemed to have recruited a great deal of Nox to his side, and along with them, Qing Tan and Huo Fang, two people Damien had practically forgotten about by now.

When he combined his forces with the Judgement Order and cooperated with them to take down the main players of the Nox side, countless victories were taken with minimal sacrifices.

Overall, it was an even war.

It was just the right playing field for Damien to start interfering in.

Unfortunately, he couldn't do it with his own hands, so...

'Now that I've finally become a Divinity, isn't it time to do this properly?'

He was a bit excited. He'd been wanting to do this for a very long time, and he always had plans to do it differently from most.

Looking at the current timeline, he scrolled with his eyes until he found the coordinate he desired.

'With this much time, it should be possible. All I need now...'

His senses honed in on a single world amongst the hundreds of thousands that inhabited the Divine Realm.

It was a smaller world without much development in terms of power structure, but it was more than enough of a foundation to eventually grow into something great if it didn't encounter setbacks.

In that world, there was a certain family that didn't stand out too much.

They were commoners fated to give birth to a stillborn son. They would succeed in having a child roughly a decade later, but the trauma of losing their first son deeply impacted them.

They lived a relatively simple life, a normal life with their daughter, and their family line continued in the same ordinary way.

However, all of that was soon to change.

Damien focused on that day, when their son was supposed to be born.

'It is time for you to wake up...'

From the Void, he split off a large piece of his soul, sealed its memories, and sent it into reality.

It traveled through the fabrics of existence, through space and time, and through every boundary protecting reality from the Void, until it reached that child and took its place in his previously soulless body.

A breath of life was born into a child that was fated to die upon birth.

That child would grow normally for the developing years of his life, but once the memories sealed in his soul were awakened...

...only then would he show his true potential.

Damien smiled as he watched.

He could see the entire life of that piece of his soul at once from his position, but he chose to stay focused on the soul fragment's present for the sake of novelty,

Because he wanted to see how it evolved.

Until the day it could receive its orders and execute the role it was born for...

'...grow well, my Avatar.'

Chapter 1320 Avatar [1]

It was 5000 years before the current day when that miraculous occurrence took place.

In a nameless corner of the Brilliant Flame Empire, a boy was born against all odds.

In that moment when he came out of the womb, he had no breath of life. His body was cold, and his parents cried as they realized the tragic fate they'd been forced to experience.

They prayed to any god. They prayed to any being that could possibly save their child, with no other hope in their hearts but the work of a miracle.

And to nobody's expectations, a miracle truly appeared.

That boy's blueish body regained its rosy hue. As warmth filled his body and a soul inhabited his body, the cries of a new life resounded through the space.

That day was their blessing. They vowed to raise that child into a proper man, no matter what happened from that moment forth.

The boy was named Alexander, a name that represented the miracle of his birth, and his parents' desire to protect.

The years passed blissfully for them as they lived their mundane lives.

That boy grew up, passing through the years of infancy and childhood like a spring breeze.

He had bright red hair like the purest of flames and eyes of the same color. Whenever he graced their small village with his presence, the atmosphere lit up, filling everyone with joy.

He was a blessed child, and though their village had no real contact with the Brilliant Flame Empire they were a part of, they didn't encounter much difficulty at all.

They were far separated from areas bandits frequented, and they made most of their money through trading.

The village bordered a forest, and just like most of the other men who grew up there, the boy became a hunter.

By the age of ten, he could hunt grown hogs and boars with his own strength. By the time he turned fifteen, even bears couldn't withstand his blows.

The system seemed to support his growth more than most. The adults in the village usually couldn't make it past 3rd class. They rarely even reached the middle stages of that rank.

However, he was able to become a 3rd class existence before the age of 18 based on nothing but his physical strength.

In reality, there was nothing special about his story.

He was a boy with talent, but he was rooted in his village and had no plans to leave.

His family didn't have enough money to send him to the academy in the capital, and he himself didn't have much thirst for power.

Or at least, that was the way he lived for the first eighteen years of his life.

On the day he reached adulthood, everything changed.

That boy closed his eyes, and his mind was filled with dreams of another life.

A life where he grew up on a world called Earth, where he acquired a thirst for power through countless years of torturous survival, where he rose higher and higher until he became an existence the entire universe couldn't ignore.

In that dream, he was a completely different man. He wasn't resigned to living such a small life, and as he reached a point beyond the boy's every imagination, he found himself in a strange situation.

When that boy opened his eyes again...



"...wow."

He exclaimed in wonder.

He looked down at his hands and clenched his fists curiously.

He had mana in his body. It wasn't much, since he focused on physical strength until this point, but it was mana nonetheless.

"I somewhat expected this, but it feels completely different."

He was no longer the same boy he once was.

As he looked at the world through new eyes, he called out in his head.

'Status'

"Hmm..."

There was no status.

After all, the system only partially had an influence on his existence.

His soul wasn't unique. His soul was just a piece of another, far greater, soul.

Therefore, he did not have his own personal record in the system.

He was a part of someone else's record.

"Or well, I guess it's my record."

Damien, or rather, Alexander smiled to himself.

"A completely new life, huh..."

It was interesting.

He couldn't feel the presence of his main body at all.

Since he was in the Void, his existence in Spacetime was convoluted, and though he technically did exist in this time, he also didn't.

That left this piece of his soul as a unique existence in its own way, a scenario that the universe had never seen before.

'I should establish a memory relay between the two bodies.'

His main body was definitely seeing how he lived, but he couldn't see what his main body saw, which was a bit inhibiting.

And as they were connected, his desire was naturally reproduced instantly.

He was the same person as the one standing in the Void.

'I see, so my status as Alexander is baked into my status as Damien. Whenever I grow here, it'll influence my main body's Legend rather than this one, but I'll also feel the effects of that growth since it's technically my own.'

It was extremely confusing, but it also made perfect sense.

'Since I'm living as Alexander now, I should do it properly. Let's find out more about this world.'

The sealed piece of his soul had lived its life thus far in a simple manner, but its talent was a reflection of his main body, so such a life was truly a waste of his talent.

Unfortunately, Alexander didn't live in a place where he could learn much. His family and friends were rural folk who didn't concern themselves with the affairs of the greater world.

'They probably don't even realize how wide the universe is...it really must be nice.'

Damien smiled as he looked back on the memories of this body before his own memories awakened.

It was a nice and quiet life, a peaceful one that wouldn't be disturbed.

These people would live and die in a peaceful era before the Nox returned to the universe. They were fated to escape the true tragedy that the universe faced in his time.

'This kind of life...'

'...this is what I want to protect.'

He felt a connection to his second family, he felt a connection to these villagers, and he felt a connection to this world.

He wasn't just a wandering soul possessing another body and overwriting its ego. He was truly Alexander. He was born a commoner and had no family name, but he was in touch with his roots and wouldn't ignore them just because he became aware of his true identity.

"Huu..."

'It took a bit to center myself, but I think I'm relatively accustomed now.'

From this point forth, he wouldn't be Damien Void, but Alexander.

He would live this life to its fullest, so when the time came for him to execute the duty he was meant for, he would be able to do so without fail.

He stood up from his bed and walked to the door, opening it and taking in the fresh air outside.

'The only unfortunate part is what comes next.'

He had lived his entire life in this village, but he had to leave.

Because if he wanted to grow, he couldn't remain stationary.

He sighed to himself.

'A stable family situation isn't something I'm used to...'

He could imagine the expression on his parents' faces when he told them his plans.

'Haa, I just hope I don't get beat up.'